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Regenerative Futures

Shaping Leaders
Cultivating Growth
Transforming Organizations

*Dare
Mighty
Things*

Introduction

In a world defined by constant disruption, resilience is no longer enough. The future belongs to those who can regenerate - leaders and organizations that don't just recover from challenges, but actively restore, renew, and create conditions for sustained thriving.

This imperative took center stage at the recent Thinkers50 London Summit and Gala, where Hult served as education partner. The global gathering of leading management thinkers affirmed what forward-looking organizations already sense: the next era of leadership requires a fundamental shift from defensive resilience to proactive regeneration.

This white paper brings together perspectives from Hult faculty on what regeneration looks like across different domains. From leadership and organizational design to growth strategies and education, these contributions explore how regenerative thinking can transform the way we lead, learn, and innovate.

At Hult, we challenge our community: "Are you ready to dare mighty things?". Our mission is to prepare leaders to move beyond theory from day one - collaborating across cultures, solving real challenges, and graduating ready to lead in an AI-driven world with the skills and global network to last a lifetime. Regenerative thinking sits at the heart of this purpose: it demands boldness, creativity, and the foresight to design systems that strengthen rather than deplete.

Inside, you'll discover:

- Why AI demands a shift from resilience to regenerative leadership.
- How to rewire inclusion into leadership pipelines.
- The power of circularity in building resilient entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- Practical pathways for human-centric regeneration and cultural reconnection.
- How regenerative organisations - from family businesses to higher education - can drive sustainable futures.

This collection offers a framework for leaders and organizations to co-create futures that are not only adaptive but truly regenerative and genuinely transformative.

We invite you to explore, reflect, and join the conversation.



Nadine Page
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Section 1

Regenerative Leadership

Feminist Leadership as Regenerative Leadership: Living in the Tensions

By Dr. Deborah Bayntun-Lees

In an era of exhaustion and complexity, sustainability is no longer enough; leadership must become regenerative. Feminist leadership offers a powerful model that restores energy and capacity through cycles of care, accountability, and renewal. Rooted in relational ethics and inspired by natural ecosystems, it reimagines how organizations can give back more than they take, from people, communities, and the planet.

Feminist leadership embodies regenerative principles by replenishing people, relationships, and systems. It thrives not by avoiding tension but by holding space for contradictions - care and accountability, hope and reality, closeness and boundaries. Far from being 'soft', trauma-informed and relational leadership demands emotional discipline, ethical courage, and structural intention, positioning it as a model for leaders who wish to navigate today's challenges with resilience and depth.

Why Feminist Leadership Matters Now

We are living through an age of depletion. Leaders, teams, and communities alike are worn down by constant crisis, complexity, and change. Too many organizations cling to sustainability as their goal - maintaining the status quo and preventing further harm. But in times of exhaustion and fracture, maintenance is not enough. We need leadership that restores, renews, and regenerates.

This is where feminist leadership offers a radical alternative. It draws on the wisdom of care, the discipline of accountability, and the courage to live inside contradictions. It shows us that regeneration is not only about protecting ecosystems - it is about cultivating human flourishing within our workplaces.

Regeneration as Leadership in Action

Sustainability maintains; regeneration replenishes. Like natural ecosystems, regenerative leadership thrives on cycles of renewal, reciprocity, and transformation. It gives back more than it takes. Researchers Amy Bradley and Katherine Semler have argued that organizations can only

ever be as sustainable as the people who inhabit them. If our people are depleted, our systems cannot thrive.

Feminist leadership offers precisely this regenerative orientation. In my work with Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service, a UK feminist, trauma-informed charity where leadership is shaped by both survivor experience and allyship, leadership is not a theory but a lived practice. Leaders and staff often carry personal histories of trauma, which makes care not an optional extra but the very bedrock of trust, safety, and performance.

Regeneration here means compassion with discipline: restoring emotional energy, balancing competing demands, and renewing collective capacity through reflection and courageous decision-making. It is a way of leading that prevents burnout by weaving boundaries into care, cycles of rest into productivity, and accountability into hope.

Living in the Feminist Double Bind

Boundaries as a Form of Care

Perhaps the most powerful insight emerging from Rising Sun's leadership stories is this: boundaries are acts of care. In trauma-informed settings, closeness is common, and trust runs deep. But closeness and care without boundaries can blur accountability and risk burnout.

One example involved a colleague who was supported for many months through shared survivor experience - where both they and some leaders carried lived experience of trauma, creating a deep sense of empathy, solidarity, and understanding. This connection allowed flexibility and care, but it also blurred the line between support and accountability. When change did not come and the team's wellbeing was at risk, leaders made the difficult choice to initiate formal processes and support their transition out. This was not compassion failing but compassion with discipline - regeneration through boundary-setting.

The Compassion-Accountability Matrix

The Compassion-Accountability Matrix (see Figure 1) helps to illuminate this tension. When compassion is high but accountability is low, leaders can drift into indulgence or 'rescue' behaviors. When accountability is emphasized without compassion, fear-driven cultures take hold. Neglect occurs when both are absent. Regenerative leadership lies in the quadrant where compassion and accountability are held together - care with boundaries, empathy with expectations. This framing makes clear that boundaries are not the opposite of compassion but its partner, enabling both individuals and systems to thrive.

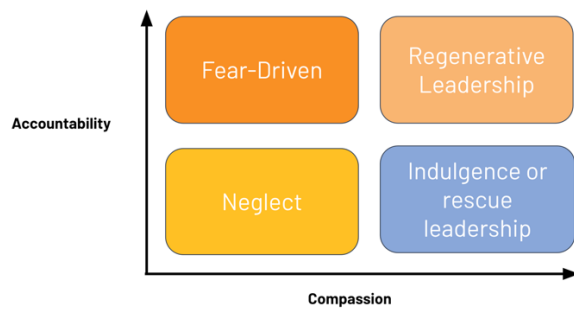


Figure 1 - Compassion-Accountability Matrix

Hope, Grounded in Accountability

Hope is at the heart of Rising Sun's identity. Staff described the organization as a *"hope merchant"* - offering a kind of *"unique medicine beyond words"* to survivors and colleagues alike. Yet the leadership team recognizes that hope without accountability can harm.

As one leader noted:

"Hope alone is not enough. We have to put things in place to make it happen."

Regenerative leadership turns hope into strategy, pairing belief with structure, emotional support with measurable plans, optimism with honest reviews.

Closeness and Boundaries in a Trauma-Informed Culture

The tension between closeness and boundaries is especially poignant in trauma-informed teams. Shared lived experience builds trust and connection, but also makes difficult conversations harder.

"I'd much rather take the emotional side of things and be a bit tired at the end of the day than have my team feel like they couldn't come to me," one leader reflected.

This willingness to absorb emotional labor is admirable, but unsustainable without boundaries. Regenerative feminist leadership means finding ways to hold space for others while also protecting the leader's own capacity to serve.

It requires role fluidity - knowing when to step in, when to step back, and when to invite others into shared decision-making.

The Feminist Regenerative Leadership Tension Map

To navigate this complexity, Rising Sun's leadership team now uses what might be called a *Feminist Regenerative Leadership Tension Map*, which highlights three key polarities:

- Care ↔ Accountability
- Hope ↔ Reality
- Closeness ↔ Boundaries

Effectiveness isn't about choosing one side over another, it's about learning to move with agility between them. Boundaries aren't the opposite of care; they are one of its deepest expressions. Hope doesn't deny reality; it gives us the strength to face it. And closeness isn't diminished by boundaries; it is sustained and safeguarded through them.

To lead regeneratively, we must resist the temptation to collapse complexity into simple binaries. Feminist leadership calls us to hold the tensions of care and accountability, hope and reality, closeness and boundaries. These are not opposites to be resolved but dynamic forces to be navigated.

The Feminist Regenerative Leadership Tension Map – See Figure 2 – visualizes these polarities. It reminds us that the work of leadership is not to choose one over the other, but to move fluidly between them, without losing either our values or our effectiveness. This map offers a compass for leaders seeking to embody care with discipline, hope with realism, and closeness with the protective strength of boundaries.

Crucially, this requires *ethical reflexivity* - the daily practice of pausing, noticing ourselves, questioning assumptions, and being open to change in relationship with others. Far from being 'soft', reflexivity demands courage. It ensures that holding these tensions is not only a skill, but also an ethical stance: one that resists exploitative models of power and reconnects leadership to human dignity. *The Tension Map* is more than a framework - it is a practice of ethical reflexivity, helping leaders hold complexity with courage, dignity, and renewal.

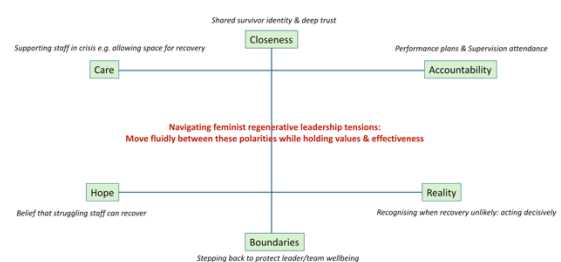


Figure 2 – The Feminist Regenerative Leadership Tension Map

Why Regeneration Requires Feminist Leadership

Feminist leadership matters now more than ever, not just for gender equity, but for organizational and planetary resilience. It teaches us how to:

- Prioritise human flourishing alongside performance.
- See care as a strategy, not just a sentiment.
- Use power with others, not over them.
- Embrace emotional intelligence as a leadership discipline.
- Renew leadership from within, by living in the tensions rather than denying them.

In essence, regenerative feminist leadership helps organizations give back more than they take - from people, communities, and ecosystems. It prevents burnout by creating cycles of care and renewal that continually restore capacity and wellbeing.

So where can organizations begin? Some questions worth asking include:

- How do we ensure our practices give back more than they extract - from our people, our communities, and the planet?
- Where in our culture are care and accountability out of balance - too much 'rescue', or too much pressure without support?
- What boundaries could actually function as acts of care, protecting both wellbeing and performance?
- How do our leaders model reflexivity - pausing, listening, and learning - rather than defaulting to control or certainty?
- What rhythms of renewal (for people and for the system) are we building into our ways of working?

These questions act as a compass, guiding organizations toward regenerative feminist leadership as a lived practice. More than a program or initiative, it's a way of leading that sustains people, strengthens performance, and creates lasting resilience.

The Art of Living in the Tensions

In an era of volatility and emotional exhaustion, leadership must become a regenerative force. Feminist leaders show us how: by practicing emotional courage, setting ethical boundaries, and building structures that sustain both care and accountability.

Regenerative feminist leadership centres human flourishing, treats care as a strategic strength, shares power in partnership, and makes emotional intelligence a daily discipline. Grounded in presence, reflection, and deep human connection, it renews leadership from within, helping us live with tension creatively, restoring capacity and wellbeing while giving back more than we take from people, communities, and ecosystems. It is leadership that embraces uncertainty with integrity, holds space for hope alongside accountability, and navigates the tensions of our shared future with steadiness and care.

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Rewiring the System: Regenerating Inclusion in Leadership Pipelines

By Dr. Aidan McKearney & Dr. Neha Pathak

In a world where inclusion fatigue and leadership burnout frequently collide, a simple question continues to resonate across boardrooms and strategy retreats: why, after decades of effort, does the 'leaky pipeline' continue to see women and minorities exit or be overlooked for key opportunities, resulting in their under-representation at the highest echelons of decision-making.

In 2024–2025, we set out to better understand what helps – and what hinders – the progression of diverse talent into leadership roles. Through in-depth conversations with 64 senior leaders from UK-based multinational companies, the Hult International Business School/Moving Ahead study explored the organizational factors that either support or block career advancement. We referred to these as tailwinds (the forces that propel diverse talent forward) and headwinds (the barriers that slow progress and contribute to the leaky pipeline).

Our goal was to identify ways organizations can develop leadership and talent pipelines that offer a diverse range of capabilities, perspectives, and life experiences, ultimately strengthening leadership benches and future-proofing strengths through diversity in our inter-connected world.

The turning point in our work arrived unexpectedly. During a focus group, a senior leader in a worldwide financial firm leaned forward and said something that changed the entire conversation.

"For years we have invested so much time, resources and effort at D&I, and yet, when we look at the outcomes, we don't have leadership benches that provide diversity of talent, thought and experience, so we have to ask the question - why is it so hard to turn the dial on this? Why is it so difficult to do?"

That question lit a fire and became the catalyst for deep exploration into how traditional inclusion strategies can be reimaged. We were so intrigued by the strength of debate that we embedded this very question into our interviews with the study participants.

Our findings revealed a general consensus: leaders are of the view that currently, EDI is often (a) poorly understood (b) perceived as top-down and imposed (c) seen as 'sticking-plaster' (d) is ineffective at promoting systemic change and (e) does not enjoy the support or buy-in of all stakeholders. We find leaders are searching for ways to regenerate, revitalise, and reform their approaches – in

ways that build stronger leadership benches and promote strength and unity through diverse talent. The impetus is coming from within.

