
Transformative Leadership

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Abstract

The basic premise of transformative leadership is that everyone can lead, and that particularly in this transformative moment, everybody contributes to, and in fact cocreates, the world we live in, whether conscious of their agency or not. Every choice, every action, every discussion, every interaction is a reflection of how we are leading our own lives. Transformative leadership invites everybody to ask what kind of a world they are creating through their thoughts, beliefs, actions, and interactions. Transformative leadership is, at its heart, a participatory process of creative collaboration and transformation for mutual benefit. At the core of transformative leadership are four orienting concepts, being, relating, knowing, and doing that assist in the framing and development of our understanding of the world, and our own approach to living and leaving.

Keywords

Creative inquiry • Creativity • Hosting • Microconnections • Microcreations • Leadership • Transformative • Transformational

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Introduction

How can we make sense of a complex, fast-changing world? What can we do to prevent looming catastrophes and help create a “better” world? And what does “better” even mean or look like in this confusing world we live in? How can we live a meaningful life? What does it really mean to “lead” our lives? What does it mean to “grow” as a person? To be a “leader”? What does it mean to make a difference – and to live and act in a way that expresses our highest ideals? In an uncertain world that seems to make less and less sense, more and more people are asking themselves these questions and not waiting for the answers: they are determined to answer these core questions themselves. They are choosing to make sense of their own experience, “lead” their own lives, and contribute something of value through their creative participation in this moment of planetary transformation.

The world is in the throes of an epochal change, a transformation: one age is dying and a “new age” does not seem to have emerged. In fact, it is unclear what it would look like, and visions of better futures are few and far between (Montuori 2011a). The current global transformation has been referred to in a variety of ways. The widely used prefix *post-* indicates that we know something is ending, but it is unclear what comes next. It appears initially in the term *post-industrial* (Bell 1973), then *post-modern* (Lyotard 1984), and most recently *post-normal* (Sardar 2010, 2015). Terms such as The Great Turning and the Anthropocene age (where human beings are the major global cause of change) have also gained in popularity. Donna Haraway’s use of the term Chthulucene, with its play on horror novelist H.P. Lovecraft’s tentacular (and fictional), ancient, sleeping god Cthulhu, gives a hint of the current postnormal state of confusion, as it slithers and slides into the bizarre and eldritch (Haraway 2016). Changes are happening at all levels of society, in varying forms and degrees all over the world, and as the evolution of the terms to describe it suggests, the world just seem to be getting weirder and weirder.

Transformation means change is not just occurring on the surface, but at the level of the basic tenets of an age’s worldview, what we might call its “deep structure.” Much of the confusion and polarization at the beginning of the twenty-first century, not just in the U.S. but all over the world, is arguably due to the tectonic rumblings of this shift.

Transformative Leadership in Context

The basic premise of transformative leadership is that everyone can lead, and that particularly in this transformative moment, everybody contributes to, and in fact cocreates, the world we live in, whether conscious of their agency or not. Every choice, every action, every discussion, every interaction is a reflection of how we are leading our own lives. Our every word and every action may be perceived as leadership by others to the extent that it influences them, whether consciously or unconsciously. Transformative leadership invites everybody to ask what kind of a world they are creating through their thoughts, beliefs, actions, and interactions, and to compare that with the kind of world they would like to create, and the kind of person they would like to be. Transformative leadership is, at its heart, a participatory process of creative collaboration and transformation for mutual benefit. It is not confined to heroic individuals making large dramatic actions and gestures. Transformative leadership can involve small actions, recognizing their cumulative effect, and the potential of the “butterfly effect.” Small actions, gestures, a word, even said casually or unthinkingly, can have a big effect, whether in an intimate relationship or in a big organization. If we have learned anything from the excesses of the past, it is that it behooves human beings to recognize the extent to which they already create and lead, to recognize what they are creating, and also to be humble when transforming themselves and their world. With creativity and leadership comes responsibility.

Transformative leadership involves an initial *choice*. It is an active decision to acknowledge the current transformative moment, to develop agency by consciously participating in it, and to give this change a direction that allows individuals to embody higher values. In other words, *to lead by creating the future in the present*. Transformative leaders are everyday citizens (not necessarily heroic, charismatic, or “born” leaders) who, during a time of planetary transformation choose to engage in a transformative process to mobilize their creativity so that they may “lead” their own lives (as opposed to being led by what they feel are outdated traditions, habits, social roles, demands, and pressures they feel they can no longer accept), make a creative contribution towards leading society towards what they consider a better future (Montuori 2010).

The term transformative leadership is used in different ways in the literature. As articulated here, it is somewhat broader than the important definition and articulation by Carol Shields (2010, 2012, 2014). Shields’s work was developed in the context of educational leadership, drawing on the work of Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire. Shields’s definition of transformative leadership is focused on social justice. The definition we articulate here is not exclusive to the domain of educational leadership, nor does it focus *exclusively* on social justice, in the sense that Shields explicitly states that her approach to transformative leadership sheds what she refers to as any psychological “trappings,” in order to focus “much more directly on sociological and cultural elements of organizations and the wider society in which they are embedded” (p. 5–29).

Unlike Shields's definition, transformative leadership as defined here actively embraces the psychological and spiritual as well as the social world and the quest for social justice. In fact, one of the key aspects of transformative leadership as we define it here is precisely the need to combine personal and social transformation and view them as a process that occur hand-in-hand. In this sense, transformative leadership draws extensively on the notion of transformational leadership developed by Burns and Bass (Bass and Riggio 2006; Burns 2004). James McGregor Burns's articulation of transformational leadership drew extensively on humanistic psychology and specifically the work of psychologist Abraham Maslow (Burns 2010). For Burns, leadership is a creative act. For Bass, transformational leaders are charismatic, build trust, act with integrity, encourage others, encourage innovative thinking, and coach and develop their people (Bass 1985). One key difference between transformational and transformative leadership lies in the latter's view of leadership as an "everyday, everyone, everywhere," relational process. In a time of transition and confusion, it is more than ever the case that leadership is not to be found in, and practiced by, only a few selected individuals, particularly in light of the emerging networked culture of collaboration, or "We" culture (Bauwens 2007; Leadbeter 2009; Rainie and Wellman 2012). It is also the case that in a time of great disequilibrium, even small actions make a difference and contribute to creating our present and future – in any context.

Transformative leadership is "everyone, everywhere, everyday" leadership. Everyone can be a transformative leader; it does not involve a specific type of person (like a "born leader," or someone with specific characteristics) or require a specific position in any system. Transformative leadership does not have a privileged locus, like an organization (whether for profit or not for profit) with specific roles and lines of authority or a community. It can manifest in any context, which also means that it crosses the divide between "public" and "private." It can therefore manifest in very "everyday" activities and does not require or demand grand gestures or contexts. Furthermore, transformative leadership proposes that "everyday" activities and small additional incremental actions can be transformative (Jullien 2011).

The fundamental assumption is that human beings lead and create all the time, wherever they are and whoever they are. Transformative leadership involves first of all an acknowledgment, or a *recognition* of this "everydayness," drawing on Bateson's insight that *all behavior is communication* (Bateson 1972) and *not communicating is also communication*. Not paying a bill, not voting, not answering an e-mail, not talking are all forms of communication. Human beings are not just observing the world, not bystanders but always already in the world, participating (even when they think they are not), leading (by example) and cocreating (every conversation, every movement, even every habit). This participatory view broadens the question of *whether* I am leading/creating to *how and what* am I leading/creating.

Transformative leadership provides *orienting concepts*, a broad conceptual framework for individuals who want to live in the world in a way that is both more creative and more interconnected, more personal, as well as more social, a way of being in the world that embodies their highest ideals and allows them to make a contribution that reflects their values, hopes, and concerns. Transformative

leadership is *aspirational* because there is no assumption of achievement or completion; its mission is a journey into the unknown and fundamentally a journey of relational creation.

One of the characteristics of our transformative moment is that the very concepts and practices traditionally associated with change and transformation, terms like leadership, creativity, the future, even “better,” as in “a better world,” are now destabilized, changing, contested, morphing, and transforming into something other than what they were (Gidley 2010; Kellerman 2012; Montuori and Purser 1995; Ogilvy 2002). Heroic Great Man and Lone Genius figures are being questioned, but they are by no means “dead,” as the increasing number of “strong man” leaders at the helm of nation states indicates. We certainly hope the future is not dead, although it may smell funny, as Frank Zappa famously said of jazz. Transformative leadership reflects an aspiration to “lead” one’s life, to create one’s own form of leadership, to collaborate with others to somehow contribute to making the world a better place. But at the same time, there is no clearly established way to do so, let alone “one right way.” Transformative leadership is aspirational because it is an invitation to embody futures that barely exist in the imagination.

