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Leadership as an Art

> **Is Leadership an Art?**
> What does it mean to lead creatively?
> Is leadership an art? And if so, where and how should we be working with future leaders?
> Why is this so important, now?

The challenges for today's leaders are many and varied, and evolving at a pace that reflects the speed of change in the world around us. The three types of challenge that I find personally most interesting at this point are as follows.

Leading through uncertainty

It goes without saying that the world has perhaps never, in any of our lifetimes at least, felt so VUCA – so volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and complex. Leading in these conditions is particularly challenging. We are very familiar with the idea that our leaders today need to be agile, adaptable and resilient, and to support those around them to be the same, wherever possible. But this is more easily said than done – how might we begin to develop the skills to do this?

One thing that can help is to clarify purpose, both for individual leaders and those with whom they work. Once underlying purpose is clear, the way this is put into practice can be adapted on an ongoing basis, to meet the needs of new circumstances as they emerge.

A new balance may also need to be found, between the direction and the support a leader offers under challenging circumstances such as these. While many may crave the certainty of direction from their leaders, others may need a more nurturing and supportive style to see them through the tough times, meaning that leaders need to be able to adapt, not only to the changing circumstances themselves, but also to the resulting changes in the needs and expectations of those with whom they work.

Leading for diversity

At a time when many of the challenges we face are so complex, and multi-faceted, it is more important than ever to be able to bring together communities and coalitions from a wide range of different backgrounds to address these. Research tells us that innovation thrives on diversity of thinking, and to find new ways of being, and doing, that can move us forward from our current challenges, we need to draw on the widest possible range of talents.

The talent of bringing together individuals from a wide range of different backgrounds, with different, and often conflicting, points of view, is rare, but we must seek this out, and support it where we can. Rethinking organisation structures, to include more networks and fewer hierarchies – more collaboration and less competition – can also help here.

Leading online

Perhaps the newest set of skills today's leaders are having to develop are those of leading online. Leaders, like so many of us, are having to learn new habits and behaviours for doing all those things which can anyway be so tricky – sensing the needs of an individual, the feel of a room, the pace that's needed to create momentum – through a layer of technology, which is itself evolving on an almost daily basis. The challenges this creates are immense, but great practices and opportunities are emerging, and I look forward, optimistically, to a world in which we are able to benefit from the best of both offline and online collaboration.

The sense that emerges, for me, from these reflections, is that leadership is, and must remain, very much an art - a creative practice involving empathy, expression and performance; experiment, adaptation and learning, in an ongoing effort to bring new and useful things into being, in the world around us. The need for creative leadership has never felt so great.