New Ways of Seeing, Thinking and Doing

What could help us shift the dial? We suggest one way forward lies in taking a systemic regenerative approach.

This means changing the direction of the lens. We need to look at ourselves, our organization, our systems and the culture that defines us, and having seen our reflections we need to be committed to build anew from the inside-out.

Culture was in fact a constant theme to emerge from our work. As one leader in a City of London finance multinational, put it:

"The high ideals written into traditional EDI strategies often flounce and fail when they meet the hard realities of 'on the ground cultures' – it all comes back to our culture."

Talking about culture presents an immediate problem, because 'culture' is in itself a highly contested term, considered by many practitioners to be a 'flaky' concept which is difficult to grasp.

Our view is that culture *is* nebulous but *can* be made real. Looking at it through the lens of McKinsey's famous 7S model - Structure, Systems, Strategy, Style, Staff, Skills, Shared Values - is a good place to start.

These seven elements form the backbone of organizational culture. When misaligned, they often work *against* the building of strong, robust and diverse leadership benches.

For example, let's take S for systems, and consider the systems we have in place for decisions on promotion and reward. One senior leader in a UK investment bank cites an example where a poor promotion decision was made on the basis of perception:

"The perception was that the two women shortlisted would not be able to travel internationally due to childcare. They were the best talent, but the decision was not to promote. Ultimately, I think we have lost out and this is bad for business."

Strategy can be another key area of sub-optimal effectiveness. For decades the traditional paradigm in the UK has been the familiar EDI strategy. Our hundreds of hours of conversations with leaders suggest that, however well intentioned, such strategies are often perceived by stakeholders as imposed, as bolt-on's, and often not horizontally or vertically aligned with other strategies.

Very few organizations want to be seen as unfair, or as sites of disadvantage and favouritism. Stakeholders don't set out to sabotage their organizations and the quest for diverse capability-led leadership talent. However, our

research does show that when we look at organizations through the lens of the 7S's, they frequently contain multiple sites of disadvantage, favouritism, and decisions that are ultimately bad for business. As one female leader in the engineering sector says: "We're often talking about the right thing. We're not always doing the right thing".

So, how can we go about systemic regenerative work on this issue?

From Tinkering to Transformation: A Systems Approach

A systems approach offers an alternative: a root-and-branch, holistic method consistent with the principles of regeneration. Systems thinking means looking at how everything connects – from policies and practices to mindsets and values – and identifying where change needs to happen.

Rather than tinkering with processes or tweaking structures, systems thinking, as advocated by Otto Scharmer for example, asks organizations to shift, where necessary, the *mindsets* and *consciousness* that shapes decisions. Put simply, to see where change is needed in the way we think about, talk about and "do" inclusion. The key stages of a systems approach to inclusion are visualized here.

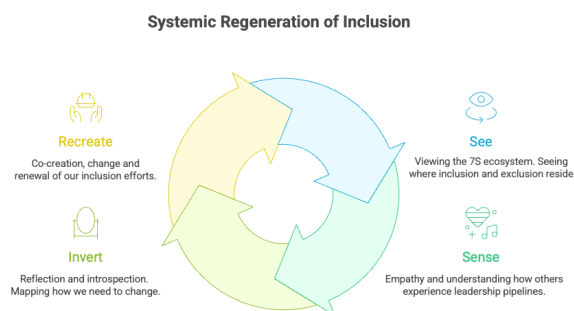


Fig: 1 Systemic Regeneration of Inclusion

See the System: Make Headwinds Visible

To understand the nature of the headwinds we need to 'see the system' and view the web of behaviors, logics, patterns and practices that hold talent back from progressing. Where are the barriers, how do they manifest, and how do they connect throughout our 7Ss in ways that sustain leaky pipelines?

Our research shows headwinds reside within the 7Ss. For example:

Style: Leadership norms often favour traditionally masculine traits. Many women (and some men) feel pressured to lead in ways that don't feel authentic, which can lead to frustration and disengagement.

Systems: Promotion criteria may reward constant availability, unintentionally excluding those with different working patterns or responsibilities.

Shared Values: Inclusion is sometimes seen as HR's responsibility alone. But real change happens when senior leaders actively champion it, and when everyone understands how they can contribute to these values in their roles.

Systems thinking encourages us to explore these areas honestly and thoroughly. Tools like systems mapping can help leaders visualise how these elements connect - and where the gaps are. That's where meaningful change begins.

Sense the system – Feel the Tailwinds

Having seen, the next step involves 'sensing' what these pockets of resistance *feel like* for those affected. This provides the impetus for closing the knowing-doing gap; moving from cognitive knowing that systemic blockages *are* real and present to *empathy* that provides the impetus for action. Leaders must *feel* the system from perspectives other than their own.

In practice, this means:

- **Listening labs** where women and under-represented managers share lived experiences of both headwinds and tailwinds – which find their way into actions for change.
- **Story dashboards** pairing data with narratives that evoke empathy and insight.
- **Cross-gender mentoring and leadership immersions** or 'learning journeys' where executives shadow employees experience barriers firsthand.

Invert the System – Inner Work for Outer Change

Many organizational headwinds endure because leaders attempt change from the same mindset that created the problem. Inverting the system means developing reflective practices that challenge how leaders pay attention, listen, and assign value.

- **Leadership reflection circles** can help senior teams explore the logics that inform their decisions, and the decisions of others.
- **Reverse mentoring** allows us to see the system through different eyes, exposing unexamined blocks that work against capability led, diverse leadership pipelines.

Recreation through Co-creation: Turning Headwinds into Tailwinds

Transformational change emerges when leaders acknowledge the picture that is emerging, and rather than run away from the (uncomfortable) revelations, they step forward, and embrace the challenge to regenerate. Pivotal to this regeneration is a commitment to recreate by *co-creating* the future that wants to emerge, not the past they are trying to fix. This is a crucial step that needs to be genuinely inclusive; because currently our research shows a perception among some stakeholders that traditional EDI paradigms have excluded them.

Organizations can **establish inclusion labs** where stakeholders help to broaden out the scope of inclusion, and prototype ways to unlock the leadership talent of all people. These labs dissect current policies, practices, behaviours (everything visible above the waterline) and reform and regenerate these in ways that are informed by the new knowledge and lessons learnt from the listening steps. In other words, they reveal the unseen stories below the waterline.

We saw examples where one organization created knowledge banks of ‘**story dashboards**’ which acted as a repository of lived experiences in their firm. These were an amazing resource for sharing and informing, and acted as a way-in to change. It’s difficult not to buy-in to the stories of colleagues! These prototypes can generate regenerative *tailwinds* - practices that renew and transform the way we do inclusion strategy, through new insights and new logics.

The regenerative payoff

When we apply systems thinking to our headwinds-and-tailwinds framework, a clear message emerges:

- Headwinds are maintained by system dynamics - structures, mental models, and logics that act against the best interests of the organisation by recycling faulty programming.
- Tailwinds strengthen when organizations cultivate awareness, empathy, and co-creation. The aim is to be an environment that jet streams talent in all its diversity; quite simply we rise above poor and uninformed practice.

Regenerative organizations learn to see and sense themselves, and furthermore sense a new future – one that creates a turbo-charged organization where capability and talent thrives. We cannot change the headwinds until we transform the consciousness that helps reinforce them. Regeneration begins when leaders learn to see, sense, and steward a new system, a new way of “doing” inclusion that is based on an authentic understanding of the living system that is your organization, and that is genuinely inclusive in co-creating solutions.

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Future-Ready Leadership Begins with Regeneration

By Dr. Belisa Marochi

Regenerative leadership is becoming a defining capability for leaders who want to build organizations fit for the future. The world is changing fast, systems are under strain, and the promises of “sustaining” are no longer enough. Regeneration goes beyond sustaining and calls for restoring what has been depleted, renewing the social and ecological systems, while creating conditions that support long-term wellbeing for people and the planet.

This style of leadership recognizes that human, organizational, and environmental systems are profoundly interconnected and that meaningful transformation must support the health of all three systems. A regenerative approach requires leaders to work with values in a new way. Decisions are shaped not only by metrics, but by care, reciprocity and a sense of shared purpose. This approach requires leadership to move away from extraction towards contribution, away from individual performance towards collective impact, and away from short-term optimization to long-term system vitality. The approach must show up in everyday practices. Leaders must dare to pose questions, hold space for dialogue and pay attention to how today's decisions shape tomorrow's possibilities.

Regeneration is relational and participatory. It is not driven by heroic gestures, but by a reflexive orientation toward the future. As we face climate change, rapid technological disruption, and social divides, the leaders who make a lasting difference are those who align people, planet, and purpose in every decision they make.

Reframing Leadership for a Regenerative Era

Leadership is often portrayed as decisiveness or direction. Yet, regenerative leadership calls for something different, asking leaders to slow down, reflect, and cultivate the inner awareness needed to recognise that social, organizational, and ecological systems are interconnected and constantly influencing one another. Regenerative scholars call for *inner work* that questions long held assumptions, acknowledging uncertainty. These practices create the shared meaning and trust essential for transformation that is regenerative.

Collaboration as the Engine of Regenerative Foresight

Regenerative foresight is about creating the conditions in which better futures can emerge. This foresight does not predict and prepare for the future, but rather focuses on the co-creation only possible through stakeholder engagement. The single visionary is outdated. Leaders should cultivate environments where diverse voices feel safe to contribute, where conversations slow down enough for patterns to surface and where communities can imagine alternatives together.

Hardman (2009) describes this co-creation as a *field of engagement*: a relational space where curiosity, openness, and shared reflection spark entirely new ways of seeing. Foresight grows through dialogue, shared observations and the reflective 'sensemaking' spaces where people interpret complexity together allowing organizations to imagine futures none could have seen alone.

What Regenerative Leadership Looks Like in Practice

To illustrate how regenerative leadership shows up across companies, consider how organizations engage with communities, transparency and long-term value creation. DP World, a logistics and transportation company operating in 80 countries with headquarters in Dubai, UAE has a commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 - Gender Equality - across their strategy. What stands out is the intention: a commitment to gender inclusion, a responsibility towards the community and the shared vision with the UAE government. This is collaboration as courage, as focusing on gender is not a necessity for business performance; however, the leadership pays attention to how proactivity can reshape the organization's future.

Airbus demonstrates regenerative leadership with its commitment to the Modern Slavery Act Statement, openly reporting supply-chain risks, due-diligence processes, and steps being taken to address forced-labour concerns. Choosing transparency on such sensitive issues reflects organisational responsibility and a willingness to confront complexity collaboratively.

Regenerative foresight is visible in Saudi Arabian ACWA Power's renewable-energy work across the Arab Gulf countries and Central Asia. Their solar, green-hydrogen, and desalination projects require coordination across governments, partners, technical teams, and local communities. As their annual report shows, these initiatives are framed not as isolated achievements but as contributions to regional energy security and economic transformation.

On a smaller yet impactful scale, when tourists travel to Goa, India, they can contribute to sustainable tourism. “We envision Goa as a model destination”, Goa Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte states. The plans deliberately prioritize community reinvestment. Rather than being a tourist, visitors become co-investors in people and place, channeling economic value back into Goan communities.

The Regenerative Leadership Framework

Drawing from regenerative leadership scholarship (Hardman, 2009; Roosen & Kenter, 2022), three mindsets help leaders build healthier, more resilient futures:



1. Courage to Question

Leaders pause and challenge assumptions, recognizing that deeper awareness opens space for new possibilities.

2. Collaboration to Create

Regeneration grows through relationships, dialogue, co-creation, and environments where diverse perspectives meet.

3. Commitment to Long-Term Value

Regenerative leaders consider the long-term health of people, systems, and the planet, embedding ecological and social responsibility into everyday decisions.

Together, these mindsets form a continuous cycle that moves organizations from sustaining the status quo to regenerating the systems they touch.

Leading Forward, Together

Earlier this year, I designed and taught a City Seminar with Dr. Amanda Nimmon-Peters on Giga Projects and Bold Visions in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A group of 27 students from all over the world joined us to visit organizations playing a role in the Kingdom’s transformation. What surprised us the most was the way people talked about their work. There was a genuine sense of connection to a larger purpose and a belief that responsibility is shared. People complimented how collaboration between government, private sector and communities were at the centre of the transformation. The visit to Riyadh was a reminder that regenerative leadership is built in these everyday interactions, where trust grows and possibilities open through collaboration.

Regeneration requires creating a future where people, planet, and purpose are aligned. Regeneration in practice is shaped by big bold visions but also by those small, consistent choices to work together. The work can begin anywhere leaders choose to slow down, pay attention, and invite others into the conversation.

