

Creative Leadership Framework

Personal Reflections

When I launched Pollicy, stepping into the world of data and digital rights was a leap into the unknown for me.

To make our mark, we embraced creativity not just as a tool, but as our ethos – using everything from illustrations and murals to data artistry. Our partners were as diverse as our methods: artists, poets, startups, feminist movements, queer groups. This unique blend led to some pretty unconventional outputs like mockumentaries, digital play, card games, chatbots, and interactive reports. In the civil society sector where thousands of organisations compete for visibility and impact, it became possible to unlock a new dimension of value in the content and format of the organisation's outputs. The result? Rapid growth, the ability to attract exceptional talent, and real impact in our field.

Through my journey, I've seen a common thread in many organisations – a pattern of working that can leave the team feeling undervalued, leaders losing sight of their vision, and ultimately, stifling growth, impact and sustainability. That's why I'm here to work with both up-and-coming and established leaders. My goal? To build organisations that are not just agile and resilient but also places where joy is a key part of the workday.

This framework I'm presenting to you is a culmination of what I've learned across continents – from East Africa to North America, Europe, and now Australia. It's a fusion of my love for art and creative media, my experiences in startups and tech, and my passion for leadership. I want to pave the way for future leaders, guiding them towards creating organisations where people don't just work – they thrive.



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Introduction

In a rapidly evolving world, where change is the only constant, the need for creative approaches to leadership has become increasingly necessary for organisations to succeed.

Traditional leadership models, while tried, tested and effective in certain scenarios, often fall short in fostering innovation, adaptability and resilience required in today's dynamic markets. Conventional approaches often focus on control and predictability, which can stifle creativity and hinder the flow of ideas, outputs and inspiration. In today's trailblazing organisations that are navigating current challenges successfully, emerging leadership models are not just placing creativity at the forefront, but leaning into and embracing change.

In this white paper, I will explore creativity in the workplace and propose a framework around creative leadership that harmonises creativity, automation and delegation as a new pathway and fresh perspective to building, sustaining and growing happy and efficient teams. This framework is not just a theory but a practical guide for leaders who aspire to cultivate a culture of innovation and agility within their organisations.

What is Creativity?

Creativity is a characteristic or process that leads to creating something that is both novel and valuable.

It is the ability to transcend traditional or widely accepted ideas, rules, patterns, and relationships, and to create meaningful new or alternative ones. While creativity is often relegated to the realm of arts and design, in reality, it is crucial to all fields, from science and technology to education and business.

In the workplace, creativity plays a significant role in one's approach to problem solving, seeking new opportunities and challenging the status quo, which may make some leaders apprehensive. However, in order for innovation to flourish in the workplace, employees at all levels must be encouraged to think freely and express their ideas without fear of criticism or failure.

Common misconceptions around creativity include beliefs that it is an innate talent that one either has or doesn't have, rather than understanding that creativity is not a fixed trait but a skill that can and should be developed and nurtured. Creativity is not just concerned with generating new ideas but plays a crucial role in everyday problem solving, management and strategic planning for a constantly changing world. Creativity may be linked to big, groundbreaking ideas but it is equally important in the daily, small, incremental changes and improvements which accumulate over time to positively impact teams, organisations and entire fields. It is present in the way we communicate, attend to everyday tasks, and deal with stress.

⁰¹ Novelty and Value

⁰² Continuously Nurtured

⁰³ Required in All Fields

⁰⁴ Big and Small Changes

The Creative Leadership Framework

⁰¹ Creativity

Your role as a leader is to ignite creative sparks and inspire others to think unconventionally. It's about championing out-of-the-box thinking, valuing innovative ideas, and nurturing an environment where creative problem-solving thrives. The goal? To generate distinctive, impactful solutions that distinguish your organisation in the competitive landscape.

⁰² Automation

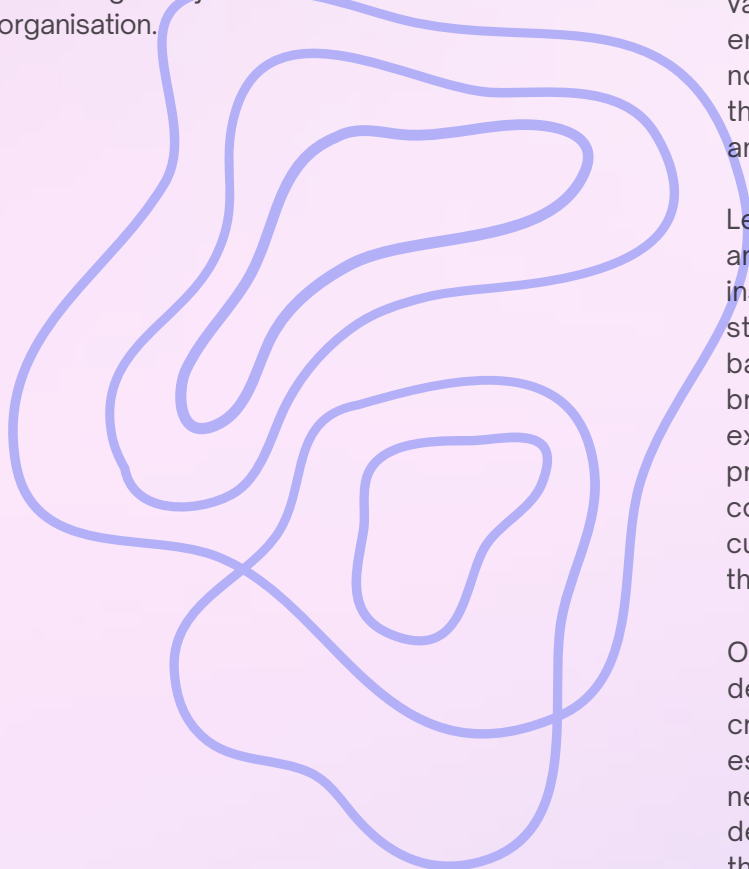
It sounds strange to talk about creativity and automation in the same breath, but in today's technology-driven world, automation is key to efficiency. My leadership approach involves identifying and implementing creative ways to automate cumbersome and repetitive processes.

