

THOUGHT LEADER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

**Cultivating Thought Leadership:
The Content-Powered Approach to
Personal and Organizational Growth**

FRANK WAMMES

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Book Design by Aeyshaa

ISBN 978-1-83556-063-1

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of the Thoughtleader Development Model

When I step onto the stage to deliver a keynote at a grand conference or present to an audience on innovation, my priority is to ensure that my content is not only up-to-date but also relevant and tailored to achieve the specific goals of that particular audience. While I have a set of foundational building blocks that I frequently utilise, one section that consistently draws the most attention (and has prompted numerous requests for sharing my deck) revolves around the insights of my early guru, Tom Peters.

The powerful message prominently displayed on that slide is this:

“Nearly 100% of innovation is inspired not by market analysis, but by people who are supremely pissed off by the way things are.”

This message acted as the catalyst for this book. Between 2013 and 2019, I held the position of Chief Technology Officer for Capgemini Europe—a role that allowed me to facilitate innovation and technological advancements within our company while also evangelizing these ideas to our clients. Taking the stage to talk about my passion was undeniably one of the greatest pleasures that accompanied this position.

However, living in the Netherlands and well known in the Dutch IT industry, I found myself overflowed with requests for keynotes, client meetings, and conference discussions. While this was certainly a fortunate situation, it also presented challenges as I needed to fulfil my responsibilities as CTO for the rest of Europe. This led to frustration for both the people I had to disappoint and my family, as frequent work-related evenings compromised my time spent at home in the Netherlands.

Fuelled by this dissatisfaction (or as Tom Peters would put it, being “supremely pissed off”), I set out to build a broader network of thought leaders—individuals whom I could recommend in cases where I couldn’t fulfil requests myself. I embarked on a journey within our organization, seeking experts who were exceptionally skilled in their specific fields.

However, in this quest, there were always some elements where I saw room for development, amongst others:

- Inability to tell a compelling story that captivates the audience.
- Being too narrow in focus and lacking a broader perspective.
- Proficiency in describing the current state, but inability to envision the future.
- Excelling in one field but struggling to apply this expertise to new or unfamiliar industries.
- Failing to inspire action and mobilize the audience after a presentation.

These requirements may seem demanding, but in my view, they are what truly defines a genuine thought leader in today’s world.

Unable to find the ideal team to support me, I opted for a different approach. I decided to deconstruct the skills I possessed and observed in other industry leaders. Based on this analysis, I developed a program to nurture our talented experts into becoming genuine thought leaders.

I initiated the first “Thoughtleader Class” in 2014, where approximately ten participants eagerly joined. It was an enjoyable and energizing experience that also provided me with insights into the essential skills that needed development. This led me to identify the five key elements of thought leadership.



However, I soon realised that not everyone could excel in all five elements. Reflecting on research conducted by Crawford and Mathews during the millennium change, I found a valuable analogy. In his book *The Myth of Excellence*, Crawford and Mathews demonstrated that successful retailers in the market always shared specific characteristics:

- They Excelled in one of the 5 P's
- Performed above par in one of the other 5 P's
- And were at par at all remaining 3 P's

Argument was that if you excel in more than one area, it would always come at a cost where you would be below par in one of the other P's, which is typically not accepted by clients, regardless of how much expertise you demonstrate in the other P's.

Inspired by this idea, I adopted a balanced approach to grow our thought leaders. As within retailers, thought leaders will also not be able to excel in each of the five elements, and each of the thought leaders will have different talents and hence will maintain a distinct balance.

This model proved to be highly effective, and over the years, the "Thoughtleader Development Model" (TDM) came to fruition.

Surprisingly, this development programme extended beyond potential CTOs. Individuals who might never become a CTO found that through the model, they could enhance their impact on clients (e.g., architects), improve the conversion of RFPs into winning deals (e.g., consultants), excel in managing clients in large engagements (Engagement directors), and drive greater value for the group.

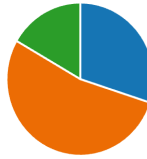
The training has proven to help the confidence of the participants. 90% of participants said that their confidence as thought leaders have increased after attending the Thought Leadership Program based on the model presented in this book. More important, 83% of responders said that the Thought Leadership model allowed them to create a roadmap for their personal growth as a thought leader.

In below picture, you will find the shift in confidence from the participants of the Thought Leader course from the last 5 years.

1. Before participating in the Thought leadership program, how confident did you feel as a thought leader?

[More Details](#)

Not at all confident	9
Somewhat confident	16
Confident	5
Extremely confident	0



2. How confident did you feel as a thought leader **after** the program?

[More Details](#)

Not at all confident	0
Somewhat confident	2
Confident	20
Extremely confident	7
Other	1



What to Expect from This Book

1. Identify Your Current Strengths

Embark on a transformative journey by first recognizing your existing strengths. You don't need to excel in every thought leadership element; the key is finding the optimal mix for your unique profile. Discover where you shine and pinpoint areas for development.

2. Map Your Growth Journey

With insights from your initial self-assessment and a deep understanding of the model, chart your ideal state. Although your journey may start as a mere sketch, establishing a starting point is crucial to kickstart your transformation.

3. Grow Your Skillset

Dive into each thought leadership element with expert guidance, leveraging real-world examples from seasoned professionals in the field. Uncover what it truly means to master specific skill sets. Each chapter is not just theoretical; it's a practical guide, providing examples and exercises to put your newfound skills into action.

4. Leverage Technology in Your Journey

Embrace the future by incorporating Generative AI into your thought leadership journey. Learn how to harness the power of technology while being mindful of its potential pitfalls. A dedicated chapter delves into the intricacies of merging cutting-edge technology with timeless leadership principles.

Throughout the thought leadership element chapters, real-world testimonials from participants in thought leadership training sessions over the years serve as tangible proof. These stories highlight the transformative impact of following the model and engaging with the exercises provided, showcasing how you can elevate your thoughts, amplify your impact, and, above all, find fulfillment in your career.

Are you ready to transcend the ordinary and become a true thought leader? This book is your gateway to unlocking your potential and reshaping your professional journey. Embrace the

path to thought leadership excellence and redefine your impact in the dynamic world of business.

I sincerely hope you find this book enjoyable and that you leverage the knowledge, examples, and exercises within it to enhance your value to your clients, your company, and, most importantly, your own growth as a (thought) leader.

Welcome to a journey of personal and professional growth through thought leadership.

CHAPTER 1

THE THOUGHT LEADER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The Definition of a Thought Leader

In order to become a true thought leader, you must understand what the unique skills are that separate a thought leader from an expert. Let's first start with what Wikipedia has to say about the different words:

Thought Leader:

A thought leader has been described as an individual or firm recognized as an authority in a specific field. From the perspective of a thought leader as the 'go-to expert', being a thought leader means to consistently answer the biggest questions on the minds of the target audience on a particular topic. Thought leaders are commonly asked to speak at public events, conferences, or webinars to share their insight with a relevant audience. In a 1990 Wall Street Journal Marketing section article, Patrick Reilly used the term "thought leader publications" to refer to such magazines as Harper's¹.

Expert:

An expert is somebody who has a broad and deep understanding and competence in terms of knowledge, skill and experience through practice and education in a particular field or area of study. Informally, an expert is someone widely recognized as a reliable source of technique or skill

¹ Patrick Reilly, "Thought' Magazines Weather Ad Storms." Wall Street Journal, Nov. 9, 1990

whose faculty for judging or deciding rightly, justly, or wisely is accorded authority and status by peers or the public in a specific well-distinguished domain. An expert, more generally, is a person with extensive knowledge or ability based on research, experience, or occupation and in a particular area of study.

If you compare the two descriptions, it looks like the thought leader is the “go-to expert”, but with the critical distinction of addressing the most pressing questions on the minds of their audience.

We can also look at it by separating the words “Thought” and “Leader / Leadership.”

Let’s start first by the definition of leadership:

Leadership, both as a research area and as a practical skill, encompasses the ability of an individual, group or organization to “lead”, influence or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations.

What clearly comes out here is the ability to lead, influence or guide. For me that is clearly something different than being an expert. An expert can be perfect in exposing his/her knowledge but does not necessarily need to have the skills to get people or organisations into action.

Let’s now focus on the definition of thought:

Thought is a mental process, in which conscious cognitive processes can happen independently of sensory stimulation. It is a mental event which can happen independently of external stimulation. It is an instance of thinking and is used as its synonym.

Moreover, in philosophy, the term thought can also act as a synonym for idea. If we go to the meaning of idea, we come to the following definition:

In common usage and in philosophy, ideas are the results of thought.[1] Also in philosophy, ideas can also be mental representational images of some object. Many philosophers have considered ideas to be a fundamental ontological category of being. The capacity to create and understand the meaning of ideas is an essential and defining feature of human beings.

An idea arises in a reflexive, spontaneous manner, even without thinking or serious reflection, for example, when we talk about the idea of a person or a place. A new or an original idea can often lead to innovation.

Leveraging the insights of the different wordings, my definition of a thought leader comes down to the following:

A thought leader is someone who, through the process of thought, comes with ideas that through his/her leadership skills can bring people/organizations into motion to work on those ideas.

Therefore, when we are looking for a model that can help our experts to become thought leaders, we need to cater for the following elements:

- The process of thought
- The creation of ideas
- The ability to mobilise and lead.

During my own process of thought on the thought leadership model, I took all these elements as driving forces with me, contextualising them within the framework of working for and within large organisations.

Before we go deeper into the model of thought leadership, it's essential to explore why thought leadership holds relevance.

The Relevance of Thought Leadership

In today's fast-paced and information-driven world, thought leadership has emerged as a crucial concept that shapes the success of individuals and organisations. Thought leaders are respected authorities in their respective fields, possessing the ability to influence and inspire others through their knowledge, expertise, and innovative ideas. While many factors contribute to becoming a thought leader, the significance of content cannot be overstated. Content serves as the backbone of thought leadership, enabling experts to share their insights, connect with their audience, and establish themselves as credible industry voices.

Establishing Authority and Credibility:

Thought leadership hinges on the ability to gain trust and respect from an audience. High-quality content that provides valuable and relevant insights can help thought leaders establish themselves as authorities in their domains. By consistently delivering well-researched and thought-provoking content, thought leaders can showcase their expertise and establish credibility within their industry.

1. Thought Provocation and New Perspectives:

Exceptional thought leadership content goes beyond reiterating existing ideas. It challenges conventional thinking and offers fresh perspectives. Thought leaders often present unique viewpoints, inspiring their audience to think critically and embrace innovation. Thought-provoking content helps differentiate thought leaders from others, making them stand out in a crowded marketplace of ideas.

2. Engaging and Building Connections:

Effective thought leadership content is not merely informative; it is also engaging. Content that sparks discussions, encourages comments, and elicits reactions fosters meaningful connections with the audience. By actively participating in conversations around their content, thought leaders can strengthen relationships with followers and build a loyal community.

3. Addressing Industry Challenges:

Thought leaders are problem solvers. Through their content, they address industry challenges and provide actionable insights to overcome them. By identifying pain points and offering viable solutions, thought leaders become valuable resources for their audience, gaining their respect and loyalty.

4. Thought Leadership as a Source of Innovation:

Innovation is a driving force behind thought leadership, and content serves as the conduit to share these groundbreaking ideas. Whether it's through blog posts, articles, videos, or podcasts, thought leaders can disseminate their innovative concepts, inspiring others to push the boundaries of their fields and driving progress.

5. Building Thought Leadership Brands:

Content is instrumental in shaping the thought leadership brand. Consistency in messaging, tone, and value proposition helps in building a strong brand identity. Thought leaders who maintain a cohesive brand image through their content create a lasting impression in the minds of their audience.

6. Attracting Opportunities and Collaboration:

High-quality content attracts valuable opportunities and collaborations. As thought leaders gain visibility, they attract speaking engagements, partnership requests, media coverage, and potential collaborations with other industry influencers. The content they create showcases their expertise, making them appealing prospects for partnerships and projects.

7. Attracting talents

In today's competitive landscape, thought leaders can be a source of gravity in attracting new talents for an organisation. Experts want to be led by people that they consider to be leaders in their field, capable of taking them to the next level. Hence, having some clear thought leadership as an organisation, and more importantly, some thought leaders known in the market, can be a key differentiator in getting the right talent out of the market.

Hence, we can conclude that in the digital age we are living, where knowledge and information are readily accessible, thought leadership holds significant importance in differentiating individuals and organisations from the rest of the pack. Content, as the foundational element of thought leadership, plays a critical role in establishing authority, provoking thought, engaging with the audience, and addressing industry challenges. Yet, as earlier described, this is not enough. By working on their network, brand and by mobilising others, thought leaders can build their brands, inspire others, and open doors to new opportunities.

The Structure of the Book

The following structure will guide you through the different components of the thought leadership model.

Introduction to the Thought Leadership Model

First, we will address the different elements of the thought leadership model. We will quickly assess the five different elements developed over the years of work on the model and we explain the relevance of the individual topic.

This will be followed by the different proficiency levels you need to reach and how this should be balanced. Mastery in all five elements is not obligatory, but a certain level of proficiency is common among genuine thought leaders.

Dive Deep into the Five Different Elements

There is a chapter for each of the elements where we try to unlock how to increase your proficiency in this specific element. For each of the elements we will dive deep in:

- Introduction into the specific element.
- Explanation of the different proficiency levels.
- Examples of thought leaders that have mastered this element.
- Exercises and tips to increase your proficiency.
- Lessons learned from followers of the Thought leader Development Trainings
- Checklist for each element.

How to Leverage AI in Your Thought Leadership

The fun part of working with the thought leadership model is that it continuously evolves. And in the age of generative AI, there is no way of escaping the fact that this also will have an impact on our thought leaders. Not so much that the AI will be the new thought leader, but it is an amazing tool that can empower our thought leaders and can accelerate their journeys.

In this chapter, I will give examples of how generative AI can help you in your start or acceleration of your specific journey.

Set the foundation



What in your childhood did you want to become when you would grow up?



Who do you consider to be a real thoughtleader and why?



What drives you in your strive to become THE thoughtleader in your respective area?



What is the biggest hurdle you need to overcome to really make your thought heard?

The Five Elements of Thought Leadership

After having defined what the characteristics of a real thought leaders are, I started to think of the elements I wanted my potential students to develop. As mentioned earlier, I also wanted to secure that they could act in an environment of (large) corporations.

After careful debate, and as said after some trial and error in my first thought leadership class, I came up with the following five elements:

	<p>Content: The ability to create content that is forward looking, put into a wide context and if possible, also provoke discussion (in order to create movement)</p>
	<p>Networking: Gathering knowledge as part of the thought leader process, as well as being able to create your network to promote your thoughts</p>
	<p>Branding: Establishing a recognisable personal brand in the market to be sought after as a thought leader.</p>
	<p>Sales: You need to be able to sell yourself, your thought, and your company. Many thought leaders are part of a larger organisation and need to be able to sell the offerings / products of the company. It is their role to put the organisation into a number one spot when it comes to selling. Hence, asking for the deal or helping sales close the deal is a crucial part of thought leadership</p>
	<p>Mobilisation: The important ability to have others support you, help push your thought and make sure that when things get tough (or political), you will prevail and get the right support</p>

In the following sections, I will dive deeper into each element, articulating their relevance within the realm of thought leadership:

Content: Contextualising Ideas in the Digital Era

To be a real thought leader, the creation of ideas extends far beyond the confines of a singular topic. Instead, true thought leaders possess the exceptional ability to contextualise their ideas within the broader landscape of society and technological advancements. In the dynamic and interconnected world we live in, content transcends isolated concepts to embrace the complex web of influences that shape our lives.

Thought leadership demands a holistic perspective—one that recognises that ideas do not exist in isolation but are interwoven with the tapestry of societal progress and technological breakthroughs. Here's why content in the realm of thought leadership goes beyond a specific topic and emphasises the significance of understanding the broader context:

- **Embracing Interconnectedness:** In today's information-rich era, everything is interconnected. A thought leader's idea is a product of their comprehension of multiple disciplines, trends, and developments. Their ability to see the bigger picture allows them to navigate the interconnected web of influences that drive change, enabling them to identify unique opportunities and solutions.
- **Addressing Complex Challenges:** Many of today's challenges are multifaceted and require a nuanced understanding of various factors. Thought leaders who can contextualise their ideas within broader societal and technological developments are better equipped to tackle complex issues effectively. By recognising the intricacies of interconnected problems, they can offer comprehensive solutions with greater impact.
- **Staying Ahead of the Curve:** Technological advancements are catalysts for societal transformation. A thought leader who contextualises their idea within the rapid evolution of technology can anticipate trends and foresee potential disruptions. Being ahead of the curve enables them to proactively shape the discourse and lead the way in their field.
- **Relating to Diverse Audiences:** Thought leaders with a holistic approach can effectively communicate their ideas to diverse audiences. By relating their concepts to real-world scenarios and other societal developments, they make their content relatable and accessible to people from various backgrounds and industries.
- **Creating Lasting Impact:** Ideas with the power to create a lasting impact transcend specific topics. They embody a deeper understanding of how individual concepts fit into the larger puzzle of progress. Thought leaders who contextualise their ideas ensure they resonate with audiences for years to come, contributing to lasting positive change.

- **Inspiring Collaborations:** By connecting their ideas to broader societal and technological trends, thought leaders can attract like-minded collaborators. The ability to forge partnerships and engage in interdisciplinary projects amplifies the potential impact of their ideas.

The Power of Networking in Amplifying Thought Leadership

For a real thought leader, building and leveraging a strong network is a paramount factor in effectively disseminating ideas and making a mark in the marketplace. Networking is not merely about collecting business cards or establishing superficial connections; it is a strategic and dynamic process that empowers thought leaders to expand their reach, gain credibility, and catalyse the impact of their ideas. Here's why networking is crucial in getting your thoughts out in the market place:

- **Amplifying Reach and Influence:** A robust network provides thought leaders with access to a diverse audience they might not have reached otherwise. Engaging with industry peers, influencers, and potential collaborators expands the dissemination of their ideas, maximising the potential for broader recognition and influence.
- **Fostering Thought Exchange:** Networking creates a platform for thought leaders to engage in meaningful discussions and thought exchanges. By sharing insights, collaborating on projects, and participating in industry events, thought leaders can refine their ideas and gain fresh perspectives that enhance the quality and applicability of their content.
- **Building Credibility and Trust:** A strong network acts as an endorsement of a thought leader's credibility. When reputable individuals and organisations connect and engage with a thought leader, it signals trust in their expertise and ideas. This validation is instrumental in gaining recognition as a reputable authority in the field.
- **Creating Collaborative Opportunities:** Thought leaders often face complex challenges that require multidisciplinary approaches. A well-connected network facilitates collaboration with experts from various domains, enhancing the potential for groundbreaking and innovative solutions to emerge.