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Reconnecting Culture for Regenerative Leadership: Lessons from Confucian Wisdom

By Barbara Xiaoyu Wang

Is Leadership Losing Its Soul?

During a recent conversation with a senior executive navigating post-pandemic restructuring, she reflected: “We’ve become so good at strategy, but I worry we’ve lost our soul.” Her concern echoes a growing sentiment: today’s leadership is often intellectually sharp but emotionally thin. As organizations face increasing complexity, cultural diversity, and ethical scrutiny, leaders are being called not just to think better - but to feel better. This is where cultural reconnection, primarily through Confucian principles, offers a regenerative path forward.

Junzi Leadership: Virtue in Action

In Confucian philosophy, a Junzi - once a term for nobility - represents an ethical ideal: a leader who cultivates virtues like benevolence (ren), righteousness (yi), propriety (li), wisdom (zhi), and trustworthiness (xin).

A Junzi leads through self-cultivation, humility, and moral will rather than dominance. Their leadership fosters respectful relationships, ethical governance, and social responsibility, embodying traits such as courage, moderation, and simplicity. Junzi leaders inspire through character, not position, making them timeless models of servant leadership and moral integrity in both Eastern and global contexts.

For instance, a Junzi leader resolving team conflict might balance fairness (righteousness) with empathy (benevolence), using wisdom to find a solution that respects all parties. This is not soft leadership; it is emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded, and deeply relational. How to become a Junzi Leader? It requires living in harmony with the universal moral order (Zhongyong).

Zhongyong: Rediscovering the Wisdom of Balance

At the heart of Confucian leadership lies Zhongyong, often translated as the ‘Doctrine of the Mean’. But Zhongyong is more than moderation - it’s a dynamic, context-sensitive philosophy that integrates mind and heart, and it is the universal standard of right.

Rather than avoiding extremes, Zhongyong encourages leaders to harmonize diverse perspectives, emotions, and ethical considerations. It prompts questions like:

- “What’s the right decision?”
- “How will this feel to others?”
- “What values are we honoring?”

This holistic mindset is mighty in multicultural teams, stakeholder negotiations, and moments of organizational change.

The Domains of Zhongyong

Zhongyong, rooted in Confucian philosophy, comprises two key domains: cognitive and affective.

- The cognitive domain emphasizes balanced thinking, ethical reasoning, and strategic decision-making. Leaders are encouraged to integrate diverse perspectives, avoid extremes, and reflect deeply to align actions with moral values. This domain fosters cognitive flexibility, enabling leaders to adapt to complex, changing environments while balancing logic with emotional intelligence.
- The affective domain focuses on emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal harmony. Leaders practising Zhong Yong refine emotions through reflection, transforming stress into constructive energy. Compassion and emotional balance are central, promoting trust and cohesion within teams. This domain also highlights intrinsic motivation and cultural sensitivity, helping leaders navigate diverse social contexts.

Together, these domains cultivate leaders who are thoughtful, emotionally attuned, and ethically grounded - enhancing both personal well-being and organizational effectiveness.

From this foundation, three practical dimensions emerge:

The Dimensions of Zhongyong

1. Holistic Perception

Leaders with holistic perception see beyond metrics. They ask:

- How does this decision affect our people, community, and environment?
- Are we honouring our values, or just chasing numbers?

For example, a CEO might pause a cost-cutting initiative to assess its impact on employee morale and long-term trust.

2. Multiple Thinking

Zhongyong promotes multiple thinking - the ability to hold and balance diverse viewpoints. This is especially vital in cross-cultural contexts where linear, Western-style decision-making may fall short. A leader might say:

- “Let’s hear from our regional teams before finalising this strategy.”
- “What would our customers in Asia think of this campaign?”

It’s about embracing complexity, not simplifying it away.

3. Harmonious Relationships

Confucian leadership is deeply relational. Harmony isn’t about avoiding conflict; it’s about cultivating mutual respect, empathy, and shared purpose. This might mean:

- Understanding a team member’s personal challenges.
- Resolving disputes through dialogue rather than hierarchy.

Harmony becomes a strategic asset, not just a cultural nicety.

Practical Steps for Junzi Leaders

If you’re seeking to regenerate your leadership through cultural reconnection, consider these practices:

- **Reflect Before Acting:** Ask “What values am I honouring?” and “Who might be affected emotionally?”
- **Balance Logic with Empathy:** Listen not just to words, but to feelings.
- **Invite Diverse Perspectives:** Use open forums, feedback loops, and cross-cultural dialogues.
- **Model Virtue:** Lead with integrity, humility, and kindness, even when it’s difficult.
- **Foster Harmony:** Build trust through openness and empathy, especially in conflict.

A Personal Reflection

As someone who straddles Eastern and Western cultural worlds, I’ve seen Zhongyong transform leadership. In one coaching session, a Western manager struggling with team cohesion in Asia realised his direct style was unintentionally alienating his team. By adopting a more relational, balanced approach - asking questions, listening deeply, and showing vulnerability - he rebuilt trust and improved performance.

Challenges and Cautions

While Junzi leadership offers a rich moral framework, it is not without challenges. Overemphasis on harmony can discourage necessary conflict, and idealizing the Junzi leader may lead to unrealistic expectations. To navigate these risks, three key practices are essential:

- **Open Communication:** In cultures that value respect and hierarchy, silence can replace honest dialogue. Leaders must actively create safe spaces for feedback, encouraging transparency and diverse perspectives. This helps prevent the suppression of dissent and fosters trust across all levels.
- **Flexibility:** Confucian values like balance and virtue are essential, but rigid adherence can hinder decision-making. Effective leaders adapt their style to suit the situation - sometimes prioritising consensus, other times acting decisively. Flexibility ensures responsiveness without compromising ethical integrity.
- **Continuous Learning:** Leadership should be viewed as a journey of growth, not a pursuit of perfection. Junzi-inspired leaders embrace reflection, learn from mistakes, and model humility. This mindset fosters a culture of shared development, where learning from experience is valued over flawless execution.

Why This Matters Now

In a world grappling with polarization, burnout, and ethical lapses, leadership needs regeneration - not just in strategy, but in spirit. Reconnecting with cultural wisdom, such as that found in Confucianism, offers a way to lead with depth, dignity, and humanity. This isn’t East versus West, it’s about integrating the best of both to create leadership that is wise, warm, and worthy of trust.

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Four Steps to regenerating yourself through humancentric leadership

By Roger Delves

Something I hear frequently, when coaching and when involved in workshops with leaders and working teams, is a plea to find a way to a more humancentric lived work experience. The relentless business of the daily grind, the sense of being somehow busy but not well utilized – being busy fools – means we feel overcome by the demands of doing and feel separated from our sense of being.

Being humancentric as a leader is not a cure-all. Nor can it resolve every issue that arises. Nevertheless, it creates a foundation for approaching difficulties more positively and for strengthening or sustaining resilience when obstacles occur.

Humancentric leaders ideally need at least half of their time to be discretionary – free to invest in people. This means taking a different approach to delegating. It means management by exception, to generate the discretionary time. The time is invested in creating an environment within which individuals and the whole team can flourish and thrive. This means paying attention to ideas like these:

- Is psychological safety genuinely in place for individuals and the whole team?
- Is there a sense that diversity, inclusion and belonging are understood concepts that everyone embraces?
- Is there a growth mindset in place?
- Do people welcome and commit to change?
- Are individuals and the team resilient?

There are many other humancentric ideas and spaces that may reward your attention – reflection will help you to identify where you can add value in your own environment. So here is a four-step guide to a humancentric regeneration of yourself.

Step One: Decide What Really Matters

Living without purpose, professionally or in our lives away from work, is inclined to create a sense within us of pointlessness. We have no overarching North Star, nothing against which to evaluate what we are doing or how well we are doing anything. When we live without purpose, we tend to be reactive, responding to requests or

requirements rather than controlling our own time and activities as we pursue our purpose.

So, how do we discover our purpose? We should demand of ourselves, do I have an **end state of existence** towards which I am striving – such as financial independence, or relational happiness, or career success - or does my sense of purpose come from contributing to a greater aim, such as contributing towards the eradication of child labour or the discovery of a cure for a pernicious disease?

Purpose gets us out of bed in the morning and drives our engagement at work. Purpose at work goes beyond the short-term achievement of an annual goal. It is about knowing why what you do is important and believing in that importance. Living without purpose is like driving a car that is stuck in second gear. Of course it can be done, but it is inefficient and ineffective, it is very wearing on the driver, and it causes the focus to be on the vehicle rather than on the destination.

Step Two: Decide What it Means to be Humancentric

Human centricity is a subjective idea. Each of us will have our own idea of what our human centricity should look like. As humans who are busy doing, we are very familiar with the external world of behaviours and actions. But our personal human centricity is found not in the external world of human doing but in our inner landscape of human being. Here we find (though we may have to look hard initially, and poke into some dusty corners) our understanding of the ideas and concepts that matter to us: our values and principles; or maybe our faith; our sense of integrity, along with emotions and memories, and hopes and expectations that others have of us.

Some of what we find in our inner landscape is old baggage and can be discarded. Some material is dusty from long neglect but is still important. Sometimes we seek and we find nothing but gaps, and we realise we need to populate our inner landscape until we can confidently say this is what it means to be my humancentric self.

Critical to this exploration of our inner landscape is taking the time to reflect. We often do not reflect enough, preferring the false reassurance of busy doing to the more demanding work of thoughtful being. But we need to know who we are and what we stand for. We need to be able to articulate our authentic selves to other people. We need to be clear about what it means to be our humancentric self.

Step Three: Decide What it Means to be Seen

Many of us feel unseen at work. It is easy to feel that one has become anonymous, a cipher, a resource, utilized but not recognized, a pawn on someone else's chessboard. This is the obverse of humancentric. In humancentric

cultures, individuals feel seen, and leaders constantly feed this sense of being seen.

So, if I am coached, I feel seen and noticed. If I am getting feedback, I feel seen. If I am asked to undertake delegated tasks, I feel seen. If I get compliments, however delivered, on work well done, then I feel seen. If I am greeted by name and if there is a simple question about my life away from work, I can feel seen. If my workload or the pressure I am feeling is acknowledged, I feel seen.

There is a sense shared by many that showing team members individualized consideration is hugely important. So, leaders who help team members to feel seen, and leaders who lead and manage by walking around, committing time to building psychological safety and creating genuine relationships with every team member, are building teams that will affect bottom line performance.

Not feeling it from those examples? Team members need to know what is needed to feel seen, and need to ask for it if it is not given. Think about treating each team member as an individual, so that they feel seen. Let the words of Maya Angelou guide you: "People will forget what you said; they will forget what you did; but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Step Four: Embrace the Fact that the Way we Treat Each Other is Critical to Workplace Health and Engagement

Being humancentric is about spending your time in a way where you not only add value, but you add value that only you can add. If you are not doing these things in and for your team, then they simply do not get done. So, if you do not coach people in your team, they remain uncoached; if you do not give feedback, they get none; if you do not give direction and support through change, the change will fail; if you do not resolve conflict, it will remain unresolved; if you do not inspire and motivate, who will regenerate and enthuse the team?

All this is value worth adding – which is why in humancentric workplaces we find workers who are healthier, more resilient, less stressed, more engaged, happier. As a result, their work is better, their performance higher, their ability to meet targets and to overcome difficulties is enhanced. We find leaders who are more focused, more able to spend their time in the most useful way, more capable of inspiring and motivating their team. Bottom lines are improved by humancentric leadership because humancentric leaders inspire better performance.

Embrace the human being and spend less time worshipping at the altar of the human doing. It's strong humancentric relationships that drive teams beyond the transactional success of meeting targets into the regenerative transformational success of performing beyond reasonable expectations.

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Regenerative Growth

London's Circular Paradox: Why Startups Can't Plug In

By Nikhilesh Sinha & Satrupa Ghosh

In 2024, we experienced an average temperature 1.6 degrees above pre-industrial levels, which exceeds the terms in the Paris Agreement. Environmental degradation accelerated across every measurable axis, and we are depleting resources faster than they regenerate, concentrating waste in landfills and oceans whilst extracting virgin materials at an unsustainable rate. Business as usual with the linear take-make-waste economy is a hazard to our collective health and the future of the planet. We need to rethink how we produce and consume. And fast. With many national governments stepping back from global sustainability commitments, and the richest corporations going all-in in the AI race, it may be up to cities and smaller businesses to drive the change. The question is, can they work together?

