

ARTICLE

Leading for innovation: A new model for 21st-century leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to argue that 21st-century realities require a fresh look at leadership and conceptualizing a new approach that reflects the new realities. Rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a new model is proposed for leading innovation that considers the multi-generational nature of the workforce, emotional intelligence of organizations, and the rapid technological changes that demand continuous innovation for organizations to stay competitive. Grounded in theory from psychology, sociology, anthropology and management disciplines, this emergent model can provide a new framework for building and leading healthy innovative organizations.

KEYWORDS

emotional intelligence, generations, innovation, leadership

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is being defined by technological revolutions, multi-generational dissonance, and sociological upheavals. Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) is a term used in the research literature to discuss unpredictable and rapidly changing environments (Mack et al., 2016; Wang & Chia, 2019). Organizational research and literature have focused on VUCA and other topics that reflect 21st-century realities like sustainable practices, inclusiveness, intrapreneurship, and philanthropy, but there have been few, if any, new leadership theories that take them into account. Leadership theories like shared leadership (Conger & Pearce, 2003; Pearce, 2007) and relational leadership (Clarke, 2018) focus on the worker's perspective generally but do not account for the complexity in the marketplace or generational differences. Petrie (2014) discusses the challenges of developing leaders in a complex world but brings the focus of the discussion back to the leader. Humphrey (2014) observed that organizations in the 21st century "have had to become more flexible and adaptable, and better educated employees now want more than just a paycheck from their jobs" (p. xvii). While Humphrey's comment is targeted mainly at Generations X, Y (millennials), and Z, there are also baby boomers and a smattering of maturists (born before 1945) still in the workforce. The 21st-century workforce is defined by an increasing number of knowledge workers that are engaged in producing an ever-changing array of technology-driven products and services. When adding ingredients such as a global pandemic, unprecedented employee turnover, and hybrid workplaces, it becomes readily apparent that the nature of work has changed.

New realities in a VUCA environment, converging with a generationally diverse workforce, call for a fresh new look at leadership and how it can be most effective in the vastly different contexts of organizations today (Wang & Chia, 2019). Add to VUCA, the repercussions of a 2-year pandemic and the fragility of the economy, and the result is that the nature of work has changed in a profound way. This radical shift in the very nature of work calls for a fresh look at how leaders lead in a way that is both accommodating to competing demands and effective in maintaining the competitive advantage of their product or service. The three factors that will be reviewed to set

the stage for introducing a new model of leadership are innovation as a constant in organizations, integrating a multi-generational workforce, and the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership and culture. After a review of each of the factors and their effects on organizations, a new model for leadership in the 21st century will be introduced and explained.

INNOVATION AS A CONSTANT

Following Moore's law of computing (Schaller, 1997), the pace of technological change in the 21st century has continued to increase at a rate that, at times, does not seem to be manageable. Technology and innovation permeate virtually every facet of organizations today and in the future. Innovation as the operationalizing of creative ideas can also be disruptive to markets, industries, and organizations. It was not too long ago that cell phones revolutionized not only the telephone industry but also created a new market for mobile computing with rippling effects in other industries like package delivery and rental cars. Uber upended the taxicab industry and created new opportunities for food delivery. These examples, and many others, demonstrate that innovation is disruptive and prevalent. In a *Harvard Business Review* article in 2015, the architect of disruption theory, Clayton M. Christensen, and his co-authors, discussed some misunderstandings of the original theory published in 1995. In the article, they discuss how their original theory may or may not apply to Uber as a disrupter. What is most striking though, reviewing this discussion in 2015 and considering the present circumstances, is that they call out higher education (colleges and universities) as an "intriguing anomaly" able to maintain their standings despite the attempts of online universities to change the game (Christensen et al., 2015). They asked the prescient questions, "Will online education disrupt the incumbent's model? And if so, when?" (Christensen et al., 2015). Could the post-pandemic era answer be yes? Traditional colleges and universities are struggling to manage disruption in higher education including balancing changes in cash flow from lower enrolments, changing faculty and staff expectations of in-person versus online teaching, and maintaining the elements of college life that attract students to a physical campus like sports and "Greek" life.

