

# To understand creativity in virtual work: identification of leadership toward creativity in different types of companies

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## An empirical study that links leadership and creativity in complex virtual work

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- Virtual work refers to people working in different locations using ICT to manage a business
  - The aim was to develop a descriptive typology to identify and describe how leadership in virtual work is made up in various types of companies
  - The study incorporated business-oriented and pedagogical thinking in leadership
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## Theoretical framework

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- Virtuality and virtual work
  - Creativity and collective creativity
  - Creative-conducting leadership approaches in virtual work
    - Transformational leadership
    - Emotional leadership
    - Complexity leadership
  - Leadership with a task-focused attitude
  - The heterarchy perspective in leadership
    - Leadership in heterarchy is shared, collective leadership and an enabler of interaction, meaningful work, inspiration, and creativity
  - Hierarchy as an organization principle
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## Methodology

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- A basic qualitative research approach
  - A multiple case study
  - An interpretivist approach and an abductive form of analysis were applied in the data analysis
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## Data gathering

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- Interviews of 21 persons in four companies in the ICT sector and in one business advisor company in Finland from April through June 2016; 5 female and 10 male leaders and 4 female and 2 male employees aged 20–60 years
- Half of the case companies mostly operated globally, many participants were experienced in global business and virtual work -> the cases aligned with the main types of company profiles that exist in the virtual contexts
- The questions focused on leading a virtual workforce toward collective creativity and interaction, and the outcomes and development of leadership



## Data analysis process

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- Codes -> themes under 5 headings -> 3 separate summaries
- **A rough outline of the typology based the 3 summaries**

Criteria for the creative-conducting leadership (Humala 2016)	Criteria for the heterarchical leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understanding virtuality as a networked work context</li><li>• developing a virtual leadership mindset</li><li>• leading meaningful work for progress</li><li>• energizing people</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• combination of organizing principles</li><li>• supportive interdependent interaction</li><li>• distributed authority to orchestrate work</li><li>• reinforcement of creativity and innovative ideas</li></ul>

- **Identifying each company type** in more detail
- **The final typology** including the key issues



# The outcome: a typology identifying leadership toward creativity in four different types of companies

Type A “Nascent launch pad”

Type B “Collective mind”

Type C “Command center”

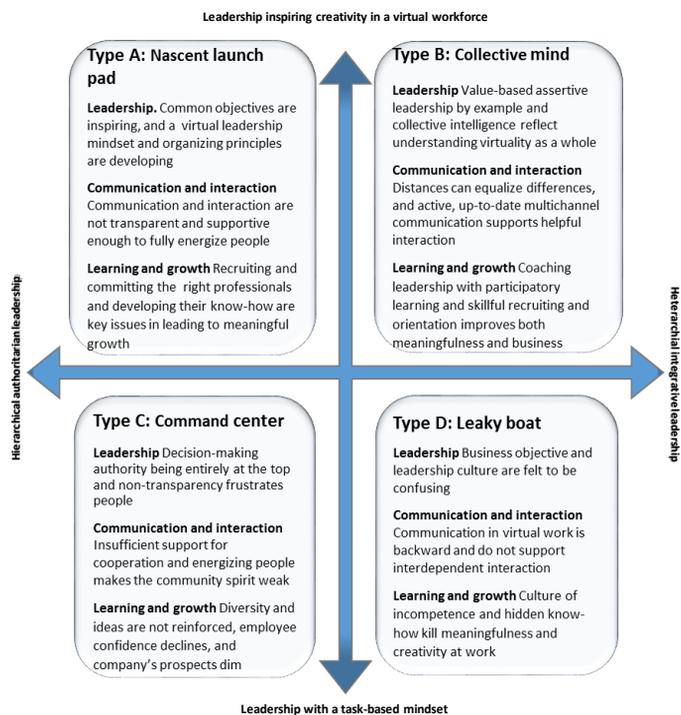
Type D “Leaky boat”

The key issues in each company type were categorized under three critical business sections:

1) leadership, 2) communication, 3) learning and growth



## The typology on leadership toward creativity in virtual work



# “Collective mind” company fosters creativity and major business outcomes

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## Main characteristics:

- shared values
- meaningful work
- collective intelligence and reflection
- transparency
- coaching leadership

## Leaders in “collective mind” companies:

- understand virtuality as a networked context
  - apply distributed authority
  - are assertive and consistent
  - create social bonds through effective multichannel interaction and caring for each other
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## Contribution

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### FOR RESEARCHERS

- improved theoretical understanding by defining alternative trajectories in the transition toward leadership creativity in virtual work
- empirical support to apply heterarchy perspective to lead a virtual workforce toward creativity

### FOR PRACTITIONERS

- fostering creative interaction requires developing leadership, communication, interaction, learning and growth at the same time
  - knowledge how to evaluate leaders’ and employees’ personal work performance in virtual work
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## Conclusions

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- **Humanistic values** are essential in future development of leadership in virtual work to promote their professional growth, self-regulation, and meaningfulness at work
- **Leaders need to know their people** and their skills and passions over the role limits and support utilizing them – and **be interested in the technologies**
- **Conscious reflection** to organize work and business models is a key to navigate in the virtual business environment



## More information

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Humala, I. (2016). Heterarchical ontological commitment for leaders to stimulate creativity among virtual workforce. *Nordic Journal of Business* 65:2, 45-65.

Humala, I. (2017). Typology on leadership toward creativity in virtual work. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management*. (forthcoming)

Keywords: virtual work, creativity, leadership, typology, heterarchy