- **Accessing Diverse Resources:** Networking opens doors to valuable resources such as research data, industry trends, and niche expertise. These resources augment a thought leader's ability to back their ideas with evidence and insights, strengthening the persuasiveness of their content.
- **Leveraging Amplification Channels:** Within a network, thought leaders can find advocates and champions who are willing to amplify their ideas. These advocates can share content, mention thought leaders in their publications, or invite them to speak at high-profile events, expanding their visibility and influence.
- **Navigating Industry Changes:** Networking equips thought leaders with information on industry trends and shifts. Staying connected to professionals at the forefront of developments ensures that thought leaders can adapt their ideas to remain relevant in the ever-changing market landscape.
- **Establishing Thought Leadership Brands:** Building a network helps establish a thought leader's personal brand. A strong reputation and consistent engagement with peers elevate the thought leader's image, reinforcing their position as a go-to expert in their field.

Branding: Aligning Personal Identity with Organizational Purpose

As a thought leader, crafting a strong personal brand is a foundational step in establishing authority and influence within your domain. However, equally important is the alignment of your personal brand with the purpose and values of the company you work for. Strategic branding not only elevates your individual thought leadership but also reinforces the mission and vision of the organisation. Here's why thought leaders need to build their own brand while harmonising it with the purpose of their company:

- **Building Thought Leadership:** A personal brand positions thought leaders as experts in their field. By curating a distinct identity that showcases their expertise, values, and unique perspective, thought leaders gain credibility and recognition. Thought leadership distinguishes them as go-to resources, attracting audiences seeking reliable insights and innovative ideas.

- **Cultivating Trust and Authenticity:** A strong personal brand nurtures trust among followers and clients. Authenticity is a key component of thought leadership, and by aligning their personal brand with their genuine beliefs and values, thought leaders foster genuine connections with their audience.
- **Amplifying Company Visibility:** When a thought leader's brand is well aligned with the organisation's purpose, it acts as a powerful amplifier of the company's mission and values. Thought leaders become advocates for the company's goals, attracting like-minded stakeholders who share similar visions.
- **Driving Organisational Objectives:** Thought leaders, as ambassadors of their organisations, can contribute significantly to achieving company objectives. Their brand influence can foster a positive reputation, attract potential customers, and foster fruitful collaborations, all contributing to the organisation's growth.
- **Embodying Company Culture:** Thought leaders who align their personal brand with the company's purpose embody its culture and values. This alignment strengthens the organisation's internal cohesion and inspires employees to rally behind a shared mission.
- **Enhancing Thought Leader's Professional Growth:** Personal branding not only benefits the organisation but also propels the thought leader's professional growth. As their brand gains recognition, they attract more significant opportunities such as speaking engagements, media features, and partnerships, all of which enhance their influence and impact.
- **Creating a Unified Narrative:** An aligned personal brand creates a unified narrative for both the thought leader and the company. A coherent story, driven by shared values and goals, strengthens the overall messaging and presents a consistent image to stakeholders.
- **Addressing Potential Conflicts:** Thought leaders who harmonise their personal brand with the company's purpose reduce the risk of conflicts that may arise if their individual values contradict the organisation's mission. Alignment en-

sure a smooth integration of interests and values, mitigating potential challenges.

The Role of Thought Leaders in Sales: From Presenting Ideas to Driving Success

As thought leaders, presenting compelling ideas and insights is only one aspect of our impact. Equally vital is our ability to support the sales process for which our thoughts serve as essential elements. Thought leaders play a crucial role in bridging the gap between conceptualisation and tangible results, driving success by actively contributing to the sales process. Here's why it is essential for thought leaders to be actively involved in sales:

- **Enhancing Credibility:** Thought leaders are seen as authorities in their respective fields. By actively participating in the sales process, they lend their credibility and reputation to the product or service being offered. This fosters trust among potential customers, making it easier for the sales team to establish rapport and close deals.
- **Communicating Value Proposition:** While the sales team is adept at understanding the product's features and benefits, thought leaders bring an in-depth understanding of the underlying concepts and the real-world value they offer. By collaborating with sales professionals, thought leaders can effectively communicate the value proposition to potential clients, highlighting the unique benefits that set the offering apart.
- **Addressing Customer Pain Points:** Thought leaders have a profound insight into the challenges faced by their target audience. Their ideas are often born out of a deep understanding of customer pain points. By actively participating in the sales process, thought leaders can address these pain points directly, offering solutions that resonate with potential buyers.
- **Tailoring Content for Different Stages:** Thought leaders can adapt their ideas and content to align with the various stages of the sales funnel. From creating awareness in the early stages to offering thought-provoking insights that drive consideration and decision-making, thought leaders play a pivotal role in nurturing leads through the entire sales journey.

- **Supporting Objection Handling:** Thought leaders are equipped to handle objections and concerns that arise during the sales process. Their expertise and ability to provide valuable insights allow them to address potential barriers and instil confidence in potential clients.
- **Facilitating Sales Enablement:** Thought leaders can contribute to the creation of sales collateral, such as whitepapers, case studies, and presentations. These materials bolster the sales team's efforts, offering compelling evidence and persuasive arguments to convince prospects.
- **Accelerating Deal Closures:** The involvement of thought leaders in the sales process can significantly shorten the sales cycle. Their credibility, expertise, and ability to showcase real-world applications of their ideas expedite decision-making, leading to quicker deal closures.
- **Cultivating Long-Term Relationships:** Thought leaders' engagement in sales not only aids in closing individual deals but also fosters long-term relationships with clients. By actively supporting the sales process, thought leaders showcase their commitment to helping clients succeed, paving the way for repeat business and referrals.

Mobilisation: Empowering Thought Leaders to Make a Global Impact

Mobilisation is an indispensable skill for thought leaders aiming to make a lasting impact on the world. Beyond the presentation of ideas, the ability to mobilise people and organisations around their thoughts is the driving force that turns visionary concepts into tangible actions and change. Thought leaders who excel in mobilisation hold the key to empowering a collective force that amplifies their ideas, extends their influence, and transforms the world. Here's why mobilisation is a critical ability for thought leaders:

- **Transforming Vision into Action:** Thought leaders possess visionary ideas, but mobilisation turns these visions into actionable strategies. By rallying individuals and organisations around their ideas, thought leaders build a unified front, driving initiatives forward with a collective sense of purpose.

- **Fostering Collaboration and Partnerships:** Mobilisation paves the way for collaboration and strategic partnerships. By inspiring others to join forces, thought leaders access diverse skill sets, resources, and networks, exponentially increasing their capacity to effect change.
- **Building a Global Network:** Mobilisation allows thought leaders to transcend geographical boundaries, creating a global network of like-minded individuals and organisations. This interconnected community facilitates the exchange of ideas, insights, and best practices, fostering a global movement united by a shared vision.
- **Inspiring Commitment and Engagement:** Mobilisation ignites passion and commitment among followers, stakeholders, and collaborators. Thought leaders who can galvanise others around their ideas cultivate a devoted and engaged community, driven to actively contribute to the realisation of shared goals.
- **Advocating for Change:** Thought leaders champion causes that resonate with their vision, advocating for change on a broader scale. Mobilisation equips them with a platform to raise awareness, garner support, and influence decision-makers, propelling their ideas from concept to reality.
- **Catalysing Social Impact:** Mobilisation is a catalyst for social impact, empowering thought leaders to address pressing challenges and bring about positive change. By mobilising resources and collective efforts, thought leaders leverage their ideas to effect transformative societal shifts.
- **Nurturing Thought Leadership Legacy:** Thought leaders who master mobilisation create a legacy that extends beyond their individual contributions. By mobilising successors and future leaders, they ensure the continuity of their vision, leaving a lasting impact that transcends generations.
- **Advancing Thought Leadership Movement:** Mobilisation fuels a thought leadership movement that resonates far beyond the thought leader's immediate reach. As their ideas gain momentum and attract followers, they inspire others to become thought leaders themselves, perpetuating a cycle of positive change.

Going through the program will help you shift your perspective on what your real strength is. We always ask the participants to rank themselves before the training and after the training. It is normal to see a shift over the course of time, participants will get a better understanding of the different elements and will find that they might have hidden talents for elements they previously ranked lower.

Content is often an element that is highly ranked amongst beginning participants, but we see that other elements get more valuation after the course.

Below you will find the results of the ranking of elements before the start of the Thought Leader training and the results from after the training.

5. Before participating in the Thought leadership program, what was the element that you felt most confident in?

[More Details](#)

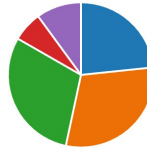
- Branding
- Content
- Mobilisation
- Networking
- Sales








6. **After** participating in the Thoughtleadership program, what was the element that you felt most confident in?

[More Details](#)

- Branding
- Content
- Mobilisation
- Networking
- Sales



Score your current position

	_____	_____
	Beginner	Master
	_____	_____
	Beginner	Master
	_____	_____
	Beginner	Master
	_____	_____
	Beginner	Master
	_____	_____
	Beginner	Master

CHAPTER 2

WORKING ON THE DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS

When I started working with the initial group on the different elements, the question that was raised by many participants, was the level of proficiency needed to be reached. What defines mastery across these elements? Equally important was the inquiry into whether it's feasible for everyone to reach the highest level in each of the five different elements.

This question bothered me for a while. If I looked at myself, I didn't (and still don't) see myself as the master on all the different levels. Yet, there are so many people that have better skills in one or more of the specific skill sets. However, I don't consider them as true thought leaders. Why was that and what perhaps was the perfect mix?

After long consideration, discussions with peers and some good meditative sessions, I came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a perfect mix, but that there are many different possible combinations, each sharing a common thread.

As stated earlier, I got inspired by a piece of work that I encountered in my early days at Capgemini. In the early 2000s, Capgemini acquired the management consulting arm of Ernest & Young. It was in the early days after the Enron scandal, which forced the audit firms to separate their consulting arms. With that acquisition, the group acquired some real good assets and one of them was a piece of research conducted by Fred Crawford and Ryan Matthews, published and titled *Myth of Excellence: Why Great Companies Never Try to Be the Best at Everything*.

The book was based on research of companies and the reason why they were more successful than others. In short, the conclusion is that they don't try to be the best in everything, but focus to dominate on one element, differentiate on a second, and be at industry par (i.e., average) on the rest. Yes, it is okay to be average as long as your customers know specifically where and how you are superior and world-class. If you want to be world-class in everything, you already know that you will be way below par on pricing, since you would price yourself out of the market. And below par is not accepted by the marketplace.

Applying this concept to thought leadership, the same principle holds. You don't have to be world-class in all five elements, but you will be world-class in one, be above par in one more and make sure that you are at par at the other three.

I made an analysis (although not as scientific as Crawford and Matthews) on thought leaders that I know, and funny enough the logic applied to them as well. They were not world-class in all the elements, but they for sure were in one, they always were stronger in another element, but made sure they were on par with the other three.

The interesting part is that this also correlates to one of the better management advice I have received. One of my best managers, Jeroen Versteeg, always said to me:

Frank, I don't want to make your "6" an "8" (leveraging the scale from 1 to 10). But rather focus that you make your "8" a "10". But make sure that you at least don't score anywhere below a "6".

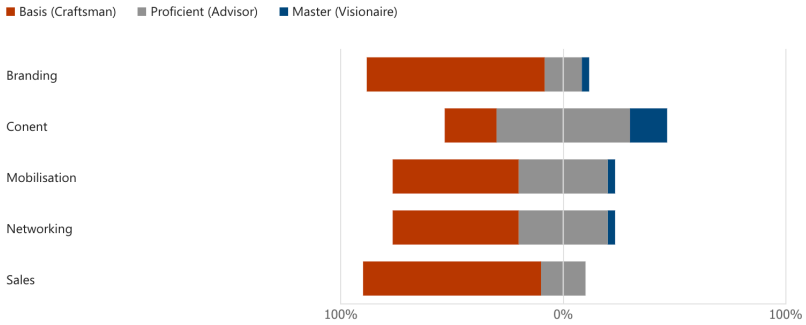
Hence, I enhanced the Thought Leader Model with the depth of the different proficiencies, since it is great to become at par, but at least you need to make sure that you know what par is.

With the help of many people, analysis from the field and feedback from the many participants of the thought leader trainings, we have now come to a proper definition of the different proficiency levels.

For the proficiency level, we also can see the effect of following the Thought Leader program, we asked the Thought Leaders from the last 5 years how they viewed their proficiency before the course and how they viewed it after the course.

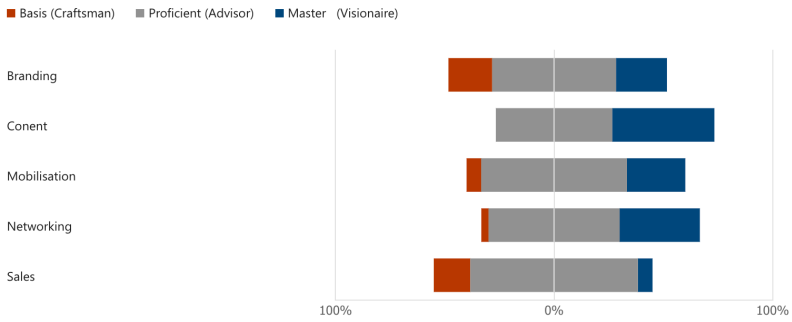
3. Before participating in the Thought leadership program, how did you rate your proficiency level in the below elements?

[More Details](#)



4. How did you rate your proficiency level in the below elements **after** the Thought leadership program?

[More Details](#)



- 70% of responders have improved their proficiency level in Branding and Mobilisation
- 43% improved their proficiency level in Content
- 73% improved their proficiency level in Networking
- 63% improved their proficiency level in Sales

CHAPTER 3

CONTENT: THE BASIS FOR EACH THOUGHT LEADER



Introduction

As I write this chapter, I find myself in Tuscany, gazing at the sunset from the agriturismo where I am currently residing. It marks the conclusion of my second week of exploring Tuscany, with a significant portion of my journey spent in Florence (with a brief two-day detour to Rome) and now venturing into the other captivating cities this region has to offer.

For those fortunate enough to have experienced this region, you must have encountered the same overwhelming sense of beauty and an appreciation for the preservation of antiquity, intertwined with the vibrant dynamics of the landscape and its people. For many, Tuscany is regarded as the birthplace of the Renaissance, an era when humanity emerged from the shadows of the Middle Ages and rekindled ancient wisdom, guided by a more scientific and humanistic worldview.

The inspiration for this narrative not only stems from my delightful holiday experience and the opportunity it provides to embark on this writing journey but also due to the influence of Frans Johansson's book, *The Medici Effect: Breakthrough Insights at the Intersection of Ideas, Concepts, and Cultures*.

Within this book, Johansson contends that the Renaissance was ignited by the Medici family. They played a pivotal role, not only through their financial patronage of artists but more significantly by fostering a gathering of diverse individuals from varied backgrounds, ideas, and cultures.

It was a period when great artists established workshops, drawing together talents spanning a wide array of skills. These creative hubs welcomed not only artists but also scientists, creating an environment that encouraged the convergence of minds, the sharing of ideas, and the exploitation of the “cross-roads” of their talents to generate innovative ideas and concepts, thereby profoundly shaping our culture.

When I deliver presentations on contemporary innovation culture within organisations, I frequently reference this book and challenge my audience to reflect on the extent to which they actively cultivate these novel intersections.

I was already convinced of this concept, but another book by Pentland further intensified my belief. In *Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread—The Lessons from a New Science*, Alex Pentland explores the conditions necessary for growth, which he attributes to the concept of Idea Flow. Idea Flow refers to the way human social networks disseminate ideas and transform them into behaviours.

To foster this flow, Pentland emphasises two crucial elements. Firstly, it is essential to ensure a constant influx of external information. It’s vital not to remain trapped in your own echo chamber but to maintain a continuous stream of information from the outside world. This external information enriches your own database, including ideas. Secondly, there’s a need for an equitable distribution of discussions surrounding these ideas. As you may have observed, many organisations often have dominant figures at the top who monopolise discussions during team meetings. Pentland’s research demonstrates that when discussions are evenly distributed and open, idea flow becomes more abundant, leading to more successful organisations.

This discussion brings me to the relevance of the “Content” element. Experts distinguish themselves by excelling and specialising in a specific field, often resulting from years of experience and practice. Consequently, their expertise tends to be quite narrow.

In my view, a true thought leader applies the ideas of Johanson and Pentland. To continuously expand and enhance their thoughts, they strategically position themselves at the crossroads. They ensure exposure to diverse ideas and fields of expertise, which can yield fresh insights. This aligns closely with Pentland's notion of gathering information from external sources.

Additionally, a genuine thought leader consistently tests their ideas with the outside world, seeking an equitable distribution in these tests. They refrain from simply pushing their ideas as certainties but rather welcome open and honest feedback, integrating it into their thought process or, in the case of disagreement, employing it for counter argumentation.

However, this doesn't imply that a thought leader should always advocate for conventional and agreeable thoughts. They also understand how to provoke and ignite discussions. As discussed earlier in the book, thought leaders are instrumental in sparking movement, so they must encourage people to act. Nonetheless, maintaining an equitable distribution ensures that their ideas remain within the realm of possibility, avoiding an unrealistic detachment from others' imaginations that would hinder attention.

