

Cultivate Leadership Contagion

A Speculative Grounded Theory Knowledge for Future Change Agents

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“Changing paradigm” can be defined as a sudden outbreak in the accepted social norm, a fundamental change in the way of thinking and a change of paradigm. Society and culture are two strongly intertwined realities. Every society is, therefore, the bearer of its own legacy and contagious. Today’s Cultural and Creative Industries’ education market is facing a rapidly mutating academic scenario. The revolutionary change of the society and the increasingly sense of Cultural and disciplinary “contagious” request our universities to rethink their philosophies towards critical and creative education. In what ways is the industry’s uncertain future challenging the traditional pedagogy? In what forms could the creative leader curriculum be evolved to prepare future talents for this new paradigm? (V.U.C.A Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) By exploring one particular international “conversation in action”, this paper investigates the implementation practice of embedding adaptive leadership in the internationalized creative curriculum. The researchers explain the mutated role of the creative educator from the ‘instructor,’ who delivers the educational content to the students, to the ‘coach,’ who constructs the learning process for the future expert designers. By empowering the future talents through training, practiced skills, and personal experiences, to cultivate their interpersonal competency. In conclusion, the authors indicate that future thinking for creative leadership needs to consider three factors: firstly, leadership thinking is not necessarily accessible for all expert designers; secondly, leadership signifies projecting the potentiality of taking responsibilities and develop critical thinking; lastly, the study implies that when facing the uncertainty of the organizational system, creative leaders should anticipate and induce, rather than simply react to the changing following the contagious.

Keywords: leadership; critical thinking; speculation; contagion; grounded theory

Introduction: Creative Leadership, Coaching Adaptive Capabilities

Design leadership has been widely recognized as a strategy for the future of ‘advanced design’ (Mozota, 2006), anticipating the role of the designer as an ‘interpreter’ who assumes an advocacy role (Buccolo et al., 2011). Several works of literature argue the importance of teaching design leadership as a competency at undergraduate and graduate levels (Baars & Ruedi, 2016) in order to draft and test new coaching strategies that will acknowledge the emergence of a new role for the design professionals. Nevertheless, these concepts are difficult to be found in the undergraduate design education that still focuses on teaching skills without integrating components of leadership training nor challenging the traditional and somewhat out-dated system of thinking about the role of the designers in the industry.

All the above bring forward the necessity to envision new training and coaching strategies that will acknowledge the emergence of leadership in design education. We argue that in order to attain a leadership mind-frame it is necessary to look at the different expertise levels in design, asking how to coach expert designers to discover and achieve master and visionary capabilities (Dreyfuss, 2003). Starting from this assumption we first present the literature review focusing on the evolution of the design thinking, present the organizational context (Cooksey, 2003) and suggest several methods that can support design leadership coaching activities.



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For such reason, we believe that in order to activate the learning about leadership it is necessary to remember the importance of imagination in blending hands-on skills with the knowledge and expertise of the design professionals. Rather than delineating designers' 'place' it is more important to focus on the role of the design leaders and understand empowerment as an important responsibility. This process of empowerment is necessary in order to acknowledge the changing reality of the marketplace and prepare the new generation of designers to face its challenges. In this sense, the actual task of the designers from a leadership perspective is to guide from within the organization with an experiential learning approach (Kolb, 2014). The most important contribution of the design leaders is to push the boundaries of the limited perspectives with the use of imagination, continuously enlarging the domain of vision, action and possible achievements.

The main question the paper aims to tackle is: while there is an ongoing acknowledgement of the leading role of the design professionals in the upper organizational levels and a growing interest for cultivating leadership through design, design leadership curricula is still not fully articulated. We suggest that the first steps in establishing such programs are the following: recognising the levels of expertise at which design leadership can be cultivated; understanding the difference between expert training and leadership coaching in design; suggesting experiential learning (EL) as a valid methodology for design leadership coaching.

The ultimate goal is not to find solutions to incoming problems, but to revert the perspectives transforming the obstacles in opportunities for change or introduce new problems with the objective to frame the context of change. We argue that the experiential learning model proposed by Kolb is a valid coaching methodology that can integrate design thinking and practice into the design leadership mind frame, in particular, because of its cyclical integration of concrete experience in the abstract conceptualization required by the strategic leadership. In this sense design 'penetrates' into everyday life, it also has the potential power to induce disruption 'CHANGE' in a mainstream behaviour of unquestioned acceptance, favouring an attitude of readiness and openness towards the unknown.

