

Sarah Lund Morrison



Sarah Lund Morrison is the founder and owner of SLUM.nu. She holds two degrees, an MA in Communication and Psychology and an MSc in Service System Design. With expertise as an experienced change and innovation practitioner and leader Sarah Morrison has worked with large and small, private and public companies in Denmark and internationally for 17 years - as both an internal and external consultant and change catalyst.

SLUM offers to design & lead development processes with a high degree of methodological expertise and in-depth knowledge of business processes, organization and management. SLUM realizes vision & creates outcomes by unlocking creativity and potentials with a service design thinking approach, use of visual co-design tools, and visual facilitation throughout all steps of the process. Inclusion and psychological safety is integral to the work as well as the foundational pillars to unleashing potential, creativity, foster innovation, realize change progress and behavior.

Creative leadership and visual thinking is the new strategy for inclusiveness and sustainability

Sarah Lund Morrison

VUCA Calls for creative leadership

In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world, traditional leadership models are being challenged. The rapid pace of change, driven by shifting economies, the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and societal shifts like the Great Resignation, demands a new approach. As stress and well-being rise to the top of business agendas, leadership must evolve to meet these challenges.

Many know this. However, it is easier said than done.

With multiple generations now shaping the workforce and new demands for work environments and experiences, the need for creative leadership has never been greater.

Creative leadership moves beyond traditional, linear decision-making, embracing design thinking, lean UX, agility and continuous learning to foster inclusiveness, drive innovation, and develop sustainable strategies that benefit both people and the planet.

The creativity Gap

Despite recognizing creativity as a critical future skill, many organizations still struggle to integrate it effectively into their leadership practices. The Creativity Gap is a term used to illustrate a giant, growing gap between the demand for human creativity at work

and the creative realisation and creative practise in the workplaces of today.

Research finds that creative thinking and problem-solving are the skills of most value to future workplaces. The World Economic Forum is one of them, and in their future of job report they say that creativity is one of the three most *critical skills* required to thrive in 2020 and beyond along with problem solving, which creativity is a driver for. Our fast-moving world of technology, globalisation and climate change demands people to foster and creative problem-solving as never before.

The era of creative innovation is here. And many workers have untapped creative potential and solutions to problems—but we see a massive barrier as workers are seldom in a position where they can give their input or test ideas. Workplaces and leadership have not been designed to foster exploration and experimentation with all that comes with it, failure, critical thinking and learning. This is a huge problem to creativity and innovation.

Visual thinking as a research backed foundation for creativity

One of the most accessible and innate human capabilities we can leverage and use to become more creative and boost our leadership is visual thinking. Creativity and visual thinking are deeply intertwined, rooted in the way our brains process and generate ideas. The human brain is wired for visual processing, with approximately 50% of its neural pathways involved in visual functions. Our human brains dominance of visual processing is why visual stimuli often trigger faster and more profound cognitive responses compared to other forms of information.

By thinking visually, we tap into a natural human capacity, enabling more dynamic and associative thinking, which are key components of creativity. Imagine what we could do if we turned to visual ways of working in line with typewriting, numbers and words?

Research shows that visual thinking enhances creative processes by engaging the brain's visual cortex, which is crucial in how we perceive, process, and respond to visual stimuli. This engagement stimulates creative thought and aids us at work when we need to organize and express complex problems and ideas. The world is increasingly complex, hence a need of many workers today. Visual thinking fosters a form of "whole-brain" thinking, where both the logical left hemisphere and the creative right hemisphere are engaged. This balanced brain activity enhances the ability to generate new ideas and solve problems creatively - this goes for you, and for me.

Even studies show that people who frequently engage in visual thinking tasks tend to display higher levels of creativity. They are better equipped to see patterns, make connections, and envision multiple solutions.

Cognitive science research supports this notion - that there is a strong correlation between the connection between visual thinking and creativity. Visual stimuli do not only enhance memory and learning but also play a crucial role in creativity.

When we are asked to visualize concepts or problems, we often arrive at more creative solutions than when relying solely on verbal or numerical reasoning.

Graphic Facilitation as a lever - grab your pen

Grabbing a pen and sketching ideas, mind maps, storyboards, and connecting elements on a board help all of us externalize thoughts that might otherwise remain abstract. It is a quick and easy way that everyone of us can turn to to aid creativity and visual thinking.