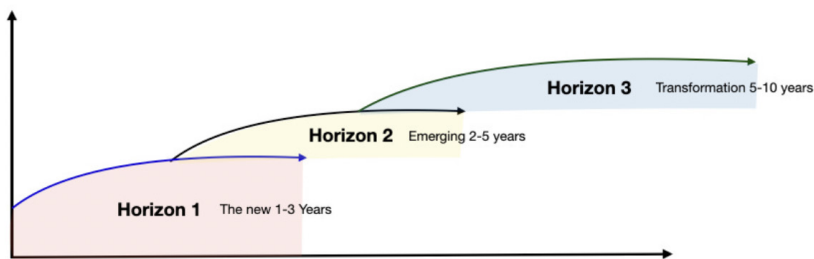
Moreover, a true thought leader possesses the skill to contextualise their field within the broader landscape of global developments. For instance, if one is a thought leader in a specific technology field, they should be adept at situating their technology within the context of other burgeoning technology fields. I once encountered a genuine expert in SAP APO (Advanced Planning & Optimisation) during one of my training sessions. While this individual had a well-established reputation in the market and had truly mastered their area of expertise, I emphasised the importance of transcending this narrow focus. It's imperative to connect this subject matter to the ongoing developments in other technology fields or anticipate its relevance in the context of future technologies.

Consider the evolution of Quantum Computing in this scenario. If Quantum Computing becomes a reality, its implications for the field of planning and optimisation could be profound. Particularly in the automotive industry, Quantum Computing has the potential to be a game changer. Given the supply chain challenges that we have encountered since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies stand to benefit significantly

if they can truly master supply chain management. The ability to plan and optimise the entire supply chain, preferably in real-time, is a goal that has been hindered by the limitations of current computing power. However, with the advent of Quantum Computing, this goal may transition from aspiration to a tangible consideration.

As a thought leader, you possess the foresight to envision this future landscape and will harness these insights to shape your thought leadership.

A good tool for this that I use on a regular basis is the McKinsey “Horizon Model”.



This framework provides three distinct perspectives on the potential growth of technology or your business model:

- Horizon 1 represents the “NOW.” In my understanding, it pertains to the current impact your field of expertise can have on people and organisations. While there’s still room to enrich this impact with insights from other domains or technologies, it allows for a more focused approach.
- Horizon 2 delves into the “NEW.” It explores what the future holds in a few years, especially if a concept matures or becomes more enriched, as referred to in Forrester’s terminology, “escaping the trough of disillusionment.” At this stage, the influence of other developments and technologies becomes more pronounced. It’s close enough to be tangible, yet it demands greater intelligence and imagination from the thought leader. This is where concepts like “the Medici Effect” can play a significant role in shaping your thoughts.
- Horizon 3 ventures into the “NEXT.” Here, we enter uncharted territory, and thought leaders are expected to provide opinions that require a higher level of thinking and creativity. As one would expect, the influence from other areas

becomes even more prominent at the “NEXT” level. This is also where visionary thinking comes into play. Thought leaders need to demonstrate boldness by making statements about what might be possible and the potential impact on organisations.

Here’s where the true differentiating factor of a thought leader emerges, as opposed to a mere thinker. It’s not just about envisioning the “NEXT” but also understanding the implications of the “NEW” and the “NOW.” Although the “NEXT” may seem distant, it’s already evident that it will profoundly affect organisational architecture or competency development. Anticipating these elements five years in advance is crucial for an organisation’s sustainability, sparking the initiation of change.




For instance, consider the use of Quantum Computing in the automotive industry. In the “NOW,” there may be no apparent impact, as the practical use of quantum computing remains unsustainable at the current price point. This could also apply to the “NEW.” However, if Quantum Computing were to become a reality in, let’s say, five to ten years, it would disrupt various aspects.

Consider the example of cybersecurity. Many modern cars are equipped with advanced technology and features like Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS). If the encryption that ensures the security of over-the-air communication to these cars could be easily compromised with Quantum Computing, should we contemplate recalling the vehicles currently on the road? Or should we proactively consider potential implications and safeguards for when this scenario becomes a reality?

These are precisely the kinds of questions that a cybersecurity or automotive thought leader should pose to their clients and engage in discussions around. Thus, the Horizon Model serves as an effective tool for enhancing the flexibility and contextualisation of your thoughts. The practical exercises in the training sessions can aid in developing these essential skills.

The Different Proficiency Levels

As described earlier, we will have three different levels for measuring one's proficiency level regarding content.

	A Craftsman is an expert already in his field, but very specialised and very much in-depth focused on his/her level of expertise itself.
	An Advisor to others on the specific topic of his/her field. Knows to contextualise the topic considering all other developments ongoing (economical, technological, etc).
	A Visionaire that will give prediction on the future based on one's topic. Will be able to describe a "Horizon 3" and can explain what the implication on the short and mid-term are as well as the long term

Basis – Craftsman

A craftsman is indeed an expert who possesses profound knowledge of a specific subject. Over years of dedicated experience, study, and practical application, these individuals accumulate a wealth of expertise that enables them to assist both individuals and organizations in comprehending the intricacies of that topic. They provide valuable insights into what the topic signifies and how it can be effectively applied for the benefit of the person or organization.

However, the expertise of a craftsman tends to be exceedingly specialised, resulting in a rather narrow focus. This limitation means that while they can offer in-depth knowledge and practical guidance, they may not provide a broader contextual understanding of the topic or a forward-looking, futuristic perspective. To illustrate this point further, consider the example of a consultant skilled in implementing SAP APO (Advanced Planning & Optimisation). Such a consultant excels at helping an organisation understand the achievable outcomes and benefits of SAP APO implementation.

Nonetheless, for a thought leader, this level of expertise falls short of the desired standard. A thought leader aspires to as-

end to a higher level, one that surpasses the confines of narrow specialization.

Proficient – Advisor

The role of an advisor involves placing the chosen topic within a broader contextual perspective. Advisors are adept at offering insights into how other developments may affect their chosen topic or how their area of expertise might exert influence on other related subjects. They possess a holistic understanding that extends beyond the immediate topic, allowing them to connect the dots and foresee the ripple effects on various facets.

In contrast, a true thought leader goes a step further. They maintain continuous vigilance over developments that could potentially intersect with their chosen topic. Thought leaders actively engage in research and experimentation to discern how these developments can impact both individuals and organisations.

To excel in this capacity, thought leaders must cultivate an open mind and be relentless in scanning the marketplace for emerging trends and innovations. This vigilance extends not only to technological shifts but also to industry-specific transformations.

Consider the automotive industry, for instance. Thought leaders in this field would scrutinise the Consumer Goods industry's transition from Business to Business (B2B) to Business to Consumer (B2C) models. In the past, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) primarily sold their products to wholesalers (Dealers), but many are now exploring the Tesla model of selling directly to end consumers. A true automotive thought leader actively seeks such references, comprehends the lessons learned from Consumer Goods companies, and discerns their relevance and application to the automotive sector.

Returning to the example of SAP APO, a thought leader aspires to comprehend how in-memory computing could reshape the planning process cycles. They also look beyond the confines of SAP to investigate the practices of niche companies like O9 and Kinaxis, which offer specialised products in the supply chain domain. Moreover, they contemplate the potential benefits of utilising Distributed Ledgers in enhancing collaboration within the supply chain.

This elevated level of thinking and proactive exploration represents the minimum expectation for a thought leader.

Master – Visionaire

When the aspiration is to attain world-class status in the domain of Content, the expectations for a thought leader rise to the level of a Visionary. A thought leader at this pinnacle is not only capable of presenting a comprehensive vision but can also articulate a clear, forward-looking perspective on how their chosen topic will shape the business landscape in approximately five years. This vision considers a multitude of factors, including economic trends, demographic shifts, and technological advancements.

Leveraging the Horizon model, a visionary thought leader excels in describing what the “NEXT” phase will encompass and, more critically, how it will impact organisations. They delve into questions like how this transformation will alter existing business models, what implications it holds for the workforce, and what novel forms of collaboration will be necessitated to address this particular subject matter.

Furthermore, a true thought leader is skilled at elucidating the near-term and short-term consequences that may arise if their vision comes to fruition. This entails identifying any preparatory measures that individuals or organisations should undertake. These measures could range from policy studies and technological assessments to the formulation of ethical guidelines. For instance, consider companies that have already established ethical guidelines for dealing with artificial intelligence (AI), anticipating the growing relevance of its potential applications.

Returning to the SAP APO consultant example, a genuine thought leader in this field wouldn't just offer insights into current supply chain dynamics but would also present a vision of the future supply chain. They would ponder how supply chain orchestration might evolve, whether it becomes more localized due to geopolitical factors like the conflict in Ukraine or returns to global supply chains. Moreover, they would opine on how emerging technologies, such as quantum computing, could enable real-time recalculations in response to global incidents.

As evident, this approach transcends a narrow focus on technology and embraces a holistic perspective of the world's potential transformations. It demands a degree of audacity, recognising that while predicting the future with absolute certainty

is impossible, a thought leader dares to take a stance and provides a rationale for their position. If reality unfolds differently, they are equipped to explain why certain conditions were not met and why an alternate reality emerged.

When we analysed the impact on the participants of the Thought Leader training, 90% responders said the Thought leadership program made them feel more confident to speak in front of the client about a broader scope of the content/topics than before.

Exemplary Thought Leaders Who Have Mastered the Element of Content

In this section, I will introduce a few individuals whom, in my perspective, have achieved world-class status in the realm of content. It's important to note that these experts hail from diverse fields of expertise, and while there are numerous thought leaders I could mention, I have specifically chosen these individuals to provide a more insightful understanding of why I believe they have attained the Master Level in the realm of content.

Yuval Noah Harari

Yuval Noah Harari is an Israeli historian and best-selling author. He stands out as a true master in the art of developing compelling content. His ability to captivate readers and audiences worldwide with thought-provoking insights has propelled him to the forefront of contemporary thought leaders. Harari's excellence in content development can be attributed to several key factors that set him apart in the world of intellectual discourse.

Firstly, Harari possesses a unique talent for synthesising complex ideas from multiple disciplines into cohesive narratives. In his landmark books such as *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus*, and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Harari artfully weaves together history, anthropology, biology, and philosophy to present a sweeping and enlightening perspective on humanity's past, present, and potential future. His ability to connect seemingly disparate threads into a seamless tapestry of knowledge keeps readers engrossed and intellectually stimulated.

Secondly, Harari's content development is characterised by his lucid and accessible writing style. Despite dealing with profound and intricate subjects, he presents concepts in a clear and understandable manner, making complex ideas accessible to a broader audience. Harari's gift lies in breaking down complex topics into digestible nuggets of knowledge, allowing readers from all backgrounds to engage with his work.

Furthermore, Harari's content stands out for its relevance and timeliness. He fearlessly tackles contemporary issues and emerging technologies, deftly contextualising them within the broader framework of human history and evolution. By addressing pressing concerns such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and the impact of technology on society, Harari keeps

his content firmly anchored in the realities of the modern world, fostering meaningful discussions and reflections.

Finally, Harari's content development is also characterised by his commitment to stimulating critical thinking. He challenges conventional wisdom and encourages readers to question long-held beliefs and assumptions. By offering alternative perspectives and encouraging intellectual curiosity, Harari fosters an environment of open-mindedness and continuous learning.

Simon Sinek

Simon Sinek is a renowned author, speaker, and leadership expert. Through his insightful books, inspiring talks, and thought-provoking ideas, Sinek has established himself as a trailblazer in the realm of thought leadership. His unique approach to content development sets him apart and has earned him a dedicated following. Here are some key reasons why Simon Sinek excels in developing compelling content:

First, Sinek's content development is anchored in a powerful and simple concept: the "Golden Circle." This idea, which he popularised in his book *Start with Why* focuses on the fundamental question of "Why" before addressing "How" and "What." By placing the emphasis on purpose and inspiration, Sinek's Golden Circle framework resonates deeply with audiences, making his content both relatable and memorable.

Second, Sinek's content is characterised by his engaging storytelling ability. He weaves captivating narratives that illustrate his concepts and ideas, creating an emotional connection with his audience. Through real-life examples and anecdotes, Sinek's stories bring his theories to life, making them more relatable and accessible.

Furthermore, Sinek's content development is distinguished by his emphasis on leadership and organisational culture. He delves into the importance of strong leadership that inspires and empowers others, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging within teams and organisations. Sinek's insights into building thriving workplace cultures have resonated with countless leaders, making his content an invaluable resource for personal and professional growth.

Additionally, Sinek's content is rooted in research and evidence. He draws from a wide range of disciplines, including psy-

chology, biology, and business, to support his ideas. By grounding his content in empirical data, Sinek bolsters the credibility of his concepts, reinforcing their practicality and applicability.

Moreover, Sinek's content development is known for its optimism and hope. He champions the potential for positive change and believes in the ability of individuals and organisations to make a difference. This optimistic outlook infuses his content with a sense of possibility, inspiring others to take action and pursue meaningful goals.

Rutger Bregman

Rutger Bregman is a Dutch historian and best-selling author who through his bold ideas, unwavering conviction, and fearless pursuit of truth has emerged as a thought leader who challenges societal norms and sparks critical discussions. His remarkable approach to content development sets him apart and has garnered widespread recognition and respect. Here are some key reasons why Rutger Bregman excels in developing influential content:

First, Bregman's content development is built on a foundation of original and provocative ideas. He fearlessly explores unconventional concepts and paradigms, unafraid to challenge prevailing beliefs and systems. This intellectual fearlessness enables him to introduce refreshing perspectives that stimulate thought and inspire readers to contemplate new possibilities.

Second, Bregman's content stands out for its basis in extensive research and historical analysis. Drawing on a wealth of scholarly studies and historical examples, he reinforces his ideas with compelling evidence and data. This meticulous approach to content development enhances the credibility and impact of his work, resonating with readers and experts alike.

Furthermore, Bregman's content is marked by his eloquence and persuasive writing style. He adeptly communicates complex ideas in clear, concise language, making his content accessible to a wide audience. Bregman's ability to articulate profound concepts with simplicity enables him to bridge the gap between academic research and mainstream discourse.

Moreover, his content development is characterised by his unwavering commitment to truth and authenticity. He addresses controversial and pressing issues with unyielding honesty,

challenging readers to confront uncomfortable realities. Bregman's dedication to presenting unfiltered truths contributes to the integrity and impact of his work.

Additionally, Bregman's content is distinguished by its focus on solutions and positive change. While he fearlessly criticises existing systems and structures, he also offers innovative and feasible solutions to address societal challenges. Bregman's emphasis on constructive dialogue and actionable steps resonates with readers, inspiring them to actively engage in shaping a better future.

Finally, Bregman's content development is driven by his passion for creating a fairer and more equitable world. He advocates for social justice, universal basic income, and greater compassion in human interactions. Bregman's unwavering dedication to these causes ignites a sense of purpose among readers, inspiring them to take action for positive societal change.

Seth Godin

Seth Godin is a prolific author, entrepreneur, and marketing guru. He stands as an icon of content development and thought leadership. With his revolutionary ideas, captivating writing style, and innovative approach to marketing, Godin has transformed the way we think about business, leadership, and creativity. Here are some key reasons why Seth Godin excels in developing influential content:

First, Godin's content development is driven by his ability to identify and articulate emerging trends and paradigms. He has an uncanny knack for spotting shifts in consumer behaviour and market dynamics, allowing him to offer prescient insights that resonate with individuals and organizations alike.

Second, Godin's content stands out for its thought-provoking nature and paradigm-shifting concepts. From *Purple Cow* to *Permission Marketing* and *Tribes*, his books and blog posts challenge conventional wisdom and inspire readers to think differently. Godin's ability to communicate groundbreaking ideas with clarity and impact is a hallmark of his content development prowess.

Furthermore, Godin's content is characterised by his emphasis on empathy, connection, and authenticity. He encourages businesses and marketers to focus on building meaningful rela-

tionships with their audience rather than resorting to traditional advertising tactics. Godin's message of putting the customer at the centre of marketing efforts has revolutionised the way brands engage with their customers.

Additionally, Godin's content development is known for its accessibility and simplicity. He communicates complex marketing and business concepts in a straightforward and relatable manner, making his ideas accessible to both novices and seasoned professionals. Godin's talent for breaking down complex ideas into digestible nuggets of wisdom has broadened his reach and impact.

Moreover, Godin's content is distinguished by his continuous quest for self-improvement and innovation. He leads by example, exploring new mediums and platforms to disseminate his ideas effectively. His willingness to experiment and embrace change reflects his commitment to staying at the forefront of content development and thought leadership.

Godin's content development is also characterized by his emphasis on creativity and courage. He encourages individuals and organisations to embrace their uniqueness, take risks, and embrace failure as an essential part of the learning process. Godin's message empowers aspiring thought leaders to share their ideas boldly and authentically.

Finally, Godin's content development is driven by a deep sense of purpose and passion for helping others succeed. He is committed to empowering individuals and businesses to thrive in the fast-changing digital landscape. Godin's genuine desire to make a positive impact on the world fuels his content, fostering a dedicated community of followers and advocates.

Exercises and Tips to Increase Your Proficiency

As you likely comprehend by now, the fundamental key to mastering the subject of Content lies in one's capacity to position their thoughts within the broader context of various developments. This necessitates a nimble and open mind, coupled with the creativity to craft innovative concepts.

While I won't be offering exercises aimed at deepening your knowledge on specific topics, I will provide a set of exercises designed to help you, as Stephen Covey would put it in his landmark book, *The 7 Habits of highly effective people*, "sharpen the saw." I sincerely encourage you to give these exercises a genuine attempt, even if some may push you outside your comfort zone.

The Card of the Shaman

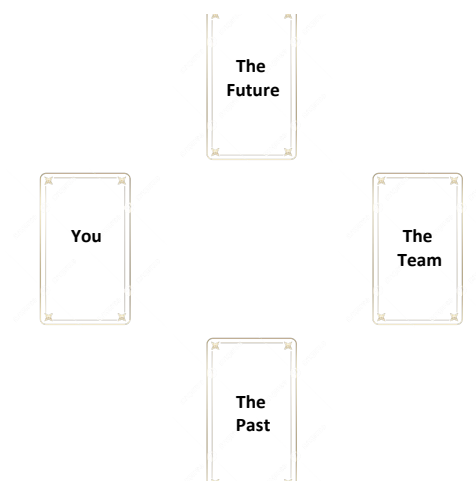
Shaman cards, also known as oracle cards or wisdom cards, are a powerful tool used in spiritual and intuitive practices to gain guidance, insight, and clarity. Similar to tarot cards, Shaman cards typically feature beautiful and symbolic illustrations, each representing a different aspect of life, nature, or spiritual energies. These cards are based on the wisdom and teachings of shamanism, an ancient spiritual practice that focuses on connecting with nature, spirits, and the unseen world.