Cities are where most of us live, work and create, generating four-fifths of global GDP but also 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Through the centuries, they have fostered institutional innovation, incubating modern finance, as well as universities and public infrastructure. The contemporary challenge is circular transition – engineering a closed loop between production and consumption to eliminate waste. Some cities are taking this seriously. San Francisco has committed to eliminating municipal waste by 2020, Copenhagen is targeting 60 per cent recycling by 2030, and Amsterdam plans full circularity by 2050. But this shift isn't limited to the global North. Bogotá, Taipei, Singapore, Manila, and Nairobi are all pursuing ambitious circular economy strategies, suggesting urban sustainability is becoming a global priority.

London was rated the world's most circular city in 2024, with a plan to hit net zero targets a full decade before the rest of the UK. The city's ambitions involve rethinking how products are designed, produced and used. Along with food, plastics, electricals and the built environment, the [City's Circular Routemap](#) has committed to transforming the textile sector. One of the fashion capitals of the world, London's love affair with fashion comes at a steep cost. Its textile consumption produces over two million tonnes of greenhouse gas annually, amounting to about 17 per cent of all emissions linked to the consumption of goods within the city.

In response, a new generation of circular entrepreneurs have picked up the gauntlet, challenging the fast fashion model that offers profits at the cost of planet. Born-circular fashion businesses from clothing swap platforms and repair

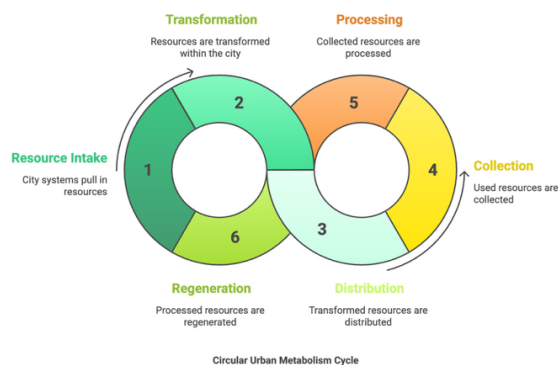
services to rental models that make designer wear accessible without ownership, embody the circular principles London champions: keeping materials in use, designing out waste, and regenerating natural systems. While legacy brands have launched circular initiatives like Patagonia's Worn Wear, Levi's SecondHand, and Burberry's ReBurberry, these programmes represent a fraction of their overall revenue and operations.

The Disconnect

Circular businesses in London should logically piggyback on the city's circular initiatives to enhance their circularity and scale. Yet most local circular startups operate in silos, building parallel networks rather than seamlessly connecting with London's circular systems. The city's ambitious circular economy plans appear to be blind to the synergies that could be leveraged through coordination with and incorporation of enterprise-level circular flows.

Why is this, and how can we bridge the divide between the circular business and the city? The trouble is that circularity at the city and enterprise scales is not synonymous. Most circular economy thinking was developed for businesses, not cities. Influential frameworks like the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's ReSOLVE principles focus on what individual companies can do: optimise their operations, close loops between suppliers and consumers, and design out waste within their supply chains. These work well at the enterprise level, but cities operate fundamentally differently. Circular businesses create closed loops within their operations, whereas circular cities need to optimise across entire urban ecosystems. The urban circular loop is more complex, coordinating across many different functions and actors in ways that individual enterprises need not.

One way to think about this is to imagine the city as a giant organism, with all of the city systems resembling metabolic flows, pulling in resources, transforming and distributing them throughout the city. In a circular metabolism, the flows would constitute closed loops, like blood vessels supplying oxygenated blood, and then looping back to the lungs for replenishment. For this to work, we need more '*connective tissue*' of shared infrastructure, coordinated policies, and governance frameworks that allow individual innovations to plug into wider urban resource flows. A repair shop can't create circular impact without a collection infrastructure to gather materials or sorting facilities to process them. A rental platform multiplies its impact when connected to local repair services and textile recyclers who supply designers with regenerated materials.



The Case Studies

To understand the blockages in London's metabolic flows, we looked at three circular fashion startups, each pioneering a different circular strategy: **Closwap** operates a peer-to-peer clothing swap platform through a digital marketplace and community events. **Circular Way** and **Stilbaar** have created what they call "the world's first fully circular fashion store," buying back all of the clothes sold and either refurbishing them or sending them to textile-to-textile recyclers like Evrnu or Circ. **HURR** offers a full-stack rental solution, facilitating both peer-to-peer rentals and providing turnkey enterprise solutions for brands like Selfridges, and has reportedly surpassed £100 million in fashion rentals since launching in 2019.

Closwap's gamified platform reduces CO2 emissions by approximately half compared to buying new, while matching "the three Ps of fast fashion: Price, Practicality, and Pace," as co-founder Maria Remy puts it. Circular Way uses NFC chip technology to track each garment's lifecycle, enabling customers to transfer the market value of end-of-use garments toward new purchases, what CEO John Atcheson calls a "frictionless" circular shopping experience. HURR's hybrid model handles the logistical complexity of returns, cleaning, repairs, and customer support. These businesses make circular fashion workable in practice, recovering value, organizing logistics and tracking garments through successive uses.

Yet despite operating in the world's top-ranked circular city, all three share the troubling reality of scale and impact. Closwap's community swaps remain neighbourhood-level events. Circular Way contends with borough-level regulatory variations and fragmented infrastructure. HURR operates outside Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks, with no targeted incentives or tailored regulations for rental models.

The city offers patchy support through initiatives such as the Pan-London Textiles Action Plan, annual London Repair Week engaging 40 organizations, and grants from the Mayor's office. But as Remy told us, "We can prototype a feature in weeks, but securing city support for a borough-wide collection pilot takes years." Meanwhile, Fashion Director Sandrine Kockum's goal to "buy back 100% of the clothes we sell" confronts a reality where there's no

infrastructure connecting repair businesses to collection systems to textile recyclers. And Victoria Prew's vision to reinvent ownership "one rental at a time" scales primarily in affluent, well-connected neighbourhoods because that's where courier infrastructure and cleaning services cluster.

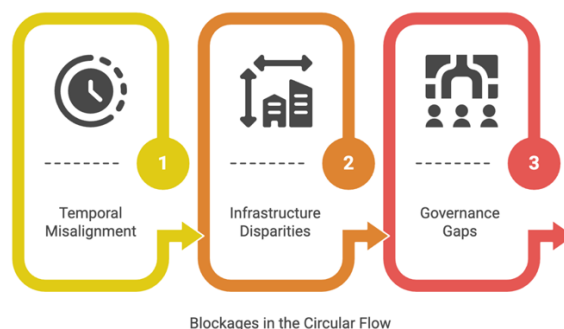
Blockages in the circular flow

Ambitious as they are, for a city that amasses 82,100 tons of second-hand clothing annually, these startups handle only a fraction of its annual textile flows. Two-thirds of the used clothing collected is ultimately exported overseas, resulting in an opportunity loss where materials that could generate local value instead enter global waste streams. This pattern reflects three structural misalignments between entrepreneurial operations and urban governance, emblematic of the gap between micro-innovation and macro-system inertia.

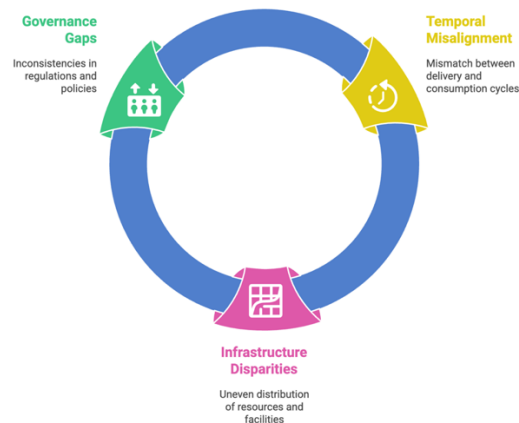
Temporal Misalignment: Circular enterprises operate on compressed timeframes of quarterly sprints, weekly inventory adjustments, and 24-hour delivery cycles. This tempo mirrors fast-fashion convenience while building sustainable alternatives. London operates on five-year strategic plans, annual budgets, and multi-year waste contracts. This cadence clash forces startups to maintain independent logistics rather than integrate with municipal systems.

Infrastructural Disparities: Startups build their own parallel mini-system because standardized collection points, shared sorting facilities, and coordinated repair hubs don't exist across London's 32 boroughs. Services concentrate in affluent, well-connected neighbourhoods, reinforcing socioeconomic disparities.

Governance Gaps: Despite symbolic support, these businesses navigate systems designed for linear consumption. UK VAT applies a 20% rate to repairs, making fixes more expensive than replacements. Extended Producer Responsibility focuses on manufacturers, not circular intermediaries. HURR operates outside EPR frameworks. Closwap's £5 event tickets can't offset unsupported costs. Circular Way faces different regulations in each borough, with no repair-specific training programs available.



Option



These divergences create ‘micro-metabolisms’ or circular systems adjacent to rather than integrated with urban metabolism. If the world’s leading circular city can’t bridge this gap, it signals fundamental challenges for circular transitions everywhere.

What Needs to Happen

The circular startups we spoke with show what is possible at the level of individual garments and users. They connect design, use, repair, and recovery in ways that echo a functioning metabolism. But they also operate within systems whose scale and tempo were never designed for the small, fast loops these models rely on. That misalignment limits how far circular startups can push without support. For now, the most practical route for entrepreneurs is to build models that align with infrastructure that does exist: courier networks, community repair groups, borough-level pilots, textile recyclers - and design their operations so they can plug into shared systems as they develop. That means treating integration not as a final step once scale is reached, but as a design principle from the outset.

For cities, declaring circular ambitions isn’t enough. What circular cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam are doing differently is that they’re not just setting emissions targets. They’re redesigning urban material flows. Copenhagen’s waste ambition isn’t about disposal reduction; it’s about rethinking what ‘waste’ means in the system. That’s metabolic redesign, not just greening the existing model. London’s circular kudos masks a fundamental struggle to build the enabling infrastructure emerging circular businesses need. This means creating shared physical systems, standardized infrastructure across all boroughs, sorting facilities accessible to multiple businesses, resources and repair hubs integrated with transit networks.

The opportunity is substantial. Along with the health benefits of lowering carbon emissions and mitigating the loss of productive land, the World Economic Forum estimates a \$1 trillion global annual benefit from circular transition. Localised material loops reduce transportation costs, provide predictable feedstock for manufacturers, generate employment in repair and recovery, and insulate cities from volatile global supply chains. For businesses, integration means access to reliable materials, shared logistics networks, and regulatory clarity. The question isn’t whether circular cities are viable. It’s whether we build the connective tissue quickly enough to capture the value.

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Driving Regenerative Growth: Why We Need a Mindset Shift

By Matthew Gitsham

Everyone wants growth, right? But what if the way we are approaching growth is doing more harm than good?

We need 'growth' to improve life for everyone, but from climate breakdown to human exploitation, many of the ways we achieve growth make things worse for people rather than better.

Regenerative growth is about growing businesses and the economy in a way that leaves society and the environment in a better place than when you started, rather than worse.

It means paying attention to what grows, how it grows, and who benefits. It means growing some things and not others.

Leaders need to rethink the goals and success measures they are aiming at, and then consider carefully how they play their leadership role – the signals they send through how they behave, the stories they share, the questions they ask – to encourage others around them to re-orient towards this new success measure too.

Why Do We Want Growth?

We talk about growth all the time, it's held up as a good thing and something we need to be aiming for, but why?

Growing the economy means increasing the number of goods and services produced and consumed overall. Economic growth is seen as the main pathway to improving wellbeing – it theoretically means more income per person, and more jobs, which enable better access to food, housing, healthcare, education and technology, all of which are stepping stones to better quality of life. It also means more tax revenue for governments to invest in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social security, similarly contributing to better quality of life.

Growing a business means increased revenues, profit, market share, customers, production capacity, employees, locations. Business growth is seen as a good thing because this means more return on investment for shareholders, more to invest in further growing the business, and more to share around through pay rises and bonuses. Businesses that are growing help grow economies, helping improve everyone's quality of life.

What's the Problem with Growth?

Growth can improve quality of life, but not necessarily. Because of what is counted and not counted, we can 'grow' but in the process hurt people in the workplace, supply chains, and communities, and burn fossil fuels and cause pollution, driving climate change and biodiversity loss, all of which makes quality of life worse, not better. And growth doesn't necessarily benefit everyone - the rich may get richer while others stay poor, seeing decline in quality of life.

In other words growth is not automatically good. What grows, how it grows, and who benefits really matters.

How is Regenerative Growth Different to Conventional Growth?

Regenerative growth addresses these questions: what grows, how it grows, and who benefits.

Regenerative growth is squarely aimed at improving quality of life, creating value through activities that enhance and restore nature and communities, rather than harming them. It means leaving things better than how you found them.

This means growing some things but not others, using some means to achieve growth but not others, and paying attention to how the benefits of growth get shared.

It might mean, for example, growing wind and solar industries, but not oil and gas. It might mean growing food and health businesses that help improve nutrition outcomes, but not growing tobacco businesses.