Businesses and other organizations are also having to adapt to the stressors of constant change (Murphy, 2020). Innovation can be described on a continuum from evolutionary or incremental to revolutionary or radical (Rosenfeld et al., 2011; Kessler & Chakrabarti, 1999). Rosenfeld et al. (2011) add an additional category between evolutionary and revolutionary, which they call expansionary or innovating on the way we use something. Kessler and Chakrabarti (1999) studied the antecedents of speeding innovation and they found that "depending upon the level of uncertainty, ranging from radical (high) to incremental (low), there appear to be different sets of methods managers can draw from in accelerating new product development" (p. 244). Some notable examples are for radical innovation, numerous higher-up champions are best to inculcate the new ideas, while for incremental innovation, fewer champions are needed. Another difference is that radical innovation is best facilitated with co-location of teams, while incremental innovation is best supported by limiting face-to-face interaction. Rosenfeld et al. (2011) studying the human dynamics of innovation, also noted that people who prefer working on revolutionary (radical) innovation, called pioneers, are more interactive in their approach, whereas the builders, preferring to work on evolutionary (incremental) innovation, are best suited working on their own and with stable rules and norms. The largest majority, they note, are the connectors who prefer working on expansionary innovation and also act as interpreters between the builders and the pioneers.

The proposition offered is that embracing innovation as a constant and encouraging both sustaining (incremental) innovations and disruptive (radical) innovations within the organization can help leaders adapt and change in sustainable ways.

Innovation preferences are a composite of cognitive, affective, and conative factors (Rosenfeld et al., 2011). Although they vary from person to person based on the individual mix of those factors, they are not age-dependent. As independent from the multi-generational factors discussed next, accommodating and making the best use of innovation preferences adds to the complexity of the challenge for leaders.

INTEGRATING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Beginning in the 1980s, William Strauss and Neil Howe started theorizing about generational events and archetypes. In their seminal work, *Generations: The history of America's future 1584–2069*, Strauss and Howe (1991) theorized that history can be correlated with recurring generational personas (archetypes). The four generational personas (idealists, reactives, civics, and adaptives) are both reflective of events they experience but are also a

product of their parenting by previous generations. The result is that every generational persona repeats in a cycle. Strauss and Howe (1991) predicted that millennials will reach adulthood in a crisis era (global pandemic?) where they will face “economic and social hardship” (p. 420). They also predicted that if the crisis occurs when the millennials are slightly older (late 20s to early 30s) then they will “coalesce as a genuine Civic type... (showing) more team like spirit and more like-mindedness in action” (p. 421).

Discussing how to manage Gen Zs in the turbulent era of the 21st century, Borg et al. (2020) noted that leaders must alter traditional leadership and management practices to adapt to different expectations to instill career resilience. Similar tomes have been written about managing the nomadic Gen Xs and overly demanding millennials or Gen Ys (Damon, 2018; Power, 2019; Hassan et al., 2020; Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). Having four or five generations in the workplace is historical, and the differences they bring with them are creating a whole new set of challenges.

Those differences begin with each group’s aspirational goals or what they want out of work or a career. The maturists who experienced the Great Depression and World War II were happy just to have a steady job and provide for their families. The baby boomers took it a step further by adding their desire for a career, usually with one company and with loyalty being a main career motivator. The Gen Xers were more self-focused and started a larger conversation about work–life balance. The millennials (Gen Y), who make up about 50% of the current workforce and will be up to 75% of the global workforce by 2025, came into the workplace expecting freedom and flexibility and are more willing to switch jobs than other generations (Insperity, 2019). As noted by Borg et al. (2020), Gen Z presents their own demands for fluidity. The generations also differ in their acceptance of and ease with technology and communication media. Older baby boomers are more likely to conduct business face to face or on the phone, whereas Generations X, Y, and Z consider effective communication has taken place if a text has been sent or a post was uploaded onto social media.