In a Shaman card reading, the practitioner typically shuffles the deck while concentrating on a specific question or intention. The cards are then drawn one by one, and their symbolic meanings are interpreted based on the reader's intuition and connection with the spiritual realm. The guidance provided by the cards is often seen as a reflection of the individual's inner wisdom and the energies present in their life at the moment of the reading. Shaman card readings can offer profound insights, encouragement, and validation, helping individuals navigate life's challenges, make important decisions, and deepen their spiritual connection.

The use of Shaman cards is not limited to traditional shamanic practitioners but is accessible to anyone seeking spiritual guidance and self-discovery. They offer a gentle and non-invasive approach to gaining insight into one's life journey and can be used as a daily practice for self-reflection and personal growth. Many people find solace and empowerment in Shaman card

readings, as they encourage a deeper understanding of oneself, the natural world, and the interconnectedness of all things. Whether used as a divination tool or a means of exploring one's spiritual path, Shaman cards provide a doorway to the wisdom of ancient traditions and the realm of the unseen.

This self-reflection aspect of the Shaman Cards is the basis for this exercise. Get yourself a deck of Shaman Cards, Tarot Cards or you can even take a deck of Photos. Now create four spaces on the table in front of you:



Now, take four cards out of your deck (blinded) and put them underneath the four elements in front of you. Now try to explain what this card means for the specific position. So, the card that you have put on The Future, what does it say about your future? What reflection pops up and how can you give the card a meaning that says something about your future perspective?

It sounds like a strange exercise, but it will enable you to be more agile with your mind and become more associative in your thinking. This will later allow you to quickly connect dots between different trends, technologies and developments.

Do this on a regular basis and as you can see you can use all kinds of decks, or topics to play with. Also, do this with your team.



In my thought leader training, I often asked participants to take one card and then reflect what the card says about their thought.

With clients, I use a card deck with Technology Trends and let them put the cards on the four positions. You will be amazed about how relevant the cards seem to be. Not by the magic of the card that you have drawn, but by the reflection the participant will have on the card that he or she pulled.

Trend Radar

The trend radar will help you force your thinking into all the elements that might have an impact on your specific topic. We will start with an empty canvas, but you can use other radars to help you in your thought process. Think about the different technology radars that are published by different companies, the magic quadrants from analysts, or any other information on future trends that you can get hold off.

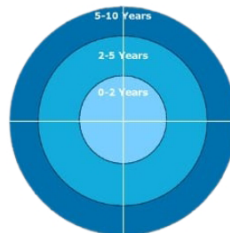
We begin with an empty quadrant that consists of four blocks and three layers. The blocks consist of:

- **Technology Advancements:** Technology is a driving force in shaping the future. Advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, renewable energy, block-chain, and quantum computing will have profound effects on various aspects of society, economy, and daily life. Monitoring technological trends and breakthroughs will help us anticipate transformative changes, assess their potential impact, and adapt our strategies to leverage opportunities and mitigate risks.

- **Demographic Shifts:** Demographic changes, such as population growth, aging populations, urbanisation, and migration patterns, significantly influence the future landscape. Understanding demographic shifts is crucial for predicting workforce needs, consumer behaviour, social welfare demands, and economic trends. Analysing demographics will enable us to anticipate societal challenges and opportunities and devise inclusive policies and innovations to address the evolving needs of diverse populations.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Environmental sustainability is a critical element in shaping the future. Monitoring trends related to climate change, resource depletion, pollution, and ecological conservation will help us assess the ecological impact of human activities. It will also guide us in developing strategies to transition to sustainable practices, adopt circular economies, promote renewable energy sources, and address pressing environmental challenges to ensure a liveable planet for future generations.
- **Geopolitical Developments:** Geopolitical dynamics, including international relations, trade agreements, geopolitical conflicts, and shifting power balances, play a pivotal role in shaping the global future. Keeping track of geopolitical trends will allow us to anticipate potential economic disruptions, geopolitical risks, and opportunities for collaboration. Understanding the geopolitical landscape will help us foster diplomatic and economic partnerships that promote stability, innovation, and international cooperation.

The three layers are based on time slots in which developments regarding your topic are taking place. We distinguish the following time frames:

- 1-2 Years
- 2-5 Years
- 5 -10 Years



1	<p>Take 15 minutes to brainstorm and document as many developments as you can think of for one specific area, considering the three distinct time frames. There's no need to restrict yourself, as there are no judgments of ideas as good or bad at this stage. For ease, it's recommended to use a large sheet of paper and Post-It notes. Perform this exercise for all four areas.</p>
2	<p>If you've conducted the exercise correctly, you should find yourself with a substantial number of Post-It notes across all areas. Experience demonstrates that the majority of these ideas will fall within the shorter time frame (0-2 years), while creativity may wane for the longer time periods. If you encounter a shortage of ideas, leave the paper on your wall for future revisits, or simply add ideas whenever inspiration strikes.</p>
3	<p>Assuming you have amassed a significant set of ideas, your next task is to identify the ones that appear less relevant in hindsight. It's not that these ideas are inherently poor; rather, this step is intended to refine your focus on the most pertinent developments. This exercise will streamline your collection of Post-It notes and, if done effectively, enhance your overall relevance.</p> <p>If you have pins available, affix them to Post-It notes that are related to each other. Connect these pins with a cord. This linkage is not strictly one-to-one; it can encompass one-to-many relationships. This visual aid will assist you in creating an overview of how different trends are interconnected.</p> <p>For those without pins, consider copying the related trends onto new Post-It notes and assemble them on a separate sheet. This method creates groups of interconnected trends.</p>

4	Endeavour to articulate how each group of connected trends influences your specific topic and how this influence evolves across the various timelines. Your formulations need not be perfect at this stage, but this exercise will enhance your understanding of your topic and facilitate your ability to start shaping your vision for the future.
5	Select the formulations that resonate most with you. Over the coming weeks, devote time to refining these formulations. Seek out study materials that substantiate your ideas with scientific research and evidence. This process may demand patience, but it will fortify your ability to craft a well-reasoned and thoroughly articulated vision.

Create your base TechRadar

Geographical Elements

0-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years

Technology Advancements

0-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years

Environmental Sustainability

0-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years

Demographics Shifts

0-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years

Horizon Modelling

The Horizon model is not so much on connecting the dots as we have seen in previous exercise, but more on stretching the mind on where the world might head to. Of course, in light of the object of expertise you want to shine your light on.

Objective: The objective of this exercise is to help you use the McKinsey Horizon Model (McKinsey, u.d.) as a strategic framework to develop a clear and comprehensive vision for a specific topic or area of interest. The model will assist you in thinking about your vision in a structured way, considering both short-term and long-term perspectives.

Instructions:

Step 1: Choose a Specific Topic

Select a specific topic or area of interest for which you want to develop a vision. It could be related to your personal goals, a business idea, a social initiative, or any other area you wish to explore.

Step 2: Understand the McKinsey Horizon Model

Familiarise yourself with the McKinsey Horizon Model, which categorises innovations and developments into three horizons:

- Horizon 1 (H1): Focuses on optimising existing products, services, or processes for immediate impact.
- Horizon 2 (H2): Involves building and scaling new initiatives that show potential for significant growth in the medium term.
- Horizon 3 (H3): Encompasses exploring and investing in transformative ideas and disruptive innovations for long-term impact.

Step 3: Define the Vision for Each Horizon

For your chosen topic, envision the desired outcomes for each horizon based on the McKinsey model. Consider the following questions:

- Horizon 1: What immediate improvements or optimisations do you envision achieving in the short term? How can you

enhance existing processes or offerings to achieve better outcomes?

- Horizon 2: What new opportunities or initiatives do you envision exploring for medium-term growth? How can you leverage your current strengths and capitalise on emerging trends to create new value propositions?
- Horizon 3: What groundbreaking and disruptive ideas do you envision for the long term? How can you challenge conventional thinking and innovate to create a paradigm shift in your chosen area?

Step 4: Align the Horizons with Your Vision

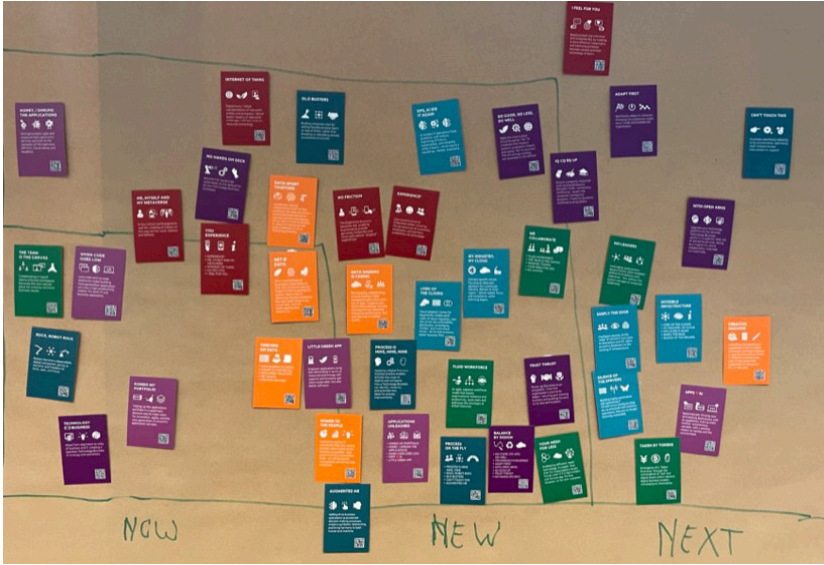
Next, align the envisioned outcomes for each horizon with your overall vision for the specific topic. Ensure that the objectives for each horizon support and complement each other, creating a cohesive and progressive roadmap towards your vision.

Step 5: Create an Action Plan

Now that you have a clear vision for your chosen topic across the three horizons, create an action plan to achieve each milestone. Consider the resources, skills, and partnerships needed for each horizon. Identify key milestones, timelines, and measurable indicators to track progress.

Step 6: Review and Iterate

Regularly review and refine your vision and action plan as you progress. Be open to new insights, feedback, and changing circumstances. Iterate and adjust your strategy as needed to stay aligned with your overarching vision and adapt to the evolving landscape.



Example of using TechnoVision trends on a Horizon Map

Lessons Learned from Followers of the Thought Leader Development Trainings

Sanne Kuijpers –Thought Leader Testing

Nine years ago, I started with a background as a teacher in a new area of expertise, starting as a tester in IT. Within the testing community, one of the emerging demand areas was security and secure software development (SSD). Out of my interest, I got involved and became the lead for SSD within the community and built my own team around that topic. Now I am responsible for SSD and DevSecOps for the entire organisation, locally, and I determine the direction we take on this topic with the team. We are a leader in the global organisation in terms of vision, team size and services, which is why I currently play an important role in this.



My main challenge for a long time has been this sabotaging thought; I am seen as the specialist, but how can I determine a vision if I do not have the confidence that I know anything about this? It wasn't so much that I really didn't know, because that wasn't true. It was specifically about the fact that people's perception of my expertise was different from the perception I had of it myself. In my head, I was the one who came in from another sector and 'knew nothing about IT'. I didn't see the value I added while the organisation clearly did. I suffered a bit from imposter syndrome.

I had to look for my added value; where was my strength? By specifically asking for feedback on my qualities in my role as a specialist, on technical and personal aspects, and looking for my added value and qualities as an authentic leader, I gained more valuable insights into this. I slowly built up my self-confidence and started to 'own' my role as a specialist—acting from my strength instead of acting from uncertainty or what I thought I couldn't do.

I have discovered that a different background can often provide a unique perspective on a subject or within an organisation. I can make a difference through something that is not necessarily directly related to the content, but to how I present or convey the content. My background as a teacher and people-oriented approach makes me good at building relationships with a team and with customers. I am honest in what I can and know (and what I do not) and am always looking for the correct translation of technology to the business and tailoring the

story to the recipient. That is exactly what you do in education; making a message or topic understandable and tailoring it so that it lands. I have turned my shortcoming, as I first saw it, into a strength, and I now consciously use it to make a difference.

Plan your growth !

AS-IS 	_____	_____
	Craftsman	Advisor
TO-BE 	_____	_____
	Craftsman	Advisor

What strength do you already have on Content

Where do you need to develop

Which Exercise could best help and why

Which sources could help you

Who can best help you in your growth and why

What are the concrete actions to you will take

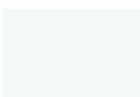
Checklist



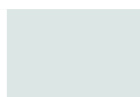
Read the chapter



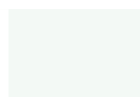
Assess strength & development



Assess what and who can help you



Actions defined



Planned in agenda

CHAPTER 4

NETWORK: INCREASING YOUR IMPACT AS A THOUGHT LEADER



Introduction

As a thought leader, it is your responsibility to ensure that your ideas gain recognition. Building a strong network is essential for this purpose, not only to promote your thoughts but also to receive valuable input from the right individuals, thereby enriching your ideas.

Networking transcends mere socialising; it serves as a strategic tool that unlocks opportunities, enhances knowledge, and encourages collaboration.

First, networking holds significance because it weaves a web of connections that can yield numerous advantages. By cultivating robust relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries, you gain access to a wealth of knowledge, insights, and expertise. Networking provides a platform to learn from others' experiences, exchange ideas, and receive valuable feedback. Furthermore, networking frequently leads to fresh opportunities, whether in the form of job prospects, business partnerships, or collaborative projects. The breadth and strength of your network directly correlate with the potential doors you can open and explore.

A crucial aspect to grasp about networking is that it is not a one-sided pursuit. Effective networking hinges on authentic, mutually beneficial relationships founded on trust and reciprocity. It is imperative to approach networking with sincerity and a desire to provide value and support, rather than solely seeking personal gain. Show genuine interest in others' aspirations, challenges, and accomplishments. Be an attentive listener and express appreciation for the contributions of your network connections. By consistently being a dependable and supportive member of your network, you reinforce your relationships and cultivate a positive reputation, thereby enhancing the value of your network.

Furthermore, networking is not confined to formal events or business environments. Opportunities to network can arise in various settings, including conferences, workshops, social gatherings, online platforms, and even chance encounters. The key is to remain open and receptive to forming connections wherever you go. Remember that networking is an ongoing process, and sustaining relationships requires continuous effort. Stay in touch with your contacts, express gratitude, and keep them informed about your progress. By remaining engaged, you can nurture enduring connections that prove advantageous over time.

In Dutch, the word “net” is synonymous with “just like.” Therefore, replacing “net” with “just as” reveals that networking is Just as Working. It is not something that happens passively; it necessitates effort and discipline.

With regard to thought leadership, there are various aspects to consider. I will concentrate on a few elements that will aid in enhancing your networking capabilities.

1. In which network(s) do you want to be?

It is important to know which networks you can contribute to, or where you can get your value out of. It makes no sense to just reach to people and think that you can just create a valuable network. You really need to think up front where you want to be. What are the networks that can contribute to your value? What are the networks that can give you more insights? This could be industry networks or networks around specific technology topics. It could also be political networks—anything is possible as long as it really contributes to the growth of your topic.

When I was responsible for the SAP business within Capgemini, I deliberately got connected to the Dutch SAP User Association, which later resulted in a board membership, where I represented the system integrators. This gave me connections to potentially all SAP users, always got me first insights in SAP developments, but more importantly connection to some of the key people in the SAP community. It helped me in my exposure into the market and helped me in my branding (will come back to that later). Also, it gave me a lot of opportunities to test my thoughts on the future of SAP and have in-depth discussions with some other thought leaders.

Therefore, it's important to think of where you want to be, and it will probably evolve over time as well. You might want to switch or create different kind of networks in order to increase your exposure and your intellectual input.

When you have eventually found your network, you need to find a way to get in. Here are some practical tips on how to make contacts and expand your network:

- **Be Approachable and Open:** Approachability is key when meeting new people. Wear a warm smile, maintain open body language, and be receptive to starting conversations. Creating a friendly and welcoming aura makes others more comfortable in approaching you.
- **Attend Networking Events:** Seek out networking events, industry conferences, seminars, and workshops related to your interests or field of expertise. These events provide a conducive environment for meeting like-minded individuals and potential collaborators.
- **Utilise Online Platforms:** Take advantage of social media and professional networking platforms like LinkedIn to connect with people in your industry. Engage in discussions, share valuable content, and reach out to individuals who share common interests.
- **Seek Common Ground:** When starting a conversation, find common ground or shared interests. This could be a shared passion for a particular industry, a recent news event, or a common acquaintance. Finding commonalities can be a great icebreaker and the foundation for building rapport.

- **Listen Actively:** Show genuine interest in the people you meet. Listen actively to what they have to say and ask open-ended questions to encourage meaningful conversations. Demonstrating that you value their perspectives creates a positive impression.
- **Be Proactive in Introducing Yourself:** Don't wait for others to approach you. Take the initiative to introduce yourself to people at events or gatherings. Be confident, extend a friendly greeting, and express your interest in learning more about their work or experiences.
- **Follow Up:** After meeting someone new, follow up promptly. Send a personalized email or LinkedIn message expressing gratitude for the conversation and reinforcing your interest in staying connected. Mention a key point from your conversation to jog their memory.
- **Attend Meetups and Workshops:** Participate in meetups, workshops, or local interest groups related to your hobbies or passions. Engaging with people who share common hobbies can lead to valuable connections beyond your professional sphere.
- **Offer Value:** Networking is a two-way street. Offer value to others by sharing insights, resources, or connections that may be beneficial to them. Being generous with your knowledge and support fosters reciprocal relationships.
- **Be Patient and Persistent:** Building a network takes time and effort. Be patient and don't get discouraged if immediate results don't materialise. Keep attending events, engaging online, and nurturing connections over time.