So How Do We Drive Regenerative Growth?

What do we need to do more of? What do we need to stop doing? The first thing we need to do is change the measure of success we're aiming for. Rather than the success measure being just growing the number of goods and services produced and consumed in an economy overall, or profits and return on investment to shareholders in a business, we need a wider set of success measures that tell us whether we are improving quality of life, communities and the environment in the ways we are growing.

A regenerative economy doesn't just ask 'Did GDP go up?' — it asks: 'Is life getting healthier, fairer, and more resilient for people and the planet — now and for future generations?' This means adding measures that tell us if ecosystems are regenerating, like biodiversity gain, soil health, clean air, and water indicators - is nature storing more carbon than we are emitting? It also means adding measures like whether poverty and inequality are falling, access to nutritious food, clean water and affordable housing, improvements in physical and mental health, fair wages, secure livelihoods.

Similarly for a business, it's not just 'Did we make more profit?' — it's 'Did we make life healthier and systems stronger?' Depending on your sector, this would mean adding measures of business success like: Are we removing more carbon than we emit? Are we restoring habitats? What % of materials are circular (reused, recycled, biodegradable)? Are we replenishing more water than we use? Are we improving soil health? It would also include measures around living wage, job security, wellbeing, training and career pathways, improving human rights in supply chains, and around who benefits from profits generated, how fairly they are shared.

A regenerative food company, for example, might measure success not just by profit margins, but by biodiversity and soil health improvements, fair prices and wages across its supply chain, improved nutritional outcomes, and eliminating food waste.

You could say the UN Sustainable Development Goals are a good starting point for thinking about a framework of goals to be aiming for if seeking to grow regeneratively.

With this wider definition of success to be aiming for, we would want to be pursuing many of the same activities as we would for conventional growth, but always asking the question, would this activity help us achieve our wider success measure, or set us back?

For example, to increase economic growth we would still want to invest in infrastructure, but in a way that led to reducing and removing carbon, and increasing biodiversity, rather than in a way that would lead to increased carbon emissions and less biodiversity.

To grow a business regeneratively, we would still for example be looking to grow customers and grow sales, but perhaps through innovating to bring to market new products and services that help customers be regenerative. We would not want to grow sales through products and services that lead to customers emitting more carbon, or exploiting more workers, or harming health. When it comes to investing in marketing, we might be thinking about how we help encourage shifts to more regenerative lifestyles. When it comes to investing in people, we would be investing in paying a living wage, improving physical and mental health, and improving human rights for workers across our supply chains.

What do Business Leaders Need to do to Drive Regenerative Growth?

For those in leadership roles, driving regenerative growth starts with thinking differently about what your job is and what counts as success. Your own personal success in your role is defined in terms of the contribution you have enabled to improving quality of life and enhancing ecosystems rather than simply growing profit.

From my experience talking with business leaders, this shift in thinking leads to a range of leadership activities in the business to drive regenerative growth, starting with helping open a conversation and create space for building shared understandings about regenerative approaches within the business and what should be approached differently.

This means a lot of listening and humility, and it also means developing the skills for making the case for a different approach. It means reshaping how the business articulates its purpose, vision, and strategy. It means using a different set of tools to guide decision-making. It means recasting success measures within the business, what people get encouraged to achieve, or are rewarded or penalised for. And it means leading by example – how are you seen to prioritise regenerative outcomes in the decisions you make?

It also means playing an advocacy role in the wider ecosystem around the business. How can you partner with customers, suppliers, competitors, and others through multi-stakeholder initiatives to drive regenerative approaches across whole industry sectors? How can you advocate to help build consensus around shifting to government policies that support regenerative economic growth?

The Call for a New Growth Paradigm

Our models for driving conventional growth were built to fix the problems of a different era. Today, we need regenerative growth, and this needs a different approach from business leaders. As professionals and leaders, we need to ask ourselves: Am I leaving people, places, and ecosystems better than I found them?

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Regeneration: The Quiet Engine of Long Term Family Business Success in the UAE

By Daniel Rukare

Family businesses in the United Arab Emirates are entering a period that is both promising and challenging. Many of these firms continue to grow commercially while navigating deeper questions about legacy, succession and the expanding responsibilities of their family offices. In recent conversations with senior executives from two different sectors, one in real estate and the other in fruit and vegetable trading, a consistent theme emerged. The theme was regeneration. Not a surface level refresh, but a serious process of redefining identity, purpose and preparedness for a more complex future.

Regeneration is no longer optional. It has become a central capability for continuity.

Why Regeneration Matters Now

Across the United Arab Emirates, a large number of family businesses have benefited from decades of success driven by the founding generation. The core question they now face is how to sustain that success as the regional and global environment evolves. Shifts in regulation, competition, digital transformation and generational expectations are creating a new context for decision making.

Regeneration provides the bridge between the past and the future. It invites families to respect earlier achievements while also acknowledging that new capabilities and governance structures are essential.

During my discussion with the chief executive of a real estate family business, he summarized the tension clearly.

"We built our success on relationships and land. The next generation wants analytics, diversification and global exposure. Both perspectives are valid and we need a way to bring them together."

That reflection captures what regeneration requires. It is not a choice between approaches. It is a process of blending them in a way that allows the business to evolve without losing its identity.

Pressures Driving Regeneration

Intergenerational Leadership Transitions: This is the most visible pressure. Many families are navigating transitions from founders who relied on intuition and deep personal networks to successors who are globally trained and expecting structure and clarity.

The executive from the fruit and vegetable business expressed this tension clearly.

"My father built this company through personal relationships and hard work. My role is to scale it, digitize it, and prepare for the family office structure. These are completely different forms of leadership."

The challenge is not about competence. It is about worldviews that have been shaped by different eras. Regeneration creates the shared space where those worldviews can align.

Increasing Complexity in Family Offices: Family offices (separate entities created to manage the family's wealth) in the region are becoming more sophisticated and require skills that traditional businesses did not demand. These skills include investment analysis, portfolio construction and risk oversight. Several executives shared that the family office now generates more difficult questions than the operating business. Without regeneration, families risk creating investment structures that lack clarity and do not reflect a shared purpose.

Changing Capital Priorities: Younger generations often prefer diversification, technology investments and opportunities linked to environmental and social themes. These shifts reshape capital allocation and decision making. Families that regenerate effectively create transparent processes that allow these choices to be discussed rather than imposed.

What Effective Regeneration Looks Like

Regeneration is a continuing cycle rather than a single transition. Families that do this well tend to focus on four elements:

A Clear and Shared Purpose Across Generations: Effective families revisit their purpose and articulate it in a way that feels relevant to younger members. This does not mean changing the values that shaped the business. It means expressing those values in a contemporary form. Purpose becomes the anchor for the business and the family office.

Governance That Creates Clarity Rather Than Control:

Governance often creates anxiety because it is viewed as a rigid structure. Regeneration reframes governance as a way to create shared clarity about roles and decisions. Tools such as family councils, decision policies, investment guidelines and leadership pathways help prevent confusion and ensure that choices reflect a collective view.

A Blended Capability Base: Family businesses in the United Arab Emirates need a mix of traditional insight and modern capability. Regeneration supports the building of this blend. It might involve pairing senior leaders with next generation members on strategic projects, adopting digital tools to enhance traditional decision making or building a more structured approach to risk.

Space for Next Generation Leaders to Test Ideas:

Younger leaders bring new ideas and global exposure. However, without space to experiment, their contribution remains limited. Regeneration encourages pilot projects in areas such as diversification, digital transformation or new investment themes. These projects allow families to identify which individuals are ready for expanded leadership roles.

Challenges That Slow Regeneration

Even when the desire is strong, several common barriers can disrupt the process. These include emotional attachment to long standing practices, unclear boundaries between family and business decisions, limited transparency around the family office, fear of conflict and the different time horizons held by each generation. Recognising these barriers makes it easier to address them.

What Leaders Should Focus on Now

If you are involved in a family business or family office in the United Arab Emirates, consider three starting actions.

- **Begin Conversations Early**
Generational transitions work more smoothly when discussions begin long before they are needed. Early conversations build shared expectations.
- **Prioritize Process Over Personalities**
Clarify how decisions will be made rather than focusing only on who makes them. Clear and shared processes build trust.
- **Treat Regeneration as a Strategic Investment**
Allocate time and resources to building the capabilities needed for the future. Regeneration is deliberate and requires planning.

Embracing the Future

Regeneration is not about replacing one generation with another. It is about creating a business that can carry the past forward while embracing the future. Across the United Arab Emirates, many family businesses are at a point where tradition and ambition meet. The leaders who succeed will be those who treat regeneration as a continuing responsibility rather than a challenge to be solved once. In every conversation I have had with executives, the aspiration is the same. They want to honour what was built and prepare confidently for what comes next.

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The New Wave of Regeneration in the FMCG Industry

By Liliana Caimacan

For most consumers, interaction with products is limited to their final presentation. We see items on a supermarket shelf or at a counter, neatly packaged and ready to be purchased. Yet the natural resources used to bring each product to life are rarely visible to the average shopper. As concerns about climate change intensify, temperatures rise, and production cycles become increasingly disrupted, consumers have grown more aware that every purchase has an impact.

What began as a transparency initiative towards product traceability, brands displaying photos of oat farmers, coffee growers, or the landscapes where ingredients were sourced, has become something far more significant. These early efforts helped people connect with the human and natural stories behind their products, they created something more powerful; sympathy, authenticity, and a sense of shared responsibility for the resources that enable production. Though a couple of years ago this was enough to demonstrate a fair handling of the natural resources needed to make our products, nowadays it is not just relevant to see what's being taken from earth but also how such is being replenished.

To understand the urgency, it helps to look at the scale of extraction. According to recent studies, Humans currently use around fifty percent more natural resources than just three decades ago, amounting to roughly sixty billion tonnes of raw materials every year. This level of consumption cannot continue without consequences. And as the natural resources such as the soil and water used for production weaken, the industries that depend on them, including fast moving consumer goods, feel the impact immediately.

Industry Examples

In the fast-moving consumer goods industry, this shift is already underway. Some of the world's largest corporations, including Nestlé and Unilever, have begun integrating regenerative practices across their supply chains. They have been the first ones to recognize regeneration is becoming a business imperative.

Climate volatility, resource scarcity, talent expectations, and stronger consumer pressure are forcing companies to rethink how growth happens, who benefits from it, and what kind of legacy they leave behind.

When speaking with colleagues who now lead transformation efforts within top global brands, a consistent phrase emerges:

We need to give back to the systems that allowed us to create the product in the first place.

Regenerative growth embodies that philosophy. It is about making profits while giving back more than we take. It seeks to replenish and grow natural resources, strengthen ecosystems, and support more equitable and resilient societies.

Within FMCG, regeneration initiatives have mostly taken place within agriculture at the core of this movement. Focusing on restoring soil health, increasing biodiversity, improving water cycles, and supporting communities that are directly involved in their production. These principles directly strengthen the long-term viability of supply chains while reducing emissions and environmental risk; in fact the corporate commitments are significant.

One of the prime examples of this trend growing across the industry has been Unilever's regenerative agriculture into the supply chains of soy, palm oil, rice, and tea. The company aims to apply these practices to one million hectares of land by 2030 and has established a dedicated Regenerative Agriculture Fund to support farmers through this transition. Nestlé, another major player, has also pledged to source twenty percent of its key ingredients from farmers using regenerative methods by 2025 and fifty percent by 2030. Its initiatives range from promoting agroforestry in coffee supply chains in Vietnam to investing in soil health improvements in the European dairy sector - impacts that go even further than the daily consumer could imagine.

Beyond Regeneration

Of course, regeneration extends beyond fields and farms. Circular innovation is also playing a major role. One fascinating example is **Banofi Leather**, winners of the Hult Prize 2023, the global competition for university students to develop and launch for-profit businesses that solve social and environmental challenges.

Banofi's genius idea? Using discarded banana peels to create a leather alternative. Instead of letting organic waste sit in landfills and generate emissions, they transform it into a high-quality material suitable for fashion and consumer products. This is circular thinking at its best. Waste becomes a resource, farmers gain additional income streams, and brands gain access to bio-based materials with a lower environmental footprint.

And if we go beyond agriculture? Regeneration also requires rethinking product design, packaging, and resource cycles. Many FMCG companies are also experimenting with refillable systems, biomaterial packaging, compostable solutions, and design choices that

extend product life. These innovations are not only environmentally beneficial but also open opportunities for premiumization and brand differentiation. Specially following consumer trends who are increasingly willing to support companies that integrate tangible regenerative commitments into their products, not just their marketing.

