

# Co-creative Leadership is Transforming the Way We Lead

*In a world where challenges are becoming more complex, old leadership models fall short. What if collaboration, not control, is the key? Discover how co-creative leadership is transforming how we lead.*

In today's rapidly evolving world, traditional models of leadership are becoming increasingly outdated. As organizations and communities face more complex challenges, a new style of leadership is emerging – one that emphasizes collaboration, empowerment, and shared responsibility. This approach, known as co-creative leadership, is transforming how leaders engage with their teams and navigate obstacles. To understand its impact, let us first explore what co-creative leadership is, how it works, and what it means for the future of leadership.

## Understanding Co-Creative Leadership

I first encountered co-creative leadership through Ursula Hillbrand, an expert in participatory leadership and the Art of Hosting. With 25 years of experience at the EU Commission and 18 years in collaborative methods, she specializes in transformative leadership, strategic multi-stakeholder processes, and participatory workshops. A lawyer by training, she is also the founder of Salonhosting, where she offers collaborative leadership training and coaching. Attending one of her workshops gave me first-hand insight into this leadership style, and I highly recommend witnessing it first-hand. Through this experience, I gained valuable insights into the power of co-creative leadership.

Leadership is not one-size-fits-all. The way a leader influences, motivates, and guides their team can lead to an organization's success or failure. Many types of leadership exist, with some of the most common being democratic, autocratic, transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire. Leaders often incorporate different elements of several of the types, based on their abilities, the needs of their team members, and the organization's goals. Rooted in democratic and transformational leadership theories, co-creative leadership has emerged as an exciting new technique.

At the core of co-creative leadership is the principle of shared ownership. In this approach, every team member feels a sense of responsibility for the group's success, and decisions emerge through

collaboration rather than being dictated by a single individual. A leader in a co-creative model does not control every aspect of the team's work but instead empowers team members to take initiative and contribute their best ideas. This process involves active listening and inclusion, with leaders valuing diverse perspectives and creating an environment where everyone's input is valued and heard. The focus is not only on the final outcome but also on the journey of collaboration itself, which fosters trust, innovation, and creativity.

A simple example of co-creative leadership is a group of friends planning a vacation. Instead of one person making all the decisions, they sit down together, brainstorm ideas, and collaboratively agree on the destination, activities, and how to split the tasks. One person might facilitate the conversation, but the group as a whole has equal ownership over the decisions. This is the essence of co-creative leadership: working together to create something meaningful.



Ursula Hillbrand  
Credits: Ursula Hillbrand,  
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Teamwork  
Photographer: tirachardz, Website: Freepik

## How Co-Creative Leadership Works

To foster a truly collaborative environment, co-creative leaders act as hosts rather than authority figures, guiding discussions and processes. This transition from hierarchical control to a participatory approach ensures that every team member feels empowered and engaged.

Co-creative methods, rooted in the Art of Hosting, offer structured practices aligned with Dynamic Process Design. The Art of Hosting is a widely recognized approach used in organizations and everyday life. Whether hosting friends or facilitating a discussion, certain patterns naturally emerge. The Art of Hosting builds on these patterns, transforming them into structured methods for fostering meaningful conversations and effectively navigating complex group dynamics. It creates space for diverse perspectives, engages stakeholders, and harnesses collective wisdom to drive innovation and transformation. While the Art of Hosting emphasizes open dialogue and collective intelligence, Dynamic Process Design offers a structured, iterative framework for creative problem-solving, where thoughtful planning is essential at every stage. Together, these approaches complement each other, blending participatory engagement with structured processes.

Dynamic Process Design begins when a participant initiates a call by presenting a topic, challenge, or a project they need help with. This call invites others to collaborate and contribute their perspectives. Then, a group works together to clarify the problem, ensuring that everyone understands its scope and purpose. The process extends to an open invi-

tation to a broader group of participants, encouraging diverse perspectives to join the discussion. Once gathered, participants meet in a structured environment to share insights, discuss ideas, and begin the process of co-creation. During and after the meeting, the group harvests the key insights, themes, and learnings from the discussions. This can take various forms, such as written summaries or visual maps. These insights then lead to action, where concrete next steps ensure discussions translate into meaningful results. Finally, participants reflect on the process, identifying successes, areas for improvement, and lessons for future co-creative efforts.

Common co-creative meeting methods include the World Café, Triads, Open Space, and Collective Story Harvesting. For example, the World Café is a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing, where participants engage in informal discussions at small tables, much like in a café setting. While predefined topics are agreed upon at the beginning to guide the conversation, outcomes emerge organically through collective dialogue, promoting shared understanding and action. Events typically involve at least twelve participants but can scale to over 2,000.

Those methods, also known as Participatory Design Workshops, actively involve stakeholders such as employees, partners, customers, and end-users in the design process to ensure outcomes meet real needs. Businesses can apply these methods for a variety of purposes, for instance conducting research sessions to gather customer insights, hosting ideation discussions to generate new product concepts, guiding project development for more

Idea Visualization  
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effective execution, and structuring evaluation processes to assess performance and impact. By integrating co-creative techniques, organizations can foster a culture of innovation and adaptability, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.

**The Future of Leadership: Why Co-Creation Matters**

As the challenges we face become more complex, the need for a leadership model that embraces diversity of thought and collective problem-solving grows more urgent. Co-creative leadership encourages open dialogue and collaboration, allowing teams to approach problems from various angles, thereby creating more innovative solutions. Moreover, as every team member contributes to the decision-making process, they feel more invested in the outcome.

The shift toward inclusivity in leadership also reflects broader societal changes. Modern leadership increasingly values fairness and equity, and co-creative leadership helps ensure that all voices are heard. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging within teams and promotes diversity, which is crucial in today's interconnected world.

Furthermore, the rise of remote and hybrid work models has highlighted the need for leadership styles that maintain engagement, trust, and collaboration across teams that are physically separated. Traditional leadership methods often fall short in these settings, but co-creative leadership thrives

in these environments as its methods can be easily transposed to online settings. It fosters a sense of connection, even when team members are dispersed, ensuring that collaboration remains strong regardless of geographic barriers.

By fostering collaboration, inclusivity, innovation, and shared ownership, co-creative leadership strengthens teams and drives meaningful change. This approach not only enhances engagement but also equips organizations with the resilience needed to tackle complex challenges together.



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