2. The art of giving

Networking revolves around ensuring that people perceive your value and consistently reinforcing that perception. As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Therefore, it's crucial to ensure that every initial encounter holds value. To achieve this, you should know who you are going to meet, where the meeting will take place, consider what could be of value to that person that you can offer, and carefully plan how to convey your message.

Keep in mind that time is the most precious asset a person possesses, so don't waste someone's time; instead, keep your interactions concise and purposeful.

Suppose you've successfully established a connection during that first encounter. In that case, it's essential to gather information about the individual, such as their likes and the topics of interest that made your interaction particularly valuable for them.

Then, log this information. In many companies, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems have devolved into administrative record-keeping tools rather than being used for effective relationship management. You don't necessarily need a CRM system, but it's advisable to find a system where you can record specific details about individuals, points of interest, and most importantly, create a log of your interactions. Establishing a time schedule for future contacts is also crucial.

Hans van Grieken, a former VP of Innovation, once shared his strategy of collecting news articles, points of interest, and interesting books and blogs. He regularly checked which of his contacts had an interest in these topics and sent out relevant content with a brief message. This not only served as a reminder of his existence but also demonstrated his interest in addressing their needs.

Hence, the significance of the CRM system cannot be overlooked. Create your own Points of Value, whether they are articles, blogs, or other content, whether yours or someone else's. You can also introduce new connections in your network to others. Ensure these regular points of interest are integrated into your agenda as recurring items; otherwise, daily responsibilities may become excuses for neglecting them.

Finally, do not underestimate the power of personal contact. If you find yourself in the vicinity of a contact, consider requesting a 15-minute coffee meeting. Short interactions are often appreciated, and 15 minutes are usually easy to spare. It's not about quantity but quality. This is another way to remind people of your presence.

This approach works because humans are inherently social creatures. Providing additional information and making others feel valuable results in recognition. Personal recognition holds a special place in human experience because it taps into our innate desire for connection and validation. As social beings,

we yearn for acknowledgment and appreciation from others, as it reassures us that our efforts and contributions matter. When someone takes the time to send a small message or share relevant information, it communicates that they see us, hear us, and value us as individuals. This act of personal recognition fulfills our longing to be noticed and understood, fostering a sense of belonging and significance.

Receiving personal recognition triggers positive emotional responses, such as happiness, gratitude, and a sense of being valued. Knowing that others pay attention to our interests, achievements, or challenges can uplift our spirits and boost our self-esteem. Personal recognition reinforces our worth and strengthens the belief that our presence and efforts impact the lives of others.

Moreover, personal recognition enhances relationships by demonstrating care and thoughtfulness. It forges connections beyond transactional interactions, establishing a foundation of trust and mutual respect. People appreciate personal recognition because it signifies that they are seen as unique individuals with their own stories and experiences, rather than just a means to an end.

In a world where interactions can often seem superficial or fleeting, personal recognition stands out as a powerful means of establishing genuine connections. It allows us to break through the noise and engage with others on a meaningful level. Personal acknowledgment requires empathy and understanding, making the recipient feel valued and cared for.

3. **When to ask for a return**

Building a strong network is not just about receiving help and support; it's also about fostering a spirit of reciprocity and giving back. While there are no hard and fast rules on when to ask for a return of favour, it is essential to approach this delicately and considerately. Timing, context, and the nature of the relationship play crucial roles in determining when it's appropriate to seek assistance in return.

Establish a Relationship First: Before asking for a return of favour, focus on building a genuine and mutually beneficial relationship with the individuals in your network. Invest time in getting to know them, understanding their needs and interests,

and offering support when possible. A strong foundation of trust and goodwill is essential for successful reciprocation.

Consider the Timing: Be mindful of when you ask for a return of favour. Ideally, it's best to wait until the relationship has matured, and the individual feels comfortable with you. Avoid rushing or immediately seeking something in return after a single interaction. Allow the connection to grow naturally over time.

Be Clear and Specific: When the time comes to ask for a favour in return, be clear and specific about what you need. Clearly articulate your request, explaining how it aligns with their expertise or interests. Avoid making vague or open-ended requests that may seem burdensome or unclear.

Offer Value in Return: Demonstrate that you value the relationship by offering something in return. Whether it's sharing relevant information, providing assistance on a project, or simply expressing gratitude, reciprocate the support you have received whenever possible.

Respect Boundaries: Respect the boundaries and limitations of your contacts. Be understanding if they are unable to fulfil your request due to time constraints or other commitments. A gracious and understanding attitude will strengthen the relationship, even if they are unable to help at that particular moment.

Show Genuine Appreciation: Regardless of the outcome, always express sincere gratitude for any help or support you receive. Acknowledge their efforts, and let them know that their assistance is valued and appreciated. A genuine show of appreciation strengthens the bond between you and encourages continued reciprocity.

4. How can you leverage the insights of your network?

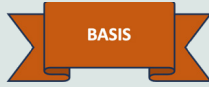
Your network is not only to make your thought heard. It also acts as a way to make your thoughts more precise, richer and you can test it. Testing an idea before fully launching it can be a critical step in ensuring its success. Your network, comprising diverse individuals with varied perspectives and expertise, can serve as an invaluable resource for idea validation. Here's how to effectively use your network to test an idea and unlock valuable insights:

- **Tap into Diverse Perspectives:** Your network likely includes friends, colleagues, mentors, and industry peers from different backgrounds and experiences. Engaging with this diverse group can provide you with a broad range of perspectives, highlighting potential blind spots and identifying opportunities you may have overlooked.
- **Seek Honest Feedback:** Encourage candid feedback from your network. While it may be tempting to seek validation, genuine insights come from honest assessments. Embrace constructive criticism and use it as a springboard for improvement.
- **Define Your Objectives:** Clearly articulate what you aim to achieve with your idea, whether it's solving a problem, addressing a specific need, or exploring new possibilities. By sharing your objectives, you enable your network to provide more targeted and relevant feedback.
- **Choose the Right Platform:** Select the most suitable platform or medium to reach out to your network. Whether it's in-person conversations, virtual meetings, email surveys, or social media polls, consider what works best for your audience.
- **Provide Context:** When presenting your idea, offer the necessary context to ensure your network understands the concept fully. Context helps them see the bigger picture and make informed assessments.
- **Ask Specific Questions:** Instead of seeking generic feedback, ask targeted questions that address particular aspects of your idea. For instance, inquire about potential challenges, market viability, or areas for improvement. Specific questions yield more actionable insights.
- **Embrace Iteration:** Be open to refining your idea based on the feedback received. Iteration is a natural part of the testing process, and incorporating valuable suggestions from your network can significantly enhance your idea's potential.
- **Show Appreciation:** Gratitude goes a long way in maintaining a positive and supportive network. Express genuine appreciation for the time and insights provided by those who participate in idea testing.

- **Respect Boundaries:** Be mindful of individuals who may not be comfortable sharing feedback or may have time constraints. Respect their boundaries and never pressure anyone to engage.
- **Maintain Relationships:** Idea testing is not just a one-time transaction; it's an ongoing process. Nurture your relationships within your network beyond the testing phase, as they can continue to be valuable sources of advice and support in your journey.

The Different Proficiency Levels

As previously explained, we will implement three distinct proficiency levels to assess one's expertise in relation to content.



A **Novice Networker**: This level signifies individuals who are new to the realm of networking, just starting to actively build a network. They have enough LinkedIn connections but they haven't actively managed these connections or proactively expanded their network.



A **Proficient Connector**: At this stage, the person has a good insight on which network(s) is relevant for him/her. Seeks out new people to connect with and makes sure to connect on regular basis.



A **Master Collaborator**: These individuals possess a vast and diverse network, excel in nurturing and leveraging relationships, and are adept at fostering collaboration and mutual support.

Novice Networker:

This level characterises individuals who are just embarking on their networking journey and are relatively new to the practice of networking. Novice networkers may feel hesitant about reaching out to others, lack confidence in establishing connections, and are still in the process of grasping the fundamentals of effective networking. They are yet to identify the most suitable networks to lend relevance to their ideas.

While they may have accumulated a considerable number of LinkedIn connections due to their profession and expertise, there is no active management of their network, and they have not proactively sought to expand it.

Proficient Connector:

At this stage, individuals have gained more experience and proficiency in networking. Proficient connectors actively participate in their network, actively seek opportunities to broaden their connections, and exhibit an understanding of the value inherent in fostering meaningful relationships. They have put more thought into identifying the right networks to engage with.

At this level, there is already some active management of existing connections, and a greater degree of proactivity in reaching out to the network, although networking is not yet managed as a full-fledged “profession.” The individual has not yet leveraged tools and has not planned their network activities in a systematic manner.

At this level, there may still be an imbalance between “giving” and “taking.” The power of leveraging one’s network is not yet fully developed, representing a missed opportunity for the thought leader to expand their exposure. Additionally, it’s a missed opportunity for their network counterparts to receive recognition and appreciation for their perspectives.

Master Collaborator:

Master collaborators are at the pinnacle of networking maturity and have elevated their networking skills to an expert level. They actively pursue various networks, possess the ability to connect people effectively, manage their value contributions, and ensure that they are consistently visible and heard within their network.

Furthermore, thought leaders at this level not only provide value to their network but also understand that network members appreciate being asked for favours. This might involve seeking a review of an article they have written, requesting an opportunity to give a speech to showcase the insights of their network members, or even seeking personal advice.

There is a continuous give-and-take dynamic, but it occurs at a subtle level. It is not perceived as a significant request but rather a natural way of working and engaging with one another.

Exemplary Thought Leaders Who Have Mastered This Element

In this section, I will highlight a few individuals whom I consider to be world-class experts in the field of networking. It's worth noting that there are many more accomplished individuals in this field, and you may find some notable omissions. However, I have chosen to focus on these individuals to provide a deeper understanding of why I believe they have attained the master level of expertise in networking.

Tony Robbins

Tony Robbins is widely regarded as a master in networking due to his exceptional ability to connect with people on a deep and meaningful level. As a renowned life coach, motivational speaker, and entrepreneur, Robbins has built a vast and influential network that spans across industries and continents.

One of the key reasons for his networking prowess is his genuine interest in others. Robbins is a skilled listener, and he makes a conscious effort to understand the challenges, aspirations, and motivations of the people he meets. By demonstrating empathy and compassion, he creates a sense of trust and rapport with his connections, making them feel valued and understood.

Additionally, Robbins is known for his magnetic personality and captivating communication skills. His ability to engage and inspire audiences has earned him a devoted following of fans and admirers. This charisma not only attracts individuals to his network but also encourages them to stay engaged and connected.

Moreover, Robbins leverages his networking skills to collaborate with a diverse range of experts and thought leaders. He actively seeks out opportunities to learn from others and shares his insights and experiences generously. By fostering these collaborative relationships, he continuously expands his knowledge and influence.

Finally, Robbins understands the power of reciprocity in networking. He actively contributes value to his connections, whether through his motivational content, educational programs, or philanthropic efforts. By giving back to his network,

he reinforces the sense of community and mutual support among its members.

Tim Ferris

Tim Ferriss is recognised as a master in networking due to his exceptional ability to connect with experts, thought leaders, and influencers across various fields. As a successful author, entrepreneur, and podcast host, Ferriss has built a powerful and influential network that has contributed significantly to his success.

One of the key factors in Ferriss's networking success is his insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. He actively seeks out individuals who are experts in their respective fields and engages in meaningful conversations with them. By demonstrating a genuine interest in their work and insights, Ferriss establishes rapport and builds lasting connections.

Furthermore, Ferriss is known for his strategic approach to networking. He is intentional in choosing whom he connects with and how he can provide value to them in return. His podcasts and books often feature interviews and case studies with influential individuals, showcasing their expertise and giving them a platform to share their knowledge.

Additionally, Ferriss is skilled in leveraging technology and social media to expand his network and engage with his audience. His active presence on various platforms allows him to reach a global audience and connect with people from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, Ferriss is not afraid to step out of his comfort zone to meet new people and explore different industries. He actively seeks out opportunities to attend conferences, workshops, and events where he can network with like-minded individuals and potential collaborators.

Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey is undoubtedly a master in networking, and her exceptional ability to connect with people from all walks of life has been instrumental in shaping her extraordinary career and influence. As a media mogul, talk show host, actress, and philanthropist, Oprah's networking skills have been a driving force behind her success.

One of the key reasons for Oprah's networking prowess is her genuine and compassionate nature. She has a unique ability to empathise with others and genuinely connect with people on a personal level. This authentic approach makes her relatable and trustworthy, allowing her to build strong and lasting relationships with her guests, audience, and influential figures.

Moreover, Oprah is known for her active listening skills. During her talk show career, she adeptly listened to her guests' stories and demonstrated a deep understanding of their experiences. This ability to listen and connect with others on an emotional level has endeared her to millions and earned her respect within the industry.

Additionally, Oprah is a master at utilising her platform to elevate others. Through her talk show and media empire, she has provided a platform for countless individuals, experts, and artists to share their stories and talents with the world. This generous approach to networking has created a network of loyal collaborators and supporters.

Finally, Oprah's philanthropic efforts have allowed her to connect with changemakers and leaders in various fields. Her charitable initiatives and support for various causes have not only expanded her network but also empowered her to make a positive impact on communities worldwide.

Sheryl Sandberg

Sheryl Sandberg is widely recognised as a master in networking, and her exceptional ability to build and leverage connections has played a significant role in her successful career as a technology executive and business leader. As the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and an advocate for gender equality, Sandberg's networking skills have been instrumental in shaping her impact and influence.

One of the key factors in Sandberg's networking success is her natural charisma and approachable demeanour. She is known for her ability to connect with people from all levels of the organisation and across industries, making her relatable and respected by colleagues and business leaders alike.

Moreover, Sandberg is a strategic and intentional networker. She actively seeks out opportunities to build relationships with influential individuals, industry peers, and thought leaders. Her

networking efforts extend beyond her professional circles, as she actively engages with women's organisations, non-profits, and educational institutions.

Additionally, Sandberg is skilled at using her network to drive positive change and advocate for causes she is passionate about. Through her Lean In initiative and advocacy for women's empowerment, she has leveraged her network to amplify her message and create a broader impact.

Finally, Sandberg's genuine interest in people and their stories allows her to build authentic connections. She is known for actively listening to others, seeking to understand their lived experiences and perspectives, and offering support and mentorship when needed.

Exercises and Tips to Increase Your Proficiency

Regarding networking, I will provide practical tools and tips on how to effectively manage and expand your network.

Tools to Help You Manage Your Network

To list interests of people and help schedule moments to send them items of value, you can use a combination of the following tools:

- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software:** A CRM tool allows you to store and manage customer information, including interests, preferences, and interaction history. It helps you keep track of your contacts, segment them based on interests, and schedule personalised interactions.
- **Email Marketing Software:** Use email marketing platforms like Mailchimp, Constant Contact, or HubSpot to send tailored content and updates to your contacts. These tools often provide automation features, enabling you to schedule emails based on specific triggers or events.
- **Social Media Listening Tools:** Social media listening tools like Hootsuite, Sprout Social, or Mention can help you monitor your contacts' interests and engagement on various social platforms. By understanding what they are talking about, you can share relevant content at the right time.
- **Survey and Feedback Tools:** Tools like SurveyMonkey, Typeform, or Google Forms allow you to create surveys to gather feedback and insights from your contacts. Understanding their preferences directly from them can help you tailor your content and offerings better.
- **Content Curation Tools:** Tools like Feedly or Pocket can help you discover and curate relevant content from various sources. By organising content according to your contacts' interests, you can easily share valuable resources with them.
- **Calendar and Scheduling Apps:** Use calendar apps like Google Calendar or Microsoft Outlook to schedule specific moments to reach out to your contacts with valuable items. Set reminders for follow-ups and personalised interactions.

- **Personalisation Tools:** Consider using personalisation software or plugins to tailor content based on individual preferences. Tools like RightMessage or Evergage help deliver personalised content and offers to different segments of your audience.
- **Note-taking and Organisation Apps:** Apps like Evernote or OneNote can help you keep track of specific interests and preferences of your contacts, making it easier to send them personalized items of value.

Remember that effective networking is about building genuine connections and providing value to others. Use these tools to understand your contacts' interests better and tailor your interactions accordingly. Always be respectful of their time and preferences, and focus on delivering meaningful content and value to foster long-term relationships.

Personal, Handwritten Card

One of the most potent tools for nurturing and sustaining your network is the humble handwritten card. While Christmas is a significant occasion in many parts of the world, this gesture can be extended to other meaningful moments as well. Whether it's a birthday, a religious holiday, or an important milestone in someone's life, a handwritten card can have a lasting impact. In the Netherlands, my company had a tradition of sending a teddy bear or a baby towel to celebrate the birth of a child, and this simple act left a profound impression on the recipients.

The handwritten card carries several key elements within it. First, it demonstrates the effort you're willing to invest in writing a personalised message. In today's digital age, this act is increasingly rare and, as a result, even more special than sending an electronic email. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to convey a personal message. You can express your appreciation, share insights or lessons you've gained from the person, and explain the impact they've had on you.

Allow me to share an example from my experience when I was responsible for managing one of the major Dutch multinational companies. We were actively engaged in Corporate IT functions, but due to internal politics, it was exceedingly challenging to penetrate other areas of the business, particularly the vast local Dutch organisation. Then, I received a new opportunity to participate in a substantial server consolidation

project, a field entirely new for us in this account and within the Dutch organisation. This opportunity came through a colleague who had sent a Christmas card with a personal message to one of his contacts. That contact had now become the interim programme manager for the Dutch part of the client organisation and was leading the server rationalisation project.

It was the Christmas card that triggered his recollection of our organisation and our potential to assist. I hadn't even been aware of this opportunity until that moment. This story underscores the incredible impact a handwritten card can have in rekindling connections and opening unexpected doors of opportunity.

Create the Golden Database (Regular Content Connect)

The purpose of this process proposal is to outline a systematic approach for a thought leader to collect articles, blogs, and relevant content, curate topics of interest from their connections, and send personalised emails with valuable content attachments on a regular basis.

Step 1: Content Collection and Curation

- **Identify Relevant Sources:** The thought leader should identify reputable sources of articles, blogs, and content that align with their expertise and the interests of their target audience.
- **Curate Content Library:** Create a centralised content library where all collected articles and blogs are stored. Organise the content based on categories or topics for easy retrieval.

