

## New Roles for Leadership in the New Business World of Social Innovation

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Some business leaders, managers, and senior executives like to look at academic journals. Unfortunately, the crossover literature has not reached enough of them. In this article, we attempt to blend scholarly concepts with real-world applications. This article is about how leadership can focus on adopting new roles to lead more innovatively and effectively for a social impact. Leading scholars have grappled with this idea for decades. Recent empirical studies show that companies can make much more money with more innovative workers. To make profitable companies, leaders need to improve their cognitive and conceptual skills and create new roles and training to help people stop old think-

ing ways and learn new ways. Much of what we share in this opinion article comes from our consulting work experience in Australia. We present a more detailed picture of the future of leadership coupled with social innovation that has not been mentioned in the past. This article

**Revolutionizing Leadership: Innovating for Social Impact and Organizational Excellence.**

presents a new leadership model in the new business world of social innovation that can help companies achieve business success, employee satisfaction, and

a greater social impact. This model also blends the notions gathered by scholars and practitioners of leadership to ascertain best practices for executives. We believe that these best practices will help to fill the need for new leadership roles.

**Keywords:** Social Innovation, Leadership Development, Future of Leadership, Interpersonal Relationships, Organizational Excellence.

Studies conducted by McKinsey in 2022 reveal that companies within the top 25% for quality interpersonal relationships are 35% more likely to experience superior social innovation (Reiß, 2022; Zohar, 2022). Social innovation manifests itself in deploying and developing the most innovative solutions in order to meet social needs in a better way (Zu, 2013; Yeratziotis et al., 2022). These studies also indicate that up to 24% of employees still feel excluded in the workplace, and emphasize that leaders must champion interpersonal relationships throughout their organizations. The role of leadership has expanded to interpersonal relationships, coupled with a thorough understanding of the conceptual skills of interpersonal relationships (de Jong, 2010; Pendleton & Furnham, 2016; Davis & Christian, 2018; Goffin, 2020; Engin, 2021; Dãderman et al., 2022). Leaders must accept that conceptual skills are here to stay. Conceptual skills used to be found primarily in the upper echelon of organizations. However, they are needed from the front-line staff to the management.

Everyone needs to use conceptual skills. Effective leaders like Bill Gates, who possess strong conceptual skills, look at the big picture and strategically think to recognize the current and future opportunities. In his work “Skills of an Effective Administrator”, Robert Katz (1974), a seminal author, defined conceptual skills as understanding how all parts of a business work together and driving changes that affect the whole company or critical business outcomes. Thus, people can manage their jobs and the expansive reach of the organization to its vital customers. Peter Drucker once mentioned that a business is not operative without a customer, and reaching each customer where they are is equivalent to an organization’s success. Drucker also argued that knowledge management is an empowering trait for all employees as they perform their jobs. The cognitive ability is also to lead others through strong interpersonal relationships (Waghmare, 2019; Paliwal et al., 2020; Guarda & Augusto, 2022). A promotion to a leadership position does not necessarily make you a leader. For many people that get promoted, there is virtually no training. Some folks go away to a two-day supervisor training. This sensitivity-type training has merit but after two days of supervisory training, there needs to be much more leadership development. Interpersonal relationships between leaders and employees create a positive work environment that promotes trust, collaboration, effective communication, empathy, and teamwork. These qualities enhance employees’ customer orientation, leading to a focus on delivering exceptional service and meeting the emerging needs of society.

### **New Trainings Are Needed**

Being promoted to effective leadership in social innovation is like becoming a black belt in martial arts

(Chhotray et al., 2018; Ötting et al., 2021; Uzorka & Olaniyan, 2022). The learning just begins at that point at an entirely new level (Issar & Navon, 2016; Carsten, 2017; Yarnell & Grunberg, 2017; Tang, 2019; Munsoor, 2021; Serrat, 2021). Many supervisors and leaders who get promoted experience very little to no training. Some go away to a two-day supervisor training, and a colleague must trust their group members to catch them as they fall backward. This builds camaraderie, but there is so much more to leadership.