Transformative leadership is intended to orient at a time when people want to make a difference but find it is necessary for them to reflect deeply about what that means. The complexity of the current situation, its transitional, transformative nature does not lend itself to easy answers. There is much skepticism about social and political movements (Achieve 2017), and about techno-centric solutionism, since so many of the “solutions” of the past have become the problems of the present. The conjunction of personal and social transformation coincides with asking questions about what really matters, what it means to be a human being, what human beings are capable of, what it means to “know,” and how we can relate to others. Core metaphors about the nature of the world are changing, and one of the emerging alternatives to a view of the world as a giant clockwork, a Machine, which emerged with the Newtonian/Cartesian revolution (Capra and Luisi 2014; Morgan 2006), is the view of an interconnected process of creation (Swimme and Tucker 2011). Traditional assumptions, whether about the nature and role of women and men, or the relationship between human beings and nature, are being questioned.

Individuals who choose to identify as transformative leaders may defy the traditional images and stereotypes of what constitutes a leader, and how a leader acts. They question and mostly reject the old images and stereotypes of “great man” leaders, not least because many of them are women, people of color, or those with marginalized sexual orientations or gender identities. They do want to “lead” their own lives and are not satisfied with hand-me-down lives. They want break out of taken for granted assumptions of how a life could and should be lived and create for themselves and those around them lives worth living. Transformative leadership provides a generative framework for leaders, orienting them towards emergent ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing (Montuori 2010).

Transformative leadership bridges “heroic leadership” and “leaderless organizations.” It is not just about heroic individuals fighting against all odds and leading their devoted followers to victory, (although there are plenty of remarkable

individuals and acts of heroism). It is also not about organizations that have no leaders, reject leaders, or do not recognize the role of individuals in favor exclusively of collective coordination (although self-organizing teams and leaderless organizations exist and represent a growing trend). Transformative leaders are adaptable; they can be both leaders *and* followers, they can embrace the notion of emergence and heterarchy (Stephenson 2009), with shifting leadership roles based on competence and contextual appropriateness, as well as participating in swarms, flash mobs, and other forms of collective action. Most of all, transformative leadership is about participation and collaborative creation. *Transformative leadership involves a conscious choice to participate in a process of collaborative creation for mutual benefit.*

The Crisis of the Future: Reinvention, Recreation, Self-Creation, Transformation

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are in an age that has been referred to in many ways, as we have seen, but also as *post-progress*, because of the lack of compelling views of the future (Montuori 2013). The notion of progress, let alone of a determined, inevitable progress (e.g., every generation will earn more than their parents, technological advances always lead to improvement in quality of life), has faded, at best replaced by the term “sustainability.” The implications are enormous because they point to the absence of a positive vision of the future and as the Dutch futurist Fred Polak (1973) has written,

The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society’s image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive. (p. 19)

While many names and interpretations have been given to the current transformative moment, one way to frame it is as a form of global identity crisis. An identity crisis, if we trace the concept back to Erik Erikson (1994), is associated with a “psycho-social moratorium,” a time when new identities are explored and tried on, but also a time during which there is a goal moratorium, either goallessness or conflicting goals that lead to a degree of paralysis. The concept was originally applied to individuals but has also been used to explain social phenomena (Maruyama 1979). In the United States, these are some of the key dimensions of the identity crisis, including Americans’ relationship:

- to their bodies (plastic surgery, living longer but also the crisis of Alzheimer’s and the greying of the population),
- to their own gender identities (changing gender roles, LGBTQI),
- to their work identity (end of the industrial age, the beginning of the digital economy, the gig economy),

- to their potential as human beings (the human potential movement, positive psychology, the New Age, extreme sports, “be all that you can be”)
- to their national identity (foreign policy, Vietnam, “cultural anxiety,” history of systematic racism, individualism, demographics, the United States’s role in the world, new immigrants, the clash over history textbooks, diversity, and pluralism),
- to their existence as citizens on one planet (globalization or planetarization, pluralism, “McWorld versus Global Jihad”),
- to nature (with the environmental crisis, organic foods, nature as a resource and nature as a partner),
- to knowledge (with the knowledge explosion and the need for complexity, discernment, and integration),
- and to their religious or spiritual identity, in the sense of a quest for meaning in life beyond simply material survival (postmaterialism, fundamentalism, cults, “spiritual but not religious”).

We used the United States to illustrate the notion of a global identity crisis, but similar identity crises are happening all over Europe, and also in China and India, which have experienced a tremendous transformation in the last 30 years, as well as other emerging nations like Brazil. One of the key factors is the ever-increasing pluralism and the lack of integrative factors. Fundamentalist movements of all stripes act as antipluralist forces for homogeneity (Montuori 2005; Slater 2008).

One of the ways we can see how this transformative moment manifests in and as an identity crisis is research suggesting that western countries have become “re-invention societies,” reinventing bodies, persons, careers, organizations, and communities (Elliott 2013). Reinvention is about *recreating*. The term invention points us straight to the importance of creativity. We can see this greater desire for creativity in the breakdown of the traditional opposition between bohemian and bourgeois and the emergence of “Bobos” or Bourgeois Bohemians (Brooks 2001). The Bourgeoisie was always identified with solid citizen, middle-class values, conservatism, a slowly growing savings account and a lack of imagination, and risk-taking. Bohemians, on the other hand, were the creative types who identified themselves by their artistic nature, cutting edge lifestyles, and disdain for mainstream culture. Bobos represent a blending of these two types, usually engaged in the kind of mainstream work traditionally associated with the Bourgeoisie but with the attitude and flair of the Bohemians. As Brooks shows, Corporate America appeals to the Bobos with advertising that represents “countercultural capitalism” and fetishizes creativity.

Bobos do not identify as businesspersons. They are creators who happen to do business. They are hipsters. An unusual marriage has occurred; business has become hip, and the new “hipsters” are not at all necessarily musicians or artists. In some sense, it is hip to be square. In fact, the new valorization of creativity may be partly the result of the way in which the “counterculture” has been co-opted and has arguably become consumer culture (Frank 1997; Heath and Potter 2004). A new generation of business magazines like *Fast Company* began the trend of looking more like *Rolling Stone* than *Fortune* or *Forbes*.

To what extent, then, is all this talk of creativity and self-creation just another playground for the privileged few, for over-caffeinated hipsters? This raises the question, now that creativity has to some extent been democratized, how are we going to use it? We would argue that the process of reinvention itself, and the possibility of self-creation and making a creative contribution is open to many, and is not strictly dependent on privilege even though people who are post-materialist, in Inglehart's terminology, who do not have to struggle to make ends meet, are more likely to explore reinvention.

The French philosopher Edgar Morin has argued that we are experiencing a *crisis of the future* (Morin and Kern 1999). A crisis of the future means there are no compelling, widely shared images of what a better future would look like, and therefore nothing to truly motivate people, exactly the sort of thing Polak warned about. In 1977, a line from the Sex Pistols' song *Anarchy in the UK* screamed prophetically that there was "no future in England's dreaming." Forty years later Europe and the United States, there is increasing clarity that the status quo is untenable, as curious and confusing phenomena like Brexit indicate, but there is little sense of a positive future direction or faith in leadership. Where do we go from here?

In the West, the broad association of the future with linear progress, with technological advances, and with financial prosperity has collapsed. The millennial generation is now experiencing the prospect of being worse off than their parents economically, but they are also faced with looming environmental catastrophes, global terrorism, resurgent nationalisms, political chaos, a loss of faith in leaders and institutions, and the general sense that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. It is not only the West that is struggling with the future. In booming countries like China, where the last 30 years have seen remarkable changes, there are also questions about what constitutes progress. For all the economic growth, there are serious environmental issues, corruption, inequality, severe dislocation, and alienation and many forms of crime that did not exist before the economic explosion (Gao 2015; Jacques 2009).

The notion of progress emerged most strongly in the enlightenment, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and brought with it Utopian visions of ideal societies. "Progress" seemed to be a given. Today, the term Utopia is associated with disastrous efforts to create new worlds, whether in political systems or failed spiritual communities. It has been displaced by the term Dystopia. The idea of progress likewise seems to have been eclipsed by the term sustainability. Sustainability has become a catch-all to refer to ways of surviving the oncoming crises caused, ironically, by those very industrial and technological advances that were once viewed as the engines of progress, whether technology, capitalism, or communism.

