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## Leaders Make the Future

### Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

We are in a time of disruptive leadership change. We need new leadership skills to succeed. The dilemmas we confront, the work forces we lead, the technologies we use and our organizational lives will change sharply in the next decade. We must develop new skills uniquely suited to the threshold decade ahead.

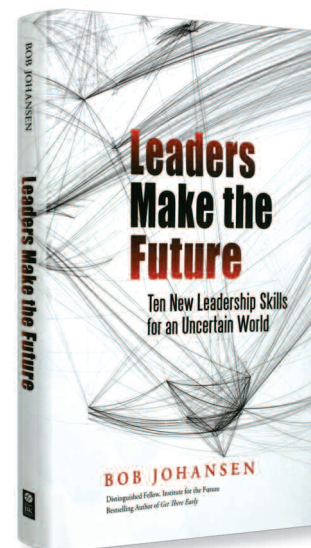
In a VUCA world — one characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity — traditional leadership skills won't be enough. Leaders who combine vision, understanding, clarity and agility can thrive in a VUCA world.

The Institute for the Future (ITF) has been doing 10-year forecasting for 40 years for some of the world's top organizations. In *Leaders Make the Future*, noted futurist Bob Johansen draws on ITF's latest 10-year forecast to introduce 10 critical new skills that will help leaders see new connections through the chaos and make a better future. He also provides role models, tools and advice to help you develop these future leadership skills.

Combining research-based forecasts, real-world examples and astute analysis, Johansen offers help to leaders who need to cope with and thrive in an extremely uncertain world.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to constructively depolarize tense situations and help people from divergent cultures to work together.
- How to immerse yourself in very different-from-you physical and online worlds and learn from them.
- How to organize smart mobs.
- How to apply the principles of nature in your leadership.
- How to prepare your organization and leaders for our rapidly changing future.



by Bob Johansen

#### CONTENTS

##### Leaders Need New Skills To Make the Future

Page 2

##### Dilemma Flipping

Page 3

##### Immersive Learning Ability

Page 4

##### Constructive Depolarizing

Page 5

##### Rapid Prototyping

Page 6

##### Smart Mob Organizing

Page 7

##### Conclusion: Readying Yourself for the Future

Page 8

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

by Bob Johansen

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## Leaders Need New Skills to Make the Future

Leaders must learn how to make the future in the midst of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). The discipline of foresight can help leaders make better decisions today. We need not passively accept the future. Leaders can and must *make* a better future.

A global futures perspective can help leaders make sense out of the chaotic patterns of change in the external world. Looking to distant possibilities can provide new insight for the present.

Leaders need not be overwhelmed and pummeled by the world of VUCA. The future will also be loaded with opportunities. Leaders must have the skills to take advantage of those opportunities, as well as the agility to sidestep the dangers.

The following 10 new leadership skills unfold in a definite order, moving from instinctual to complex. Leaders can either develop each skill personally or partner with someone else to perform.

### Turning the Negative VUCA Around

These 10 new leadership skills are plausible, internally consistent and provocative statements about what will be most important for leaders in the years ahead. The negative VUCA can be turned around with effective leadership that follows these principles:

- Volatility yields to vision.
- Uncertainty yields to understanding.
- Complexity yields to clarity.
- Ambiguity yields to agility.

The VUCA world of the future will be formidable

and loaded with opportunities. The best way to be prepared is to look 10 years ahead. ●

## Maker Instinct

The maker instinct is the ability to exploit your inner drive to build and grow things as well as connect with others in the making.

Everyone has some maker instinct. The challenge is to turn the natural urge to create into a leadership skill, to synchronize the maker instincts of leaders with those of others. Many people don't realize their own maker instinct and potential. It must be recognized, valued and nurtured if it is to become a leadership skill for the future. Beyond do-it-yourself, we need to nurture *do-it-ourselves* leadership. The maker instinct will be amplified by connectivity.

The leaders of the future will be less controlling, since there will be fewer things they can control. They will also be more engaged with others, since connectivity will be required to make the future. Everyone is part of a network. Leaders are nodes, and the best ones are hubs that form, nurture and grow networks that stretch far beyond the individual leader.