All these factors might lead one to believe that managing these generational differences is a daunting task. A deeper look at the data indicates that there are some surprising similarities along with their differences. Brandon Rigoni and Amy Adkins, in a *Harvard Business Review* article written in 2016, cite Gallup data that show that although six in 10 millennials are always looking for a new job, it is not fun they are seeking, contrary to what some were saying. What they ranked as extremely important is the opportunity to learn and grow. The data show that baby boomers and Gen Xers ranked the opportunity to learn and grow at closer to 40%, while the millennials ranked it closer to 60%. Millennials also ranked the quality of management and managers almost 10 points higher than the Gen Xs.

Since the idea for this article came up in a conversation between two of the authors, a baby boomer and a younger millennial, it was thought that providing vignettes would be helpful to show how different perspectives might pose discontinuities in a workplace where both are present. The purpose of these vignettes is to demonstrate how people of different generations see themselves in the context of work. These differences in perspective impact most aspects of work like the use of technology for training and communication, incentives and rewards, work–life balance, and predilection for changing jobs and even careers. The first perspective below is from the baby boomer, and the second is from the millennial.

I see our differences as a matter of the choices we were afforded. When I was growing up, we had five kids and one car, which our dad took to work every day. Our choices for recreation were playing outside or taking advantage of activities in the community or church that provided transportation or to where we could hitch a ride. If we hoped to talk with someone, we had to wait by the phone in our house or at work, and if we wanted to correspond with someone in writing, we wrote letters and memos. Going to college was not inevitable. Without a scholarship, it was a matter of means. Choosing a career was not guaranteed either. Barriers to entry were most definitely in place for women, and if you chose a traditionally female job, your possibilities for advancement were limited. The result was that when women got a job, they adapted to the norms of the organization and accepted whatever advancement opportunities were available. (Baby boomer)

When a non-millennial thinks about the qualities and attributes of a millennial, they might think, participation trophies, iced coffee, and wanting praise for doing basic tasks. When a millennial thinks about the qualities and attributes of a millennial, they think, trailblazer, changing the norm, making a difference, being successful, and happy. I imagine the difference of opinions is in vision and values. We were told that we can do anything we put our mind to, so we want change. We were told to be nice and kind to one another, so we want fairness and equality. We were told that the only way to make it was

to get into college, so we went for higher education. The Gen Xers were caught in the middle, the first generation of working moms, raised with the entry of new but relatively primal forms of technology. Where Gen Xers saw technology as games and pastimes, millennials were true “digital natives” with technology in every part of their lives. ([Younger] millennial)

THE ROLE OF EI AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

The third factor that informed approaching leadership in the context of 21st-century challenges, after the rapid pace of innovation and managing a multi-generational workforce, was the role of EI and psychological safety. Discussing EI and the role of psychological safety in how leaders shape culture is a critical component of enacting a new concept of leading for innovation.

EI is a concept that was moved into the organizational lexicon by Mayer and Salovey in 1990. Since then, and especially after Goleman (1995, 1998) brought EI into the mainstream, discourse on EI has grown exponentially. EI is seen as either ability-centric (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) or focuses on integrating related abilities that can be learned (Nelson & Low, 2011; Rude, 2013; Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010). This article adopts the Nelson and Low (2011) definition of EI: “A convergence of *learned abilities* [emphasis added] that facilitate (a) the accurate knowledge and value of self, as well as responsible actions based on personal worth and dignity; (b) a variety of strong, healthy relationships; (c) the ability to work well with others; and (d) productive reactions to the demands and pressures of everyday life and work” (Rude, 2013, p. 30). In this context, the psychosocial aspects of EI can be appreciated at both the individual and organizational levels of analyses.