During a transformative moment, the call for a return to earlier and better days is almost inevitable (Kelly 2010). It is certainly the case today, with a flood of nostalgia for (somebody's) idealized past, "simpler" days, and "retromania" in pop culture (Reynolds 2011). The dominant dystopian visions of the future in movies and

science fiction seem all too likely, making the idyllic images of the past look even more attractive.

This brings us to another central element of transformative leadership: The transformative moment requires a *radical* approach, in the etymological sense of the word of going to the roots of the issues, challenging fundamental assumptions, and proposing and embodying alternative futures. This requires healing the traditional split between theory and practice (Donnelly 2016). Transformative leaders do not feel they can simply “act,” because they are aware of the extent to which they are steeped in the problematic ways of doing things that have caused the very problems they are attempting to address. Just acting without reflection and awareness of the extent to which all actions reflect a theoretical perspective, beliefs, and assumptions can be deeply counterproductive, particularly if the purpose is to create something new, rather than replicate the past. As Edgar Morin (Morin 2008) has stated,

...our thinking is ruled by a profound and hidden paradigm without our being aware of it. We believe we see what is real; but we see in reality only what this paradigm allows us to see, and we obscure what it requires us not to see. (p. 86)

The challenge for transformative leaders is to make the invisible visible, not just to adapt to these new conditions, but also to question, critique, *and provide alternatives* to this domination of the market economy in almost every dimension of our lives, what Rushkoff calls *Life Inc.* (Rushkoff 2011). Technological and economic changes are pushing us in a specific direction, but they are the result of human choices, something that is sometimes forgotten in the overwhelming onslaught of change. The changes appear somehow deterministic, driven inexorably by the laws of the market, the forces of technology, and so on – outside of our control. Where *is* our creativity leading us, and where are we leading our creativity? Transformative leaders need to be able to step back and reflect on the human agency in this process, acknowledge that this is not “just happening” but the result of human choices.

Four Orienting Concepts

Transformative leadership has four primary orienting concepts, summarized as (ways of) being, relating, knowing, and doing (Montuori 1989, 2010; Montuori and Conti 1993). They serve as a broad framework through which to interpret and guide changes towards a better world, a world that is beyond “post-,” whether the post- is postindustrial, postmodern, or postnormal. Their purpose is to clarify what we might call the Operating System (OS) of the past, and to articulate the OS of a new culture, an alternative based on a synthesis of significant futurist and philosophical works.

Way of being refers to our fundamental assumptions about what we believe human beings are, as well as what, the entire Universe – “is.” Transformative leadership entails a shift from the Cartesian Newtonian view, which saw the universe and human beings as machines, initially with God as the Great Watchmaker, then

just a machine with no God, to an emerging view that sees the entire universe as one ongoing interconnected creative process or *creatio continua*, continuous creation (Burneko 2005; Capra and Luisi 2014). For the Cartesian Newtonian view, the focus was on parts and structure. For the creative worldview, interconnectedness and creativity are primary. The change in worldview is dramatic and the new understanding of the creative universe also requires a different *perspective*. As physicist Paul Davies summarizes the transition,

(F)or three centuries, science has been dominated by the Newtonian and thermodynamic paradigms, which present the universe as either a sterile machine, or in a state of degeneration and decay. Now there is the paradigm of the creative universe, which recognizes the progressive, innovative character of physical processes. The new paradigm emphasizes the collective, cooperative, and organizational aspects of nature; its perspective is synthetic and holistic rather than analytic and reductionist. (p. 20)

Creativity, in this view, is the fundamental nature of the Universe, rather the spark of an occasional (C)creator. Human beings are part of this intrinsic creativity of the universe: We are creatures and creators in creation. Creativity is not limited to certain unusual people and to certain unusual moments. It is rather, the very stuff we are made of, and creating is a basic “everyday, everyone, everywhere” human capacity (Bocchi and Ceruti 2002; Ceruti 2008; Davies 1989; Kauffman 2016; G. D. Kaufman 2004; Peat 2000; Richards 2007). This creativity does not have to manifest in earth-shattering revolutionary ideas, but in a greater response-ability, deautomatization, and less unquestioned reliance on rote, habitual responses. It is the ability to participate with greater freedom and openness to change and the creation of more choices.

In terms of leadership and creativity, in the machine view, the leader/creator was always outside the machine. After all, machines have to be created by somebody, and somebody has to “lead” them. God was the Creator, human beings were simply doing his will; the great leader was an exceptional person, standing apart from his men, whose job it was to follow his orders. The great creative geniuses were always outsiders, different, weird, “inspired,” “gifted,” both loved and resented (McMahon 2012; Tonelli 1973). In other words, there was a distinct separation between leaders and creators and the social systems they interacted with. The lone cowboy gunslinger coming to save the helpless town folk from the bandits, the lone private investigator taking on the dark forces of crime and corruption singlehandedly, these were popular twentieth century images of the individualistic outsider. The one and the many. Leadership and creativity were never *in* the system. They were always in the hands of an individual who by his very nature (and it was almost inevitably a man) was outside the system.

For transformative leaders, the premise is that human beings are fundamentally creative, live in a creative universe, and that being, relating, knowing, and doing are fundamentally creative processes (G. D. Kaufman 2004; Montuori 2011b; Swimme and Tucker 2011). Human beings live in worlds of their own creation. They create their understanding of nature and of the universe, of what it means to be human and

what a human being is, and that understanding is never final, always changing. This is the “cosmological motive” Frank Barron found in creative individuals: the desire to create their own unique understanding of the world (Barron 1995). Human beings *create* their understanding of their world and create their world through their participation in it as they are, in turn created by their own creations and by creation itself. Based on their interpretation (knowing) of themselves and of the world (being), humans have created schools, prisons, businesses, houses, marriages, government, languages, sports, role models, outsiders, leaders, and so much more (Gergen 2009). Human beings create cultures, political and economic systems, and power structures, and these in turn shape human beings. The French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis has argued that the health of a society can be assessed by the extent to which it recognizes its own process of self-creation; in other words, the extent to which it takes responsibility for its own creations rather than thinking “this is just the way things are” (Castoriadis 1997). The same is true for individuals. Human beings “forget” their own agency, their own responsibility, and their own creativity. This way of being is an invitation to recognize and take responsibility for human creativity, in the larger context of universal creativity (Kauffman 2016; Peat 2000).

Way of relating addresses our fundamental conceptions about human nature and the nature of relationships. Riane Eisler has usefully differentiated between domination and partnership relationships and social systems (Eisler 1987). In the former, relationships are a zero-sum game; somebody has to win, and somebody has to lose. Somebody has to be on top, and somebody else on the bottom. The system is rigidly hierarchical and authoritarian with women inevitably a subordinate role. A key element of the current transformation is the challenge to traditional hierarchical binary oppositions such as male/female, culture/nature, in-group/out-group, white/nonwhite, boss/worker and, of course, leader/follower, with the first term always superior. The environmental crisis has led to a critique of “anthropocentric” views of nature, where nature’s only role is to be exploited by humans (R. E. Purser et al. 1995). The women’s movement has challenged the supremacy of men in society, from the home to the workplace. The civil rights movement in the United States challenged the supremacy of white people over people of color. The term nonbinary challenges a binary way of viewing human beings as separated into two sexes exclusively.

What is of particular interest and adds considerable complexity to the transformation of these hierarchical binary oppositions is the fact that in the case of civil rights in the United States, for instance, research suggests a majority of white people believe that any reduction in prejudice towards people of color must by necessity mean an increase in prejudice towards white people (Norton and Sommers 2011). In this view, racism is a zero-sum game that they are losing. The implications for the future are considerable, since this view does not take into account the possibility of a reduction in prejudice and discrimination across the board, and the possibility of partnership, of creativity and mutual benefit in diversity. Partnership systems are democratic rather than authoritarian and involve *the creation of mutual benefit*. This involves making win-win a primary goal. Creativity is needed to make this possible,

particularly because so many of human relationships and social systems are informed by the dominator view.

Way of knowing refers to the way in which we make sense of the world. Traditionally, this has been through what French philosopher Edgar Morin calls a *paradigm of simplification*, with analysis, reductionism, decontextualization, and disjunction (separation) (Morin 2008). In other words, breaking a phenomenon into its smallest constituent parts in order to understand it, as well as using a logic of either/or. The organization of knowledge helps us to see this manifests as a fractal phenomenon. The way institutions organize knowledge has a “fractal” or self-similar relationship with what is considered “good thinking” in the West. In the same way, that organizations have historically been created as a system governed from the top with separate departments that often do not communicate, human thinking has focused on analysis, breaking down issues into constituent parts (Zerubavel 1991, 1995). Morin’s alternative, *complex thought*, argues for the importance of a form of thinking that contextualizes and connects, is self-reflective and relational, and open to the reality of uncertainty rather than engaging in a perennial quest for certainty. Faced with an interdependent, interconnected world, a world of creation and interrelation, we also need a way of thinking that can account for interconnectedness and creativity.