After raw materials, design thinking, and alternative solutions are implemented, one thing is key - regeneration cannot happen in isolation. Brands need strong partnerships with suppliers, scientific organizations, local communities, and NGOs. Measurement tools also matter because they are the numbers that reinforce that a change is happening. In fact, without clear metrics, it becomes difficult to understand whether regenerative efforts are truly making a difference. For example, frameworks such as Science Based Targets for Nature are helping companies evaluate biodiversity impacts and track progress more transparently.

As the conversation evolves, the broader mindset shift becomes clear. Growth in the FMCG sector is starting to look different from how it looked in the past. It is no longer defined solely by scale or efficiency. Instead, companies are beginning to ask deeper questions:

- What is the impact of our success on the systems that support it?
- How can we expand while strengthening the natural resources we depend on?
- What does long-term value look like for people and the planet?

These questions are pushing brands to move beyond sustainability reports and into real action. Regeneration invites companies to rethink not only their supply chains but their identities. It encourages them to design products that fit into a healthier, more balanced world rather than one that is constantly stretched to its limits.

Ultimately, the new wave of regeneration signals a hopeful present and future for the FMCG industry. It is a reminder that restoring ecosystems and running profitable businesses do not have to be opposing goals. In fact, they can reinforce each other.

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Regenerative Education

Sharper Education with AI: Beyond the Knife

By Anusha Vissapragada

Why the Knife Isn't the Point

Imagine you've just come home after a long day, ready to cook dinner. In front of you sits a pile of onions. You have a sharp knife, but the task is tedious. A slip could cut your finger, and it takes time you don't have. Now imagine replacing the knife with a food processor. In seconds, the onions are ready—same outcome, less frustration, and you can spend your energy on the fun part: experimenting with flavors.

That's what **regeneration** looks like in the classroom. Too often, students spend their limited learning time struggling with the equivalent of 'knife skills'—the mechanics of coding. But when we replace that knife with AI, the food processor of our age, we regenerate time, energy, and creativity. Students can focus less on syntax errors and more on making sense of the data in front of them.

Giving Back Time, Energy, and Creativity

Regeneration is about giving back more than we take away. In education, that means reducing unnecessary hurdles and replenishing students' capacity for curiosity and critical thinking.

In **business schools**, many students arrive without coding experience. They want to learn how to analyze markets, design strategies, and make data-driven decisions. Instead, they often get stuck at 'this is too hard,' bogged down by debugging errors rather than exploring insights. Frustration leads to disengagement, and the learning potential diminishes.

Traditional teaching models tend to split class time evenly: half on mechanics, half on analysis. But that balance is skewed. Why should students spend 45 minutes fighting a missing semicolon when they could spend that time debating what a correlation means for a company's strategy?

Regenerative teaching means flipping that equation. It's not about lowering standards. It's about shifting the focus: away from the mechanics of the knife, and toward the richness of the dish.

Knife vs. Food Processor: Timing the Difference

To make this tangible, I ran an experiment with my class.

We had a simple dataset—ten rows of items with prices and quantities. Students were asked to answer five straightforward questions:

- Find the highest price.
- Find the lowest quantity.
- Count the number of unique items.
- Calculate the average price.
- Build a scatterplot.

Round One: Knife in Hand

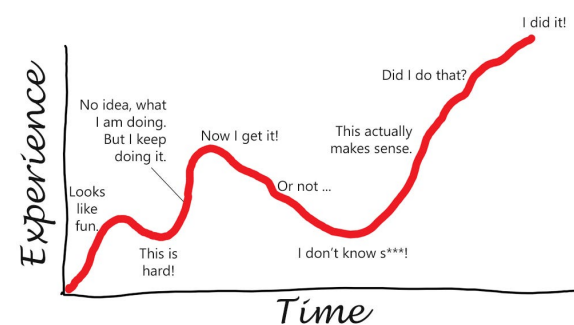
I timed myself solving the questions in Python. With a decade of coding experience, I managed only three answers in 90 seconds. My students, most new to coding, were already stuck at step one. This is the knife problem: it works, but it's slow, frustrating, and risky for those without training.

Round Two: Bring in the Food Processor

Next, I used an AI tool. I copied the five questions into a prompt. In under 30 seconds, the tool generated clean, runnable code for all five. When we executed it, the answers and the scatterplot appeared instantly.

The difference was striking: same output, with radically less friction. Instead of being trapped in 'how do I code this?' students could now ask: What does the scatterplot tell us? Why is the average price useful? How might a business leader use these insights?

This is regeneration in action. By swapping the knife for the food processor, we didn't lower the bar—we cleared the path.



Less Coding, More Thinking

The real win here is not just efficiency - it's transformation. AI allows us to move students from doing to thinking.

- **Reclaimed time:** Instead of spending 90 minutes debugging, we spend that time on interpretation, discussion, and creativity.
- **Lower barriers:** Students without technical backgrounds can participate fully without being left behind.
- **Elevated learning:** We emphasize how to think with data, not just how to code data.

This doesn't erase the value of coding. Just as chefs still benefit from knife skills, business analysts benefit from knowing the basics. But mastery of the knife is not the goal. The goal is understanding the flavors, the combinations, and the impact - the business insight.

Teaching Smarter, Not Harder

How can educators apply regeneration in their classrooms? A few practical steps:

1. **Identify the 'knives'.** Where are your students or employees losing energy on mechanics that don't directly serve the bigger goal?
2. **Introduce food processors.** Use AI or other tools to reduce frustration and speed up rote tasks.
3. **Redefine success metrics.** Don't just ask: Can the student code a loop? Ask: Can they explain what the output means for a client or executive?
4. **Prioritize human-only skills.** Use the time gained to focus on critical thinking, ethics, and innovation - the areas where human intelligence shines.

When I restructured a typical 90-minute class using this approach, the results were dramatic. Instead of a 50/50 split between coding and analysis, the class shifted to a 75/25 split - 75% of time on interpretation and creative problem-solving, 25% on mechanics. That's regeneration: giving back more than you take.

When Major Projects Become In-Class Activities

The knife vs. food processor metaphor doesn't end with business analytics. Colleagues across disciplines are seeing the same shift.

One marketing faculty member recently told me that what used to be a major assignment—a multi-week project analyzing campaigns—has now become an in-class activity. Tasks that once required hours of setup and technical grind can be completed in minutes with AI. This speed doesn't lower the bar - it raises the stakes. We need to teach students how to leverage these tools thoughtfully, or risk them falling behind.

The core skill is no longer the mechanics of the knife. It's knowing how to choose the right tool, ask the right questions, and interpret the output for impact. Across classrooms, regenerative teaching means reallocating time and energy away from rote work and toward insight, creativity, and critical thinking.

Regeneration, then, is not just a business analytics strategy. It's a mindset shift for how faculty design learning experiences - in marketing, finance, analytics, and beyond.

Measuring Success by Impact, Not Mechanics

In the end, regeneration in education is not about replacing human effort with machines. It's about elevating what humans do best.

The onion will always need chopping, but we don't have to wear out students - or employees - teaching knife techniques when the food processor can do it faster. The real test of success is not whether someone can code a mean function, but whether they can tell you what that mean means for a business decision.

As educators and leaders, we must ask ourselves:

- Where are we still teaching knife skills when we could be serving dishes?
- How can we use AI to regenerate time and creativity?
- Are we measuring success by mechanics—or by impact?

If we get this right, we regenerate not only classrooms but workplaces, organizations, and society. We give back more than we take—time, clarity, innovation. And that is the essence of regeneration.

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Regenerating the Classroom: What Happens When AI Becomes a Teaching Partner?

By Thomas Sullivan

On November 30, 2022, I was driving home after teaching my last class and listening to a radio program unsettling enough that I had to pull over to focus. When it ended, I drove straight back to campus and went to my dean's office. "Do you know what ChatGPT is?" I asked. When she said she didn't, my reply came out before I could soften it: "Well, you need to know. Everything has changed."

I am not often certain about the future, but in that moment I knew this would reshape education. I didn't yet understand how, but the shift had already begun. In 2023, as we emerged from the pandemic, one sign spread quickly: student writing improved almost overnight. Something fundamental was changing in how students learned, and yet faculty, myself included, had not changed our approach to meet this new reality.

For decades, technology in education has been an accessory - tools to support instruction, platforms to host content, systems to manage grading. But AI no longer fits that category. It isn't limited to specific uses or tied to predictable patterns. It is capable of far more. Meanwhile, higher education faces pressures it hasn't experienced in decades. Costs have risen. The return on investment of a traditional degree is increasingly scrutinized. The model, built around structures from another century, is showing strain. One symbol of this is the Carnegie Unit, which tells us how long students sit in a room but says nothing about what they learn. If we can begin to see AI as a teaching partner rather than a tool, we can start regenerating education from the classroom outward.

This provokes a simple question with wide implications: What would higher education look like if we designed courses assuming that AI is a teaching partner, not an add-on?

AI as a Teaching Partner

Students are already answering that question for themselves. A now familiar pattern unfolds each semester. A student asks a question after class; I give my best real-time answer. Later that evening I receive a message: "I asked ChatGPT the same thing and it gave me three explanations, two diagrams, and a practice quiz." Trying to police the use of AI is a Sisyphean task. This is not a story about AI replacing faculty. It is the story of realizing that while many of us continue teaching with a twentieth-century model, our students are already learning with a twenty-first-century partner.

We are entering a period in which AI is not simply a tool students use. Whether we embrace it or not, AI is becoming a second instructor in every classroom. If that is true, regenerating education requires rethinking not only curriculum design but the entire architecture of learning.

A tool waits to be used. A partner takes initiative. A partner can adapt to a learner's pace, quiz and clarify understanding, coach students privately when they hesitate to ask for help, synthesize content in multiple modalities, and support teams in coordinating and managing project work. If this is the new baseline, the question is no longer how students should use AI but how faculty should teach in a world where every student already has a tireless, on-demand tutor.

Measuring Progress

This shift becomes even clearer when considering assessment. Once AI becomes a partner in learning, the traditional way of measuring progress - based on time spent in class (often referred to as the 'credit hour') rather than actual mastery - reveals its limitations.

Employers, however, care about demonstrated skills. Competency-based education has existed for decades, but AI makes it newly scalable. It becomes possible for AI to track micro-skills demonstrated across assignments, identify misconceptions before they calcify, provide individualized practice, and generate simulations to test judgment, teamwork, or strategic thinking.

Assessment stops being something that happens after teaching and becomes something woven throughout learning. Formative assessment can become continuous, supportive, and low-stakes. Evaluative assessment shifts toward applied performance: real projects, negotiations, ethical decisions, strategic choices. Students learn by doing; AI tracks progress; faculty interpret results and shape the learning experience. This allows us to meet students precisely where they are. Experience becomes the teacher, and AI becomes the always-available tutor helping students build progressively deeper mastery.

Project-based learning, once challenging to execute at scale, also becomes more workable. Consider the elective we are developing with a local professional sports team, where students analyze how to increase attendance by leveraging post-World Cup fan energy. AI can help students analyze data, model strategic choices, and manage project work. It gives each team support tailored to its level of readiness. Faculty shift from delivering content to orchestrating experience.

These changes reshape the role of the professor. If AI can handle a personalized explain-practice-coach cycle for each student, the faculty role becomes even more important - not less.

The Learning Journey

One shift is teaching to need rather than to the middle. Most faculty design courses for an 'average' student who doesn't exist. With AI diagnosing student readiness, we can teach to specific gaps: who needs reinforcement, who is ready to extend, who needs conceptual reframing. Classrooms can become ability-responsive rather than time-responsive.

Another shift is designing the learning journey. Content matters, but designing how students move through content matters more. Faculty become architects of learning pathways, while AI handles moment-to-moment tutoring.

The third shift involves cultivating judgment. AI can provide options, but students need human guidance in choosing wisely. Judgment, ethics, and the ability to interpret ambiguous situations remain distinctly human strengths and grow in importance, not decline.

The physical classroom also changes. We can expect more small-group work based on differentiated need, real-time AI-supported diagnostics that place students 'just in time', more project studios and fewer lectures, and a shift toward labs, simulations, and applied challenges. Progress becomes tied to competence rather than calendar weeks. The classroom becomes the place for collective meaning-making. The part AI cannot replicate. The rest becomes distributed, personalized, and continuous.

To regenerate education for an AI-partnered future, we might begin with a few questions. Where could AI provide individualized support we currently cannot? What competencies should students demonstrate, and how might AI help measure them? Which parts of teaching add the most human value? What would project-based learning look like with 24/7 tutoring support? If not the 'Credit Hour' referred to earlier, what should define progress? And how might we design classrooms that respond to need rather than assume uniformity?

Regeneration is not replacement. This is not about removing educators. It is about regenerating the classroom so that faculty, students, and institutions can unlock forms of learning that were previously impossible. AI is not a rival. It is a partner waiting for us to redesign education around what it makes newly possible.