⁰³ Delegation

Effective delegation is an art that requires trust, clarity, and alignment. It's about knowing when to let go and allow team members to take ownership, enabling a shared commitment to success. But it's not just work and responsibility that can be delegated. We can also delegate opportunities for growth, credit and awards, ownership and strategic decision, all of which strengthen the members of the team.

My approach to Creative Leadership is rooted in the belief that leadership is not just about managing tasks and people, but about sparking innovation, fostering a culture of creativity, and leading by example in a constantly evolving landscape. It's about exploring future possibilities, imagining what could be, and empowering others to turn those visions into reality. This involves a delicate balance between providing direction and allowing autonomy, between challenging the status quo and maintaining operational stability - all while embodying compassion and kindness in how we approach different situations.

This unique leadership framework is built on three core tenets: creativity, automation, and delegation. Each of these components plays a vital role in cultivating a dynamic and successful team and organisation.



Creativity

At the forefront of this approach is creativity. As a leader, it's my role to not only be a source of creative ideas but also to inspire creativity in others.

This means encouraging my team to think outside the box, to challenge conventional thinking, and to embrace a mindset where innovative ideas are valued and explored. It's about fostering an environment where creative problem-solving is the norm, and where the focus is on creative outputs that set your organisation apart from competitors and offer real, positive impact.

Leaders must employ design thinking, prototyping, and reflective practices to refine their creativity and inspire it in their teams. Design thinking offers a structured yet flexible approach to problem-solving based on empathy and ideation, while prototyping brings ideas to life through exploration and experimentation. Complemented by reflective practices, these methodologies enable leaders to continually evolve their creative skills and nurture a culture of innovation and continuous learning within their teams.

Outputs from these processes could include the design and execution of engaging events, the creation of compelling and informative content, the establishment of diverse communities and networks, inclusive forms of convening, and the development of novel products or services. Each of these outputs embodies the spirit of creativity and has the potential to significantly influence and shape our work and the wider community. Importantly, these creative outputs are not just valuable in their own right; they can also be instrumental in increasing fundraising efforts, boosting profits, and setting yourself up as an industry leader, thereby fueling the continued growth and success of the organisation.

Automation

My leadership approach involves identifying and implementing creative ways to automate cumbersome and repetitive processes.

Examples of such automations include using AI-driven tools for data analysis, implementing automated communication and marketing, and employing project management software to streamline task allocation and progress tracking. This unique leadership framework is built on three core tenets: creativity, automation, and delegation. Each of these components plays a vital role in cultivating a dynamic and successful team and organisation.

This is not about replacing human creativity with machines but using technology to free up time and resources, allowing the team to focus more on creative and strategic tasks. By automating routine email responses, utilising Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems for automated triggers, and deploying digital marketing tools for personalised content delivery, we can significantly enhance operational efficiency, yet still present a human touch in operations. Applying automation with creativity is a powerful way to enhance productivity and encourage innovation.



Delegation

Effective delegation is an art that requires trust, clarity, and alignment.

It's requires knowing when to let go and allow team members to take ownership, enabling a shared commitment to success. This involves creating a sense of alignment and equity in the organisation's achievements and values, building trust within the team, and ensuring that everyone is working towards a common vision. Granting autonomy and demonstrating trust in staff not only empowers them but also encourages the use of creative problem-solving techniques, as they feel more invested and free to explore innovative solutions.

Additionally, it's just great for the bottom line by enhancing operational efficiency and productivity. Empowering employees can lead to higher engagement and innovation, which in turn can result in the development of competitive products and services. Additionally, fostering internal leadership talent reduces the costs of external recruitment and training. Employee autonomy also correlates with reduced burnout and turnover, leading to cost savings in hiring and training. Moreover, teams with greater autonomy are often better equipped to provide responsive outward-facing service, boosting customer or client satisfaction and loyalty, crucial for sustained revenue growth.