And using a pen is everything else but about looking nicely and about perfection. It is not art. Sketching ideas with a pen is aiding our thinking processes and mindsets as previously argued. In this subtle way we can all facilitate the exploration of ideas from different perspectives together - it is a creative collaboration formula right there and can stimulate creative problem-solving and innovation in seconds - a creative act with very little effort and with the tools available for everyone.

Visual Thinking, Inclusion, and Psychological Safety

So visual thinking, graphic facilitation and creativity are interlinked. When it comes to psychological safety, visual thinking can provide a democratic and universal language for collaboration. Visuals have a tendency to provide a non-threatening way to share and discuss ideas. It disarms power discourses and often hard to unwire stakeholder split in an organisation.

Visual tools democratize the process making it easier for all team members, regardless of their communication style or expertise, to contribute. This inclusivity reduces the fear of judgment, fostering a safer environment where individuals feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and experimenting with new ideas.

In this way inclusion and creativity go hand in hand. Ensuring that all team members, regardless of their background or identity, have equal opportunities to participate and contribute leads to a broader range of perspectives and enhances creativity. When people from diverse backgrounds feel included, they bring unique viewpoints to the table, leading to more innovative ideas and solutions.

Visual thinking supports inclusion by transcending language and cultural barriers, making complex ideas accessible to everyone. With graphic facilitation and a facilitator, it can democratize processes and ways of working driving the culture we need, allowing diverse teams to engage fully in the creative process, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

Visual tools bridge gaps between departments, fostering cross-functional collaboration and enhancing overall team creativity. It takes facilitation but no doubt that using visual thinking is a lever.

Creative leadership in a VUCA world drives DEI & sustainability

In the context of today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environment, the shift toward creative leadership is essential. And visual thinking plays a pivotal role in this transformation, helping leaders and teams grasp and simplify complex information, facilitate continuous learning, and drive innovation as a means to DEI and innovation.

By adopting visual strategies, leaders can foster creativity, integrate diverse perspectives into decision-making, and navigate the complexities of the modern world with greater agility and insight.

Adopting creative leadership utilizing visual thinking goes beyond simply implementing new tools—it's about cultivating a culture of creativity, collaboration, and continuous learning starting with one self as an everyday practise. The approach not only enhances communication and drives innovation but also is a leadership strategy to foster inclusive environments that effectively navigate complexity. And this leadership we can all embrace and bring into play - not because of the title you formally get in a work context, but rather because of the value it brings and mission it sets out to accomplish.

In today's rapidly changing world, visual and creative thinking are not just skills; they are strategic imperatives for any organization seeking to thrive and they can be seen as essential drivers to agendas such as DEI, Sustainability and innovation.

Conclusion

Leveraging each of our human capability to practise creativity and many people's desire to create, the freedom to explore through experiments, is crucial for business success because experimentation is learning, learning leads to new insights and to innovation.

The gap between innovation investments and the actual outcomes from these are often results of a lack of creative leadership. Without leaders and creative ambassadors to guide and inspire others through an innovation process, creative ideas will most likely fail to become solutions. This gap is further widened by stifled organizational cultures, risk-averse mindsets, and bureaucratic processes that paralyze creativity and growth mindsets.

Bridging the gap between the freedom to create and the need for creativity in the workplace as a driver for sustainability, wellbeing and DEI strategies is not just an economic necessity; it's about honoring and nurturing what is naturally human and merging business with what it means to be human.



Visual thinking refers to the process of using visual elements—such as diagrams, sketches, mind maps, and other graphic

representations—to structure, understand, and communicate ideas. It leverages the brain's natural inclination toward visual processing to help individuals and teams organize thoughts, solve problems, and convey complex concepts more effectively.

Graphic facilitation is a specific application of visual thinking within group settings, such as meetings, workshops, or strategy sessions. A graphic facilitator uses visual tools and techniques, often in real-time, to capture ideas, discussions, and decisions in a way that enhances understanding, engagement, and collaboration among participants. The facilitator might create large-scale visual charts, mind maps, or illustrations on whiteboards or flip charts as the group works through a topic. While visual thinking is a broad cognitive process involving the use of visual tools to generate and process ideas, graphic facilitation is the practice of applying visual thinking techniques to facilitate group discussions and processes, helping to make the collective thinking visible and more easily understandable. This approach fosters inclusiveness and ensures that all participants can see how their contributions fit into the larger context.

Sources:

<https://www.weforum.org/publications/series/future-of-jobs/>

IEDP

The American Institute of Stress Top Devs

Leadership Development & Assessment CCL Innovation