EI has been most often researched and applied to leaders. Emotionally intelligent leaders have a positive impact in the workplace that results in a more positive culture. To demonstrate those connections, this discussion follows (a generally sequential) logic trail:

1. EI begins at the individual level of analysis, with self-awareness typically cited as the starting point for EI discovery (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Nelson & Low, 2011; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
2. Organizations are social mechanisms as they involve multiple individuals in a workplace environment (Goleman, 1998; Illeris, 2007, 2011).
3. EI manifests in an interpersonal, relational context through the display of social awareness, empathy, and decision-making, among other attributes (Nelson & Low, 2011).
4. Effective leadership is an inherently social endeavor (Schein, 1992; Yukl, 2010).
5. Organizational culture is a complex phenomenon with widespread implications for both organizational and individual (e.g., leader) success (Kaur & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Rude, 2014; Schein, 2010).

“Organizational culture and leadership have both become very complicated topics” (Schein, 1992, p. ix). Commenting on the role of the leader, Schein (1992) notes that culture is very stable but not very malleable and “leaders create and manage culture” (p. 5). Culture is the result of a group learning process only partially influenced by the leader, but when group survival is threatened, it is the job of the leader to defend it. Schein (1992) describes the role of the leader in a way that shows the potential negative impact a leader can have on a culture.

Leaders first start the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations. After cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will or will not be a leader. But if elements of a culture become dysfunctional, it is the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment (p. 22).

Schein (2017) explains that “leadership is the key to learning” and when the organization experiences difficulty, it is the leader who senses the need and takes action to resolve it, which, over time, changes the culture (p. 14).

Psychological safety in Edmondson’s (2019) book is described in terms that are closely related to EI. Edmondson (2019) broadly defined *psychological safety* “as a climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves ... when a work environment has reasonably high psychological safety, good things happen ... mistakes are reported quickly so that prompt corrective actions can be taken; seamless coordination across groups or departments is enabled; and potentially game-changing ideas for innovation are shared. In short, psychological safety is a crucial source of value creation in organizations operating in a complex, changing environment [emphasis added] (p. xvi).” When people are emotionally intelligent and feel psychologically safe, they can more

TABLE 1 Emotional intelligence (EI), psychological safety, and leadership

Category	Setting the stage	Inviting participation	Responding productively
Leadership tasks and behaviors	Frame the work emphasize purpose	Demonstrate situational humility, practice inquiry, and set up structures and processes	Express appreciation, destigmatize failure, and address violations
Psychological safety outcomes	Shared expectations and meaning	Confidence that voice is welcome	Orientation toward continuous learning
EI attributes	Reflection, self-awareness, social awareness, and effective communications	Self-Awareness Empathy Thoughtful Decision Making	Empathy and relationship management

Source: Adapted from Edmondson (2019, table 7-1), *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. Wiley.

readily express themselves in a productive manner. A central tenet of EI, based on pioneers Nelson and Low (2011), is the learned ability to think productively and act wisely. EI is well-aligned with Edmondson's (2019) leader's toolkit for psychological safety as depicted in Table 1.

INTRODUCING THE MODEL

Managing the complexity of a VUCA world requires innovation in virtually every aspect of work from hybrid work environments to flexible forms of communication. Adding to the complexity, leaders must do more than just lead people unilaterally they must be aware of multi-generational differences and how to motivate, communicate, and evaluate the performance of a wider range of workers. After a review of how innovation has become a constant in organizations, how integrating a multi-generational workforce can be a challenge of adapting to differences or an opportunity to look for similarities, and the role of EI in managing complexity and shaping culture, a new model of leadership is offered that builds from the groundbreaking work of Dr. Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, and his hierarchy of needs. Maslow argued that humans have a tiered hierarchy of emotional needs to be satisfied. The basis of the theory is that only after each need is satisfied, can the next level need be attained. Self-actualization, at the highest tier, can only be achieved when the other needs are met. His theory ran contrary to earlier psychological theories that focused on abnormal or deviations from normal behavior. He focused on positive, healthy psychological states that resulted in highly effective, well-adjusted individuals.

Organizations should be both highly effective and healthy, providing a psychologically safe (Edmondson, 2019) and encouraging environment. For this reason, Maslow's hierarchy of needs seemed an appropriate place to start (Maslow, 1954). After some discussion, the authors likened the tiers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to their own hierarchy of organizational elements that can be built upon to reach the highest level of functioning and creative engagement that feeds innovation.