Way of doing brings these three earlier dimensions together in their embodiment in action. Does action involve following preestablished rules, the one right way, or is there openness to spontaneity, improvisation, and being in the moment? The rule and routine-based approach is part and parcel of the machine, top-down authoritarian, control culture. It is still firmly embedded in our educational systems and in far too many organizations, valuing obedience and following orders. A creative worldview draws far more on the creativity and initiative of individuals and groups, on *emergence* and the ability to improvise and deal with the unforeseen. The rule and routine-based approach may work well in stable environments but falls apart in more turbulent, uncertain, complex environments where we are confronted with non-routine tasks, with surprises not addressed in the manual or for which our boss or colleagues have no immediate solution. Improvisation involves developing competencies beyond rule-based expertise to be able to create on the spot, in a play of constraints and possibilities. It is a process of navigation. It is not the case that because the rules do not apply suddenly anything goes. There are still values and goals, a larger context within which one must be appropriate, but at the same time, the degree of personal responsibility and freedom is much greater.

The metaphor of the improvising jazz musician is relevant here (Montuori 2003). Individual and collective improvisation are central to jazz. What is usually not well understood is that in jazz, with the exception of a few forms like free jazz that often dispenses with all structure, the improviser’s performance occurs in the context of a specific song, which has a musical form, a key, a chord progression, and an agreed upon mood (a ballad, for instance), all of which have been agreed upon in advance by the musicians in the band. The song, the key, and the other musicians are constraints within which the musician has to develop possibilities, with a great deal of discretion. This requires an alignment between the individual musician and

the group and the ability to create collaboratively in context. The musicians know how to lead as well as follow, listen as well as play, create structure as well as innovation; traditional binary oppositions of either/or are transformed into both/and. The “jazz metaphor,” which perhaps not surprisingly emerged from marginalized cultures of “outsiders” (Becker 1963), and African-Americans, has been a rich source for generative alternative concepts and practices which are becoming recognized in the leadership literature (Barrett 2012).

One example of the both/and nature of jazz performance is shown in a group exercise involving listening to a jazz performance and understanding the dynamics of the process (R. Purser and Montuori 1994). This made it clear to the participants that central to a successful performance is the art of *listening*. While the listener’s attention may initially and obviously be drawn to what the performers are playing, the sounds they are making – what they are *saying* – a key insight for the participants was that the musicians were also, and above all, listening to each other. The quality of the individual and collective performance was very much shaped by the extent to which the musicians listened to each other and were able to interact, which made it possible to play off each other, mutually inspire, and create a sound that was more alive. The sound of the performance is an emergent property of the relationship between the musicians, meaning that it is not all about one person; it is about individual *and* group (*not* there is no I in group), part *and* whole, playing *and* listening.

Creative Inquiry: Learning and Unlearning to Lead

Leadership and creativity have been associated with an aura of mystery and magic, as well as a rich and mostly partial or completely incorrect set of myths. One fundamental myth is that “we either have it or we don’t.” Some people are creative, or leaders, others are not. Some people are “born leaders” some people are “gifted.” Joseph Nye sums up what the research tells us about this view like this (Nye 2008):

Almost anyone can become a leader. Leadership can be learned. It depends on nurture as well as nature. Leadership can exist at any level, with or without formal authority. Most people are both leaders and followers. They “lead from the middle.” (p. 147)

Many of the cultural myths about creativity many of us have grown up with are simply not correct, or very partial views (S. B. Kaufman and Gregoire 2015). A key factor in clearing up some of the myths about creativity comes from the research on mindsets by Carol Dweck (2007). Dweck differentiates between *fixed* and *growth* mindsets. With a fixed mindset, people believe qualities like creativity are fixed traits, and we cannot do anything to develop them. They believe that talent alone creates success – and no effort can make a difference. As a result, these people focus on showing other people how much of the apparently finite qualities they have, instead of developing them, or assuming they are simply not creative or talented and resigning themselves to it. This is not a helpful way of being, and Dweck documents

how limiting it is. Society generally perpetuated a fixed mindset with the cultural myths of creativity: you either have it or you don't, and if you are creative, you really don't have to "work" at it. In fact, the idea of "genius without learning" was central to the notion of genius that emerged in eighteenth century Europe. Genius was a gift, and the genius did not have to learn anything or work hard at it. *Our cultural myths about creativity reflected and perpetuated the fixed mindset*. They also reflected a way of being that made creativity the exception, rather than the core of human existence, and perpetuated an uncomplex, either/or way of knowing. You have either got it or you have not. And the people that allegedly did not have it, the vast majorities, we reduced to being conforming, to following the exceptional individuals.

The fixed mindset is disempowering and has been perpetuated in a variety of ways, for example, in the popular show-business saying, "don't let 'em see you sweat." In other words, do not let them see you are working hard, because it takes away from the magic that makes the performer more attractive and marketable (Stigliano 1999). While this is understandable in the context of a performance, it does create a feeling for the audience that "no ordinary human could do this – or at least I couldn't!" This same "magical" quality is often cultivated by leaders, to appear wise, decisive, never doubting, never at a loss, and responsible for all successes (and failures) (Meindl et al. 1985).

Dweck contrasts the fixed mindset with what she calls *the growth mindset*. In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through commitment, dedication, and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point. This view fosters a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all successful people have had these qualities, Dweck argues. This is the mindset necessary for creative, transformative leaders: A process of ongoing learning, rather than attempt to "prove" how good we are, coupled with a healthy skepticism for leaders who play up their gifts and their charisma, often as a smoke screen for their true motives and/or failings.

In this time of transition, there is a need for new ways of making sense of the world. This process requires a new approach to inquiry, and to the relationship between theory, action, reflection, and practice. Compared to even 50 years ago, a mindboggling amount of information is at our fingertips. This is forcing a reflection and reassessment of what constitutes "knowledge," because now the issue is not so much getting access to information, but how to assess whether it is meaningful, useful, what constitutes "fake news," and how to integrate and make sense of it all (Weinberger 2012). Transformative leadership is a journey of exploration and creation; it is a journey into the unknown, where the future is a path laid down in walking that requires an ongoing process of *creative inquiry* (Montuori 2006, 2011b). Creative inquiry is an approach to learning that shares the view that human beings, their cultures, institutions, relationships, and traditions are all part of a larger universal creative process (way of being). It is an ongoing, self-reflective inquiry into creation and transformation at a variety of different levels, whether at the level of the personal, interpersonal, organizational, or in communities.

In this transitional moment, it is necessary to understand where we are coming from, if only to have a sense of the way our current reality is informed by our own creations: the specific beliefs, assumptions, structures, institutions, customs, and traditions that were developed in our past. With the rapidity of change on many different fronts, the role and view of the past become of great interest. We see that some wish to bring back a past that never existed, while others believe that the past has little to offer us, that it is as “outdated, past its sell-by date” and as unnecessary as an old operating system. But unless we become aware of the past, of how and what we created and how those creations created us today, we are indeed doomed to repeat the past. All our best efforts at being “solution oriented” may, in that case, just replicate the same kind of thinking and behaviors that created the problems we want to avoid. And we must also retain and honor what is useful, important, and wise.

There is so much to learn but also so much to unlearn. And perhaps not surprisingly, even our approach to learning has changed. All too often, learning is still viewed and practiced with the mentality that informed schools in the Industrial Age, what we have called *reproductive learning* (Montuori 2011d). Schools and factories in the Industrial Age were not designed to foster creativity. On the contrary, they were designed to eliminate any trace of it and produce docile workers and citizens. They were part of what the sociologist Philip Slater called control culture (Slater 2008). Unfortunately, much of schooling in the twenty-first century, with some exceptions, is still based on this fundamental premise, and control culture is still dominant. Transformative leaders engage in the process of *creative inquiry* as an ongoing exploration of what it means to be, relate, know, and act as a transformative leader.