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Regenerative Technology

Skeptical Intelligence: Disciplined Doubt for AI-Powered Innovation

By Ted Ladd & Priyanka Shrivastava

Walk into any boardroom, strategy offsite, or investor summit and you'll hear the same chorus: artificial intelligence will transform everything. Strategy, operations, accounting, hiring: AI is often portrayed simultaneously as the vehicle and the propellant for organizational transformation.

Yet beneath the hype sits a simpler, harder truth: when the volume of machine-generated 'insight' explodes, the scarcest resource in a company shifts from data to disciplined doubt. The ability to question well – to identify root problems, probe assumptions, test claims, and use AI as an assistant, not a replacement – is fast becoming a professional superpower. We call this emerging capability Skeptical Intelligence – the disciplined art of questioning well.

Even though Skeptical Intelligence sounds like a rebrand of critical thinking, it is not. Since its introduction by Plato in 399 BCE and John Dewey's popularization of the term in the 1930s, critical thinking has sprawled to include not just intellectual analysis but also personal self-reflection and emotional control. It has been used as a process, a single behavior, a collection of multiple behaviors, a mindset, a disposition, and an instinct. The term is now so overextended as to be unhelpful.

Skeptical Intelligence is a fourth pillar of capability alongside IQ, Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Artificial Intelligence (AI). IQ gave us a way to measure 'raw' intelligence. EI, and its measurement tool, the Emotion Quotient (EQ), helped us take emotions seriously as inputs to judgment and performance. AI purports to put all existing information into the hands of every person. But none of these three, on its own, equips leaders to find the optimal solution to a problem. Skeptical Intelligence fills that gap.

How IQ and EQ Got Us Here—and Where They Fall Short

For decades, IQ was the yardstick to measure smartness. It predicts academic performance and certain forms of professional success. That correlation still matters in business settings. Intellectual limitations cannot always be

overcome by training or experience. People with high IQ perform well for well-specified problems with clean feedback loops and single solutions, not the murky dilemmas and trade-offs that leaders face today.

EQ arrived as a necessary corrective. It reframed emotions as useful input rather than interference. Leaders with high EQ listen better, regulate their own impulses, direct other people's emotions, and build trustful teams. All of these are essential. Yet the managerial culture that evolved around EQ sometimes drifted toward comfort over challenge: satisfying meetings, thin critique, polite acceptance of flawed information for the sake of improved relationships. These traits may even be counterproductive in opaque, complex circumstances. AI is heralded as a cure, but it may be the cause.

The result is a capability gap. Highly intelligent, emotionally skilled executives are still focusing on dashboards and forecasts that deserve a cross-examination. EQ without skepticism can make smart people very agreeable about very shaky claims. Thus, while IQ and EQ remain valuable, neither equips leaders to interrogate the increasingly opaque decisions made by intelligent systems.

Why Do We Need a Fourth Pillar Now?:

AI systems now write, recommend, price, forecast, rank, allocate, and deny at industrial scale. They are also fallible in systemic ways: biased training data, spurious correlations, brittle generalization, seductive visualizations, and confident responses that seem certain but are not, in fact, accurate. None of this makes AI useless. Yet AI is consistently and systematically prone to errors that require human discernment.

As AI improves, it also gets better at responding with conviction. Concrete language, declarative sentences, assertive but misused terms like 'thinking' and 'reasoning' all lull even disciplined operators into premature trust. When time pressure and social validation ('the model says ...') are added, the conditions are ripe for cognitive complacency.

Recent, well-documented AI failures have the same ingredients: historical bias baked into training data, opaque features, and leaders who assumed that 'data-driven' equals 'well-founded.' The fix is not to automatically reject or exile AI from critical decisions. As Kahneman (2011) suggests, leaders must learn to distinguish speed from haste – moving quickly while introducing structured friction at critical junctures.

Those seeking novel ideas will be disappointed. Structurally, AI reports the *average* answer to any question based on its historical data. Everyone asking AI for an innovation in a particular domain will receive the same answer. Unless... Unless you use AI to question and verify your own ideas.

Skeptical Intelligence (SI) is the capacity to interrogate claims with disciplined curiosity and intellectual humility. It is not reflexive contrarianism. It is not cynicism dressed up as rigor. It is a practical operating system for decision-makers who want the upside of AI without sleepwalking into the downside. SI operationalizes the often loosely applied concept of critical thinking into a measurable, teachable framework.

A few commentators have suggested that, because AI is (or at least seems) better at data collection, analysis, and delivery than most professionals, future leaders should focus on developing their EQ skills because, as yet, AI cannot connect emotionally to people. While EQ and SI can and should coexist in each person and team, our research intentionally positions SI as entirely distinct from EQ.

A Working Definition

Skeptical Intelligence is a repeatable way of thinking that combines four habits:

1. Curiosity with an edge – a deliberate thoughtful provocation to ask “what would change my mind?” instead of “how do I prove I’m right?”
2. Epistemic humility – an accurate sense of what you (and your models) know and do not know.
3. Evidence discipline – an ability to trace a claim to its data, method, and assumptions.
4. Counterfactual imagination – a habit of generating plausible alternatives and testing the original claim against them.

If IQ helps you solve the puzzle and EQ helps you read the room, Skeptical Intelligence helps you validate that you’re solving the right problem with the right solution based on the right data. It is not instinctive, even with training, because instincts are more prone to human bias. It is the intentional rejection of one’s instinct in order to engage a more disciplined approach.

Based on survey data from 401 participants across six industries, our statistical analysis revealed two core elements of SI: the ability to question new information and the ability to then verify this information within a specified context. We also validated the first iteration of a measurement scale, called the Skeptical Quotient (SQ), that people can use to assess their own abilities.

Our initial findings show that men are more likely to question and women are more likely to verify. When SI and EQ were compared through regression analysis, SI emerged as a stronger predictor of performance, while EQ’s effect became statistically insignificant.

In plain language, SI is more important for people using AI effectively. This does not invalidate EQ. It just shows that EQ is useful in collaborative teams, whereas SI is crucial for individual performance.

Asking questions with nuanced information in complex scenarios may result in rejecting your own initial ideas. In short, you were wrong. If your sense of your own worth is fragile, this conclusion can be so painful that you will not even risk asking the question. This aligns with prior findings linking psychological safety and intellectual humility to improved reasoning (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Leary et al, 2017)

The Skeptic’s Playbook

Critical-thinking scholars have mapped this terrain for decades. We don’t need to reinvent the canon; we need to refit it for an algorithmic world. Here’s a practical short-list leaders can use without a philosophy degree to generate better answers. And many of these steps use AI in a controlled way.

1. Clarify the problem. AI engines optimize for attention because the most accessible metric they have is the user’s repeated use of the AI tool. This is not necessarily nefarious, but it can descend into self-reinforcing bias toward user affirmation.
2. Surface and test assumptions. What must be true about the data, the context, and the scope for an AI response to hold? Where is AI consistently limited or biased? AI can point out some of these assumptions and can propose ways to test them, but AI cannot actually run experiments.
3. Spot alternative causes. Are there existing theories that might arrive at a different conclusion from the same data? AI can help identify and explain these adjacent fields of inquiry, but only if you ask.
4. Consider counter-arguments. Can you, even with the help of AI, disprove AI’s initial response?
5. Make your own decision. Do not outsource intellectual rigor to AI. Instead, treat it as an assistant with potentially useful observations that can feed into your human filter for new information.

None of these steps requires you to code. None expects formal training in logic. However, all of them require you to keep your hands on the wheel. Rather, they require conceptual clarity, structured reasoning, and a willingness to challenge assumptions.

How to Insert Skeptical Intelligence into a Team

Skeptical Intelligence scales when it’s institutional, not heroic. Four moves help:

- Train beyond compliance. Ditch generic AI ethics lectures for scenario workshops that ask teams to pressure-test real models and real dashboards under shifting conditions. Force them to identify the potential sources of human

and AI bias in their methods. Make teams defend both the recommendation and the route to it.

- Hire for humility. Reward candidates who can say “I don’t know yet” and then show how they’d find out. Curiosity without swagger is a stronger predictor of sound model governance than tool fluency alone.
- Reward constructive dissent. Bake thoughtful disagreement into rituals and performance reviews. Assign a rotating Red Team to every major decision whose explicit, celebrated role is to attempt to (respectfully) disprove a recommendation.
- Celebrate often. Not everyone should get a trophy, but small achievements – like asking a thoughtful question or admitting uncertainty – deserve small public praise from managers and peers. This is where EQ can foster SI.

Some will say, “We already ask hard questions.” Often, that means we ask *familiar* questions. Skeptical Intelligence formalizes the unfamiliar ones: the questions that probe the scaffolding of a claim rather than its convenience to our plan. It forces rigor before momentum hardens into commitment. Ultimately, embedding SI in organizational culture requires visible modeling by senior leaders – demonstrating that asking better questions is not dissent but diligence.

The Payoff: Innovation and Productivity

Our research found a strong positive relationship between people who have the ability to employ Skeptical Intelligence with their ability to use AI to generate more and better innovative ideas and to use AI for other tasks more productively.

History will remember early AI leadership in two groups. One waved models and decisions through because they ‘looked right’ and delivered a mix of spectacular wins (great!) and avoidable disasters (boo!). The other built muscle around interrogation – fast, repeatable, teachable – so that they could achieve more upside with fewer blind-side hits. This latter group also prepared for new generations of AI and other decision-making tools and types of information more innovatively and productively.

IQ still matters. EQ still matters. But the scarce executive asset in a world of plausible-sounding AI outputs is Skeptical Intelligence – the disciplined, curiosity-driven, humility-infused ability to demand better questions and resist easy answers. SI doesn’t make you slower. It makes you surer about when to go fast.

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A Leadership Mindset Matrix for the AI Age: From Resilience to Regeneration

By Patrick Lynch

I wasn't expecting a leadership breakthrough on a trail in New Zealand, but it struck me. Trekking through the lush green fern forest, I kept seeing the spiraling koru, a Māori symbol of new life and evolution. Inspiring.

Later, a colleague put it into words for me, "It's not enough to bounce back. We need to bounce forward." That became our mantra. We named our initiative Project Koru, a reminder that change comes from growing, not returning.

With AI flooding boardrooms, I'm reminded of this lesson. The future belongs to leaders who spring forward like the koru, embracing change not to survive but thrive.

Some call this resilience, but what they mean is regeneration. Often conflated, one avoids scarcity, the other attracts abundance. Resilience restores function, valuable but reactive. Regeneration is expansive, creatively building new things.

I see this confusion in how leaders talk about digital transformation. It's often just cleanup: paper reports become dashboards, and processes get automated. That's resilience. Regenerative transformation asks, "What new value can AI create? How can AI do novel things, not just old things faster?" Resilience drives us to recover. Regeneration dares us to reimagine.

To help leaders like you know where you stand and where you need to go, I designed a new mindset matrix.

Why AI Leaders Must Shift from Resilience to Regenerative Thinking

For years, resilience rallied leaders through disruptions from pandemics to politics. It's vital, helping us bounce back and retain continuity. Agile and adaptive, it's the corporate equivalent of a rubber ball, ready for the next volley.

But as AI becomes ubiquitous, ask, "Is resilience enough?" Resilience steadies organizations but won't evolve them. That takes regeneration.

Picture two boardrooms. Both adopted the same AI tools with radically different visions. In the first, executives

huddle over spreadsheets, calculating how many customer service reps they can cut with chatbots. Resilient leaders ask, "How do we maintain functions during disruption?"

In the second, leaders sketch new business models, imagining fresh products. Regenerative leaders ask, "How do we create value despite disruption?" They use this as fuel, becoming stronger, more effective than before.

This shift is happening but unevenly. Many leaders I meet think defensively about AI, "How do we protect our advantage?" instead of "How do we create new value?" They chase efficiency over creativity. Engineering resilience not designing regeneration.

I lived through the 'save your way to prosperity' era when Six Sigma ruled transformation, squeezing juice from the same old berry. Cost-cutting protects today's margins but rarely opens tomorrow's markets. Efficiency has a ceiling. Innovation doesn't. Choose wisely.

Wendy Collins, Chief AI Officer of [NTT DATA](#) recently shared, "The initial conversations around AI were all about improving operational efficiency and reducing costs by automating tasks. But that focus has proven to be too narrow. AI's true value lies in helping organizations identify new revenue streams, optimize customer engagement and deliver better outcomes."