Figure 1 provides a comparison of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the new leading for innovation model. The following sections will discuss the different elements of the new model.

First level: Being transparent

In Maslow's theory, meeting basic physiological needs supports the rest of the pyramid. From the time of our birth, food, water, and sleep are constants. Even in our adult bodies, we cease to function at our peak when we are hungry, thirsty, or lacking in sleep. In the leading for innovation pyramid, the foundation is transparency. Simply put, leaders must be open and honest in every communication, spoken or written. We need honesty and openness in our work lives, and when it is lacking, we cease to function at our peak. The Enron scandal prompted years of research into (lack of) transparency and how it permeates every facet of the organization. For example, Cuong (2011) cited "poor corporate governance and a dishonest culture that nurtured serious conflicts of interests and unethical behaviour" (p. 585) as significant reasons for the collapse that ruined thousands of lives. Being open and honest are hallmarks of all relationships—be it marriages, partnerships, or organizations. When honesty and openness are lacking in our work life, we begin to question others' motives and intentions, giving rise to

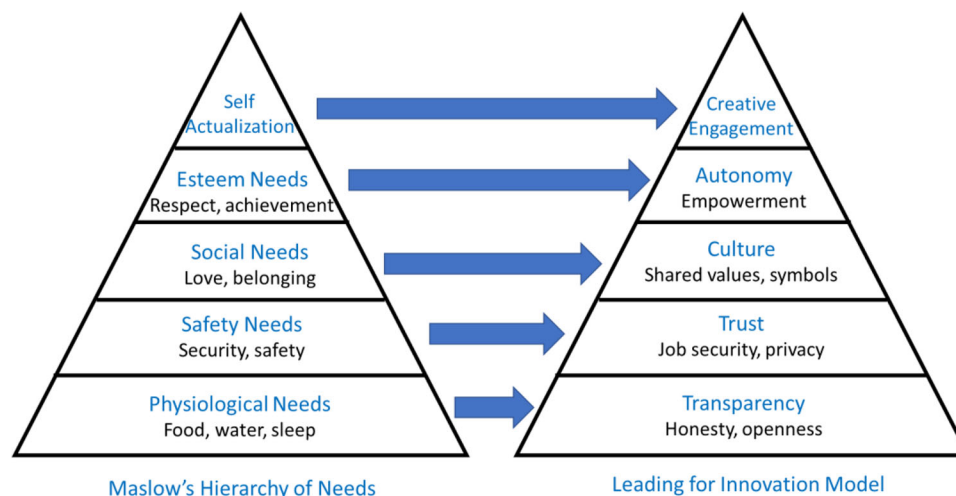


FIGURE 1 Comparison of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to leading for innovation model

resentment and skepticism. When leaders are open and honest, however, transparency is reinforced making way for the next level: trust.

Second level: Building trust

Maslow's theory holds that once the basic physiological needs are met, people look for safety and security. In a human survival context, after finding sources of food and water, the next concern is finding a safe and secure location protected from the elements. In the organizational context, psychological and employment safety are analogous to trust. Employees trust that they will have job security and be compensated fairly. Psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019) gives credence to employees feeling safe to express their voices, which runs counter to organizational silence, a research field borne in part from a psychological safety void. Trust also extends to privacy and confidentiality. Even handshakes are a renowned gesture of trust. Historians believe that the handshake was originally created to check if the other person was carrying a weapon in their hand or forearm. The up and down motion was meant to dislodge hidden blades or knives. With the onset of the severe acute respiratory syndrome-related coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), commonly referred to as COVID-19 pandemic, the handshake was replaced with a fist bump or no physical contact. Removing this simple gesture may be a setback for trust in the workplace.