Step 2: Gathering Topics of Interest

- **Conduct Audience Research:** Use surveys, interviews, or social media listening tools to gather insights into the topics of interest among the thought leader's connections.
- **Categorise Interest Topics:** Group the collected topics into relevant categories based on the themes or preferences expressed by the audience. Regularly update the list of interest topics to reflect the evolving interests of the audience.

Step 3: Regular Engagement Tracking

- **Record Engagement Data:** Keep track of the audience's engagement with the shared content. Note which connections have shown interest in specific topics and articles.
- **Maintain an Engagement Database:** Create a database or use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to store the engagement data. This database should link each connection to their expressed interests and the content they engaged with.

Step 4: Personalised Outreach

- **Schedule Regular Outreach:** Set a consistent schedule for sending personalised emails to connections, sharing relevant content based on their interest topics.
- **Compose Personalised Notes:** Craft a warm and personalised message for each email. Use the recipient's name, acknowledge their previous engagement with related content, and express gratitude for their continued interest.
- **Attach Relevant Content:** Select the most appropriate articles, blogs, or content from the curated library based on the recipient's expressed interest and attach them to the email.

Step 5: Measure and Refine

- **Monitor Email Engagement:** Track the open rates, click-through rates, and responses to the personalised emails. Analyse the data to identify the most engaging content and refine the outreach strategy accordingly.
- **Seek Feedback:** Encourage recipients to provide feedback on the shared content and the personalised approach. Use this feedback to enhance the quality and relevance of future content.

By implementing this process, the thought leader can build stronger connections with their audience by consistently providing valuable content tailored to their interests. The personalised outreach will foster engagement and trust, positioning the thought leader as a valuable resource in their field and strengthening their thought leadership position in the market.

Train the Brain

Objective for the exercise is to enhance your networking skills by improving information recall and fostering meaningful connections.

Networking Cards Creation:

- Create a set of networking cards, each representing a person you've recently met or plan to meet.
- Include basic information such as name, profession, interests, and any noteworthy details from your conversations.

Memory Snapshot:

- Spend a few minutes reviewing your networking cards, absorbing the details of each individual.
- Close your eyes and try to create a mental snapshot of the information for each person.

Brain Blitz:

- Set a timer for 5 minutes.
- Quickly jot down as much information as you can remember about each person from your mental snapshots.
- Focus on specific details, like their role, hobbies, and any potential collaboration points.

Association Game:

- Take one networking card at a time.
- Think of an object or concept that is somehow related to the person on the card. It could be a profession-related symbol or a personal interest.
- Use this association to reinforce your memory of their details.

Quick Connect:

- Simulate a networking scenario. Choose two random cards from your set.

- Imagine you are at an event, and these two people are present. Try to create a hypothetical conversation or collaboration opportunity between them based on their characteristics.
- Story Building:

Select three networking cards.

- Create a short story that involves all three individuals. This exercise helps in linking information and reinforcing memory through narrative.

Reflection:

- Take a moment to reflect on the exercise. What strategies helped you recall information more effectively? Were there certain details that were more challenging to remember?

Repeat and Expand:

- Regularly update your networking cards with new connections.
- Gradually increase the complexity of the exercise by adding more details or increasing the number of cards in each session.

Empathic Exploration - Group Networking Exercise

Objective is to develop empathic networking skills in a large group setting, fostering sincere connections with individuals you may not know.

Icebreaker Empathy:

- As participants arrive, have each person write one personal interest or hobby on their name tag.
- Encourage mingling and starting conversations based on the shared interests visible on the name tags.

Random Acts of Empathy:

- Distribute sticky notes to each participant.
- Instruct them to anonymously write a positive and encouraging message on a sticky note.

- Participants should place their notes on the back of someone else without revealing their identity.

Empathy Exchange:

- Divide the group into pairs.
- Each person takes turns sharing a recent personal or professional challenge.
- The listener's task is to actively listen, ask open-ended questions, and express genuine empathy.

Speed Empathy Rounds:

- Organize a “speed networking” session with a twist.
- Participants have a limited time (e.g., 2 minutes) to share something personal or a passion.
- Focus on listening attentively and expressing empathy within the short timeframe.

Empathy Bingo:

- Create Bingo cards with various traits or experiences people might have.
- Participants mingle and try to find others who match the traits on their Bingo cards.
- The goal is not just to collect names but to engage in meaningful conversations about each trait.

Story Circle:

- Form a circle with participants.
- Begin a story by sharing a personal experience or challenge. Pass a small object around the circle, and each person adds a sentence to the story.
- This encourages collaborative storytelling and connection-building.

Empathy Interviews:

- Pair participants and designate one as the interviewer and the other as the interviewee.

- The interviewer asks open-ended questions to understand the interviewee's values, motivations, and experiences.
- After a set time, switch roles.

Reflect and Share:

- Gather the group and provide a moment for reflection.
- Encourage participants to share one meaningful connection they made during the exercises.

Commitment Wall:

- Set up a wall where participants can leave notes committing to continue fostering empathic connections beyond the event.
- Encourage them to connect on social media or schedule follow-up conversations.

As facilitator of this exercise, make sure you emphasize the importance of active listening and genuine curiosity. The purpose is to create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere. Remind participants that networking is about building relationships, not just exchanging business cards and encourage participants to step out of their comfort zones and connect with people they might not typically approach.

Lessons Learned From Followers of the Thought Leader Development Trainings

Alex Bulat - Thought leader aka “The Tech Guy”

Networking in general is a difficult task to achieve, but networking for introverts or learned extroverts, like me, is difficult. We tend to not really want to engage with strangers unless it is around a topic we love. Chit chat is not our preferred way of engaging. You will find us at the edge of a party, standing in a corner or clinging to the people we know. So how do you network if this is you? Stepping out of your comfort zone is an easy thing to say but how? During one of the coaching sessions, I learned 3 tricks in the Thought leadership program that helped me to improve my networking skills. It is helpful for everyone not just the introverts.

Be authentic and listen.

Don't force it. You are you and you can't get everyone to like you. Try to find a genuine connection. Easiest is to kick off a conversation or interaction with personal hobbies or your interest and keep listening for overlapping interest to find a common ground with the person you are networking with. In this listening was my biggest learning. It's not about speaking more but listening. Did you know there are 3 levels of listening. Most of us are stuck on level 1 I learned in an amazing coaching session, to get connected you need to be on 3. So go work on your listening!

Have a conversation starter.

If you still have difficulty approaching people during events or meetings, try to have a conversation starter to attract people to you instead. It must be something visible. It could be something simple like an extra watch on your wrist, a distinguishing piece of clothing or special shoes. I started applying this while going to conferences and meetings, and it truly helped me with having conversations I wouldn't have started myself.

Work on your Brand.

Biggest learning is that your branding is heavily intertwined with networking. And I would say maybe the most important of the entire thought leadership program. If your reputation precedes you, it is easier to network, because people just know who you are.

Off course make sure it is a good one. Building a brand takes time, patience, and repetition. I choose to start building a brand around my love for technology and innovation. Branding starts with naming, something easy to remember and catchy, I choose the “Techguy”. With that simple tagline over the past year since the thought leadership program I continued to keep building my brand. Keeping it narrow and focussed on technology. Starting a technology podcast Ideaload, a newsletter, and speaking at events.

Applying these 3 simple but hard to execute tricks, help me not only in networking. It accelerated my career to new highs, helped me focus, and gave me the patience and insights to keep growing.

Donald Hessing – Thoughtleader Cloud and Microsoft

In the dynamic landscape of IT, the journey from a technical expert to a thought leader has been a tapestry woven with the threads of personal connections. Here are some key learnings that have shaped my perspective on networking as a vital component of thought leadership:

One realization of my networking journey is that I have much more to bring to the table than



I initially thought. Networking ceased to be a one-dimensional transactional activity but transformed into a platform to sound-board ideas, a source of diverse perspectives, and a catalyst for innovation, a way to validate my vision and ideas, but also to understand others’ perspectives. It’s a realm where the exchange is not just about business deals but about enriching professional relationships. It’s about sharing experiences and ensuring the network remains a vibrant ecosystem of collaboration and support.

During the course, I also learned that asking for favours within your network is not a sign of weakness but an acknowledgment of the reciprocal nature of relationships. It brought me a position as program chair for the largest conference of its kind in Europe, great personal insights, and new friends. Most people within your network are willing to help because mutual benefit exists.

A balanced network is key to its effectiveness. Seeking diversity, not just in like-minded individuals but also in those

with strong opinions and varied geographic and cultural backgrounds, enhances the richness of the network. It's a mosaic of perspectives that challenges and enriches your thought process.

Plan your growth !

AS-IS 	_____ Novice	_____ Master
TO-BE 	_____ Novice	_____ Master

What strength do you already have on Networking

Where do you need to develop

Which Exercise could best help and why

Which sources could help you

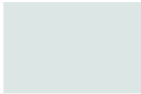
Who can best help you in your growth and why

What are the concrete actions to you will take

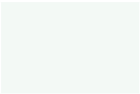
Checklist



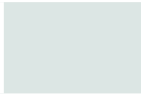
Read the chapter



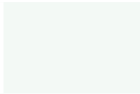
Assess strength & development



Assess what and who can help you



Actions defined



Planned in agenda

CHAPTER 5

BRANDING: ALIGNING PERSONAL IDENTITY WITH ORGANISATIONAL PURPOSE



Introduction

During my MBA program, our strategy professor introduced what he referred to as the “Harvard Management Question.” He tasked our group with defining the essential qualities a leader should possess. After posing the question, he left the classroom, allowing us to engage in extensive discussions. We explored various facets such as having a vision, charisma, decision-making abilities, financial acumen, and more. As time passed, our frustration grew because none of our answers seemed to hit the mark.

When our professor returned, he asked us to present our findings. As we did, we increasingly felt that our responses were falling short of his expectations. He acknowledged that the traits we mentioned were indeed important qualities that a leader might possess, but he insisted that we were still missing the essence of the answer. Finally, he unveiled the solution to the “Harvard Management Question”:

“A leader needs Followers”

It was a moment of realisation for us, as we had been overthinking the question, focusing too much on individual traits rather than grasping the core concept.

Similarly, when it comes to thought leaders, it's easy to contemplate various qualities they should possess. However, at its core, there's one fundamental requirement:

“A thought leader needs to have an audience.”

What's the point of having profound thoughts if there's no avenue to share them or an audience to listen? It may sound straightforward, but this is the very essence of our objective. Therefore, the thought leader bears the responsibility of ensuring there is an audience. As we discussed in the previous chapter, establishing a robust network is crucial. However, there's one additional factor that can bolster and expedite audience development: building your personal brand.

When it comes to building your brand, several key elements that will contribute to the acceleration of your thought leadership journey come into play:

1. The definition of your brand
2. Connect your personal brand to your organisation's brand
3. Your Target Audience
4. (Online) Presence
5. Reputation Management
6. Patience & Persistence

Definition of Your Brand

In his book *Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age*, Tom Peters introduces the concept of the Professional Service Firm. In essence, his argument is that every department within an organisation should be able to articulate the value it contributes to the organisation. If a department cannot do this, it becomes a candidate for outsourcing. Peters takes this idea a step further and suggests that every individual should also think in these terms of their own role.




He provides an excellent example: What is written on your business card? Is it simply “Head of Recruiting,” or is it some-

thing more like “The Talent Magnet, dedicated to attracting top talents from the market to drive ongoing market-leading solutions”? When you engage in this exercise, it compels you to delve deep into the essence of what you bring to the table. What is the value that you, with all your insights and expertise, can deliver to individuals and organisations?

This, in essence, is the foundation of your personal brand. It’s about determining what you want to be recognised for in the marketplace and ensuring that people instantly understand the value you can provide through your brand.

For companies, this process is somewhat more straightforward, as we understand the need for them to establish a consistent brand identity. Consider the following examples:

	<p>Apple’s brand positioning revolves around innovation, simplicity, and cutting-edge design. From its iconic logo to its sleek product packaging, every aspect exudes a sense of elegance and sophistication. Through this positioning, Apple communicates that its products are not just devices; they are a gateway to creativity, efficiency, and a seamless user experience. The brand promises to enrich lives, empowering users to explore their potential while staying connected with the world.</p>
	<p>Nike’s brand positioning revolves around empowering athletes and inspiring individuals to embrace their inner champions. The famous “Just Do It” tagline encapsulates the essence of their brand, urging consumers to overcome obstacles and achieve greatness. With its renowned Swoosh logo, Nike evokes a sense of aspiration and performance. The brand communicates that wearing their products not only enhances physical performance but also embodies a winning mindset.</p>

	<p>Coca-Cola’s brand positioning is built on a foundation of happiness, nostalgia, and togetherness. The red and white logo and signature contour bottle are instantly recognisable symbols which lend authenticity to the brand. Coca-Cola communicates a promise of joy and connection, associating its products with cherished moments and shared experiences. Beyond its taste, the brand delivers a sense of emotional gratification, making it a cultural icon worldwide.</p>
	<p>Google’s brand positioning centres on simplicity, accessibility, and being an indispensable tool for knowledge. Its clean interface and colourful logo signify user-friendliness and approachability. Google’s focus on innovation and providing relevant search results instils trust among users, making it the go-to platform for information retrieval. The brand is synonymous with solving problems and connecting people with answers.</p>
	<p>Tesla’s brand positioning revolves around sustainability, cutting-edge technology, and the future of mobility. Its sleek electric cars and the distinct T logo represent a vision for environmentally conscious transportation. Tesla communicates that driving their vehicles is not only a statement of environmental responsibility but also a testament to embracing the future of automotive engineering.</p>

Similarly, this principle also applies to you as a thought leader. You need to be known for something and have a recognition which is instant and consistent. Therefore, let’s also look at several key individuals and their branding:

- **Brené Brown**

Brené Brown is a renowned research professor and best-selling author who has crafted a strong personal brand around vulnerability, courage, and authenticity. Through her compelling TED Talks (Brown, U.D.) and insightful books, she has become a leading voice in the fields of vulnerability and shame resilience. Brown’s personal brand is a beacon of emotional intelligence and empathy, inspiring countless individuals to embrace their imperfections and lead whole-hearted lives.

- **Neil deGrasse Tyson**

Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist and science communicator, has built a powerful personal brand around science advocacy and curiosity. His infectious passion for the universe and engaging style of communication have made complex scientific concepts accessible to the masses. Tyson's personal brand represents intellect, wonder, and a deep appreciation for the cosmos.

- **Malala Yousafzai**

Malala Yousafzai is a global education activist and Nobel laureate who has established a compelling personal brand as a champion of girls' education and human rights. Her unwavering commitment to advocating for education, even in the face of danger, has made her an international symbol of courage and resilience. Yousafzai's personal brand stands for education, empowerment, and the unyielding pursuit of equality.

Connect Your Personal Brand to Your Organization's Brand

In the modern business landscape, the lines between personal and corporate branding are becoming increasingly blurred. More than ever, professionals are recognising the value of aligning their personal brand with the brand of their organisation. This synergy between individual identity and corporate values creates a powerful symbiotic relationship that benefits both the individual and the organisation. In this essay, we will explore the importance of connecting your personal brand with that of your organization and how this alignment can lead to enhanced credibility, brand loyalty, and organisational success.

- **Amplifying Organisational Values:**

When employees align their personal brand with the brand of their organisation, they become living embodiments of the company's values and mission. By consistently embodying these values in their interactions, behaviours, and communications, employees amplify the organisation's core message and culture. This alignment fosters a sense of unity and purpose, creating a cohesive and authentic brand image that resonates with customers, clients, and stakeholders alike.

- **Building Trust and Credibility:**

Customers and clients are more likely to trust and engage with an organisation when they see its employees living the brand's promises. When employees align their personal brand with the organisation's, they become brand ambassadors who showcase the organisation's commitment to its values and promises. This alignment builds trust and credibility in the eyes of the audience, as they witness a genuine commitment to delivering on the brand's claims.

- **Strengthening Brand Loyalty:**

When employees are proud of their association with the organisation and feel aligned with its values, they are more likely to stay committed and loyal. A strong connection between personal and corporate branding fosters a sense of ownership and purpose, which translates into higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction. This, in turn, contributes to lower turnover rates and higher productivity, benefitting the organisation in the long run.

- **Driving Employee Advocacy:**

Employees who identify with their organisation's brand are more likely to become enthusiastic advocates, both within and outside the workplace. This advocacy can extend to social media, professional networks, and personal interactions. As employees share positive experiences and align their personal brand with the organisation's, they become influential promoters, effectively expanding the organisation's reach and attracting potential customers and talent.

- **Fostering Innovation and Growth:**

When employees connect their personal brand with the organisation's, they are more likely to feel invested in the organisation's success. This alignment fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, inspiring employees to take initiative, innovate, and contribute to the organisation's growth. As employees feel aligned with the organisation's vision, they become more motivated to strive for excellence and pursue continuous improvement.

Connecting your personal brand with the brand of your organisation is a strategic move that yields numerous benefits for both individuals and the organisation. By aligning values, build-

ing trust, and fostering brand loyalty, this synergy creates a powerful force that amplifies the organisation's message and drives long-term success. As employees become authentic brand ambassadors, they contribute to a culture of pride, advocacy, and innovation, creating a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved. Embracing this alignment can lead to enhanced reputation, customer loyalty, and sustained growth, making it a crucial strategy in today's competitive business environment.

Below are some tips to help you achieve this alignment:

- **Understand the Organisation's Values and Mission:**

Get familiar with your organisation's core values, mission, and brand identity. Identify the key messages the organisation wants to convey and understand its target audience. This foundational understanding will serve as a compass for aligning your personal brand with the organisation's overarching goals.

- **Identify Shared Values and Objectives:**

Reflect on your personal values, strengths, and passions. Look for areas where your personal brand aligns with the organisation's values and objectives. Identify common ground that allows you to authentically represent the organisation's brand.

- **Embrace the Organizational Culture:**

Immerse yourself in the organisation's culture and immerse yourself in its practices and ethos. Be an active participant in company events, initiatives, and conversations. This involvement will not only help you better understand the brand but also demonstrate your commitment to the organisation's mission.