The Difference Between Authority and Leadership

More important the education activities introduce the difference between authority and leadership which is one of the main distinctions that sets apart the concept of adaptive leadership. The authority is to maintain the equilibrium by providing direction, protection, orientation, conflict control, and discipline; the leader instead has to learn from observing the ongoing dynamics at individual, organizational and environmental levels in order to provide guidance to his/her followers, support adaptability, in order to navigate in incoming circumstances, empower decision-making, and challenge norms (Figure 1).

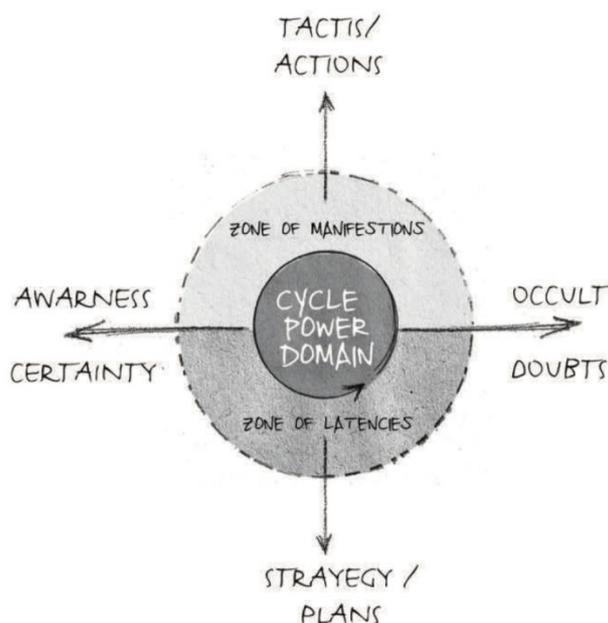


Figure 1. The parameters that set up the background for the exercise of leadership. (F. Galli 2015)

Observing the Creative Leadership Dynamics; The Changing Role from Passive Witness to Activator, Viral-Provoking Agent

Having said that the course introduces the leadership dynamics as intended in the literature concerning power and war literature. One of the essential fascinating writings as coming from ancient China in the shape of the Sun Tzu and the art of war. Still, a reference oeuvre for organizational behaviourists, corporate strategists and political figures alike, the writings of Sun Tzu have at core the political figure of a general, his dedication to the sovereign and the victory but first and foremost stresses out the relation between the general and his army of soldiers. As such the 'wise general' doesn't think or act as an individual but becomes the mind of the people he leads being responsible for their lives as much as for the victory.

Drawing from this insight, we can speculate that the observer gains a different dimension, that allows her/him to have the threefold perspective of the outside, inside and the tensions created by the interferences between coupled systems and disturbance agents. Rather than a neutral space, the boundary zone within a 'membrane' that becomes a contended territory in which the communication codes have multiple meanings, as we have actually seen in the previously quoted example, a conflict zone in which communication triggers action.

Having said that, in real-world people share the same space or even work together without necessarily engaging in an overt conflict on a daily basis, and there are several reasons for this. First of all, there is little awareness of the individual differences because of the minimal contact, the lack of communication providing little basis for opposing attitudes to be transformed into opposing interests. In the second stance, although there might be a certain level of acquaintance with opposing perspectives and attitudes, there is little will to transform them into opposing interests. Finally, superficial social interaction occurring through communication could stimulate opposing interests and still, the will may have no reason to actualize this opposition (Rummel, 1976).

To summarize, the sub-phases of the latent conflict phase can be divided as such:

- A. the definition of a socio-cultural space in which different values, meanings, norms, status or hierarchical positions coexist, and the role dispositions are outlined.
- B. the potential conflict situation is structured by acknowledging the differences, creating awareness about the cultural differences, being ethnic or cognitive and/or social distances.
- C. once the structure of conflict formed through awareness, the opposing attitudes generated through clustering are activated and become opposing interests.

This leads to the transformation of the structure of the learning process into a kind of conflict situation in which the opposing parties are mutually weighting their capabilities and forces. Through this process, the opposing interests are turned into vectors of power directed towards the opposing party.

We have though the potentiality of the learning process delineated into a socio-cultural space, the actualization of the opposing dispositions into opposing attitudes, the energizing of the opposing attitudes into opposing interests, and finally they will prepare for the manifestation of conflict.