Transformative leaders (1) review the past, (2) question and recognize the present, (3) envision alternatives and possibilities, and (4) embody and enact the future. Transformative leadership is about creating and embodying the future in the present. To do that, transformative leaders have to remain aware of the triad of past-present-future. In order to understand transformation, they want to understand the extent to which history informs the way they think, know, feel, and act in the world. If efforts at transformative change are informed by the values and perspectives that informed the world that is no longer working, they are doomed to reproduce the conditions they seek to change. The present is shaped both by the past and by the future. The past shapes us, and the way we conceptualize the future influences the way we act today. If we assume the world will end tomorrow, or that the economy will take a downturn, we will act differently today than if we think that the economy will be booming and we have an appointment with the love of our life. At the same time, we also have to remember that it is not enough to critique, to challenge existing structures and “speak truth to power.” More than ever today, we need possibilities and alternatives, we need to enlist our creativity to give us hope for the future, and the discipline to embody that future in the present.

Creative inquiry means navigating our ongoing personal transformation, the transformation of society, and how they are interconnected. It involves understanding oneself, and our world, relationally and *in context*. It means understanding one’s limits as well as one’s potentials, and viewing the process of becoming a

transformative leader as on ongoing process of self-eco-creation, the eco serving the purpose that we are always creating and transforming in a context, an ecology (Montuori 2012). Creative inquiry is contrasted with *reproductive education*, which originated in the Industrial Age and was designed for a different era, with values such as standardization, homogenization, and information transfer, a “cognicentric” approach that unquestioningly reproduces the status quo, its power relations, assumptions about what is and is not possible, what human beings can and cannot do. Leaders who want to create the future cannot simply reproduce what has come before. Creative inquiry is also contrasted with *narcissistic education* (Montuori 2011c). This view holds that if the old ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing are obsolete, if traditional authority has failed, if one leader is as good as another, then anything goes, there are no experts, no guidelines, no criteria, and I can make up my own rules. The narcissistic approach defines itself in opposition to the reproductive. It values all the latter rejected, like subjectivity, affect, personal history, opinion, subjectivity, imagination, and creativity, in turn rejecting anything that is seen as impractical, theoretical, or “intellectual.” It views the past as a failure, and wants nothing to do with it. But in rejecting the reproductive, it also rejects all that is valuable in more traditional approaches to inquiry such as the importance of developing a more comprehensive understanding of the world, an overview view of the different theoretical frameworks that may inform a subject, the importance of research, and so forth (Montuori 2006). This polarization is often reflected in the split between scholars and practitioners, with scholars accusing practitioners that they are theoretically unsophisticated, and practitioners finding scholars too far removed from reality (Donnelly 2016).

Transformative leaders can draw on the interrelated, interconnected tetrad of theory-action-reflection-practice. They recognize that they are, willy-nilly, informed by *theory*, by ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, and that many of these theories are implicit, meaning they are taken for granted and assumed to be just the way the world is or the way things are always done. More than just “knowing” a single theory, it is becoming necessary to be able to take a meta-position, which means becoming aware of our own implicit theories, as well as understanding several theoretical perspectives and being able to assess them, see their strengths and weaknesses and their implications so as to expand our ways of understanding the world, and challenging our own assumptions. This does not mean that all transformative leaders need to have a Ph.D., but rather that in today’s world, greater demands are being made of our cognitive capacities – demands that education mostly does not prepare us for (Kegan 1998; Morin 2001; Tsoukas 2017). As Tsoukas suggests, we must not simplify but complexify. This does not mean we should complicate, or make understandable only to an elite, but rather make sense of the world, of ourselves, and of our fellow human beings in ways that are not reductive, not simplistic (Morin 2008). All too often, for instance, there has been a tendency for the quest for “actionable” knowledge to mean that ideas have to be presented in easily digestible, recipe, the “5 steps to. . .,” “4 ways to. . .,” approaches. While this approach has a certain appeal, the recipe approach also means that we are never making our own food, always following somebody else’s instructions. And in

some cases, it is as if the food is already digested for us, emptied of any nutrients. Personality assessments are often misinterpreted in a simplistic “essentialist” way, as “this is how I am,” rather than as a roadmap towards psychological growth and integration, as Jung intended his typology which became the widely used MBTI assessment (Jung 2014). The key difference is whether we see knowledge reproductively, as a statement of fact (one right way, this is the way to do it, you are X, Y, or Z), or also creatively, as a guide that entails work on our part – thought, reflection, action, and practice (Argyris and Schon 1974, 1996; Senge 1994; Weick 1995).

Reflection invites us to develop a complex relationship with knowledge and how we engage the world. Reflection invites us to ask, What theory am I currently embodying? Am I embodying a zero-sum approach or a win-win way of relating? Am I embodying a creative way of being, or am I locked into a mechanical set of responses? Do I want to take charge, be the boss and forget about participation? *Action* is a great crucible for learning, where our ideas manifest, are tested, and shaped. Reflection on action is vital, and the results of these reflections can lead to the development of *Practices* designed to address areas of growth. By practices, here we intend transformative practices like various forms of meditation, shadow work, and so on, cultivating wisdom and compassion, as well as more specific contextual skills that foster the creation of desirable ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing (Walsh 1999). *Theory* informs all of the above – our approach to reflection, the way it is embodied in our actions, and informs our practices. When integrated in the tetrad, the theoretical dimension enriches and complexifies our lives.

Background of Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership views leadership as a phenomenon that it is constructed, contextual/relational, emergent, and paradoxical (Montuori 2010).

1. *Leadership is constructed.* An overview of the research and history of the concept of leadership shows that it *constructed* (Ospina and Sorenson 2006). By this, we mean that there is no univocal, timeless, universal understanding of what constitutes leadership. Different times and cultures have different understandings of what leadership means, and what constitutes good leadership. Cultural mythologies uphold images of what it means to be a leader, of what a leader “is,” how a leader should look and act. These images tell us what a leader should be like, and who can be a leader: those who do not conform to these images are viewed as not having “the right stuff,” and historically this “stuff,” besides heroic tendencies, has included the right gender and the right color. These images create our *implicit assumptions* about what a leader should be like, what a “real” leader “is.” But it is increasingly clear that there are many different people who can lead, and many different ways to lead (Bordas 2012; Western 2008). Particular attention needs to be paid to groups that were traditionally under- or even un-represented. The very characteristics traditionally associated with “good leadership,” such as the strong man figure, can often be counterproductive and lead to disaster (Brown 2014).

These images can force individuals to behave in certain ways in order to retain their image as “leaders” by, for instance, acting immediately when reflection is more appropriate but might be perceived as “weakness” or “hesitation.”

Viewing leadership as constructed therefore also draws our attention to popular images of leadership, how they are constructed and perpetuated in the media, and the way they shape our understanding and experience of leadership. One of the current challenges of leadership is that while new ways of leading are desperately needed, the popular implicit assumptions about leadership may still lag behind and reflect a different era. Particularly in times of anxiety, change, and threat, it is easy to fall back to these images, and demand “real” leaders, strong decisive leaders who act first and ask questions later, when in fact the complexity of the situation may require a very different form of leadership (Montuori 2005).

Understanding leadership as constructed and manifested in a plurality of ways opens up a realm of possibilities. Enacting and embodying new forms of leadership may well get pushback because they are innovations. It may be the case that particularly the more collaborative, participatory, approaches that do not have the explicit characteristics traditionally associated with leadership, may be misunderstood. Transformative leaders are in many cases individuals who are under-represented among traditional leaders, minoritized groups such as people of color, women, as well as people of marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities. They therefore draw on different cultural backgrounds and values in their construction of their approach to leadership, and may clash with the traditional images of the dominant culture. Transformative leaders therefore need the courage to create and also the ability to support other leaders to make it possible for different voices and directions to be created and for them to succeed.

2. *Leadership is contextual-relational.* Leadership is not merely the function of the characteristics of a lone individual. A person is not a closed system. He or she needs to be understood in context, as systems theory and Fiedler’s contingency theory pointed out (Fiedler 1964). A transformative leader is a node in a network of interactions in a larger context of relationships. A leader can be a nexus, a systemic attractor, a catalyst, a facilitator, a leader can push and pull but always in the context of a network of relationships. In fact, relationships can lead, as we are becoming increasingly aware that leadership is not strictly an individual function. The traditional frame of leader and followers is now expanded (Crossman and Crossman 2011). The view of leaders as active and followers as passive has been challenged, and the boundaries are blurred. Transformative leaders are *participatory* leaders. They do not see leadership as a top-down process, but as a relational one, involving the transformation of others who would normally be viewed as followers into participants through participatory processes, as well as the leader her- or himself being willing and able to be a follower when necessary. And most importantly, transformative leadership can be the *creation* of generative contexts and relationships.
3. *Leadership is paradoxical.* Transformative leaders combine “soft” and “hard” power, emotional intelligence and analytical intelligence, “hard” (organizational, task) and “soft” (“people”) skills, and the spiritual world and the material world

(Neal 2006). They can lead but also follow, inspire but also listen, be decisive but also reflective. In more traditional ways of thinking, we are often impaled on the horns of either/or thinking, whether in decision-making or in our self-creation as leaders, choosing *either* hard *or* soft, decisive *or* reflective, task *or* relationship (Low 2008; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2001). Transformative Leaders develop the ability to embrace paradox, where paradox refers to going beyond traditional dualisms, and draw on a wider spectrum of choices which may include combining what has traditionally been viewed as opposed (either/or) (Donnelly 2016). Transformative leaders are aware of the dualisms of modernity that have led to excessive polarization and opposition. Two of these dualisms are intimately related, as we have seen, and they are between theory and practice and scholars and practitioners.