Social innovation leadership training begins with an introspective journey that requires continuous development, and in some cases, as Peter Drucker once noted, leaders need to know what not to do. However, a fundamental mediator element is the one that allows the Unlearning step. The unlearning task is not an easy one. However, today’s dynamic environment demands leaders to be able to unlearn (Austin, 2016; Montuori & Donnelly, 2017; Shekshnia et al., 2018; Inam et al., 2021; Kiß & Sulíková, 2021; Caldwell, 2022; Dean, 2022; Gündemir & Kirby 2022; Tipurić, 2022). Using workshops, peer reviews, or role-playing exercises, older methods, beliefs, and habits must be discarded to make way for new, more effective ones. Any leadership training program must incorporate the concept of unlearning. The unlearning and training activities are a great way to learn through experience (Pless et al., 2022; Bhattacharya et al., 2023). Removing or, better, identifying what is not working anymore, with an effective reality check, allows new learning with experimentation. Action Learning “learning by doing” also involves actively engaging with real-world challenges and reflecting upon them to gain new knowledge and insights (Rojot, 2017). When combined, people can effectively draw from experience to address complex problems and reflect if they are applicable. They benefit from supportive peers who offer new perspectives to explore emerging issues through novel inquiries and probes.

A leader’s personality must be continuously discerned to achieve a challenging personal transformation and positively influence others (van Saane, 2019). Therefore, leaders must deepen their insights to be more authentic, and sometimes, this requires an outside evaluation from knowledgeable, effective leaders who can add suggestions for continuous improvement. Discernment is a key leadership trait and usually develops over time. Leaders must also discern followers and develop their personalities to lead better and more introspective by grasping new management techniques and attempting to implement them. The simplistic perception of human beings as the most complex phenomenon is why leaders stay away from deepening their insights and resort to simple management fad-type techniques to minimize the complexity of the leader-follower

equation (Cardona et al., 2019). Executives must smooth the path of leadership development to enhance their ability to solve complex leader-follower conflicts. Leader-follower conflicts show their ugly face when followers are left alone without any direction or when many demands are coming from multiple leaders, causing friction. Employees must also use their conceptual skills to let leaders know when their needs may not be realistic in the allotted timeframe.

## Difficulties Ahead

We have found that the discussion of the challenges and complexities of social innovation leadership makes some senior managers reluctant to develop as leaders. This reluctance seems quite logical, as social innovation leadership development requires leaders' personal development and deepening their insights in dealing with complex issues. These issues are sometimes too complex to solve in a short time or more significant and more prominent issues must be addressed. Two globally recognized authors, Robin Di Angelo, and Verna Myers, have observed authentic leadership asks to manage discomfort and difficult conversations about social innovation, change, and aggressive behaviors. Authentic leadership involves a deep dive into the realm of introspection to develop an authentic leadership persona.

In an international financial company in Australia, after several meetings were held via chatbots with lower-level employees to include their views on the redevelopment of new knowledge management systems, employees became more aware of the possibility of cyber-attacks and how to avoid phishing, reducing the related risks. In some cases, executives appear to be following predetermined recipes to resolve problems and lead others. Models of leadership are often used in universities and specific organizations. Some leadership models are only used once, while others are only used with some leaders. Once the leader moves on, they take the leadership model with them, and that leadership model is not utilized.

The key to leadership models is that they are for all people in organizations and, in some cases, reach out to suppliers, vendors, and even customers to build a solid leadership presence---leadership models that reap the most significant benefits to the stakeholders (Chhotray et al., 2018; Pizzolitto et al., 2023). In practice, leadership models set specific roles at all levels of the organization that not only motivate people within the organization and instill a sense of ownership into employees but also become a boundaryless model of organizations, creating an open business system: In an open business system, team members are involved in decision-making and creativity and collaboration are encouraged. This can lead to increased social innovation and greater organizational efficiency. The study by Ahsan and

Khawaja (2024) supported the fact that an open business system could be positively associated with social innovation and organizational efficiency.

In addition, executives should be aware that aggressive behavior from leaders is nothing new. For example, at Salomon Brothers Inc., leaders would tell people to tell their story walking or fire someone by saying they are out of here. These aggressive behaviors are not known as micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are pinpointed toward a particular group. They could be passive or aggressive. The key question is: Where are they and how does one abolish them from the organization?

## The Future Roles for Leadership

We make a deeper dive into the roles for the future to make the organization a think-tank for the world to view, understand, learn, and apply. We propose a new model of leadership that can help develop leadership in today's global and complex business environment. A model that, along with personal development, introduces leadership as a set of roles that leaders should adopt according to social innovation. Leaders can play an essential role in leadership development. They must take a deep dive into the introspective journey and personal development of authentic leadership for their personal transformation and to better influence others. Some executives see nothing wrong with having a psychologist in the midst to help them and other employees cope with the day-to-day stress of leadership---both personal and professional. This new leadership model also needs to embrace social innovation practices that can meet the needs of all employees and society. Our approach with executives is to pose leadership roles that consider leadership a responsible and continuous commitment to create motivation and a sense of shared ownership for employees, ensuring everyone feels included and valued and operating in an environment where employees feel safe to speak up and share ideas without fear of being judged or punished (Psychologically safe environment -PSE).