Transformational Leaders: Coaching a New Generation of Creative Leader (Change Agent)

The learnership model proposed by Cooksey (2003) is perhaps the most relevant to help draft a definition of the role of leader that exercises a disruptive design strategy, and that is because it emphasizes the importance of the adaptive behavior as an asset of the leader. This gives an important value and attention to the emergent leaders and the capability to become a leading figure no matter the level of experience within the organization.

Moreover, Cooksney proposes a scheme of the learnership development (Figure 2) which has as a motion point the cycle through which a leader is capable: juxtapose new meanings against old meanings > create new meanings > create new actions.

In this sense, we suggest that the juxtaposition of old and new meanings manifest the generation of an uncertainty zone as a way to make place for a newly created meanings expressed and shared through alternative metaphors and that the implementation of actions geared towards decision making implies even in restraint social groups the exercise of influence through power.

To this concern, the learnership model proposed by Cooksney (2003) is closely related to the adaptive leadership concept and strategy for leading developed by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky from Harvard University. The core of adaptive leadership focuses on the activation of change by observing and orienting emerging challenges at the organizational level, determining the core practices of an organization and the obstacles to change; developing and testing 'future' practices and integrating them into the organizational structure (Cambridge Leadership Associates). The adaptive leadership framework emphasizes learning in action, underlining the importance of navigating in uncertain circumstances.

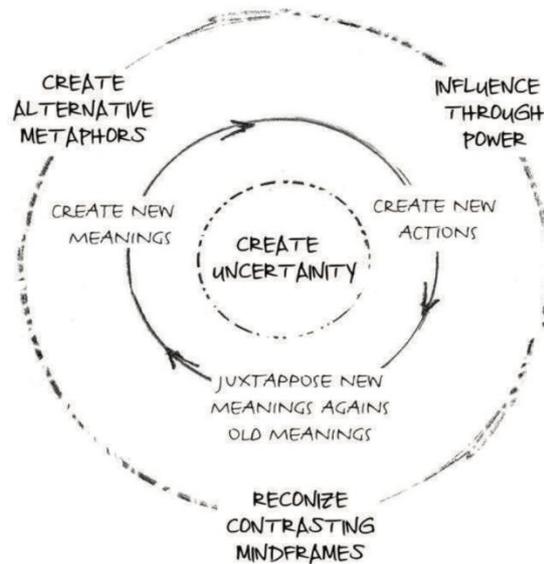


Figure 2. Close-up on the implications of the meaning – changing process. (F. Galli 2017)

During the conversation in action, the instructors will discuss different ideas with students from the educational processes and testify experiences in workshop activities, describing case studies. The typical approaches are selecting an application field, defining an intervention area, carrying on an ethnographic study, identifying personas and then tracking possible behaviours and needs, defining some possible solutions for possible problems seems to be an excellent way for providing trivial uninteresting and obsolete good solutions. We will then try to invert some of the above elements, starting from disruption as a starting point. Starting from the principle of provoking constraints, possibly to be overtaken. Then following with a slightly different approach: select an application field, define an intervention area, observe the behaviours, consider which are the usual stereotypes, try to destroy them and define new formal constraints, provide preliminary solutions, use different principles and methods as validation means, and provide the final proposal.

Future Change Agents and the Spread of Ideas in Creative Education.

“Speculative Conversation in Action”

One of the methods developed for critical classroom training was the insertion of the concept of “Design Diaspora” as the main element for understanding a change in status or cultural paradigm shift. When comparing different education traditions, progress should be evaluated in terms of the adequacy of solutions offered for both empirical anomalies and conceptual paradoxes in educational and professional context an important question in the study of progress is: How do students react to anomalies and paradoxes?

Kuhn (1970) defines an anomaly as a violation of the ‘paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science’ (p. 52-53). Anomalies are detected through empirical analyses and have formed the basis for most discoveries in the natural sciences. For Kuhn, the discovery of anomalies provides the impetus for paradigm change within a field of study. Anomalies are empirical difficulties that reflect differences between the observed and theoretically expected data.

The aim of education is to coach how to observe, recognize and criticize what often, from society and from the cultural contexts in which one is formed or trained, is defined as normal, obvious and validated a priori by prejudices and opinions and create (design) or ‘juxtapose’ a new meaning at the real world and be able to communicate and discuss with a critical thinking, favouring an attitude of readiness and openness towards the unknown.

