

Adaptive Leaders

Creating better working lives



Leaders are facing the ultimate test in adaptiveness

Right now, our world is characterised by colliding geopolitical, societal and economic trends. This has created a phenomenal level of external complexity for our leaders to navigate.

Meanwhile internally, leaders are managing increasing workloads, the multi-generational workforce and a fundamental shift in what value creation looks like, considering disruptors such as Gen AI.

Leading through this complexity requires a level of sophistication that is scarce in many leadership groups. It necessitates the ability to lean into high order leadership skills such as navigating paradoxes, as well as accessing a higher level of consciousness that can deal with systems thinking and complex human emotion.

Leaders find themselves needing to toggle skilfully between different leadership styles, for instance from a visionary leader to a supportive 'container' leader. They need to anticipate what will create value in the future, which is unlikely to be the same things that have brought them to today.



*"Organisations are **no longer navigating steady, incremental changes**; instead, they are grappling with **rapid, and at times unpredictable, shifts** that demand agility."*

*How organisations navigate this change to a new 'business as usual' **will define them for years to come**."*

Professor Lynda Gratton
Founder, HSM Advisory



Interview: Hear from Mark Dickinson-Keen (M+C Saatchi) and Dr Sarosh Khan (HSM) on leadership



Sarosh: How is 2025 playing out so far? What's been interesting and exciting for you?

Mark: **2025 has been a fast-paced year, marked by transformation.** We are implementing the next phase of our new operating model, shifting focus from back office and middle office to how we go to market. This includes an exciting new proposition, a global brand relaunch and new, more integrated ways of working for our client facing teams.

Sarosh: We are finding that many organisations' leaders have little structured support systems in place. How are your leaders faring?

Mark: **Our leaders have shifted from independent, entrepreneurial roles to a model focused on collective success and cross-functional collaboration.** Growth now depends on 'T-shaped' individuals who combine specialisation with a broader understanding of the business. To support this transition, we're launching leader development initiatives, addressing a long-standing gap in training within our time-driven industry.

Sarosh: At HSM Advisory we're interested in defining Value Creation above commercial metrics only. How does this fit into your thinking?

Mark: There are two ways we have been approaching this. First, **we focus on seamless collaboration and resource management**, investing in technology to efficiently move resources between projects. This ensures the right people are on the right projects, which can be crucial for winning accounts. Second, we redefine **value for clients through our new proposition, tapping into the power of culture to enhance brand positioning.** This approach balances optimisation and efficiency with ensuring our people have the knowledge and time to explore culture. Both approaches are essential for achieving the best outcomes.

Sarosh: Has there been anything in particular that has surprised you about the last 2 to 3 months?

Mark: **I'm always surprised by how resilient and creative people are in the face of challenging situations.** The macro environment is challenging us all, and then we're asking our people to deliver huge transformation on top. The spirit that people show up with is quite phenomenal. Increasingly I realise my job is just about creating the conditions for that creativity and determination to thrive.

Sarosh: At the moment, there is a lot of anxiety between the macro environment, which is tough right now, and the ambiguity that exists in the world of work. What are you optimistic or excited about for the year ahead within the world of work.

Mark: M&C is back on the front foot—**new propositions, a new brand, and new ways of working signal a pivotal growth phase. It's an exciting shift for the business. On a broader scale, I'm optimistic about AI's potential.** While all technology has risks, we've become more thoughtful about ethics and data protection. If approached wisely and used in harmony with humans, this technological revolution could be a real advantage.

With thanks to Mark Dickinson-Keen

Four ways we see leaders adding value

They are taking a strategic view to...

1. Navigate complexity.

We already know that a great leader is **skilled at creating an engaging narrative and vision about the future**.

People like to feel there is some certainty, so a leader's ability to create certainty out of uncertainty - but also to have the vulnerability to acknowledge where there is no certainty - is key.

Ultimately, this looks like being able to **shift in an out of a default logical doing mindset into an empathetic intuitive mindset**, intentionally and with ease.

2. Hold an enterprise mindset.

It's certainly true that right now many organisations are considering a more 'local' approach to business.

However, with multi-national clients who derive value across nations and functions, **organisations do require leaders who have a sophisticated view of the changing nature of value creation**.

The stretch capability here is if their leaders **can knowledge, judgement and experience into systems thinking** - something which is scarce and valuable.

3. Enable excellence.

The key word here is 'enables', not delivers, excellence. As we all know, organisations tend to promote people on technical expertise instead of leadership skills. This means that **many organisations have individual achievers, not leaders**, at the top of the business.

What we observe great leaders do, is to **break down organisational silos, collaborate, share knowledge** and understand how other leaders and colleagues collectively contribute to value creation.

4. Build tomorrow's Leaders.

This feels intuitively obvious but is often scarce in organisations. **Leaders who do this well ensure they show up with solid interpersonal skills, every single day**. They model trust and healthy leadership to build a culture of humanness, honesty and accountability.

Ultimately, they build a learning environment where **developing future leaders is considered a core competency**.

As you consider how to move forward, questions to ask yourself

1

Do I have the ability to lead through complexity? Am I skilled at creating an engaging narrative and vision about the future? ***Am I skilled at toggling from the default logical doing mindset to the empathetic intuitive mindset?***

2

Do I hold an enterprise-wide mindset? Do I have a view of the changing nature of value creation in the firm? ***Do I combine knowledge, and judgement into systems thinking?***

3

Do I enable consistent execution? ***Do I break down siloes, drive collaboration and knowledge sharing to support value creation?***

4

Am I building tomorrow's leaders? Am I building a culture of trust, honesty and accountability? ***Am I helping people to shift from achievers to leaders?***

"That ability to join the dots connecting ideas, concepts and themes that are emerging – I think it's an important art and skill that leaders need today."

Michael Fraccaro, Fellow and Former
Chief People Officer, Mastercard

HSM Advisory Webinar Leadership in 2025
and Beyond



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