



# Creative

# Leadership

Leading With and For Creativity



As technology continues its automation of programmatic work, the **premium** on creativity in the workplace only grows. Creativity allows us to imagine, play with, and build previously unknown futures. It is the fuel behind innovation, offering up the raw material of ideas, which are then refined into operational products and services.

It makes sense then that since the middle of the 20th century researchers have been **highlighting the need for creative leadership**. Creative leaders understand that conventional decision-making frameworks and technical-administrative thinking, while efficient, aren't enough to meet the demands of open systems and new challenges.

But what does it mean to be a creative leader? Well, there are two dimensions:



**Leadership as Creative Thinking, and**



**Leadership as Facilitating Creativity**

## Leadership as Creative

### Thinking

Leadership is fundamentally a creative act. We live in a world where no simple solution fits the constantly evolving and varied situations in front of us. And when it comes to the opportunities and challenges of leadership, this is the case many times over. We are faced with a range of problems requiring adaptive solutions - from workforce planning to changing customer expectations and, at a broader scale, volatile geopolitical and economic conditions.

Creativity is a crucial skill for leaders, enabling them to explore opportunities, stay agile and meet the demands of the moment with innovative problem-solving. There will never be a definitive playbook for all the decisions that need to be made – creative leaders must forge their own path.

Being creative also allows leaders to become fluent storytellers, crafting narratives that will energise and connect people. Take, for example, the magnetic power of Elon Musk to lead innovative organisations and mobilise capital through sharing his vision for the world (and for space).

A defining characteristic of creative leaders is that they are unafraid of failure. In order to explore creative options, we need to let go of fears about them not working or being too radical. Rajiv Ball, a Partner at THNK the UC Berkeley School of Creative Leadership, describes a certain tension and paradox in creative leadership, between the directive and the exploratory aspects of this leadership style. Creative leaders try to optimise the balance in this tension to stay fluid in their calculations and courageously open to possibility.



# One doesn't manage creativity. One manages for creativity.

Teresa M. Amabile and Mukti Khaire

## Leadership as Facilitating Creativity

Creative leadership is also about how we **facilitate and serve the creative process** of our teams. Creative leaders promote the **conditions for creativity to flow**. This means allowing for downtime, energising collaborations, providing structure (but not too much!) and creating an environment where people are comfortable to fail fast. In this space, creativity research has become more focused in recent years on the 'context of creativity' rather than the myth of the uniquely creative person. And leaders have a large part to play in building that context.

Fundamentally, we need to lead teams to be open to ideas. Research shows that humans are likely to assess critics (negative reviewers or the devil's advocate) **as more intelligent** than others. It's easy, then, to get into a cycle of doubt and negativity, where ideas are critiqued rather than created. Creative cultures are more inclined to say "yes, and" to team members' ideas than "but, no".

Open creative cultures demonstrate:



### Psychological safety

We feel comfortable putting ourselves and our ideas before the group without fear of harshness or hostility. Promoting psychological safety in your teams is the best way to ensure diverse ideas make it to the floor.



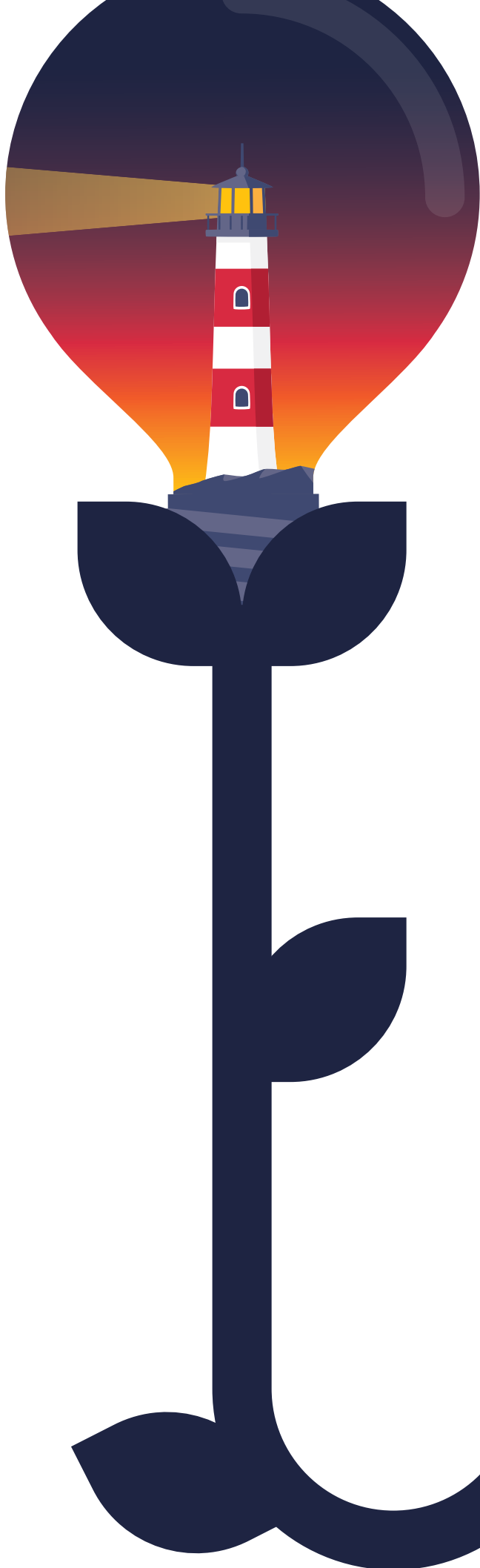
### Projects over egos

We are able to put the project's needs before our own, even though that can be hard to do. When we associate our idea with our sense of self-worth, we lose the ability to have objectively critical conversations about the merits of a position.



### Confidence in originality (or 'creative confidence')

We believe deeply in the possibility of new and innovative ideas. The confidence to stand behind an idea is described by Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar, **as key to the success** of Pixar's films. It requires a team with open heads, hearts, and hands, who have confidence in themselves, and each other.



## Regenerative Creativity

Creativity is intrinsically linked to leadership, both as a decision-making quality and as a way of serving our teams. Even more than this, creativity is part of a regenerative approach to leadership, because it is by its nature a practice which heals and energises.

Not only does creativity lead to innovative solutions to global problems, it is also linked with enhanced wellbeing, health and flourishing for individuals. To the extent we practice creativity ourselves and encourage it in our teams, we are contributing to our collective flourishing.

With the dual trajectories of complex problems in leadership and the need for constant innovation in organisations, creativity in leadership is a higher priority now than ever. As creative leaders we must develop our own creative practice as well as serve our team's creativity, unlocking their intrinsic capacities. Take a moment to consider how effectively you are incorporating this key skill into your leadership repertoire, and how you are cultivating it in those around you.



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