Students who come from different cultures and backgrounds have a big effect on the way they look at design and, in turn, the way design is understood. The idea of “Design Diaspora” came to mind from our own experience as three university professors with three different experiences learning and practicing design. In many ways the process is similar to our own and varied only between emphasis on human factors and contextual importance. Students learning design at the institute also brought different points of views. Our role as professors is sharing our perspectives with students and understanding their way of looking at problems to direct them toward a formal process more suited to each scenario. We dedicated our

conversation in action “Design Diaspora: Sharing or Hoarding Knowledge in the New Normal” because in the context of a pandemic a universal perspective was more readily being compared, contrasted and analysed. The world suddenly was united in a problem that brought into question design in practical terms such as surgical masks too systems for social compliance and new human behaviours. This also impacted higher education in the way it was delivered but could it also impact what was being taught?

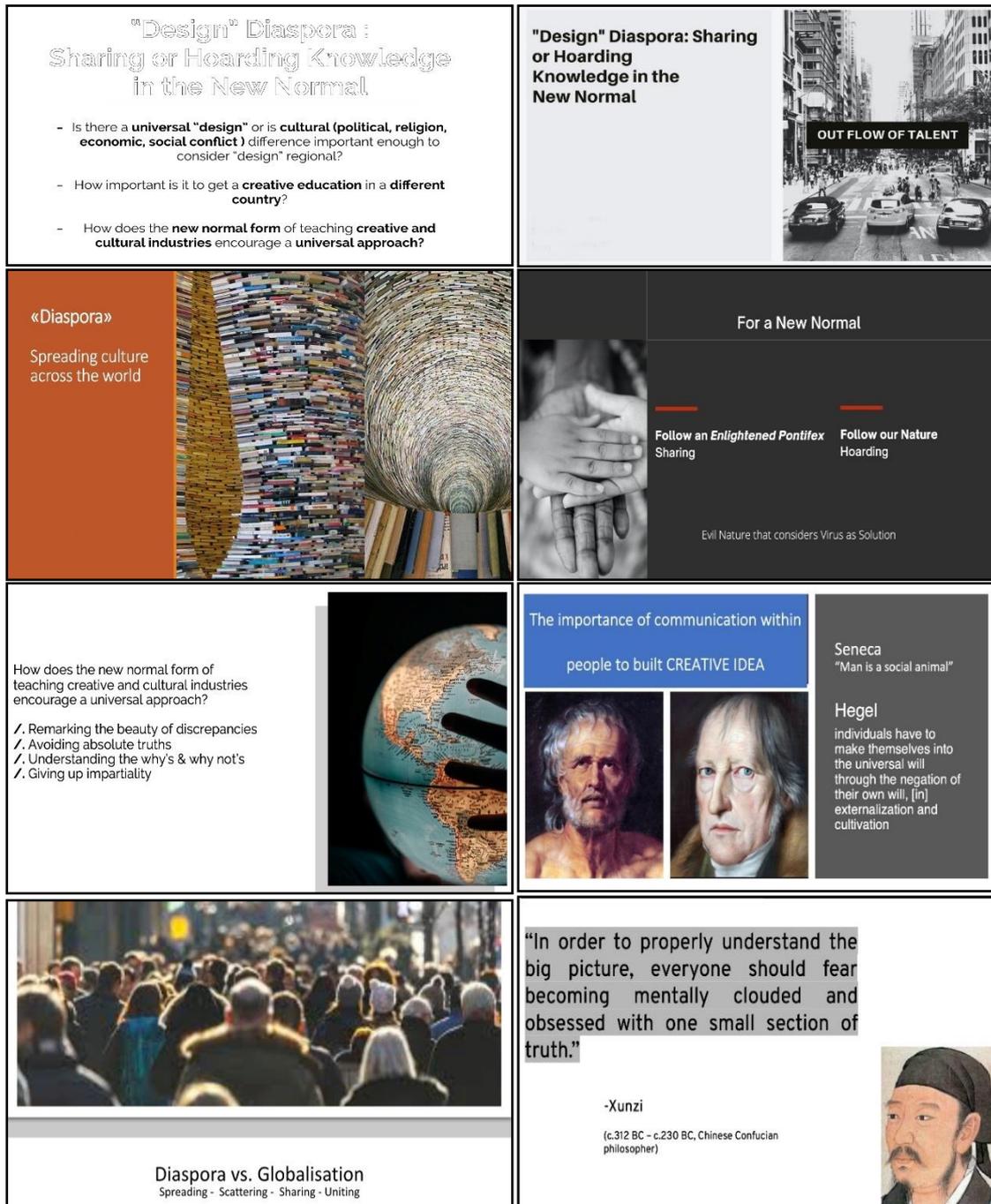


Figure 3. Some of the images taken from presentations during the observation, visualization, presentation, and criticism of “Design Diaspora Conversation in Action”.