When leaders create an environment of safety built on trust, it empowers the organization (C-suite, teams, and individuals) to develop a deeper level of vulnerability-based trust—trusting one another on a fundamental, emotional level (B. Brown, 2018). When leaders, managers, and employees develop this level of trust, they can be comfortable being vulnerable with one another about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors. Joseph and Winston (2005) explored the relationship between employee perceptions of servant leadership and leader trust, as well as organizational trust, relying heavily on Greenleaf's seminal work on servant leadership and the role of trust (Greenleaf, 1977). They found a high correlation for all their hypotheses related to the role of the leader in building organizational trust and "the important role of trust in organizational effectiveness" (p. 16). Biro (2015), citing the work of Jehn and Shah (1997), opined that this type of openness, without filters, also leads to higher levels of engagement, productivity, communication, and decreases attrition. "A leader's inability to build and foster trustworthy relationships with subordinates can prevent them from generating new ideas, especially when the leader's support is absent" (Kaur & Hirudayaraj, 2021, p. 63).

Third level: The dynamics of culture

Maslow's social needs of feeling loved and included are manifest organizationally in the culture. Schein (1992) views culture as a phenomenon that always surrounds us, is being constantly enacted, and is created by our own interactions with others. The dynamic processes of culture can be created, embedded, developed, manipulated, managed, and changed. Stability of culture depends on "structure and patterning or integration" of the elements into a larger paradigm through shared assumptions and shared experience (p. 11).

Linking EI, leadership, and culture can begin by making observations of the culture and climate in the organization and then attempting to draw inferences about the role of leaders. The other way to study the intersection of these three elements is to adopt Schein's (1992) notion that leaders can create culture through artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions. In Rude's (2013) study on highly effective federal government leaders, the development of EI was explored. The research question sought to discover the salient experiences that shaped and honed the participant's EI. The study drew on adult learning theories (particularly experiential and situated learning); leadership and leader development; and the burgeoning research literature on EI. Rude (2013) noted "participant EI experiences were oftentimes contextualized in terms of relating to and connecting with people in a social milieu" influencing and being influenced by culture (p. 138). Rude (2013) noted the exploratory work of Cherniss (2010a, 2010b) to underscore the need for organizations to be emotionally intelligent. The leading for innovation model embraces the expansion of EI from a largely individual to now a collective level of analysis.

More chief executive officers (CEOs) and other leaders are also realizing that they must change and adapt the culture to accommodate four or five generations in the workplace. For the millennials and Gen Z, there is a definite shift to a more open culture that includes breaking down the silos and power structures (fiefdoms). This shift supports more of a shared leadership approach where leaders act as "coach" versus "boss" to keep them engaged and "bought in" to the organization's vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Power (2019) cited Alison Gutterman, CEO of Jelmar who said, "servant leadership is quickly becoming the new normal in management style," flipping the focus of traditional top-down leadership to putting the needs of employees first as promoted by Greenleaf (1977). Also, new leaders must attend to the organization's culture (Rude, 2014).

For this third level, understanding the social mechanisms operating in organizational cultures, (norms, values, myths, and symbols), capitalizing on the corporate utility of EI, and adopting a more egalitarian mindset for leadership can be harnessed by leaders to lay the groundwork for innovation to happen through increasing their autonomy.

Fourth level: Instilling autonomy

Maslow's focus in his hierarchy of needs shifts from the individual in levels one and two to the need for others in level three and then back to the individual for levels four and five. A closer look finds that at the lower two levels of the pyramid, the individual is looking outward to find satisfaction, safety, and security. After meeting the social needs in level three, the fourth level shifts to the individual finding a sense of self through inward-looking means. This is described by Maslow as self-esteem confirmed through respect from others and achievements by the individual. In the context of work, self-esteem is closely related to self-efficacy. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy was built around a social exchange framework that proposed that the individual's "prolonged transactions" with the environment serve to direct and mediate experience (p. 203). Self-efficacy determines how much effort a person will invest and "how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). An individual's self-efficacy varies in magnitude, generality, and strength, which are determined by past performance, "vicarious experience," direct or social persuasion by another person or group, and affective manifestations (pp. 195–198). When trust is high, members in the organization have higher levels of self-efficacy to act independently, which reinforces positive self-esteem.