### Improvement

Leaders with maker instinct have a constant drive to improve the organizations around them. Both managers and leaders ask how things work, but leaders have an urge to make them work *better*.

Makers like to be hands-on and see things from the inside. The *MAKE: Magazine* motto is "if you can't open it, you don't own it." Open means transparent and accessible, but it also means able to be altered, customized or personalized.



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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

Leaders will grow, re-grow and re-imagine their own organizations again and again. The maker instinct fuels that growth. Leaders will make the future in the context of the external future forces of the next decade.

## Customization and Personalization

In the future, personal empowerment will mean that customization and personalization will be desired and often demanded. Even global products will need to feel local, or at least not feel foreign. Grassroots economic systems, like eBay, will make bottom-up financial transactions possible. Smart networking will create results that will not be predicted but will be profound.

Leaders with the maker instinct are able to approach their leadership with the commitment of a job and the energy of a hobby. The leaders of the future will kindle this maker energy in themselves and in others. ●

## Clarity

Clarity is the ability to see through messes and contradictions to a future that others cannot yet see. Leaders are very clear about what they are making, but very flexible about how it gets made.

As volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity increase, there will be many people wanting to be led out of the mess. Clarity will be a prerequisite for compelling leadership.

The future will be loaded with contradictions, but leaders with clarity will need to see through those contradictions and have the ability to discern what to do and where to go, when neither is apparent. In order to grapple with complex questions, leaders will need to resist the temptation to oversimplify and give the easy answers that many people crave.

Clarity requires inner strength and discipline. Although they will no doubt experience hopelessness, leaders with clarity will still be determined to engage with the VUCA world and pull everything together in a way that is unmistakably practical.

## Self-Knowledge

Clarity requires great self-knowledge, so leaders will have to look within and sort out what is most important to them.

Clarity requires external engagement. Leaders must express themselves clearly in ways that inspire others to follow and be able to make sharp statements about plans for the future with an enthusiasm that attracts others.

Clarity requires flexibility. The best leaders will be

## Four Keys to Clarity in Leadership

Clarity in leadership is the ability to:

- See through messes and contradictions.
- See a future that others cannot yet see.
- Find a viable direction to proceed.
- See hope on the other side of trouble.

clear about their long-term intentions, but very flexible about how to get there.

## Muhammad Yunus

Nobel Prize-winner Muhammad Yunus is a current leader with clarity about social justice. Yunus developed the principles and practices of microfinance to help impoverished people help themselves. His approach is local, personal and integrated with local communities. His model focuses on micro-credit that allows someone with little or no resources to start a business, which creates an upward cycle of receiving income, investing more into the business, making a profit and repaying the loan. He works with and grows social capital with small loans, primarily to women in local communities. Expressing his clarity about social justice, Yunus says, “One day our grandchildren will go to the museums to see what poverty was.”

Clear-eyed leaders will experience hopelessness, but they won't accept it; they will see through it and be determined to make it otherwise. Leaders will immerse themselves in the VUCA world and — even if they become disoriented — find a way to clarity. ●

## Dilemma Flipping

Dilemma flipping is the ability to turn dilemmas — which, unlike problems, cannot be solved — into advantages and opportunities.

Leaders must be able to flip dilemmas over and find the hidden opportunities. They must avoid oversimplifying or pretending that dilemmas are problems that can be solved. Dilemma flipping is the recurrent skill that leaders (many of whom were trained as problem solvers) will need in order to win in a world dominated by problems that nobody can solve.

Future leaders must be able to nurture the ability to engage with hopelessness, learn how to wade through it to the other side and flip it in a more positive direction. Dilemma flippers turn hopelessness into hope.

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

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## Three Steps to Dilemma Flipping

To improve your own dilemma flipping abilities, try these three steps:

- First, identify your dilemma. If you are not sure if you are dealing with a problem or a dilemma, it is better to assume it is a dilemma. If it turns out to be a problem you can solve, just solve it. If, on the other hand, you mistake a dilemma for a problem, you may be in deep trouble by the time you realize your mistake. If others expect you to come up with a solution and you don't, it is hard to recast the situation as one that you cannot solve after all.
- Second, immerse yourself in the dilemma. This allows you to listen to and learn about what is going on within the frame of the dilemma — without jumping to conclusions. Immersion also allows you to look for patterns and ways of making some sense out of what is going on.
- Finally, flip the dilemma in a more positive direction. Dilemmas don't go away, but a leader can learn to reframe them and then re-imagine the apparent contradictions in a way that leads to new opportunities that others don't yet see.

