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## LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF DISRUPTION – TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

*Transformation is permanent: technology, geopolitics, demographics and social change force leaders to turn knowledge into action. Yet many current leaders lack this capability; only by reframing their mindset – rethinking priorities, habits and assumptions – can organizations, including in the automotive industry, master continuous transformation through experiments, distributed leadership and lifelong learning.*

### THE PROBLEM: KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT ACTION

We live in an era where transformation is no longer episodic but permanent. Technological innovation, geopolitical uncertainty, demographic shifts, and societal change define the reality of organizations and their leaders. In this environment, knowledge alone is insufficient – the decisive factor is the ability to consistently translate insights into action. »The Knowing-Doing Gap«, as described by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton, captures this paradox: organizations invest heavily in knowledge, training, and consulting, yet fail to act on what they know. Closing this gap requires courage, consistency, and a willingness to take responsibility. But leadership today is not only about bridging the gap between knowing and doing; it is about empowering people, reframing uncertainty, and preparing organizations for longevity.

### KNOW THYSELF

Closing the gap begins with self-awareness. I have learned to watch how strengths can become liabilities: decisiveness can harden into stubbornness; empathy can become indecision. I cultivate the habit of pausing to ask: »Is my strength helping or hindering right now?« That reflex helps choose the right posture – sometimes decisive, sometimes consultative, sometimes coaching. This is why the first rule of leadership effectiveness is always to know thyself. Leaders must understand their personal strengths and weaknesses to know what they truly offer the people they lead. Your biggest strength can also be your biggest weakness. Recognizing this paradox allows leaders to temper their strengths and avoid overusing them.

## » Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.«

George Bernard Shaw

### DEEPENING LEADERSHIP THROUGH »OUTSIGHT«

Herminia Ibarra's »outsight« principle resonates with me: leadership identity is shaped by action. Early in my career, I believed leadership meant thinking deeply before acting. Yet the most transformative moments came when I acted first – taking on roles outside my comfort zone, leading teams in unfamiliar cultures, and experimenting with new approaches. These experiences reshaped my thinking and expanded my leadership identity. Authenticity, Ibarra argues, is not about clinging to a fixed self but about evolving through action. I have found that authenticity emerges when leaders are willing to experiment, adapt, and grow alongside their teams. This connects to another rule: what got you here won't get you there. The skills that earned success in one role may not be sufficient for the next. Leaders must build on current strengths while broadening their range to prepare for new demands. Moving from operational leadership to strategic transformation required me to shift from detail orientation to vision-setting. Reinvention is not optional; it is the price of continued relevance.

### CREATING »SAFE ZONES« AMIDST DISRUPTION

We live in a »Never Normal« world like Peter Hinssen is defining, where uncertainty is not a threat but the raw material for opportunities. Leaders must stop treating volatility as something to be minimized and instead harness it as a driver of reinvention. Leaders must move faster, think bigger, and use technology to build futures worth striving for. Disruption is not a temporary shock but a continuous condition.

## Strategic Misalignment Challenges

### HIGH STRATEGIC AWARENESS

- 91% of executives say strategic alignment is critical
- Less than 15% strongly agree their organization is aligned

### LIMITED EMPLOYEE UNDERSTANDING

- 48% of employees are informed of strategic goals
- Only 40% clearly understand their role in strategy

### DIFFICULTY LINKING WORK TO STRATEGY

- 85% of organizations feel confident in their strategy
- 44% struggle to connect daily work to strategy

Sources: Harvard Business Review, Skillsoft,  
i-nexus Future of Strategy Report [2025 – 2026]

Organizations must be designed for fluidity, experimentation, and resilience, as Constantinos Markides emphasizes. Leaders must balance exploitation of today’s business with exploration of tomorrow’s opportunities, encouraging small, continuous experiments rather than waiting for large-scale transformations.

In my global leadership roles in the automotive and technology sectors, I often faced this tension. For example, in technology-driven projects, we created »safe zones« for small experiments while maintaining operational excellence in core businesses. This dual approach allowed organizations to remain resilient while preparing for disruption. Yet agility is not only structural; it is cultural. Leaders must set the stage for others to succeed, appreciating what those who are different bring. In diverse, international teams, I found that creating space for varied perspectives was the key to innovation. Setting the stage means building trust, dismantling silos, and empowering others to shine. Great leaders know when to step back and listen, and my career has taught me that humility is as important as vision.