- **Be a Consistent Brand Ambassador:**

Consistency is key when aligning your personal brand with that of your organisation. Ensure that your actions, behaviour, and communications reflect the organisation's values consistently. This consistency builds trust and credibility with stakeholders and reinforces the organisation's brand message.

- **Leverage Social Media and Networking:**

Use social media and professional networking platforms to share content and insights that align with the organisation's brand and values. Engage in conversations that are relevant to the industry and demonstrate your expertise in line with the organisation's objectives.

- **Seek Opportunities for Thought Leadership:**

Position yourself as a thought leader in areas that align with the organisation's expertise. Share valuable insights and expertise through blog posts, articles, or speaking engagements. This will enhance your personal brand while also promoting the organisation's authority in the field.

- **Seek Feedback and Support:**

Engage in open communication with your colleagues and superiors to seek feedback on your efforts to align your personal brand with the organisation's. Embrace constructive feedback and make adjustments when necessary. Foster a supportive environment that encourages others to do the same.

- **Showcase Teamwork and Collaboration:**

Demonstrate your commitment to the organisation's success by actively collaborating with team members. Showcase your ability to work cohesively towards common goals and highlight how your individual contributions align with the organisation's overall vision.

- **Stay Adaptable and Open-Minded:**

The business landscape is constantly evolving, and brand strategies may change over time. Stay adaptable and open-minded to adjustments in the organisation's brand positioning. Align your personal brand accordingly to remain in sync with the organisation's goals.

- **Be Authentic and True to Yourself:**

While aligning your personal brand with the organisation's, never compromise on authenticity. Stay true to your values and strengths, ensuring that the alignment feels natural and genuine. Authenticity will enhance your personal brand while also reinforcing the organisation's credibility.

By following these tips, you can effectively align your personal brand with the brand of your organisation, fostering a strong and cohesive identity that benefits both you and the organisation in the long run.

(Online) Presence

In the digital age, establishing a strong online presence is essential for thought leaders to expand their reach, influence, and impact. Thought leaders leverage various online platforms to share their insights, expertise, and thought-provoking content with a global audience. This section delves into the strategies and best practices for building a powerful online presence as a thought leader, enabling individuals to establish themselves as influential voices in their respective fields.

- **Define Your Niche and Message:**

As a thought leader, the first step in building an online presence is defining your niche and core message. Identify the specific topics or industry areas where you excel and have valuable insights to share. Focusing on a niche allows you to target a specific audience and establish yourself as an authority in that domain.

- **Create a Compelling Personal Brand:**

Craft a compelling personal brand that aligns with your expertise and values. Choose a clear and professional profile picture, and write a captivating bio that highlights your accomplishments and expertise. Consistency in branding across all online platforms will reinforce your identity as a thought leader.

- **Utilise Social Media Strategically:**

Social media platforms are powerful tools for building an online presence. Choose the platforms that align with your target audience and engage actively with your followers. Share valuable content, participate in discussions, and network with industry peers. Establishing a consistent posting schedule will keep your audience engaged and updated with your latest insights.

- **Start Blogging or Writing Articles:**

Blogging and writing articles on industry-specific topics allow you to share your expertise in-depth. Create a blog on your website or contribute guest articles to reputable publications. Focus on providing valuable, well-researched, and actionable content that addresses the pain points of your audience.

- **Leverage Video Content:**

Incorporate video content into your online presence strategy. Record thought-provoking videos, webinars, or interviews that showcase your expertise and charisma. Video content can enhance your personal brand and create a more engaging connection with your audience.

- **Engage with Your Audience:**

Respond to comments, messages, and inquiries from your audience promptly and thoughtfully. Actively engaging with your audience builds profound trust and loyalty. Encourage discussions and debates on your platforms to foster a community around your ideas.

- **Monitor Your Online Reputation:**

Be proactive in monitoring your online reputation. Address any negative feedback or misinformation promptly and professionally. Upholding a positive reputation as a thought leader is crucial for maintaining credibility and trust.

Building a strong online presence as a thought leader requires a combination of strategic planning, authentic engagement, and consistent content creation. By defining your niche, crafting a compelling personal brand, utilising social media strategically, and producing valuable content, you can establish yourself as an influential thought leader in your field. Embrace opportunities to collaborate, engage with your audience, and adapt to evolving digital trends. A powerful online presence not only elevates your personal brand but also empowers you to make a meaningful impact on your industry and beyond.

Reputation Management

In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, the rise of social media and digital platforms has amplified the importance of reputation management. Thought leaders, individuals recognised for their expertise and insights in specific fields, hold

a unique position in the online landscape. As thought leaders, their reputation not only shapes their personal brand but also influences the credibility of their ideas and the impact of their messages on society. This essay explores the importance of reputation management for thought leaders, discussing how it affects their influence, credibility, and overall effectiveness in driving positive change.

I. Building Trust and Credibility:

One of the fundamental pillars of thought leadership is trust. As a thought leader, your audience expects reliable and well-informed perspectives on complex issues. Maintaining a positive reputation is key to building trust with your followers and target audience. Thought leaders must consistently deliver high-quality content, demonstrate expertise, and uphold ethical standards. Engaging with followers, answering questions, and acknowledging feedback contribute to establishing credibility, making it more likely for others to accept and follow their ideas.

II. Impact on Influence:

Reputation management plays a significant role in determining the extent of a thought leader's influence. A positive reputation attracts a broader audience and opens doors for collaboration with other industry experts, influencers, and media outlets. Conversely, a damaged reputation can severely limit one's reach and influence, hindering the potential to drive change and bring attention to important topics.

Thought leaders should be mindful of their online presence, including social media posts, articles, and public appearances. Demonstrating consistency and staying true to their values reinforces their position as a trusted authority. Thought leaders should also avoid controversies and engage in constructive dialogues to maintain a positive reputation and maximise their impact.

III. Enhancing Thought Leadership Brand:

A thought leader's reputation directly impacts their personal brand. A strong reputation increases the perceived value of their insights and opinions, elevating them above competitors or others in their field. A positive reputation helps solidify the thought leader's positioning as an authority, leading to greater visibility and recognition.

To strengthen their thought leadership brand, individuals should focus on creating valuable, relevant, and thought-provoking content. This content should align with their expertise, values, and the interests of their audience. Consistency and authenticity in their messaging will help establish a powerful personal brand that resonates with followers and sets them apart as thought leaders.

IV. Navigating Challenges and Crisis:

Reputation management becomes especially crucial during times of crisis or challenging situations. Thought leaders are not immune to negative publicity or misunderstandings. How they handle such situations can significantly impact their reputation. Transparency and honesty are vital in crisis management. Thought leaders should address any issues promptly, take responsibility, and provide clear explanations or solutions. By acknowledging mistakes and demonstrating a commitment to improvement, thought leaders can rebuild trust and maintain their standing as influential figures.

V. Staying Relevant and Evolving:

The landscape of thought leadership is ever-changing, with new ideas, technologies, and trends constantly emerging. Reputation management is essential for thought leaders to stay relevant and adapt to these changes. Thought leaders should proactively engage with their audience, seek feedback, and be open to learning from others. This process of continuous improvement not only enhances their reputation but also allows them to remain at the forefront of their industry.

Reputation management is a critical aspect of thought leadership. As influencers and opinion-shapers, thought leaders must recognise the impact their reputation has on their audience, credibility, and ability to drive positive change. Building trust, maintaining authenticity, and navigating challenges are all essential components of effective reputation management. Thought leaders who prioritise reputation management as a core element of their strategy can establish a powerful personal brand, maximise their influence, and continue making a meaningful impact in their respective fields.

Patience & Persistence

Last but not least, you must cultivate patience and persistence. I recall a time when my children, aged 11 and 14, decided they wanted to become social influencers during the heyday of on-line gaming content creators, with millions of viewers tuning in to watch gameplay. While I still couldn't quite grasp the appeal of watching someone play instead of playing yourself, I understood it as a generational gap.

During one holiday, they approached me with aspirations of building a career in this field and asked if I could assist. Always up for a good challenge, I helped them create a YouTube channel and invested in producing an engaging introductory video that they could use for their recordings.

The next step was teaching them how to use video editing software, and off they went. They produced several entertaining videos that likely resonated with their audience. Initially, they were excited when they shared the link with a few friends, and the first likes and subscriptions trickled in.

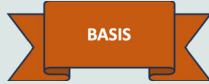
However, the bubble of enthusiasm burst when, within just three weeks, they hadn't yet reached 1,000 subscribers. This became the defining moment when the entire project came to a halt. My attempts to explain that they needed to work harder, engage more with their audience, collaborate with other channels, and seek support fell on deaf ears. It turned out to be too much work for them, and their youth might have contributed to their decision to quit.

This is a lesson that likely applies to your journey as well, albeit not necessarily on a YouTube channel (although it's an excellent platform for thought leaders). It could be in the responses you receive to a LinkedIn blog post or in gaining subscriptions for a podcast you want to launch.

Building an effective personal brand that resonates with your audience takes time. While there might be instances where success happens quickly, most often, it's a gradual process. Having the right content and networks certainly help speed up the process, but your patience and persistence are the most vital qualities you must develop to achieve lasting success.

The Different Proficiency Levels

As mentioned previously, we will utilise three distinct proficiency levels to assess an individual's expertise in the realm of branding.



A **Branding Apprentice**: At the initial stages of brand development, a brand apprentice possesses a foundation of expertise yet to be clearly defined for recognition purposes.



A **Branding Craftsman**: Embodies a thought leader who has defined a clear brand for him/herself, but is still working to gain substantial recognition in the competitive marketplace.



A **Branding Trailblazer**: Stands as a distinguished thought leader who has developed a clear brand for him/herself. The brand gives direct recognition for his/her expertise and is being recognised by the marketplace.

Branding Apprentice:

Branding Apprentices are enthusiastic learners who eagerly absorb insights and experiences that will shape their future as influential voices. They actively seek to understand their unique value proposition and the impact they wish to make on their audience. Through their initial experiences in content creation and engagement, they plant the seeds of their personal brand, nurturing its growth with each connection and interaction.

While they navigate this formative stage, branding apprentices readily embrace challenges and seek guidance from established thought leaders. They recognise that a robust personal brand is the foundation for thought leadership and are committed to developing a distinct presence that resonates with authenticity and potential. However, they are still working on creating a distinctive brand and gaining clarity on what they truly want to be known for.

Branding Craftsman:

A Branding Craftsman is a thought leader who has moved beyond the initial exploration phase and has developed a deep understanding of the power of personal branding. Guided by a clear and compelling vision, they serve as the architects of their own brand identity, crafting a comprehensive narrative that captivates and inspires.

These individuals possess the innate ability to see beyond surface aesthetics and envision a holistic brand ecosystem that transcends visuals. Their expertise extends to aligning messaging, values, and actions, creating a seamless and resonant experience for their audience.

Constantly innovating and pushing boundaries, branding craftsmen leverage diverse platforms, mediums, and creative expressions to amplify their impact. They are dynamic communicators who adeptly navigate the evolving digital landscape while staying true to their core values. However, it's at this stage that patience and persistence become crucial. Gaining recognition in the market and maintaining a consistent message with their brand require continuous effort and feedback.

Branding Trailblazer:

A Branding Trailblazer is a visionary and innovative individual or company that pushes the boundaries of traditional branding strategies. They create unique and memorable brand identities by leveraging cutting-edge techniques, embracing new technologies, and challenging conventional norms. These trailblazers often set trends, inspire others, and leave a lasting impact on the world of branding by redefining how businesses connect with their audiences and stand out in competitive markets.

The primary distinction between a Branding Trailblazer and a Branding Craftsman is market recognition. The Branding Trailblazer has a strong brand and has established a significant presence in the marketplace. They are frequently invited to deliver keynote presentations, participate in boardroom discussions, and command a substantial fee for the inspiration they provide to others.

Exemplary Thought Leaders Who Have Mastered This Element

In this section, I will describe some people that in my opinion are world-class when it comes to networking. Again, I could have selected a more extensive list, potentially overlooking individuals you wished to see. However, I selected these specific ones to give better insights on why I believe they have achieved the Master Level when it comes to content.

Gary Vaynerchuck

Gary Vaynerchuk is widely regarded as a world-class figure in personal branding due to his exceptional ability to authentically connect with his audience and convey a compelling message. Through his prolific content creation, including videos, podcasts, and social media posts, Gary has cultivated a distinct personal brand that centres on raw honesty, unrelenting hustle, and a genuine desire to inspire and motivate others.

His relentless work ethic and willingness to share both successes and failures have created a relatable persona that resonates with a diverse range of individuals seeking guidance in entrepreneurship and personal development. By consistently sharing practical insights, life lessons, and business advice, Gary has positioned himself as a thought leader and mentor, elevating his personal brand to a global scale.

Moreover, Gary Vaynerchuk's approach to personal branding extends beyond mere self-promotion. He actively engages with his audience, responds to comments, and encourages open conversations, fostering a sense of community around his brand. This genuine interaction has solidified his reputation as an approachable and trustworthy source of knowledge, making him a true trailblazer in the realm of personal branding.

Richard Branson

Richard Branson is a true exemplar of world-class personal branding, distinguished by his charismatic and adventurous spirit. His ability to craft a captivating narrative around his brand has propelled him to the forefront of global recognition and admiration.

Branson's personal branding revolves around his audacious pursuit of challenges and his fearless approach to entrepre-

neurship. His daring feats, such as attempting world records and venturing into uncharted territories, embody the essence of adventure and risk-taking. This fearless attitude has become synonymous with his name, creating a distinctive and iconic image that resonates with individuals aspiring to break free from conventional norms.

Through his diverse business ventures under the Virgin Group, Branson has built a brand that represents innovation, disruption, and a commitment to customer satisfaction. His willingness to challenge industry norms and provide unique and customer-centric solutions has further solidified his personal brand as a trailblazer.

One of the cornerstones of Richard Branson's personal branding is his affable and approachable demeanour. He engages with his audience through candid storytelling, relatable anecdotes, and an active presence on social media. This accessibility has cultivated a sense of camaraderie, allowing people to connect with him on a personal level and fostering a loyal following.

Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama epitomises world-class personal branding through her impactful advocacy, grace, and relatable authenticity. Her ability to connect with a diverse audience and inspire positive change has elevated her personal brand to remarkable heights.

At the core of Michelle Obama's personal branding is her unwavering dedication to social causes and her genuine passion for making a difference. As First Lady of the United States, she used her platform to champion initiatives such as education, military families, and healthy living. Her commitment to these causes has created a deeply resonant narrative that positions her as a compassionate and effective advocate.

Michelle's personal brand is marked by her grace under pressure and her ability to navigate complex situations with poise. Her eloquent speeches, empathetic interactions, and composed demeanour have set a standard for leadership and authenticity. Her approachable and relatable nature has endeared her to people from all walks of life, making her personal brand both aspirational and accessible.

Furthermore, Michelle Obama's personal brand is built on inclusivity and diversity. She has consistently used her voice to address issues of equality, representation, and empowerment, amplifying the voices of marginalised communities. This commitment to diversity and equity has further solidified her reputation as a trailblazer and a beacon of hope for positive change.

Through her bestselling memoir, public speaking engagements, and social media presence, Michelle Obama continues to shape her personal brand as one of empowerment, leadership, and empathy. Her ability to inspire and connect with individuals on a deeply emotional level has established her as a global icon and a true master of personal branding.

Zlatan Ibrahimović

Zlatan Ibrahimović is renowned for his world-class personal branding, characterised by his unique charisma, exceptional skill, and fearless individuality. His ability to stand out both on and off the field has solidified his position as a global sports icon.

Central to Zlatan's personal brand is his unmatched confidence and self-assuredness. His unapologetic authenticity and bold statements create a captivating narrative that resonates with fans and critics alike. This fearless demeanour has not only made him a dominant force in football but has also fuelled his broader influence and appeal.

Zlatan's personal branding is marked by his exceptional talent and drive for excellence. His on-field performances, marked by acrobatic goals and remarkable skills, have captivated audiences around the world. This mastery of his craft has become a hallmark of his personal brand, making him a symbol of dedication and achievement.

Off the field, Zlatan's larger-than-life persona shines through in his public interactions, social media presence, and business ventures. He leverages his brand to engage with fans, showcase his sense of humour, and promote his various endeavours, ranging from fashion to philanthropy.

Furthermore, Zlatan's personal brand is distinguished by his international appeal and cultural impact. His multicultural background and experiences have allowed him to resonate with

fans from diverse backgrounds, transcending geographical boundaries and uniting people under his brand.

Madonna

Madonna, an enduring pop music icon, epitomises world-class personal branding through her innovative artistry, reinvention, and cultural impact. Her ability to continuously evolve and captivate audiences over decades has solidified her position as a trailblazer in the entertainment industry.

At the heart of Madonna's personal branding is her fearless exploration and pushing of boundaries. She has consistently embraced provocative themes, challenged societal norms, and used her music and imagery to spark conversations. This willingness to take risks and address controversial subjects has created a brand that is synonymous with artistic boldness and creative experimentation.

Madonna's personal brand is marked by her reinvention and adaptability. With each new album or era, she has successfully transformed her image and sound, keeping her brand fresh and engaging. This reinvention has not only sustained her career but has also inspired countless artists to embrace change and push their own creative limits.

Furthermore, Madonna's personal brand is deeply intertwined with her role as a cultural influencer. She has used her platform to advocate for social issues, promote equality, and champion the rights of marginalised communities. Her ability to connect her brand with meaningful causes has elevated her beyond a mere entertainer, positioning her as a symbol of empowerment and activism.

Madonna's impact is not confined to music; her personal brand extends to fashion, film, and business ventures. She has successfully leveraged her brand to launch successful ventures in various industries, showcasing her versatility and business acumen.

Werner Vogels

Werner Vogels, as the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of Amazon and a respected figure in the technology field, exemplifies world-class personal branding through his expertise, thought leadership, and strategic vision.

Central to Vogels' personal branding is his deep technical knowledge and thought leadership in cloud computing. He has played a pivotal role in shaping Amazon Web Services (AWS) into a global powerhouse, and his ability to distil complex technical concepts into accessible insights has made him a trusted authority in the industry. His regular contributions to conferences, blog posts, and public speaking engagements showcase his commitment to sharing knowledge and advancing the field.