4. *Leadership is an emergent process.* Leadership *emerges* through a process of interactions, with unpredictable, holistic, systemic properties, and qualities. The whole that emerges through the interactions of the participants in context can be more than the sum of its parts, but it can also be less than the sum of its parts. The role of *organization* is key in this process (Morin 2008). The organization of interactions is always confronted with the dialogic of order and disorder. Too much order and the system becomes ossified, inflexible, and incapable of change. Too much disorder and the system descends into utter chaos. Navigating the edge of chaos is where creativity and transformation can emerge (Montuori et al. 2003). Transformative leadership involves the ability to recognize, catalyze, and wisely inform this process of navigation. The transformative leader facilitates the emergent relationships in a specific tribe and may focus on cocreating a tribe that is itself not simply a collection of followers but a generative, creative environment. This means that transformative leaders shift their focus from exclusive top-down control and prediction to navigation of the ongoing process of emergence, what in some circles is called “hosting,” a very interesting term because, as the title of the article “from hero to host” suggests (M. Wheatley and Frieze 2011), the two terms reflect very different understandings of what it means to lead. This requires great awareness of the directions in which creative interactions are moving and how those directions reflect agreed upon values through a reflection on the emergent whole.

The Art of Hosting, Participatory Leadership, and Collaborative Creativity

One contemporary development that illustrates many aspects of transformative leadership is the growing global movement called *The Art of Hosting Conversations That Matter*, or simply *The Art of Hosting*. The Art of Hosting “is an approach to leadership that scales up from the personal to the systemic, using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges” (The Art of Hosting 2012). It is about creating opportunities for participatory

leadership and participatory leaders, what Margaret Wheatley (1996) refers to as the activation of “leader-full” communities and organizations.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, streams of people and work across the United States and Europe began to join, forging the river that is The Art of Hosting today. As a community of practice, it now spans from Goa, India, to the European Commission, from rural revitalization in Kafunda Village, Zimbabwe, to activating youth leadership in the Yukon Territory, from the issue of homelessness in Columbus, Ohio, to changing the public healthcare system in Nova Scotia. Art of Hosting practitioners in these contexts among many others, both within and outside of organizational boundaries, are using participatory leadership methods to activate collective intelligence to address contemporary challenges.

So what are these methods and practices? The Art of Hosting is a blend of methods for creating open and meaningful conversations and dialogue such as Circle, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, and Collective Story Harvest. Through Art of Hosting trainings, as well as ongoing local and global communities of practice, practitioners learn the skills of integrated, contextual design where each event, meeting, dialogue, or conversation is tailored to the specific context and purpose.

What makes the Art of Hosting distinct from the general category of facilitation is that it is rooted in a living systems worldview, a perspective that acknowledges the role and generativity of complexity, and chaos in human affairs. These methods of dialogue are not based on a machine worldview that subscribes to command-and-control leadership. Rather, they intentionally invite the emergence of collective creativity that can surface through integrating and even welcoming the chaotic, complex, dynamic messiness of human behavior and interaction. The Art of Hosting is a response to the awareness that no one leader, individual, government, organization, or nation can address, never mind solve, many of our social and ecological problems. A guiding question for Art of Hosting practitioners is: How then, do we as people living in this planetary moment, come together in uncertain times and tap into our collective creativity and intelligence?

At first, a desire to learn the dynamic conversational methods (Circle, World Café, Open Space) is what attracts new practitioners to the Art of Hosting, but one quickly realizes that it is also an ongoing practice, art, craft, and lifelong apprenticeship that emphasizes the relationship between personal and social transformation. In the vein of transformative leadership, becoming an Art of Hosting practitioner means unlearning myths and assumptions about heroic leadership, the dominance of the machine worldview (and learning to find the cracks), and of releasing one’s need to know “the answer” or sell “solutions.” It requires not only hosting others but also hosting oneself through reflective practices, self-inquiry, as well as centering the cultivation of deeper skills or *metaskills* (Donnelly 2016; Mindell 1991) needed to work with social emergence such as compassion, working with bias, listening, improvisation, and letting go of the need for control, all while staying engaged and attentive. Working with paradox is an essential metaskill to strengthen as a host, as hosting often means engaging perceived oppositions (in oneself and others) such as action/reflection, results/relationships, theory/practice, power/love, process/

content, and tradition/innovation. The practice of hosting requires an intimate understanding of how these perceived oppositions (or polarities) can be brought into a dynamic relationship that neither needs to seek integration nor rejects one aspect through creating and solidifying an opposition (Donnelly 2016).

The Art of Hosting work shows directly the relationship between personal and social transformation. In order to engage in social transformation in a way that does not replicate the same problematic approaches of modernity, it is necessary for individuals to engage in an ongoing practice of self-development. This practice, which can only be lightly summarized in the four foundations of transformative leadership but obviously requires much deeper immersion, will involve learning how to let go of assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors – ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing – that individuals have inherited from the past. It is not enough to develop either new social systems or engage in personal development. We can learn from the abject failure of many spiritual communities that have focused on personal development without taking into account the role of social systems, and the problems faced by social change efforts that do not also involve a concurrent focus on personal development. Too many utopian spiritual communities have not succeeded in working together because they simply replicated authoritarian structures of the past, and too many well-meaning social activist groups and non-profits have faced endless bickering and interpersonal problems because the individuals involved did not recognize the need to address their own personal issues, particularly in times of stress.

It should be pointed out that a typical trap in this process is to engage in both personal and social transformation, concurrently, but in fact separately. The personal transformation efforts are not directly connected to the challenges of everyday life and social transformation, and the social transformation efforts are not used as grist for the mill of personal transformation. The challenge of transformative leaders is to weave together personal and social transformation.

Characteristics of Creativity: Creative Leadership Against Authoritarianism

In this transformative moment, creativity and leadership go hand in hand. The quest for reinvention tells us that we want to “create ourselves,” “lead” our lives, and creatively contribute to social transformation. The quest for social transformation, whether in organizations or larger social systems is historically often connected with the struggle against authoritarian power, whether political, economic, or organizational. Hierarchies of domination (ways of relating) are built into the old worldview, where they are often seen as reflecting a “natural order.” Historically, leadership has tended to be authoritarian, summarized as “command and control.” People have to obey the leader’s commands, and everybody’s actions are to a great extent pre-determined. Any deviation from role and expectation is a bug, not a feature. This makes it very hard if not impossible for anyone except the leader to engage and express creatively. It means an authoritarian, domination, control culture where

freedom is drastically reduced because one has to conform to the rules and roles and tasks. This is the heart of command and control: the order from above, and then the control to make sure the order is followed – conformed to. Creativity and freedom are only allowed at the top.

Creativity and conformity are traditionally two ends of a spectrum of personality. While authoritarianism is mostly associated with strength, domination, and power, it manifests mostly in *conformism* or the willingness to relinquish authority and freedom to a person perceived to be a leader. Erich Fromm called this the human tendency to want to *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 1994). Authoritarian individuals and systems want to take away our freedom, our ability to make choices. But making choices is often also difficult and a burden. One of the insights of the social sciences has been about the extent to which human beings have been willing give up their freedom – and their creativity. Transformative leadership requires an awareness of this dynamic, and the courage to remain creators and leaders, making it possible for others to do so as well.