Some executives have a difficult time developing organizational leadership. This difficulty seems quite logical being that the development of leadership requires the personal development of leaders and the deepening of their insights in dealing with complex issues, we found that our first training with leaders incorporates a deep dive into the realm of introspection. Leadership roles can play an important role in influencing others. Marshall Goldsmith, a leader in executive education, has a person call him every day to see how he is dealing with his hectic management consulting game plan. When we develop consultation sessions with the managers, we also state that before getting familiar with the leadership roles, managers should look at leadership as a service to develop a sense of common ownership in the em-

ployees. The only way to do this is to discover the benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This leadership approach creates an environment of interpersonal motivation for employees, which results in the extensive participation of human resources in organizational processes.

First, the complexities of the external ecosystem and the emergence of factors such as digital transformation and artificial intelligence take the power away from managers to force employees as leaders to follow them in the path of realizing the future. The view of creating a spark of innovation in the mind of a leader should give way to a new view that believes that all employees make the puzzle of innovation and each of them plays a role in it. This new perspective is strongly dependent on the democratization of the work environment, and leaders should provide as much human power in organizational innovation as possible through the expansion of the culture of participation and trust and the creation of flexible and flat structures. We decided to call them “**innovative democratic leaders**.” Particularly, this role emphasizes the democratization of the organization and away from pyramidal and bureaucratic structures. With the emergence of the complexities of digital transformation and artificial intelligence, leaders need to grasp ways of meeting the needs of employees and society without being persuaded by leadership models that are counterproductive not only in the workplace but also in their personal lives.

The next point is that innovative leaders are at the forefront of the future. A democratic innovation leader is defined as a leader who invites all employees to participate broadly in completing the innovation puzzle. With the new genius culture, leaders can take a step further from the extensive participation of intellectual capital within the organization in the innovation process. They look for intellectual capital outside the organization and involve them in the innovation process of the organization. We believe that organizations will rely heavily on freelancers’ intellectual capital in the future bringing new perspectives to training. In pursuit of acquiring innovative ideas from foreign intellectual capital, they will cross the limits of geographical boundaries and involve experts from all over the world in the form of remote work in organizational projects. We decided to call this important role the role of the “**innovation leader search steering committee**.” In this new role, leaders appear as supporters who are full of personal qualities such as patience and humility. They are at the forefront of the future. They invite all employees to participate broadly in transformations. In this role, leaders recognize that all employees, from the lowest to the highest organizational levels, are pieces of what we call organizational genius.

The last role we suggest for leaders is the role of “**organizational excellence keeper**”. Always remem-

ber that small but consistent steps will lead to giant leaps. In this role, leaders should expand the continuous communication of human resources within the organization with the external ecosystem and the intellectual capital outside the organization (i.e., freelance experts). Leaders of the future should provide more opportunities for the expansion of knowledge transfer with intellectual capital outside the organization by expanding organizational communication. Leaders are, particularly, responsible for maintaining organizational excellence through continuous learning of human capital within the organization. Leaders should expand the infrastructure to develop the knowledge flow process throughout the organization and help their human resources on the path of excellence and growth by designing performance feedback systems. The effectiveness of this stage also requires communication of human resources with learning and development experts and management consultants.

These new roles and their related key responsibilities are illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1.

### **Equipping Business Leaders to Champion Social Innovation**

As for the new, learning also requires upskilling in culture, communications, allyships, and the creation of an innovative environment. Concerning training content about social innovation, we have asked executives to develop a positioning statement that reflects how they address social innovation, why they do it, what it means to them to understand and develop leadership competency, and the importance of this introspective viewpoint as role models for followers. The origins of managing interpersonal relationships come from authentic leadership and servant leadership approaches, resulting in extensive participation. Promoting self-reflection, building skills, adopting inclusive behaviors, driving systemic change, fostering collaboration, and establishing accountability measures. Achieving this personal transformation for leaders requires understanding the impact of assumptions of their past and present behaviors. Leaders must realize that their beliefs will play an essential role in their behavior. Leaders should adopt the best assumptions according to the collaboration circumstances to provide the best behaviors to meet the followers’ needs.