Empowering employees through autonomy builds the self-esteem Maslow describes as the next higher level need after social needs are met. Leaders in organizations can build on high levels of trust and a positive culture by giving employees room to expand their sphere of responsibilities, experiment, and perhaps fail. Biro (2015) noted that "employees are more motivated by work passion than career ambition—a number that will surely rise. The new workplace has to include self-motivation as a driving force behind employee engagement—which means (no matter the geography, whether digital or physical) that employees are given the freedom to grow, learn, and push themselves." Citing several sources on the preferences of Millennials, Damon (2018) summarized her findings by saying "young professionals are most comfortable in work environments where they're trusted in their capabilities to complete projects." In contrast, Schroth (2019) found that although Gen Z are "the most achievement-oriented of the generations," they are the least autonomous because of overly protective parenting and lack of work experience (p. 5).

This contrast points to the challenge for leaders and managers of multiple generations in the workforce. While older baby boomers possess self-esteem and self-efficacy through decades of experience, Gen X might need more "me" time to satisfy their need for work–life balance, Gen Y might want to be left alone with only the goal to guide

them, and finally Gen X might need one-on-one coaching to build their confidence and skills. Accommodating this wide variation in needs for autonomy will certainly continue to be a challenge for leaders in the future.

Once a positive sense of autonomy is achieved and employees feel empowered to contribute to the organization through their actions, the final level, or pinnacle, of the leading for innovation pyramid can be reached.

Fifth level: Reaching the pinnacle of creative engagement

After transparency has been established, trust has been achieved, a positive culture has been created, and autonomy has been given, the pinnacle of creative engagement, which is required for innovation, is reached. To establish a definition for creative engagement, we review McLeod's (2007) summary of Maslow's theory, a recent literature review on creativity and innovation in the popular press and academic journals, and Shuck et al.'s (2017) discussion on employee engagement.

The pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization. In his discussion of Maslow's theory, McLeod (2007) noted that "self-actualization can be achieved through creating works of art or literature, for others through sport, in the classroom, or within a corporate setting" (p. 9). He also cites Maslow's (1970a) 15 characteristics of self-actualizers including being "highly creative" (p. 10). A recent literature review by Rainone et al. (2021) defines both creativity and innovation as "creativity refers to the generation of novel and useful solutions to complex, ill-defined problems while innovation refers to the implementation of creative solutions" (p. 6). In their literature review of the popular press and academic articles, they focus on creativity and innovation together. In the leading for innovation model, a definition of creative engagement was developed by considering creativity at the individual level of analysis and innovation, as the "implementation of creative solutions" (Rainone et al., 2021), at both the individual level and team and collective levels of analysis. Rainone et al. (2021) also call for research that incorporates anecdotes, used by the popular press to encourage readership, and provide recommendations that are useful to practitioners to "begin to narrow the research-practice gap" (pp. 18–19).

Incorporating traditional aspects of employee engagement, Shuck et al. (2017) "operationally defined employee engagement as a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy" (p. 269). Further, they outlined three approaches to engagement: engagement as an outcome (Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002), engagement as a psychological state (Soane et al., 2012; Yalabik et al., 2013), and engagement as a process (Barrick et al., 2015, p. 280; Kahn, 1990).

Engagement is impacted by an employee's sense of satisfaction and belonging (Shuck et al., 2021). Teams with higher levels of engagement are less likely to leave their organization (Shuck et al., 2014, 2021). Harter (2020) noted that engagement levels reached a record high in 2019, with those who were engaged up to 35% and those who were actively disengaged down to 13%. Harter (2020) explained that employees defined being engaged as feeling clear about their role, having the opportunity to do what they do best, having opportunities at work to develop, enjoying strong coworker relationships, and working with a common mission or purpose. J. Brown (2017) proffered that one's sense of inclusion relied on being welcomed, valued, respected, and heard.

Biro (2015) cited the creation of UberEvents as an example of leadership trusting their people to innovate. A group of employees at Uber had an idea that was not quite ready to pitch to leadership, so they self-organized a weekend away to develop the idea and pitched it successfully to the leadership the next week. This example demonstrates that a group of employees who have experienced transparency from their leaders and have trust and feel a sense of autonomy in a positive culture can pour out their creative energy to innovate.