Leaders of the future must revel in the space between judging too soon and deciding too late, leaning toward action. ●

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## Immersive Learning Ability

Immersive learning ability is the ability to immerse yourself in unfamiliar environments, to learn from them in a first-person way.

Variants of simulation and gaming are a practical way for leaders to experience the future before it happens. Growing up playing video games could be very helpful for prospective leaders since serious gamers have the chance to immerse themselves in dilemmas and learn advanced social networking skills. Gaming and simulation are low-risk-high-return learning mediums, if used in a constructive fashion. They provide mind expansion and leadership skill development.

## Online Social Worlds

Immersive online environments can be a safe place to practice leadership skills. Leaders don't have to adopt every model they come across, but it is important that they explore and understand what they can and cannot do. At least, leaders should encourage others to explore online social worlds so they have some organizational intelligence.

Reacting with fear or distain to new technologies and media (and the ecosystem of social and cultural practices that surround them) is precisely what a leader should not do. Engagement with gaming environments and encouraging (not just accepting) similar immersion among those being led will be an important dimension of leadership. Social networks are necessary to succeed.

## Active Attention

Immersive learning requires active attention, the ability to listen and filter, and to see patterns while staying centered — even when overwhelmed with stimuli. Leaders can't absorb everything, so they must filter out extraneous information and learn how to recognize patterns as they are emerging. The difficulties of signal/noise filtering are increasing dramatically as data sources multiply. Generational differences will be apparent, and leaders who have grown up in the digital age will have better skills for continuous partial attention.

Another requirement for immersive learning ability is an open mindedness beyond what many top executives can muster. Once leaders get toward the top of organizations, even open and informal ones, they get more and more insulated from what is really going on. Leaders need to step outside their protected roles to step inside very different experiences from which they can learn. Ideally, the immersive learning environment will be more difficult than what the leader experiences in the real world. Leaders should seek out immersive learning opportunities — especially experiences that make them uncomfortable in constructive ways. ●

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## Bio-Empathy

Bio-empathy is the ability to see things from nature's point of view; to understand, respect and learn from nature's patterns. Respect for nature is basic to this perspective, with a long-term view of what is needed for life to go on for generations beyond the present. Bio-empathy also depends upon a knack for natural thinking and a leadership resilience that draws from nature's ways.

Eating is everyone's everyday link with nature. If we eat with consciousness about where our food comes from, we have the potential to empathize more deeply with natural processes. Eating with awareness is one form of bio-empathy, the ability to learn from nature. It applies to many different forms of leadership in many different ways.

Bio-empathy looks at leadership through a natural filter, in search of the underlying biology of each choice. What are the underlying patterns of nature that could

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

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inform how leaders lead? Nature teaches, if only we humans can understand its lessons.

## Ecological Systems

One characteristic of bio-empathy is being able to see the big picture of ecological systems, not just the components. Some people begin to understand ecosystems through immersion in the natural world by camping or going on a safari.

Bio-empathy is about seeing human activity as nested within environmental stability and vice versa. Our human systems live within natural systems. Bio-empathy is about respecting the inevitable ecological consequences of one's actions and seeing these new parameters not as barriers but as opportunities. To acquire bio-empathy, one needs to be humble and realize that getting in sync with the processes of nature can add greatly to life.

Biomimicry is one example, where principles of nature get built into products. Some buildings in Africa, for example, are designed around the airflow principles of a termite mound and therefore have less need for air conditioning. Energy efficiency can be improved when it is based on models from nature. Bio-empathy can be a platform for long-term strategic planning, capturing a growing consumer market and opening one's mind to new insights.