In our consulting work with an Australian international financial company, we distributed a checklist determining their stand on several managerial issues. Once this was diagnosed, we then asked the organization to distribute a checklist of the best possible behaviors according to the adoption of the best assumptions and try to completely master behaviors separately. Then, we attempted to raise the bar through extensive training and development. This stage was challenging, but in training workshops

**Table 1: The New Leadership Roles and Their Related Key Responsibilities in the New Business World of Social Innovation**

The New Leadership Roles for the Future	The Key Responsibilities
<b>Innovative Democratic Leadership</b>	<b>Democratizing an organization and going away from pyramidal and bureaucratic structures.</b> <b>Meeting the needs of employees and society without being persuaded by the old leadership models.</b>
<b>Innovation leader Search Steering Committee</b>	<b>Supporting personal qualities such as patience and humility.</b> <b>Inviting all employees to effectively and broadly participate in transformations.</b> <b>Looking at all employees, from the lowest to the highest organizational levels, as the pieces of organizational genius.</b>
<b>Organizational Excellence Keeper</b>	<b>Maintaining organizational excellence through continuous learning of human capital within the organization.</b> <b>Expanding the organizational infrastructure to develop the knowledge flow process throughout the company.</b> <b>Helping human resources on the path of excellence and growth through designing performance feedback systems.</b> <b>Communicating human resources with learning and development experts and management consultants.</b>

for the managers, we convinced them that this stage could play an important role in their personal development. Next, we demonstrated to the managers in workshops' training that those best assumptions and pursue behaviors could play an essential role in their personal development. For example, we asked them to hypothesize how humility can be essential in developing organizational leadership. Then, we asked them to write down the best behaviors in performing their duties in a checklist, according to this assumption and regardless of the position of the organization in which they are located. The results were fantastic, and the feedback received from the managers showed us that many behaviors with their employees had improved significantly compared to before these training workshops were held.

There are many ways of using social innovation executive training. Based on our consulting experience in Australia, we recommend using social innovation training to improve discussion learning quality by enhancing teaching and learning to maximize opportunities and experiences for employees and stakeholders. Executives can do it by enhancing the tools and techniques of social innovation to explore significant ways of learning and growing with diverse life experiences, different perspectives, and a wide array of backgrounds. There are also recommendations for interactive techniques:

- First, we propose a life story exercise that gets executives to explore their life stories and utilize lessons to help them lead people better.
- Second, we recommend motivational techniques to enhance authentic leadership to meet

the emerging needs of people who collaborate with and communicate with them in our global society.

- Third, we suggest using particular movie scenes and exercises that tap into the inner core of leadership development.
- Fourth, executives can develop the civil leadership characteristics that enhance an organization's ability to meet society's emerging needs by equipping them with what it takes to have a successful community.
- Fifth, AI, and Automation can also play an essential part in leadership development. Here, managers can examine their benefits and risks while simultaneously discussing building PsyCap (Psychological Capital). PsyCap skills offer positive perspectives to tackle difficult situations. However, there are some potential drawbacks, such as over-reliance on technology or ethical concerns. Therefore, we suggest complementary human-centric approaches.

Furthermore, we recommend practical insights to make leadership roles where everyone can take part and feel ownership. These recommendations can help leaders grow in self-understanding and open-mindedness, and do fun training on social innovation using real people's stories and motivational exercises. Here, we have four actionable ideas for executives:

- First, set up deep training sessions on social innovation using real stories and inspiration. This helps leaders stop biases and learn to value differences.



**Figure 1: The New Leadership Roles in the New Business World of Social Innovation**

- Second, make leadership roles where all workers can take part in big decisions. This stops rigid top-down control. Leaders need to stop wanting to control everything and learn to share power.
- Third, leadership roles are all about constant learning. Help people stop using outdated skills and learn skills needed today to understand the impact and how to manage social innovation.
- Fourth: Use chatbots and AI to create safe places to stop old assumptions and behaviors. Do activities like picturing an ideal innovative future and thinking backwards about how to get there. Question old assumptions by exploring worst-case situations.

## Conclusions

This article indicates effective leadership now means making social innovation the top priority. Resistance to this new leadership path will lead to the loss of opportunities for companies and ultimately their failure and exclusion from global markets. In embracing this change, organizations will flourish with excitement and freshness. Based on our evidence, these three roles (i.e., Innovative Democratic Leader, Innovation Leader Search Steering Committee, and Organizational Excellence Keeper), along with personal development and improvement of leaders' behaviors influenced the performance of organizations and made reaching the peak easier for organizations. Interactive training, roles where everyone participates, and constant learning allow this change. Leadership has to champion social in-

novation, including everyone's unique talents. Executives should lead this change to create positive, engaged cultures where all feel they belong. Leaders also need to adopt these three new roles in our new business world of social innovation. Leaders should become more familiar with these new roles and understand when to use these roles. All of these three roles are necessary at any level of the organization. Just as followers need to possess the same roles as leaders. Finally, executives should also be aware that their future endeavors will be completed by the unlearning processes and connecting them with the learning ones.

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