Creativity and authoritarianism lie on a spectrum of human possibilities. While some people may be born with tendencies that lead to more or less creativity, or more or less authoritarianism, they are not “fixed” (Montuori 2014). Creativity, individual, and collective, is a practice that requires cultivation, in the same way that leadership does. It makes a huge difference whether one lives in an environment that supports or inhibits creativity. It is no surprise that advances in sciences are clearly associated with democracy and not authoritarianism (Ferris 2010). The most creative persons can under certain circumstances involving danger, fear or anxiety have an “authoritarian response.” It is not inappropriate during times of great danger to make quick assessments and ask, “friend or foe?” But being permanently in an emergency mode is not only unhealthy but opens the door to authoritarianism. That is why authoritarian leaders always stress the danger of an external (or even internal) threat to keep populations loyal to them (Montuori 2005).

Creativity is the way we express our freedom: *Creativity involves the ability to generate possibilities and alternatives, make choices, and act upon them.*

Emergence and Creativity for Transformative Leaders

In many ways, the phenomenon of emergence is a thread that connects transformative leadership and creativity. We have seen how transformative leadership is a move away from the centrality of command and control towards creating contexts that make emergence possible, for oneself as well as in interpersonally and collectively. This does not mean that transformative leadership rejects order and control. Rather, it puts them in dialogue with disorder and emergence to navigate in a contextually appropriate way between the risk of too much and too little of either, as well as finding the “sweet spot” on the edge of chaos. Emergence is characterized by the creation of new properties in a system that could not be predicted from the individual parts. We see this phenomenon in groups but also in the way ideas emerge as a result

of bringing together concepts that were previously not considered together (Koestler's bisociation).

Creativity is associated with such personality characteristics as independence of judgment, preference for complexity, psychological androgyny, and tolerance for ambiguity, and more generally with openness to experience (Barron 1995). These characteristics point to an openness towards opportunity and alternatives – an openness to emergence – rather than a desire to conform and superimpose existing interpretive frameworks on situations and individuals. The characteristics associated with creativity are contrasted with preference for reducing complexity to the simple (reductionism), conformity, either/or thinking, and rigidity, all involving attempts to stifle emergence.

The characteristics associated with creativity are generally viewed as intrapsychic, as personal characteristics. Another way of seeing them is as guides to interpersonal and group creativity. Does a person's interaction style promote tolerance for ambiguity, independence of judgment, and the other characteristics listed above? Does a group promote these characteristics? The characteristics of group-think and of authoritarian individuals can be counteracted by remaining aware of and cultivating these characteristics associated with creativity, both at an interpersonal and a group level. Transformative leaders cultivate these qualities in themselves, but also extend them to their relationships, and foster them in others. They learn to create and lead together.

Cultivating and fostering these creative characteristics in ourselves and in relationship is a practice that involves becoming aware of our responses and our natural tendencies, and developing our ability to be more open. The connection between feelings, cognition and perception is clear, because every choice involves not just a perceptual choice, but a related feeling, and very often it is the case that certain choices are made in order to avoid the anxiety of not-knowing. Cultivating our creativity in that sense has some distinct affinities to the Buddhist practices designed to help people become *comfortable with uncertainty*, to use the title of one of Pema Chödrön's books (Chödrön 2008).

Tolerance for ambiguity is a very important characteristic for transformative leaders given the current transformative moment. The term "ambiguous" is defined as a situation for which there are no preexisting rules and regulations. Dacey writes that ambiguity means there is "no framework to help direct your decisions and actions" (Dacey 1989, p. 18). People who have tolerance for ambiguity do well in situations where there is no set way of doing things, where it is necessary to experiment and try new things out (Lauriola et al. 2015). Some people become very anxious when confronted with situations for which there are no clear guidelines. If a procedure breaks down, or if there is some unknown situation ahead, this can be extremely stressful for those who are intolerant of ambiguity (Barron 1990). Being aware of the effect of ambiguity can also create an opportunity for mutual support, to create what in Taoism is referred to as the "invisible ground of sympathy" that allows creativity to flourish (Chang 1963). This is the yin to creativity's yang, an essential, mutually intertwined relationship, but a dimension of the larger view of creativity that has been ignored for too long in the West.

Cultivating our creativity invites us to be intrigued, stimulated, and motivated to explore the unfamiliar and unstructured situations and things for which there is no one clear solution or approach. It means addressing our fear of the unstructured and unfamiliar, which is why we need *The Courage to Create* (May 1975). Cultivating our creativity means being open to enjoying and being attracted by situations for which there are no clear rules, no established roadmaps. The ambiguity destabilizes mental equilibrium. It forces inquiry, exploration, and the creation of new ways of dealing with a situation. An unwillingness to allow or accept ambiguity means the person confronted with ambiguity will immediately attempt to impose a preexisting framework or set of rules on the situation and not remain open to the situation long enough to allow for the emergence of a situation-specific way of dealing with it. Tolerance for ambiguity involves wanting to create one's own rules and roadmaps and not immediately applying preexisting ones. In a sense, tolerance for ambiguity is closely related to our desire to be free, indeed to create to be free. Transformative leaders can foster relationships that support freedom, support creative inquiry, and remain mutually supportive and aware of the challenges faced by embracing freedom and creativity.

Tolerance for ambiguity is connected to creativity because in situations where there is no clear framework, some kind of order has to be *created*. Indeed, creative persons often appreciate unstructured situations precisely because they get to make up new ways of dealing with the world. Transformative leaders need to make sense of a world that seems increasingly chaotic and engage in exploration and creation of alternatives to the systems, processes and structures that are breaking down all around them. They are excited by the prospect of improvising, of getting to experiment and figuring things out by trial and error.

Intolerance for ambiguity is also associated with leadership but in the form of conforming authoritarianism. The rise of authoritarian leaders is closely associated to moments of chaos and confusion – we need only think of Germany's social, political and economic crisis during Hitler's rise. Authoritarian leaders can make themselves appealing by offering simple solutions, by providing a framework with which people can make sense of the world. Unfortunately, these frameworks more often than not remove ambiguity by eliminating complexity, involving a black and white, us versus them view, and curtailing freedom.

Cultivating our own tolerance for ambiguity means remaining alert for those times when we cannot make sense of a person or a situation. It means staying with discomfort and refusing to immediately super-impose our own or somebody else's interpretation. Particularly relevant here is the finding that human beings crave certainty, and above all, the *feeling* of certainty (Burton 2009). Staying with not-knowing will at least initially not alleviate the anxiety associated with it, the "wanting to know," and the desire for a feeling of certainty.

Creativity is associated with nonconformism, with not always going along with what everybody else is doing, not always thinking like everyone else. It means being willing to make up one's own mind even in the face of considerable social pressure. The opposite of independence of judgment is conformity, going along with the majority opinion because "if everybody else thinks so, they must be right." A lack

of independence of judgment in groups can lead to the phenomenon known as “groupthink.” Groupthink occurs when, for instance, groups make bad decisions because nobody wants to show dissent to the leader, or to what they perceive is the general mood of the group. Cultivating Independence of Judgment requires staying attuned to the tendency to go along with the group or social pressures, becoming more aware of – and indeed “owning” – our own ability to assess people, situations, proposals, and so on.

Barron found that preference for complexity is a very good indicator of creativity (Barron 1953). Creative individuals favor disorder and complexity, but only because they wish to integrate them into a higher order – simple but not simplistic, hence reductive – synthesis, what has been called “integrative complexity” (Barron and Bradley 1990; Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977). Barron likens the goal to the achievement of mathematical elegance, “to allow into the perceptual system the greatest possible richness of experience, while yet finding in this complexity some overall pattern” (1968, p. 199). “At the very heart of the creative process,” writes Barron (1990, p. 249) “is this ability to shatter the rule of law and regularity in the mind.” Subjects with a preference for simple order attempt to maintain an equilibrium, which according to Barron (1968, p. 198–199) “depends essentially upon exclusion, a kind of perceptual distortion which consists in refusing to see parts of reality that cannot be assimilated to some preconceived system.”

As Barron points out, creative people enjoy disorder and complexity because they enjoy the challenge of integrating complexity and disorder and creating a new order. Creativity therefore requires an integrative dialogical relationship between complexity and simplicity. Not *either* order *or* disorder, complexity *or* simplicity, but a constant dialogue between the two. Focusing only on simplicity does not give rise to the challenges needed to create something new, a new order. Focusing only on complexity leads to an excessive disorder out of which no simpler, integrative order can be created.

Authoritarianism is associated with a strong preference for order and simplicity. We see this in individuals who are rigidly concerned with order and prefer simple slogans to an open-minded engagement of complex issues, typically leading to reductionism (scapegoating – the problem can be reduced to one thing) and either/or thinking (you are either for us or against us; we are good, they are bad) (Sanford 1973). In authoritarian social systems, we see the same dynamic, the same kind of rigid orderliness (the USSR, pre-Deng China, authoritarian cults), and the same tendency to scapegoat either outside groups or a specific subgroup inside the system, based on race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and so on (Montuori 2005).