## Reflect Nature

A leader should reflect (as water reflects) nature. There are many ways to develop bio-empathy, but the first step is to observe and appreciate the natural processes that are always going on around you. Bio-empathy contributes to person-to-person communication. Mimicking natural processes ensures moral and ethical boundaries for human action. Every organization's guiding principles should reflect bio-empathy and express it in organic — not mechanical — language. Bio-empathy takes big-picture thinking that respects all the multiple interrelated parts and nonlinear relationships, as well as cycles of change. ●

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## Constructive Depolarizing

Constructive depolarizing is the ability to calm tense situations where differences dominate and communication has broken down — and bring people from divergent cultures toward constructive engagement.

In these times, many different groups will believe that they are right; some of those will believe that everyone else is wrong. Leaders will need to engage with extreme groups who may not even agree with other similar

groups. Extreme positions and polarization will be commonplace. Engaging with those who are obsessed with certainty — whatever the source — will be difficult indeed.

Leaders need to redirect the energy of a conflict and bring the stakeholders toward constructive engagement and dialogue.

## Remake Polarization Into Dialogue

Constructive depolarization is the maker instinct applied to a conflict, an attempt to remake polarization into dialogue. When leaders encounter conflict, the temptation is to pick sides. Picking sides, however, is rarely a good strategy. Conflicts are often dilemmas that must be flipped in order to make good progress.

A background in cultural anthropology (ethnography), qualitative sociology (participant observation) or comparative religions will be very helpful for future leaders. International travel and living in a variety of places can be very instructive, as can language skills. The more comfortable a leader is with cultural diversity, the more likely he or she is to be able to lead in diverse organizations.

Future leaders will need cross-cultural grace in order to constructively depolarize a situation: an ability to listen and learn from people who are very different from them — and perhaps different in a disturbing way.

## Reverse-Mentoring

Reverse-mentoring is a simple but powerful strategy for crossing the polarities of the future. Many innovative organizations already have reverse-mentoring programs, and they are of great benefit. For example, young Facebook users mentor their Boomer managers in social networking skills. Mentors have traditionally been experienced, often older, people who show the ropes to those who are less experienced and younger. In situations where young people are actually more skilled than older people — as is often the case with the new social media — why not reverse this process? Leaders and soon-to-be leaders should look for these opportunities wherever possible.

Constructive depolarization starts with an ability to listen deeply, engage our common humanity and empathize with others who come from very different points of view. Leaders will need to calm tensions and move through the conflict.

Extreme polarization will be a driving force for the foreseeable future, so leaders will need a personal strategy and style for constructive depolarization that goes beyond picking sides. ●

## Quiet Transparency

Quiet transparency is the ability to be open and authentic about what matters to you — without advertising yourself.

Transparency is rooted in the maker instinct. People's curiosity and knowledge about how things are made has always been there, but will increase dramatically. Where did those ingredients come from? What standards of safety were used? How green were the factories? Who were the workers and how were they treated?

### Humility

Quiet transparency in leadership begins with humility. Leaders should be self-effacing and not self-promoting — as well as open.

Whether they are more or less transparent, leaders will definitely have to give up some control. They need to decide what they themselves can and want to manage, since they cannot directly supervise everything.

Some degree of transparency will be required of all leaders, certainly more than in the past. It will still be possible to keep some things private, but they will be limited and defined by your leadership role. Quiet transparency means that leaders will decide what measures are important to them (and to the people they lead) and then be completely open about those measures — but not necessarily about everything.

### Sensing, Measuring and Monitoring

Outside scrutiny of leaders is likely to grow in the world of the future as the tools for sensing, measuring and monitoring — the tools of transparency — become ubiquitous. Also, it seems that there is more to be transparent about and more people who want to know what leaders are doing. In the future, they will have the tools to do it. Measuring devices will be everywhere, connected to people all around the world.

Corporations and their leaders will be under much more scrutiny in this world. But there will also be new opportunities to work across companies, perhaps across industries, to establish new commons for trading that fit within the constraints of certification. Industry associations, for example, will have new opportunities to use pervasive computing to provide shared measures around important topics like safety.

### Beyond Petroleum

There is one big lesson from quiet transparency: If leaders advertise themselves and take credit for their own performances, they will become targets. British Petroleum learned this when the company changed its

name to BP, for “Beyond Petroleum.” BP did a lot to live up to its new name, with many creative efforts around sustainability. Taking that bold position with regard to environmental policies, however, did little to advance relations with advocacy groups or regulators. In fact, this self-promotion seemed to make people even harder on BP, which was sometimes perceived as a soft target.