The following questions ask if students could see how approaches to creative education may also need to change:

- Is there a universal design or is cultural difference (political, religion, economic, social conflict) important enough to consider design regional?
- How important is it to get a design education in a different country?

- How does the new normal form of teaching design encourage a universal approach?

The following are their responses categorised into *Universal* and *Cultural* design processes: (Figure 3)

Universal

- Creativity is not necessary. Study abroad brings different points of view and helps creativity.
- Some agree with diaspora concept;
- Believes diaspora helps you to create your own idea.
- Thinks emphasis on social connection to create disruptive ideas.
- So, if we consider the google view like the future new normal we cannot consider diaspora in the negative way like hoarding of knowledge but we can consider it only in the sharing point of view, that is positive.

Cultural

- Domestic Diaspora
- Our creativity is deeply connected to our culture,
- Today no diaspora from a cultural point of view, scholars and philosopher justify the status quo, no more disruptive thinking
- Sees diaspora as a threat to creativity. Because some believe diaspora and globalization will make everybody think the same.

Straddle Both

- We have to take care of our cultural differences, but we also have to be aware of the needs of the other populations, in that way people can create a common “design” and not a diaspora.
- Today thanks to technology we can be in many places by just staying at home, having professors from all around the world. Seeing positive and negative parts of sharing and hoarding.
- So, should we follow nature and give voice to the enlightened ones, or should we listen to the system we have been growing with, but isn’t that also the reason we are “at war” in the first.

Speculative Grounded Theory, An Interpretation

Grounded Theory has its benefits in forming theory and at the same time providing rigor in the analysis of qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). When analyzing the “Speculative Conversation in action” material we posed the question of cultural context versus global principles to reconsider the both the state of design education and a shift toward design as a humanitarian activity that has world implications. At first glance, the question seems to approach design education and its activities as a theoretical investigation. Assessment of design’s educational practice as well as global trends and our shared understanding of design may garner a new perspective such as global design theory, or a unified design method that adds social metrics, or rights of inclusion. Theory at this scale and scope posits a more thorough investigation is warranted and the underpinnings of the investigation be based on comparisons between arguments that are weighted. Grounded theory therefore seems an appropriate form of analysis for this investigation.

Raby and Dunne have solidified a definition for speculative design which integrates societal issues with forward thinking, “it thrives on imagination and aims to open up new perspectives on what are sometimes called wicked problems, to create spaces for discussion and debate about alternative ways of being, and to inspire and encourage people’s imaginations to flow freely.” (Dunne & Raby, 2013) Unlike traditional approaches to theoretical processes that are based on current scenarios, speculative design attempts to project future states to offer design input. It may be a simple matter of asking questions of burgeoning problems to anticipate a design solution but according to Raby and Dunne the speculative aspect of the process is principally marked around “freeing one’s mind” of current states. It requires the design theorist to ask how and what designers can do in the face of wicked problems. To stretch this definition further Raby and Dunne go on to say, “Design speculations can act as a catalyst for collectively redefining our relationship to reality.” **Speculation** is a broad view that pushes our current state out of the minds of designers to ask more provocative questions such as, ‘what if’. What if we didn’t have country borders that defined cultural difference? Or why is a design that is born out of a particular country significant? This approach to theory development is unlike the questions asked by design theorists and is unlike the many examples that use grounded theory and the constant comparative method described by Glaser & Strauss (1967).

The use of the constant comparative method is, “concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties and hypothesis about general problems.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, we might imagine designing for a global marketplace to be liberating, free of local

regulation, social norms, and cultural idiosyncrasies. Focusing on the human interests, and needs seems naively grand but as we see when cultures interrelate through trade, negotiation, tradition and beliefs for example, exchanges re-enforce their own cultural perspectives. (Stairs, 2002) In this way, we imagine the hegemony of design as a form of guarding sovereignty or cultural identity. Grounded theory described by Glaser and Strauss offers a four-stage process to consider qualitative data and its relationship to other data to evaluate these arguments as they are introduced.