Flexibility has been defined as the ability to see the whole of a situation, rather than merely focusing on one of its parts. As Dacey (1989, p. 28) points out, in high pressure situations, people are eager to focus on the first decent idea that looks like it might be able to help. But the problem is that this focus (this premature convergence, if you will) does not allow them to step back and see the whole of the situation and assess other options and solutions. We can see how many of the characteristics we are describing here are related and form part of the larger process of creative thinking. As Morin states, echoing the philosopher Pascal, one cannot

understand the whole without knowing the parts, or the parts without understanding the whole (Morin 2008). Once again, creative thought involves a constant dialogic, a constant to and fro between ways of thinking that have historically been seen as opposed, such as the analytical focus on taking things apart into their smallest constituents in order to understand them, and the intuitive approach, which focuses on the whole. An exclusive focus on a part may lead to losing “the big picture,” whereas a focus on the whole may miss out on important details that would require a reassessment of that “big picture.”

Social theorists and researchers have pointed out that in our society, sex-role stereotypes were defined in opposition to each other (Eisler et al. 2016). This means that a man is defined as being a man in as much as he does not show any characteristics that are typically associated with women, and vice versa. The stereotypes that emerge are the John Wayne, independent, silent, unemotional loner, and the so-called “Southern Belle,” who is, of course, very emotional, very social, and very dependent. Freedom from sex-role stereotyping, a characteristic associated with creativity (Barron 1990), means that men can experience those stereotyped characteristics society typically associated with women, such as intuition, empathy, sensitivity, and self-awareness, and women can engage the characteristics stereotypically associated with men, such as aggression, self-assertion, analytical thought, and a degree of toughness. Once again, we see that in order to both understand and experience creativity it is necessary to go beyond a logic of either/or, and move to both/and. The “emotional intelligence” Daniel Goleman and his colleagues found to be an essential feature of successful leaders incorporates a number of qualities that were stereotypically associated with women, such as understanding one’s own emotions, empathy, and the ability to communicate effectively (Goleman et al. 2002). The leader as “host” rather than “hero” also shifts the emphasis to relational, supportive characteristics that are stereotypically more closely associated with women.

Recognition and Microactions: The Everyday, Everywhere, Everyone of Transformative Leadership

The “everyday, everyone, everywhere” aspect of transformative leadership is one of its most unique dimensions. At the same time, it can also seem potentially trivial given the enormity of the global changes. What exactly are the implications of this view for leadership? And if leadership and creativity are everywhere and in everyone, then what is *not* leadership or creative?

The everyday, everyone, everywhere focus also invites us to recognize – to become aware of a rethink, reconsider, and refeel, as it were – our everyday lives. Transformative leadership does not view the self in the traditional atomistic, individualistic way. If the self is viewed in this way, personal growth efforts can easily become narcissistic in the sense that they focus on the individual’s growth without taking others and the environment (social or natural) into account. It is often said that

change begins with the oneself, but this can also be an escape from a world perceived to be harsh and unwelcoming, or an excessive preoccupation with the self at the expense of others. Historically, there has been a split between social activism and personal transformation. The philosopher Hannah Arendt referred to these two worlds as the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. If the self is viewed as relational, embodied, and embedded, always already participating in the world, then the apparent opposition between personal and social transformation breaks down. Our everyday experience becomes the locus for both personal and social transformation in the recognition that the two are not separate. Our every action, no matter how *seemingly* insignificant, is embedded in the social world. Developing an increased awareness of this complex self, a self that is not isolated from the world but part of a larger network, an awareness that we are in the world, and the world is in us, is an essential dimension of transformative leadership.

As an example, the term microaggression has entered our vocabulary to refer to discrimination that is not (necessarily) intentional, discrimination, or aggression that is subtle or indirect (Campbell and Manning 2014; Lau and Williams 2010). Not overt acts of racism or sexism, for instance, no cross burning or racial epithets but the kinds of slights that precisely because of their subtlety have a destructive cumulative effect. These microaggressions may *appear* trivial, certainly when compared to the heinous nature of more familiar forms of prejudice and injustice, and particularly if one is not at the receiving end of them, but they contribute to the creation of a climate that is oppressive.

A parallel can be made with the phenomenon of culture shock. Culture shock does not involve one big shocking event. It is, rather, an accumulation of small events that trigger a gradual disorientation and feeling of not having a grip on reality. The small events make one feel one is not “at home,” and that any minute a “normal” situation one typically would not even think about could be deeply disorienting and disturbing. The sense of agency and control is lost, one’s value is diminished. Of course, victims of microaggressions are mostly “at home,” in their own culture, but in a culture or context that ironically often claims not to be racist, sexist, ableist, etc., microaggressions are therefore also a reminder that things are not the way the dominant narrative may claim they are, and that one does not *really* belong. Microaggressions show us the way that small, *apparently* insignificant acts can have a powerful cumulative impact. This is also something chaos theory has taught us with the concept of the butterfly effect. Not only do microactions have an impact, they can also cause a ripple effect with widespread implications (de Vulpian 2008).

The microdimension is very relevant for transformative leaders who can apply its principles in their everyday, everywhere, everyone context, through generative (rather than oppressive, demeaning, controlling) micropractices we might describe as *microconnections* and *microcreations*, as antidotes to microaggressions. Particularly in urban centers, we find a degree of depersonalization whereby interactions with strangers can become purely instrumental. This is not surprising given the larger scope of the machine metaphor. The stress is on one’s task, efficiency, and

getting things done, whether it is buying a subway ticket or getting served in a restaurant. But the exclusive task focus at the expense of relationship creates a cold world, one that reflects a tendency to think in terms of on/off, either/or: either we connect, or we get things done. Microconnections are those moments when we reach out to somebody who may be a perfect stranger to establish a relational rather than purely instrumental connection, to acknowledge the person is a human being in their individuality, not just a nameless “pedestrian” crossing the street, for example. One way of framing the difference is in terms of the two worldviews we have articulated, by asking ourselves if we are all isolated atoms going about our business, or whether we are all unique individuals, and yet all in the same boat, sharing a common destiny.

Similarly, microcreations are those interpersonal moments when we break out of habitual patterns of interaction and realize we are *creating*, or more accurately *cocreating*, the interaction. Microcreations often involve a certain amount of humor, passion, trust, and a willingness to take risks. This is creativity applied to the “mundane,” to those aspects of our lives where creativity is usually least expected or recognized.

Creating and connecting, in this sense, is *leading*.

Conclusion

Transformative leadership proposes that everybody can lead and create, and in fact, willy-nilly *does* lead, even if only by example. Becoming a transformative leader means acknowledging the larger context of a moment of global transformation, and recognizing the way all human beings *participate* in the world. We cannot step outside of the transformation. We *are* the transformation, and our choices and actions, our ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing, contribute to the direction the transformation will take.

Transformative leadership involves embodying and taking responsibility for one’s leadership and creativity. As a variety of philosophical and spiritual schools from existentialism to Buddhism tell us in different ways, human beings are far more creative than they realize, and are mostly not aware of their creativity, or how they cocreate their world. They are also not aware of the extent to which they are “leading” their own lives, creating their understanding of the world, their interactions, their futures. Transformative leadership is, among other things, *a practice of unveiling our own creativity and leadership*, taking responsibility for them, and applying them to mutual benefit, creating collaboration and participatory leadership.

Transformative leadership is obviously aspirational; it is a particular orienting view of the current condition and the human potential. As such, no one individual or group can necessarily claim to be the shining example of transformative leadership. To the extent that it is aspirational, transformative leadership is also an invitation to participate in a collective journey into the future, a journey of creative inquiry, creating ourselves, our relationships, and our communities.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Collective Virtuosity: Lessons in Personal and Small Group Transformation from Classical Chamber Musicians](#)
- ▶ [Creativity to Flourish: Pathways Towards Appreciative Leadership](#)
- ▶ [Global Transformation: Visions of an Imminent Future](#)
- ▶ [Leader Self-Development, Maturation, and Meditation: Elements of a Transformative Journey](#)
- ▶ [Leadership Convergence: The Dawn of Practical Wisdom](#)
- ▶ [Self-Knowledge: The Master Key to Personal Transformation](#)
- ▶ [Teaching Creativity and Spiritual Meaning Using Insights from Neurobiology](#)
- ▶ [The Role of Improvisation in Organizational Transformation](#)
- ▶ [The Truth About Transformation: One Person CAN Change the World](#)
- ▶ [Transformation](#)

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