This example teaches us this: Do the right thing and be transparent, but don't be self-promotional. Be willing to tell others what you are doing and why, but only when they ask. Anyone who is interested is more likely to see what you are doing and believe what you say. As a leader, you will need to make it easy for third-party organizations to notice your transparency as well as spread the word to others. ●

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## Rapid Prototyping

Rapid prototyping is the ability to create quick early versions of innovations, with the expectation that later success will require early failures. Rapid prototyping enables us to learn from failure quickly, again and again. It is the trial-and-error method that has always been important for innovators, but on a faster cycle. The motto of rapid prototyping is fail early, fail often and fail cheaply.

Rapid prototyping is a perfect leadership style for the VUCA world — where truth emerges from engagement, trial and error — because it allows leaders to try out their own ideas quickly, as well as tap into the maker instincts of potential collaborators.

Few leaders get it right the first time, and it will get even harder in the future. Early failure is often the key to later success. The failures of “computer conferencing” in the 1970s contributed to the eventual success of MySpace and Facebook, for example. This lesson from failure took a very long time, however. In the future, leaders need to speed up the process. As Alan Kay was known for saying when he was at Xerox PARC, “The purpose of research is to fail, but to fail in an interesting way.” Rapid prototyping is all about failing in interesting ways.

### Innovation and Refinement

Rapid prototyping is a quick cycle of innovation and refinement. Rapid prototypes typically have lifetimes measured in hours or days, not months. They are different from pilot or demonstration projects, which often take much longer to conduct.

Rapid prototyping is the maker instinct applied to

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

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innovation. While the concept of do-it-yourself is still important, the next generation of innovation will be driven by “do-it-ourselves” leaders who don’t get stuck on idea ownership since in this process people’s ideas get mixed quickly and it is often impossible to sort out who thought of what.

In rapid prototyping, the emphasis is not on abstract thought about possibilities or plans; it should begin with real people, with the end users out in the field, and as early as possible in the process. It is more about listening than it is about thinking.

## The Innovation Cycle

The innovation cycle is not necessarily over when the product is sold. Leadership through rapid prototyping:

- Is characterized by a trial-and-error mentality with an interest in getting something started quickly. Leaders expect to fail early in the process so they can succeed later.
- Emphasizes experience in the field, rather than massive advance planning.
- Maximizes education by putting priority on extreme speed in learning.

Leadership in the future will be about high-speed, perpetual prototyping. The best leaders will be those who embrace the process and develop the ability to discern the patterns across the prototypes, the ideas that really do work. ●

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## Smart Mob Organizing

Smart mob organizing is the ability to create, engage with and nurture purposeful business or social change networks through intelligent use of electronic and other media.

Some social networks will have intense values linkages, so leadership must mesh with those values, some of which will be competing. Indeed, leaders’ own networks and connections will be their most powerful assets. This has always been true to some extent, but the connections in the future will be amplified.

### Choose the Right Medium

Smart mob organizing starts with choosing the medium that is appropriate to the situation. Most of today’s leaders communicate well in person, but have a range of skills using electronic media. Leaders of the future must have a strong online identity, as well as a compelling in-person presence.

The electronic media are not, by themselves, what makes a smart mob smart. The leaders and participants

in the smart mob provide the intelligence, but the media amplify that intelligence. Powerful collaboration technologies are now practical, after more than 30 years of testing. Smart mob organizing is the maker instinct applied to social connectivity and network making. Solo makers are coming together into smart mobs of makers. All that maker energy has the potential to be channeled in new and highly creative ways, if leaders are able to figure out how to tap into it.

### Common Purpose

Smart mob organizing brings together large groups for a common business or social change purpose, making savvy use of available media as appropriate. They are smart because the media amplify their collective intelligence for greater impact. They are mobs because their behavior is emergent and often unpredictable. Of course, smart mobs can be more or less intelligent — depending on the resources of the members, the talent of the leaders and the effectiveness of their media.

Smart mobs and not-so-smart mobs will become much more common over the next decade. Leaders will need to learn the skills of smart mob organizing and develop their own online presence and leadership styles. In-person leadership will not be enough.