### DISMANTLING BUREAUCRACY TO ACTIVATE THE »SEEKING SYSTEM«

In this context, organizations play a crucial role. Gary Hamel’s »Humanocracy« adds a powerful critique of bureaucracy. He argues that traditional hierarchies and rigid rules stifle innovation and engagement. Organizations must be rebuilt around human initiative, creativity, and autonomy. Hamel’s call to dismantle bureaucracy aligns with Daniel Cable’s »Alive at Work«, which draws on neuroscience to show that humans have a built-in »seeking system« – a drive to learn, experiment, and grow. When work activates this system, people feel energized and engaged. Leaders can spark this engagement by giving employees autonomy, connecting their work to purpose, and encouraging curiosity – rather than imprisoning them in monolithic structures.

### LEADERSHIP IN A 100-YEAR LIFE

Demographic change reshapes careers and leadership. Andrew Scott and Lynda Gratton’s »The 100-Year Life« introduce another layer: longevity. Rising life expectancy reshapes careers, organizations, and leadership. The old three-stage model of education, work, and retirement no longer applies. Leaders must prepare for multi-stage careers, support lifelong learning, and bridge intergenerational teams. Longer lives mean more transitions, requiring flexibility and resilience. Purpose and meaning become central as people seek fulfillment across decades.

In my leadership journey, I have seen how intergenerational teams bring both challenges and opportunities. Younger colleagues push for digital transformation and sustainability, while experienced professionals provide stability and wisdom. For example in the automotive organisations I’ve led, this implies career paths that move

engineers between different roles, and that reward continuous reskilling. Bridging these perspectives requires empathy and adaptability. Ultimately, your best role is the best fit with who you want to be. Leaders thrive when they find positions that resonate with their identity, not just their résumé. The best leaders embrace agility, curiosity, and playfulness, finding roles that allow them to live authentically.

### THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF LEADERSHIP

At the heart of this philosophy lies the human dimension: trust, dignity and empathy are decisive forces that determine whether people will follow you through disruption. As Maya Angelou observed, »I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.« In an age of AI and rapid change, the emotional imprint a leader leaves determines whether a team will follow that leader into the unknown. Invest in coaching, visible rituals that reinforce values, and recognition systems that celebrate learning as much as success. Distributed leadership, trusted advisors and candid feedback loops protect leaders from blind spots and broaden organizational intelligence.

### STRATEGY BEFORE METRICS: THE PRACTICALITY OF CLARITY

A common pitfall in leadership is allowing KPIs to define the path forward. I believe that numbers are a consequence of a strategy; they cannot define it. Too often, business planning begins with spreadsheets and assumptions that drown managers in complexity.

To improve clarity, leaders should start by visualizing a clear picture of what success looks like. This forces the organization to think about the future before the numbers, ensuring that strategy drives the metrics. This focus on clarity is a lived necessity that ensures everyone understands expectations during times of rapid change.

### KNOW THYSELF:

- Strengths can become liabilities without self-awareness

### WHAT GOT YOU HERE WON’T GET YOU THERE:

- The skills that earned success in one role may not be sufficient for the next

### YOUR BEST ROLE IS THE BEST FIT WITH WHO YOU WANT TO BE:

- Leaders thrive when their positions resonate with their identity, not just their CV

### ACTIVATE THE SEEKING SYSTEM:

- Flatten hierarchies and encourage experimentation over bureaucracy

### EMOTIONAL IMPRINT MATTERS:

- Trust and empathy drive followership

### STRATEGY BEFORE METRICS:

- Clarity of vision guides meaningful KPIs

Sources: Harvard Business Review, Skillsoft,  
i-nexus Future of Strategy Report [2025 – 2026]

## Core Principles of Modern Leadership

## LEADERSHIP AS ATTITUDE

Leadership in the age of disruption is an attitude: clarity of purpose, values, authenticity and empowerment turn insight into impact. After more than 25 years spent in the automotive industry – leading cross border OEM programs, supplier integrations and digital transformation initiatives – I believe that leaders can turn disruption into opportunity and knowledge into impact. Leadership in the age of disruption requires more than strategies or processes. It requires an attitude – one that embraces transformation as a permanent condition, closes the »Knowing-Doing Gap«, and uses values as a compass. Only in this way will leaders design organizations fit for the »Never Normal« world and the »100-year life«.