Delegation, in this context, is not just a managerial task but a strategic tool for empowering individuals and teams, encouraging autonomy, and developing future leaders. We tend to think of delegation in terms of reducing our own workload. But it's not just work and responsibility that can be delegated. We can also delegate opportunities for growth, credit and awards, ownership and strategic decisions, all of which strengthen the members of the team.



Case Study #1

PathwayUp, a well-established non-profit has been serving the community for over 30 years, focusing on providing educational resources and training to underprivileged youth. Despite deep community connections, the organisation was losing its connection with the younger demographic as well as donors and facing operational inefficiencies.



Creativity

The leadership initiated weekly brainstorming sessions by inviting creative thought leaders from other industries to interact with the team. They complemented these mini-workshops by providing warm meals for all attendees, to foster a welcoming and collaborative atmosphere. This approach was aimed at stimulating fresh ideas for digital engagement which led to the launch of a virtual tutoring program, harnessing social media for outreach and engagement.



Automation

PathwayUp adopted a CRM system, automating donor communications and fundraising efforts. This shift not only streamlined operations but also improved donor engagement through timely communication, follow-up and reporting.



Delegation

The leadership empowered a team of tech-savvy college volunteers from the community, who had previously benefited from the organisation, to lead the digital transformation. This move not only accelerated the adoption of new technologies but also strengthened the role of the organisation within the community, while providing opportunities for local youth to gain industry experience and build networks.

The application of the creative leadership framework transformed the organisation. PathwayUp rejuvenated its operations, expanded its reach, and began to attract a diverse volunteer base and new donors, positioning itself as a forward-thinking, technology-embracing non-profit.

Case Study #2

Elegance Connect, a small online business, operates a marketplace that links beauty supply wholesalers with retail operations. While the business model was promising, Elegance Connect faced challenges in expanding its market reach and profitability.



Creativity

The leadership at Elegance Connect organised a quarterly internal pitch competition where team members could present and discuss new ideas for enhancing the online platform. This led to the introduction of a feature that allowed for seamless integration of retailers' inventory systems with the wholesalers' databases, making the supply chain more efficient and responsive.



Automation

Recognising the need to optimise operations, Elegance Connect implemented an AI-driven analytics tool. This system automated the process of market analysis, providing real-time insights into consumer trends and preferences, which helped in curating a more targeted product range on their platform.



Delegation

The company established a dedicated digital marketing team, giving them the autonomy to develop and execute online campaigns. This team focused on leveraging social media and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to increase the marketplace's visibility and attract a broader customer base.

These strategic changes brought about a significant increase in revenue at Elegance Connect. The business not only streamlined its operations but also expanded its reach in the beauty supply industry. The implementation of creative leadership principles led to improved efficiency, a more robust online presence, and a marked increase in user engagement and transactions on the platform.

Where Creative Leadership Happens

While Creative leadership seeks to promote innovation and drive change; it's also deeply rooted in the principles of compassion and kindness. These human elements are essential in nurturing a supportive, collaborative, and forward-thinking environment. Creative leadership transcends the confines of traditional leadership models, manifesting in various realms of interaction and influence. It begins within oneself, extends to colleagues and teams, and ultimately impacts the wider world.

With You

Leading by Example

The origins of creative leadership lie within the leaders themselves. It involves embodying the principles of creativity, innovation, and openness in everyday actions and decisions. Leading by example means consistently demonstrating a willingness to embrace new ideas, challenge conventional methods, and encourage a culture of continuous learning and improvement. It's about being a consistent guide and source of inspiration, setting the standard for creativity and excellence within the organisation.

With Colleagues

Building Trusted Relationships

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With the World

Impacting our Career Field

The impact of creative leadership extends beyond the confines of the organisation, influencing the broader field of work and the world at large. The creative outputs – be they innovative products, services, or new ways of working – set new benchmarks and inspire change across industries. It involves sharing knowledge, contributing to industry dialogues, and leading initiatives that have the potential to reshape practices and perceptions. In order to be a thought leader, an innovator, and a change agent, driving progress and inspiring transformation on a larger scale.

Conclusion

Overall, I see Creative Leadership as a pathway to identifying our purpose, leaning in to our passion and bringing on real impact in the world by:

Unlearning

Unlearning habits that stifle openness and transparency personally and in the workplace

Overcoming Fear

Overcoming a fear of failure, of the unknown or of standing out

Automation

Setting on autopilot busybody tasks that take up brainspace that could otherwise be used towards creative pursuits

Culture

Fostering a work culture that thrives on seeing your colleagues grow and succeed individually, within their teams and ultimately in the larger world

Listening

Actively seeking and valuing diverse perspectives and ideas, recognizing that varied experiences and backgrounds contribute to a richer, more creative environment

Empathy

Focusing on developing empathy and emotional intelligence, which are key to understanding and motivating people, and fostering a supportive workplace

Trust

Giving team members the trust and autonomy to take ownership of their ideas and projects, which encourages innovation and personal accountability.

Contact

You can reach me for any questions, coaching requests or collaborations.



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