The use of the term creative engagement is aligned with Maslow as a psychological state for individuals, but it is also asserted that creative engagement can occur in teams and organizations, which speaks to engagement as also a process and an outcome. Adapting from works cited, creative engagement is defined as *the creation of novel and useful solutions, across the spectrum from incremental to radical, that engage the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy of individuals working alone or in groups*. The leading for innovation model provides a framework for leaders who want their people, and their organizations more broadly, to be more innovative. By building a healthy and vibrant organization with high levels of transparency and trust, a positive nurturing culture, empowering employees to function with the appropriate level of autonomy, and ultimately celebrating creative engagement through innovative approaches to problems, leaders can reap the benefits of a high-functioning organization.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In this conceptual and theory-building article, a model for leading innovation was introduced that considers the new realities of a VUCA environment where innovation seems to be happening everywhere, managing a

generationally diverse workforce that requires diversity and flexibility of approaches to leadership and work, and the role of EI in not only the leaders but also in every member of the organization. After a brief review of each of the factors (VUCA, multi-generational workforce, and EI) and their effects on organizations, a new model for leadership in the 21st century was introduced and explained. The discussion set the stage for a definition of creative engagement, which is at the pinnacle of the model and represents the full manifestation of creative energy that fuels innovation. This discussion answered Shuck et al. (2017) call to explore “exciting engagement-related lines of research” adding to others like student engagement, faculty engagement, and community engagement (p. 283). This model provides a framework for researching and validating the efficacy of a new leadership model that focuses on a constant need for innovation in the 21st-century workplace.

If innovation is a constant in work today, then conceptualizing and theorizing how best to nurture innovation in organizations is a worthy goal. While the lower levels (transparency and trust) of the leading for innovation model are universal, the next two levels (culture and autonomy) may be understood differently by different generations. For example, what encourages a sense of belonging for a baby boomer may not be the same for a more aloof Gen Xer, and the level of autonomy a millennial desires is different from what Gen Z might indicate.

For these reasons, our new model for leading innovation should be researched in different contexts to validate the hypothesis that creating a positive healthy organization by building and reinforcing transparency, trust, culture, and autonomy can lead to higher levels of creative engagement. Opportunities to do research with the leading for innovation model will be pursued and until that research can be done, feedback on the model is welcome and collaboration with other researchers would also be helpful.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In terms of implications for practice, there are many in the popular press that are writing about innovation, high-performing organizations, employee engagement, and the impacts of a multi-generational workforce. For example, Harter (2020) found that high-development organizations have four themes in common. They are driven by a CEO and/or board of directors with a clearly stated vision, the organization practices companywide communication, managers are held accountable, and managers are educated and encouraged to move from a culture of “boss” to “coach.” These four themes are rooted in factors discussed during the development of the leading for innovation model, and while coaching was not specifically discussed, it most certainly has a role to play.

Based on the factors discussed in building the model, the following practical recommendations are offered that may help leaders cultivate highly effective and innovative organizations.

1. Be transparent in all spoken and written communications.
2. Clearly state the vision for where the organization is headed and what goals need to be attained to get it there.
3. Build and maintain trust by making and keeping commitments, ensuring privacy, and treating employees fairly.
4. Develop the social and emotional skills of members of the organization by providing positive cultural experience, personal autonomy, and organizational learning opportunities.
5. Engage employees in visioning, change management, and goal-setting activities.
6. Cultivate innovation through compensatory time for personal interests, sharing those interests in organizational settings, and intrapreneurship opportunities.

Finally, considering everything that has happened since December of 2019, it is understandable that many have concluded that the nature of work has changed. The authors look forward to collaborating with others to research this proposed model and its practical applications that are focused on building healthy organizations made up of a diverse workforce that is equipped psychologically, socially, and emotionally to thrive in an uncertain and ever-changing work environment.

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