The point is not that all leaders need to be smart mob organizers personally — although it is better if they use the media themselves and do at least some of their own organizing. Rather, it is that all leaders must be respectful and understanding of their importance in the future when they will all need to have smart mob organizers working for them.

Leaders must be smart about which medium works best to deliver the message at hand. ●

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## Commons Creating

Commons creating is the ability to seed, nurture and grow shared assets that can benefit other players — and sometimes allow competition at a higher level.

The more connected you are, the freer and safer you are. Connectivity can only make you free and safe, however, if you nurture it. As a planet, we are searching for new common ground. What is it that we have in common that could make the world a better place for more people?

### Grow New Places

Future leaders will be called upon to create new commons, to grow new places within which collaboration and mutual success can occur. There will be many

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE

opportunities to create new commons between public and private, social and economic, digital and physical. These spaces and places present many leadership challenges because they will be full of dilemmas, some of which will appear hopeless on the surface.

Essentially, the search for new commons is a process of engaging with dilemmas that combine what is good for both the individual and the community. Is it possible to address personal needs and community needs simultaneously? In a world shaped by problem-solving mentalities, having a winner usually implies that there is a loser as well. However, in a world of dilemmas, the potential for win/win solutions is more apparent, if leaders can figure out ways to flip the dilemmas into opportunities.

## Shared Wealth

A commons is a shared asset that benefits multiple players, as in shared wealth. If a team improves its playing field, all the teams that play will benefit.

There are many types of commons, including parks, town squares, beaches and markets. While many commons are clearly organized for the public good, market-oriented commons are focused on providing a platform of shared assets that allow competition to take place at a higher level.

Leaders will have an opportunity in the next decade to reframe and broaden the purpose of their organizations. In the world of global interactive media, companies will have new potential to create both market value and more commons. Companies will be able to become stronger protectors of the commons that are already here and advocates for new commons that need to be created. ●

## Conclusion: Ready Yourself for the Future

Leaders can make the future. Leaders can decide what kind of future they want to create and go for it.

Given the future forces of the next decade, where do you stack up in terms of the current leadership skills? Are you ready to lead in a future that will be volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous? How could you improve your own readiness?

## Challenges

Leaders need to understand all of these future leadership skills, but don't need to do them all at once or all by themselves. These 10 skills are challenging to master, but each of them can be learned and there are many resources.

Foresight is the ability to look over the horizon and

## Creating Commons and the Next Generation

The more connected we are, the safer and more powerful we are — if we realize our interconnections. Through the growing global electronic webs, we are able to communicate and cooperate better than ever before.

The next generation will be the focal point for new commons. Thinking about the world we want to leave to our children and grandchildren gets everyone in a good space to create a commons and make the future.

see the big picture. All effective leaders must have the ability to think ahead, beyond the standard planning time frame. Thinking 10 years ahead will give you a much more robust perspective from which to make decisions today.

Insight is discernment, the unique “Aha!” that suggests what it is that you should do to succeed. The challenge for leaders will be to derive insight from the messiness around them and sense what's important.

Action depends upon the ability to decide on a strong path ahead. Leaders may be known by their vision, but their actions will be evaluated most vigorously.

The best future leaders will have their own styles of cycling continuously through foresight, insight and action.

## From the Negative to the Positive

Moving from the negative VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) to the positive VUCA (vision, understanding, clarity and agility) will be the ultimate challenge for leaders in the future. As leaders of the future, you will need to have all 10 of the future leadership skills in a mix that is all your own. Connectivity will bring the leadership skills to life and amplify their impact. ●

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Leaders Make the Future*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Leader of the Future 2* by Marshall Goldsmith and Frances Hesselbein, editors.** This sequel contains 27 insightful essays from some of the world's most recognized leaders. It aims to help new and current leaders adapt to unexpected changes and comprehend new trends in leadership.
2. ***Saving the World at Work* by Tim Sanders.** Sanders reveals why companies must go beyond making profit and must start to make a difference. He offers concrete examples on how to join the “Responsibility Revolution.”
3. ***Leadership Gold* by John C. Maxwell.** Maxwell shares a lifetime of leadership truths which can guide anyone who currently leads or aspires to lead.