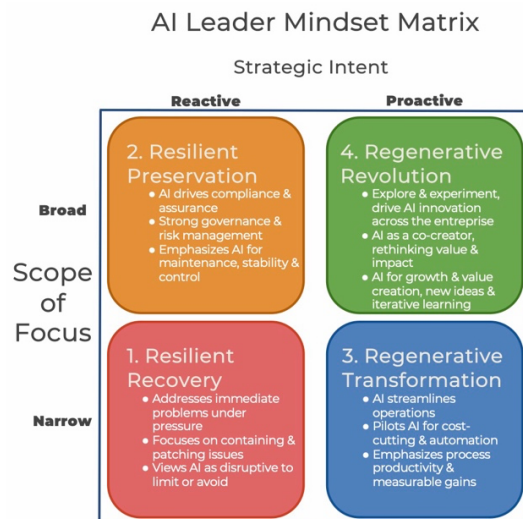
Wendy's sentiment echoes global economist Joseph Briggs of [Goldman Sachs](#), who predicts that generative AI will boost U.S. GDP by 6.1% over the next decade, roughly \$540 billion by 2028. That growth stems from both new activity and automation, mirroring patterns we've seen in past tech innovation waves.

[IBM's](#) global executive survey finds 63% of leaders expect material financial impact from AI, while 85% anticipate new product breakthroughs. In one year, AI-driven innovation jumped from mid-level concern to top CEO priority.

As Jim Covello of [Goldman Sachs](#) put it, "What trillion-dollar problem is AI going to solve?" Jim sees irrational exuberance in AI infrastructure spending to just automate tasks that were already cheap. That's cost shifting, not regeneration.

Unlike past tech revolutions offering cheaper solutions, AI is an expensive technology still searching for its killer app. To justify investment, it must create new businesses, new products, new value.

That's where you come in, a regenerative leader, creating what AI alone cannot.



The AI Leader Mindset Matrix: Mindsets for Strategic Adoption

It's not your fault. Many AI strategies focus on tech readiness. But it's not the tech that needs to be ready, it's you. I recently told a group of MBAs, "I am the 'I' in AI," because it's much more about what we do with it than AI itself. We're facing the biggest change management challenge in human history, yet people still focus on AI. Let's shift from the artificial to the intelligence. That comes from you and me.

Leaders must prepare for a greater focus on the human side of transformation. The consultancy [BCG](#) advises a 10-20-70 model: 10% algorithms, 20% tech and data, and 70% people and processes. AI alone won't transform your business. The real impact comes when people adopt, adapt, and apply it.

So here we focus on your mindset. How you think about AI determines how far it will take you. AI will change your organization. Will you guide that change toward resilience or regeneration? The difference determines your relevance in the AI economy.

The path from resilience to regeneration isn't intuitive. Most leaders know they need to evolve but lack a roadmap. Leadership in the AI age isn't just about the tech you adopt, it's how you think, where you focus, and who you're building with. That's why I designed the AI Leader Mindset Matrix.

The model builds on two leadership dimensions: Strategic Intent (Reactive to Proactive) and Scope of Focus (Narrow to Broad). The first asks, "Do you use AI to respond to disruption or shape what's next?" The second: "Are your AI efforts limited to immediate operational needs or woven into a wider vision?"

These create four quadrants, from Resilient Recovery, where AI is managed in crisis mode, to Regenerative Revolution, where AI becomes a co-creator in reimagining value and purpose.

Think of this as a sensemaking tool asking: "Am I leading from fear or vision? From urgency or purpose? What would it mean to lead from regeneration instead of recovery?"

Quadrant 1: AI in Crisis Mode - Resilient Recovery (Narrow Focus, Reactive Intent)

This is leadership adopting AI in crisis mode, not as a strategic partner but as a tool to patch problems and restore normalcy. The mindset is survivalist: keep the lights on, control damage, stabilize operations.

Charlie, a regional operations leader at an online retailer, panicked when a competitor slashed delivery times using AI. He scrambled to adopt a basic chatbot and automate routine logistics. Charlie's motto: "Just survive the quarter." With AI as digital triage, he solved symptoms, not systems.

Quadrant 2: AI for Continuity – Resilient Preservation (Broad Focus, Reactive Intent)

This leader sees AI as a tool for continuity and compliance, safeguarding systems and ensuring predictable performance. The focus is defensive but broader, planning for long-term stability and risk mitigation. The goal is using AI to absorb shocks while functioning smoothly.

Angel, a financial services director, watched regulatory pressure mount around AI governance. Rather than resist, she led a comprehensive initiative implementing AI monitoring across all business units. After months of policy reviews, testing, and board-level sign-off, 'Better safe than sorry' guides every decision.

Quadrant 3: AI for Process Innovation – Regenerative Transformation (Narrow Focus, Proactive Intent)

This leader sees AI as a lever for improvement, streamlining processes, boosting efficiency, and enhancing existing capabilities. The mindset is competitive and efficiency oriented, but often limited to current business models.

Blake, a manufacturing manager, introduced AI-powered predictive maintenance and quality control. Productivity soared as employees shifted from reactive repairs to strategic supervision. Blake's focus: "Making our people and processes better than they've ever been."

Quadrant 4: AI as Co-Creator – Regenerative Revolution (Broad Focus, Proactive Intent)

Here, leaders treat AI as a collaborator to rethink purpose, value, and impact. AI becomes a co-creative partner, improving processes and redefining the organization's role in serving people, planet, and profit.

Chris, chief innovation officer at a global consulting firm, rolled out an AI agent to coach staff. The system amplified client engagement, flagging biased proposals and diversifying recommendations. As teams interacted with the tool, collaboration deepened and knowledge shared more equitably. "AI should help us do more than scale," Chris said. "It should help us heal."

How Regenerative AI Leaders Drive Innovation and Growth

There's a moment coming when you'll have to choose your AI mindset. Most leaders don't live in just one quadrant. We shift, sometimes by choice, often by crisis. You might lead with bold imagination for product development, defensive preservation for operations. But times are changing.

We urgently need regenerative leaders willing to aim AI at bold problems and build bolder solutions. Yes, [AI is full of paradoxes](#). It boosts productivity while displacing jobs. It accelerates medical breakthroughs and amplifies bias. It enhances security and enables threats. It democratizes knowledge and spreads misinformation.

Some leaders see these as trade-offs to manage: "How do I maximize benefits while minimizing harms?" Regenerative leaders see actionable challenges: "How do I use AI to build new solutions?"

Like the Māori koru, regenerative leaders adopt AI with ingenuity. They see it not as a shortcut but a catalyst to serve the whole while strengthening its parts. They know we must reimagine how we work, what we value, and who benefits. For our AI era, there's nothing artificial about this intelligent choice: Are you a bounce back or bounce forward leader?

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Regenerative Dashboards Using Data to Restore Trusts

By Luis Escamilla

Regenerative dashboards replace static ESG reports with real-time, mission-driven metrics, community visibility, and two-way engagement. By making progress transparent and participatory, platforms like Decide Madrid and FixMyStreet show how live data builds trust. Evidence from UC Berkeley and global cities confirms that interactive dashboards turn sustainability into a daily practice of accountability and shared responsibility.

Why Traditional ESG Reporting No Longer Works

In 2025, DSW, a major investment house that called itself a leader in sustainable investing, quietly admitted its marketing had been too exuberant. Regulators fined the firm €25 million after finding that its ESG claims did not match its actual performance. The slick ESG report stayed online, full of attractive charts, yet the trust it was meant to build collapsed.

If a global institution can lose credibility so quickly, it raises a harder question for everyone else: **what chance do ordinary organizations have when their ESG PDFs sit unread on websites.** When reporting becomes a marketing exercise rather than a source of truth, trust erodes fast.

Annual ESG reports rarely reach those most affected and often serve analysts, not communities. Static, selective data erodes trust. Today, organizations must use data to rebuild credibility through transparency, not just meet compliance.

Introducing Regeneration Dashboards

Many companies attempt to fix mistrust with messaging. The problem is that trust does not come from words, it comes from evidence. Accountability grows when data is visible and accessible. Research shows that organizations that communicate sustainability results in real time are more likely to maintain credibility with stakeholders, because transparency reduces information gaps and signals responsibility (Barkemeyer, Preuss, & Lee, 2025).

A regenerative dashboard is different from the sustainability scorecards that became common in the early waves of corporate responsibility reporting. Early scorecards emerged as structured tools for summarizing environmental and social indicators, yet scholars found that

they often reflected static, backward-looking data and encouraged symbolic disclosure rather than active learning or stakeholder engagement (Searcy & Buslovich, 2013). Scorecards look backward. Dashboards look forward. Scorecards are static. Dashboards update daily. Scorecards speak to investors. Dashboards speak to people

What Makes a Dashboard Regenerative

Not every dashboard builds trust. Old scorecards only track past internal indicators. A regenerative dashboard has four traits.

- **Mission-driven and Visible Metrics.** A regenerative dashboard starts with a clear social or environmental purpose and makes progress easy to see. Daily actions link directly to the mission, and results are open to everyone. Visibility reduces suspicion and helps people understand how their contribution matters.
- **Participation and Shared Ownership.** Regeneration invites ideas and feedback from the community. Dashboards that allow questions and direct input build shared responsibility. When people see their ideas influence actions, engagement deepens and trust grows.
- **Real-Time Accountability.** Regenerative dashboards update frequently and show outcomes as they happen. Real-time data prevents selective reporting, encourages honest progress, and keeps leaders attentive to issues before they escalate. Accountability becomes a daily practice rather than a yearly report.

Real-world sustainability dashboards already show how the three principles of regenerative practice work in action. Decide Madrid in Spain and FixMyStreet in the United Kingdom start with mission-driven metrics tied to civic well-being, make results easy for everyone to see, and invite participation through idea boards and comments. They update progress as issues are reported and resolved, which prevents selective reporting and keeps performance honest. (Fung, 2015). See Exhibit I.

Cities outside Europe are moving in the same direction. In Shenzhen, civic dashboards let neighborhoods track air quality and pedestrian safety, with officials posting quick responses to pollution spikes. The goal matches Madrid and the United Kingdom: turn data into a public asset and make accountability visible. When residents can see outcomes in real time and take part in the process, trust and legitimacy grow.

When people see numbers change, they believe the work is real. If a restaurant claims it reduces food waste but never shows data, customers are skeptical. When a dashboard shows pounds of composted food every day, trust grows. When residents see improvement, they know their actions matter.

A Practical Example from UC Berkeley

My work at UC Berkeley shaped this understanding. More than 60 systems operated across housing, dining, finance, HR, and customer service at International House, leaving data scattered and students often confused. Leaders focused on compliance instead of experience.

Over time these systems were integrated into a single data layer that tracked resident experiences in real time. Students could see how long their tickets took to resolve. The dining team could monitor food waste. Managers could follow maintenance wait times, traffic volume in busy areas, and satisfaction trends. Transparency changed behavior and teams improved faster because results were no longer hidden. Much of this data was shared back with students through a dashboard they could monitor themselves. They did not need to trust promises, they could trust the data.

Although this example focuses on operations, the principle applies to social and environmental data. When numbers are shared quickly and honestly, trust rises. When mistakes are visible, communities forgive. When data disappears, suspicion grows.

What Leaders Can Do Now

Many leaders want to build trust but do not know where to begin. These steps help.

1. Start with a clear mission and simple, visible indicators. Choose a challenge the community cares about and select a small set of indicators that update often and are easy to understand. Show the baseline, current value, and target in open dashboards without passwords. Visibility builds clarity and lowers suspicion.
2. Connect data to real stories and daily actions. Data becomes meaningful when people see themselves in it. Pair indicators with brief examples of how workers, residents, or students contributed to improvements. Stories explain the why behind the numbers and help communities understand what is changing and why it matters.
3. Invite participation and show how feedback leads to action. Engagement deepens when people can offer ideas, ask questions, and see responses. Publish suggestions, share decisions, and outline next steps. A visible feedback loop shows that contributions shape the work, strengthening trust and shared responsibility.

Keep the data honest. Do not hide setbacks, since authenticity builds more trust than perfect performance. Dashboards do not replace leadership, yet they make accountability a daily practice by showing progress as it happens and keeping outcomes visible. Trust will not return through branding. It grows through honest data, shared

ownership, and real-time transparency. Regenerative dashboards help make that shift possible.

Exhibit I: Real-time two-way issue tracking dashboard from fixmystreet

The screenshot shows the FixMyStreet website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Sign in', 'All reports', 'Local alerts', and 'Help'. The main heading is 'Report, view, or discuss local problems' with a subtext '(like graffiti, fly tipping, broken paving slabs, or street lighting)'. Below this is a form to 'Enter a nearby UK postcode, or street name and area.' with a 'Go' button and a 'Use my current location' link. To the right, there's a section 'Recently reported problems' listing issues like 'Raised utility cover', 'Massive pot hole', 'Builders waste flytipped', and 'Vehicle LK14 NDG blocking our garage access for over 48 hours'. At the bottom, there are statistics: '20,827 reports in past week', '46,261 fixed in past month', and '13,248,756 updates on reports'.

Source: <https://www.fixmystreet.com/>

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