The first stage selects and codifies comparable incidence applicable to each category. At this stage we suggest a weighting of the data based on how tightly or loose the incidence is held. Tightly held beliefs will be less likely to change and should be evaluated accordingly. The second stage integrates categories of similar properties building relational data that can develop into theories about the topic. If we reflect on the workshop a clear delineation between the 'globalists' and the 'culturalists' have proposed arguments for their predictions of future design education. In the third stage Glaser and Strauss propose delimiting the theory through the gaps in the data and the extent to which the theory can be contained. This stage assumes that the speculation of the question that generates the data forms the context of the theoretical position. The realization of a borderless world may not develop a context for a design to flourish however; there may be alternatives to operating in a world as if there were none (ie. designers without borders initiative). Lastly, writing the theory is a stage in the constant comparative method that asserts a theory set in the future of a world that currently does not exist yet still retains the hypothesis based on current related theory. The hypothesis is evaluated on a scale of categorical weighting for data instigated by speculation and the level of expertise of the speculator, for example. As with any qualitative coding scheme, bias is a concern but using the constant comparative process the bias is recognisable in the categorisation however consistently it is applied. Creative Leadership Contagion, Critical thinking and Conclusions.

Moving from Creative Expertise to Adaptive Creative Leadership

Starting from the integration of design thinking and design practice into the design leadership mind frame, the researcher presented experiential learning activities as a possible approach for coaching design leaders. This is essential to note in particular because it gives a further relevance and meaning to the importance of coaching for adaptive leadership which enables designers to surpass the expert level and attain the full awareness of the environment and the 'capability to transgress' the boundary of the professional domains questioning its limitations. To better frame the drastic change introduced by this step it is necessary to look at the mental functions brought into play as explained in the original work by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980).

In order to fully understand the importance of the adaptive leadership training in creative discipline, it is necessary to concentrate on the passage from the expert level to respectively master and visionary (Figure 4). While in the previous levels or up until becoming experts, designers respond to incoming problems the master and visionary levels transcend the mere execution of tasks. We argue that in order to attain a leadership mind frame it is necessary to look at the different expertise levels in the discipline, asking how to coach expert creative leaders to discover and achieve master and visionary capabilities (Dreyfuss, 2003).

SKILL LEVEL MENTAL FUNCTION	NOVICE	COMPETENT	PROFICIENT	EXPERT	MASTER	VISIONARY
RECOLLECTION	NON SITUATIONAL	SITUATIONAL	SITUATIONAL	SITUATIONAL	SITUATIONAL	CHANCE SEEKING
RECOGNITION	DECOMPOSED	DECOMPOSED	HOLISTIC	HOLISTIC	HOLISTIC	RANDOM
DECISION	ANALYTICAL	ANALYTICAL	ANALYTICAL	INTUITIVE	INTUITIVE	INSTINCTIVE
AWARENESS	MONITORING	MONITORING	MONITORING	MONITORING	ABSORBED	MUTATED
YOUTH TRAINING				ADULT EDUCATION		

Figure 4. The expertise levels table modified from Author (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980; F. Galli 2019)

Rather than stressing the understanding of the design education in terms of a breakthrough, the researchers suggested in this paper that the creative education can benefit from shifting the focus on empower creative leadership education to teaching the young generation how to activate Critical thinking and adopt a leadership attitude in the “contagious” scenario.

With the rapidly “contagious” landscape of the new normality realities, creative leaders are requested for a mutated awareness, which shifts from the individual focus to the overall acknowledgment of the organizational system and environment. We believe that this type of ‘Change Agent Revolution’ can have a deeper and longer-term impact on creative education helping to adjust the expectations of the creative talents to the reality of the continuously changing work environment.

The researchers suggest that future thinking for creative leadership needs to consider three factors: firstly, leadership thinking is not necessarily accessible for all expert designers; secondly, leadership signifies projecting the potentiality of taking responsibilities and develop critical thinking; lastly, the study implies that when facing the uncertainty of the organizational system, designers should anticipate and induce, rather than simply react to the changing opportunities.

This holistic approach calls for expert designers to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses and learn to cultivate visionary capabilities. We conclude by suggesting that although design leadership is still a relatively new concept in design discipline literature, coaching strategies can be successfully implemented at the grounded level of creative education for prepare future Change Agents.

The duality of leadership – The learnership model we assert implements conversation in action activities aiming to direct what we call the “navigation” in the uncertainty, balancing several dimensions embedded in the framework. Toward this concern, Murphy, & Toomey draft several dimensions of learnership that help construct a view of the overall model and places it between the boundary of education and business environments. In an early version of the model proposed for educational contexts, there are five axes on which several dimensions of learnership unfold: vision, empowerment, evolution, action and accomplishment (1993, p. 14) (Table 1) deriving their own meaning and understanding from both learning and leading practices. These axes help delineate the territory in which the various dimensions of the training model have evolved.

Table 1. The learning and leading dimensions. Modified after (Murphy, & Toomey, 1993)

LEARNING		LEADING
VISION	emphasizes the individual capabilities to be creative and independent	seeks a common vision in the organization, constructs a common sense of understanding
EMPOWERMENT	entails individual learning how to learn and motivates the pursue of personal development	entails the organization to recognize its members needs and match them with individual and group capabilities and resources
EVOLUTION	entails each individual to recognize and built on the personal, skills, knowledge and expertise	entails the recognition, evaluation and use of both internal and external resources in the organization.
ACTION	the capabilities of each individual to learn from the challenges and changes at hand emphasising the personal and collaborative improvement.	the capability of the organization to deal with change and uncertainty, adopting anti-fragile and resilient strategies.
ACCOMPLISHMENT	individual practice of problem solving, evaluating own achievements and activating personal resources for ongoing personal development	enact decision making strategies to solve incoming problems, to achieve common visions and asses and applaud the accomplishments of the common vision.

The capability of the future visionary leader is to mutate the meaning of this apparent contradictory

conversations transforming into the activation of the experiential learning training. Looking back at the structure of the zone of latency (Fig.01) all factors that act as transformers, experience, communication, stimulated needs, become learning opportunities. This brings us to the reflection on the training of the adaptive behavior at the master and visionary levels that implies the navigation between the proactive, negotiating and anti-action attitudes. The link between the different attitudes is better explained when looking at their etymology, in which action, action, or “agree” means putting in motion, performing, doing; “negotiation”, communicating in mutual agreement, and finally anti action or standing in front of, observing action in a reflective stance.

In the context of training for adaptive and creative leadership at master and visionary levels, the above learning styles have to be seen in the context of collective activities and working groups in which experts test their leadership capabilities learning from each other and from their facilitator. The role of the facilitator in this case is not to lecture pre-defined rules but to indicate the learning opportunities emerging from the internal conflicts and controversies.

Training specifics place the leadership model within the expertise level framework and problem briefs could situate student to experiment within the master and visionary levels. For example, the **Visionary** creative learner recognises the data, status and input from a given system or problem space and uses a **Randomised** strategy to consider new possibilities for solving the issue. This takes on the characteristics of a ‘fresh-eyes’ (Mutated) (Fig. 04) perspective on a complex or entrenched problem, but should not be misconstrued as an arbitrary choice of eyes rather an understanding of potential connected principles that could be applied to the problem space. Within the learnership framework the facilitator would draw connections to the empowerment dimension where matching the individual capability to the organizational need may seem random. Principally empowering individuals who would not typically be considered to provide input could solve the problem in a unique way and potentially be a competitive advantage over other solutions.

All the above explain how the experiential learning is an adaptive process, that has to be seen projected onto different temporal dimensions looking at learning as a holistic, integrative process, the disciplinary boundaries that are relevant at expert level, are seen only as different perspectives of a similar process. By expanding his/her awareness on the different domains, the visionary understands the creative, decision-making, problem solving or scientific research as interconnected experiences that open possibilities of adaptation, evolving in space and time. As such an immediate reaction to a stimulus in a specific circumstance is seen as performance, a longer time process of recognition and classification of patterns of behavior and classes of situations refers to learning, and a lifelong adaptation to more profound change in one's total life identifies as self-development.

The conclusion proposes a different approach for “creative disciplines” that as a provocative activity counter intuitively induces conflict and creates problems. To support this perspective we tried to explain how change-provoking processes have to be supported by EMPOWERMENT activities in design research and EDUCATION. Toward this concern we tried to explain how seeing design as power is particularly relevant at advanced COACHING levels (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980). For this reason we provide an open ended model for ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP (Heifetz & Linsky, 2003) and experiential leading & learning training (Cooksey, 2003). Finally we suggested that future work exploring the nature of power flow, takes into consideration the paradoxical facet of “design” like ANTITHESIS between its POTENTIALITY and the PRESERVATION OF CHANGE (Agamben, 1995).

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