Vogels' personal brand is marked by his emphasis on innovation and the future of technology. He consistently advocates for disruptive technologies, encourages experimentation, and highlights the transformative potential of the cloud. This forward-looking approach positions him as a visionary, inspiring both fellow professionals and aspiring technologists.

Beyond technical prowess, Vogels' personal brand reflects his genuine and approachable demeanour. He engages with developers, startups, and the broader tech community, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collaboration. His willingness to engage in conversations, address concerns, and provide insights has solidified his reputation as an accessible and relatable figure.

Furthermore, Vogels' personal brand extends to his commitment to sustainability and ethical technology practices. He actively promotes environmentally responsible computing and advocates for the responsible use of technology resources, aligning his brand with crucial societal and environmental issues.

Exercises and Tips to Increase Your Proficiency

Below, you will discover some valuable exercises and practical tools designed to enhance your expertise in the field of branding.

Never Eat Alone

Networking may seem simple, but it's a skill that requires practice. At the outset of my career, I often felt awkward during receptions, conferences, and similar gatherings. However, I eventually came to realise that networking is something you must cultivate and become accustomed to, just like improving your presentation skills. We all know that our initial presentations were awkward, but over time, you will improve and feel more at ease.

What better way to practise than during lunch? Try sitting at a table with people you've never met before, or join someone who is alone, but always start by seeking their consent. Once you're in a conversation, aim to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- **Discover Your Counterpart's Passion:**

Ask questions to uncover what this person is passionate about, whether it's related to their work or business. Find out what truly ignites their enthusiasm. Don't settle for surface-level answers; strive to delve deeper.

- **Identify Common Ground:**

Look for common links, which could relate to their passions or even entirely different subjects. You'll notice that you'll need to explore various areas of interest quickly to see if you can find something that resonates.

- **Extend a Helping Hand:**

End the conversation by offering your support. This can be something small, such as offering to review their work or offer support to topics related to your earlier discussion. Making this offer serves several valuable purposes:

- It forces you to find something to offer, helping to hone your questioning skills.

- It makes the other person feel valued and appreciated.
- It provides an opportunity to exchange contact information, such as exchanging business cards or connecting on LinkedIn, which is common in modern networking practices.

Become the Five-Minute Empathy Master

One of the main issues I struggled (and sometimes still struggle with) is how to network on a large conference or company gathering and meet a lot of people. Given that I know a lot of people, some will show up and express the desire to talk with me for hours. While these interactions can be enriching, they can also impede my ability to establish the connections I seek at the event.

The goal is to maintain control over your time while ensuring the other person feels valued. It's important not to rush interactions. Therefore, here are some tips for effectively managing your time and connections at a networking event while remaining empathetic and meeting multiple people:

- **Set Clear Objectives:**

Before attending the event, define your goals. What do you want to achieve? Are you looking for potential clients, partners, mentors, or job opportunities? Having clear objectives will help you stay focused.

- **Create a Time Budget:**

Allocate a specific amount of time to spend with each person you meet. For example, you might decide to engage in a 10-15 minute conversation with each individual. Setting time limits helps you maintain control over your schedule.

- **Use Open-Ended Questions:**

Ask open-ended questions that encourage meaningful discussions. This allows you to quickly get to know the other person while also demonstrating your interest in their perspective.

- **Exchange Contact Information:**

If you find a connection particularly valuable, exchange contact information. You can suggest connecting on LinkedIn, swapping business cards, or exchanging emails. This allows you to follow up after the event.

- **Signal Your Time Limit:**

Politely communicate your time constraints at the beginning of a conversation. You can say something like, “I’m really excited to chat with you, but I have a few more people I’d like to meet before the event ends. Can we make the most of the time we have?”

- **Manage Your Body Language:**

Be aware of your body language to convey your availability. If you want to signal that you have a limited amount of time, stand with an open stance and maintain eye contact but keep your body oriented toward the event’s flow.

- **Practise Empathy and Gratitude:**

Show genuine interest in the people you meet. Express gratitude for their time and insights, even if your conversation is brief. Being empathetic and appreciative will leave a positive impression.

Remember that effective networking is not about collecting as many business cards or LinkedIn connections as possible. It’s about building meaningful relationships. By setting clear objectives, managing your time, and being empathetic in your interactions, you can strike a balance between meeting multiple people and forming valuable connections at networking events.

Leverage LinkedIn to the Fullest

In today’s world, LinkedIn has emerged as a powerhouse platform, revolutionising the way individuals connect, collaborate, and grow in their careers. With over 700 million users worldwide, LinkedIn offers an unparalleled opportunity to expand your network, discover new opportunities, and develop valuable relationships.

The power of LinkedIn is probably done complete injustice by giving a short summary and really would recommend you all to follow a LinkedIn course (Udemy, u.d.) which you can find ev-

erywhere on the internet. However, here are some of the things you can do to boost your networking skills to the fullest:

1. Create an Impressive Profile:

Your LinkedIn profile serves as your digital business card. Ensure it's complete, up-to-date, and professional. A well-crafted profile includes a high-quality photo, a compelling headline, a concise summary, and a comprehensive work history with relevant details. Don't forget to add key skills and endorsements to showcase your expertise.

2. Personalise Connection Requests:

Sending personalised connection requests is more effective than generic ones. When reaching out to potential contacts, mention shared interests, mutual connections, or why you'd like to connect. Personalisation demonstrates your genuine interest in building a meaningful connection.

3. Engage with Your Network:

Stay active on LinkedIn by sharing insightful articles, commenting on others' posts, and participating in relevant groups. Engagement fosters visibility and helps you connect with like-minded professionals who share your interests.

4. Utilise LinkedIn Messaging:

LinkedIn's messaging feature is a powerful tool for one-on-one communication. Use it to initiate conversations with your connections, inquire about job opportunities, seek advice, or offer assistance to others. Be courteous, concise, and respectful in your messages.

5. Join and Participate in Groups:

LinkedIn groups are communities of professionals with shared interests. Join groups aligned with your industry, hobbies, or career goals. Engage in meaningful discussions, ask questions, and share your expertise. Groups provide an excellent platform for expanding your network.

6. Showcase Your Work:

If you have a portfolio, articles, or presentations, consider showcasing them on your LinkedIn profile. This not only demon-

strates your skills and accomplishments but also encourages others to reach out to you.

7. Attend Virtual Events:

LinkedIn regularly hosts virtual events, webinars, and workshops on various topics. Participate in these events to gain knowledge, connect with industry leaders, and network with like-minded professionals.

8. Use Advanced Search and Filters:

LinkedIn's advanced search and filtering options enable you to find specific individuals or companies within your desired criteria. This can be especially useful for identifying potential mentors, employers, or partners.

9. Send Follow-Up Messages:

After connecting with someone new or engaging in a conversation, send a courteous follow-up message. Express your appreciation for the connection or discussion and suggest ways to continue the relationship, such as a virtual coffee chat.

10. Be Patient and Persistent:

Networking takes time, and not every connection will lead to immediate results. Be patient and persistent in your efforts. Nurture your connections over time, and genuine relationships will develop.

Lessons Learned from Followers of the Thought Leader Development Trainings

Fina Piazza – Thought Leader Agile

When we started the programme, I thought I had a good personal branding, people knew who I was and could find me for questions, so I figured I was doing quite well.

However, in one of the sessions, we had the honour to meet Michel van den Brande from Sogeti as a guest speaker, who showed us what and how personal branding could look like. It had way more depth than I imagined, and I soon realised I had some work ahead of me. I remember that I wasn't the only one impressed, more team members were amazed and intrigued.

It's nice to think back at that day, looking at the articles and study materials again, how I filled in my first personal branding canvas and answered some questions around strategy, building my personal branding, but most important- be authentic!

Reflecting back, I realise that working on personal branding is an ongoing activity. You have to think and rethink about what you want to achieve. For instance, in the next two years, where do I want to be, how would I like to be perceived, when am I successful, what makes me different? My journey so far has brought me to great places. I started as scrum master/ agile coach, continued my journey at different customers. I continuously worked hard to get Agile awareness within my company. Today, I'm a cluster lead of around 45 Agile professionals within a practice, we have two global certification paths (one for agile transformation managers and one for scrum masters and agile coaches with a growth path towards agile engagement managers). And through our Agile Value Centre, with a team of talented subject matter experts, we help inspire clients to drive more value for their organisations through an Agile journey

Bhawesh Kumar - Thought leader Insights & Data



The thought leadership course I undertook has been a transformative experience, propelling my professional growth and elevating my personal brand. One of the program's fundamental insights was the mantra: "People do business with People." This philosophy underscored the importance of not just being a knowledgeable expert in Data & AI but also projecting oneself as a valuable brand within Capgemini.

This programme helped me identify key areas to focus: shape **Personal Brand**, extend my **Network**, improve **Social Engagement**, thus become trustworthy advisor to clients and within Capgemini.

In this journey, I learned to balance two essential roles: being an advocate for Capgemini and being recognised as a thought leader in the realm of Data & AI. This dual approach ensured that I not only represented and promoted Capgemini effectively but also established myself as an authority in the field, a strategy that both customers and colleagues could trust and respect.

This journey has been nothing short of a game-changer. As I started implementing the principles and strategies centred on these key areas, I witnessed a shift in people's perceptions. Colleagues and clients began to view me as not just an expert but as a dynamic and reliable resource in Data & AI. My personal brand gained momentum, positioning me as the go-to authority in my field, both within Capgemini and in the broader professional community. This growth, fuelled by the thought leadership course, continues to propel my career to new heights.

Plan your growth !

AS-IS	_____	_____
	Apprentice	Trailblazer
TO-BE	_____	_____
	Apprentice	Trailblazer

What strength do you already have on Branding

Where do you need to develop

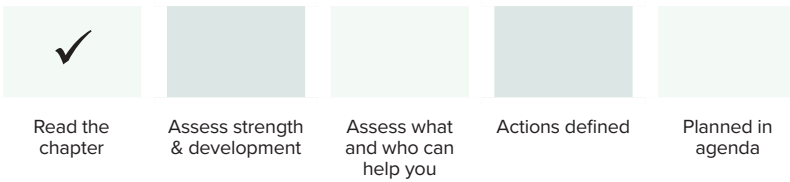
Which Exercise could best help and why

Which sources could help you

Who can best help you in your growth and why

What are the concrete actions to you will take

Checklist



CHAPTER 6

SALES: FROM PRESENTING IDEAS TO DRIVING SUCCESS



Introduction

“Why did the consultant bring a ladder to the sales meeting? Because they heard the salespeople were reaching for the stars, and they wanted to help them climb that corporate ladder!”

Perhaps, this is a very bad consultant joke, but unfortunately a sentiment that I have encountered with a lot of people in the industry. Sales is often perceived as something negative, yet without sales business wouldn't exist.

Tom Peters puts it better. He declares that “Everyone is sales”. This profound statement underscores the idea that regardless of one's role or position within an organisation, the ability to effectively communicate, influence, and persuade is fundamental to success.

Peters' assertion challenges the traditional notion that sales is solely the responsibility of a designated sales team. Instead, he emphasises that every interaction, whether with colleagues, clients, or stakeholders, presents an opportunity to showcase the value of a product, service, or idea. This concept promotes a customer-centric mindset across an entire organization, high-

lighting the importance of delivering exceptional experiences and meeting the needs of those you serve.

In a broader context, Peters' statement encourages individuals to cultivate skills such as empathy, active listening, and clear communication. By recognising that everyone plays a role in shaping an organisation's reputation and customer relationships, Peters underscores the significance of a unified and customer-focused approach across all functions.

With that said, I hope that in the future the jokes would be more like the following:

“Why did the consultant and the salesperson start a band together? Because the consultant could hit all the high notes of analysis, and the salesperson was a master at closing deals – they were the perfect pitch-perfect duo!”

The Relevance of Sales in Consultancy

Having been in different roles in my career, I could always feel the attitude from the client towards me. When I was in sales roles, no matter how committed I was to the success of the end-client (end trust me, I really was committed), they always distrusted me, just for the sheer fact that my salary was dependent on “selling” them services. You are already in scores behind, since a salesperson is being perceived negative. Some research found that negative perceptions can arise from various factors, including aggressive or pushy behaviour, a lack of transparency, unfulfilled promises, and a perceived focus on self-interest rather than customer needs. Here are a few key points from research in this area:

- **Aggressive Sales Tactics:** Research has shown that aggressive sales tactics, such as high-pressure selling and persistent follow-ups, can lead to negative perceptions. Buyers may feel uncomfortable or manipulated, which can erode trust and damage the salesperson's credibility.
- **Lack of Trust:** Trust is crucial in any sales relationship. When buyers perceive a lack of honesty, transparency, or sincerity on the part of the salesperson, it can lead to negative perceptions. Buyers want to feel confident that the salesperson has their best interests in mind.
- **Mismatched Priorities:** If buyers feel that salespeople are more focused on meeting their own targets or quotas rather

than addressing the buyer's needs, it can result in negative perceptions. Buyers want to work with salespeople who prioritise understanding and fulfilling their specific requirements.

- **Unrealistic Promises:** Research indicates that buyers often become wary when salespeople make promises that seem too good to be true. If expectations set by salespeople are not met, it can lead to disappointment and negative perceptions of the sales process.
- **Inadequate Understanding:** Buyers may develop negative perceptions if they feel that salespeople do not have a deep understanding of their industry, challenges, or specific needs. A lack of relevant knowledge can undermine the credibility of the salesperson.
- **Poor Listening Skills:** Effective communication involves active listening. If buyers feel that salespeople are not attentive to their concerns or are pushing products that don't align with their needs, it can contribute to negative perceptions.
- **Transactional Focus:** Buyers often prefer consultative and relationship-driven sales approaches over purely transactional interactions. When salespeople prioritise the sale itself without building a meaningful relationship, it can lead to negative perceptions.

However, as a thought leader, you do not come with this negative perception. People will have the perception that you have something valuable to tell and hence have a positive attitude towards the thought leader. This can help you in establishing and strengthening the relationship and help progress towards an agreement.

A thought leader can often be more effective in the sales process than a traditional salesperson for several reasons:

- **Credibility and Trust:** Thought leaders are respected authorities in their field. Their expertise and insights command credibility and trust from potential buyers. This credibility can significantly expedite the trust-building process, as buyers are more likely to engage with someone they perceive as knowledgeable and genuine.

- **Value-Oriented Approach:** Thought leaders focus on providing value to their audience. They offer valuable insights, information, and solutions that genuinely address the needs and challenges of potential buyers. This value-oriented approach creates a more meaningful and authentic connection with buyers.
- **Relationship Building:** Thought leaders prioritise building long-term relationships rather than just closing a sale. They engage in genuine conversations, listen actively, and tailor their recommendations based on the unique needs of each prospect. This helps establish stronger and more enduring customer relationships.
- **Educational Selling:** Thought leaders often engage in educational selling, where they aim to educate and empower buyers rather than using aggressive or manipulative tactics. This approach resonates well with modern consumers who prefer to make informed decisions.
- **Content and Thought Leadership:** Thought leaders regularly create and share high-quality content, such as articles, videos, webinars, and podcasts. This content not only showcases their expertise but also attracts potential buyers who are seeking valuable information. It positions the thought leader as a go-to resource, making them top of mind when a purchase decision is being considered.
- **Reputation and Word of Mouth:** A strong thought leadership position often leads to positive word-of-mouth referrals. Buyers are more likely to listen to recommendations from their peers or respected industry figures, enhancing the thought leader's influence in the sales process.
- **Differentiation:** In competitive markets, thought leaders stand out from the crowd. Their unique perspective and innovative insights differentiate them from traditional salespeople who might be perceived as just pushing a product.
- **Leveraging Influence:** Thought leaders have a broader platform and influence beyond individual sales transactions. Their impact extends to a wider audience, which can indirectly lead to increased exposure and opportunities for referrals.

While thought leaders can be highly effective in the sales process, it's worth noting that a successful sales strategy often involves a combination of thought leadership, strong relationship-building skills, and a deep understanding of the product or service being sold.

This doesn't mean that the thought leader needs to be the one that closes the deal, but at least can help shape up the deal so that the sales can go into the sales process and do his/her part of the job.

Let me share an example from my early days as a consultant. During the transition to the Euro currency, I chose to specialise helping companies navigate the complex processes required for a smooth transition. Most of my clients had little understanding of the intricacies involved and believed the transition would happen seamlessly. However, through thorough research and gathering insights from colleagues and the market, I developed my own well-defined approach and narrative on how clients could successfully navigate this change.

Because I was known for being outspoken and never hesitant to express my opinions, our marketing department frequently utilised me for various media outlets, including publications and radio interviews.

On a particular day, one of our sales colleagues invited me to join a meeting with a specific client seeking assistance with their transition, which involved a substantial SAP implementation and broader business changes.

During the discussion about various approaches and options for the project, one of my colleagues presented multiple possibilities, leaving much to the client's imagination. I began to lose patience because we had already prepared numerous clients for similar transitions, and in this case, there was a clear and proven path to follow. It was an instance where we needed to lead the client and enable them to benefit fully from the expertise our consultancy firm had accumulated.

When it was my turn to speak, I addressed the CFO and presented two options:

1. I would provide guidance on how to approach the project, leveraging best practices we had developed. We would hold weekly meetings where I would explain the steps and

the reasoning behind them. The client could ask questions for clarification, but there would be no debate about my expertise.

2. We would approach the project in the way many organisations handled their SAP implementations at the time, with multiple options and extensive workshops. The client would have the illusion of complete control, and we would engage in numerous discussions with various stakeholders, slowing down the decision-making process.

I concluded by stating that in option one, we would complete the project with a small team in two months, whereas in option two, it would take at least twice as long and likely be three times as expensive. I left the decision in the CFO's hands.

As you might imagine, a salesperson might have found it challenging to make such a statement, and some clients might have perceived it as arrogance. However, it was the clarity of my expertise and the genuine interest I showed in their business that prompted the CFO to call us the next day, expressing a desire to move forward with our consultancy.

There was one condition, though – he wanted me on the project. This is where many experts make a second mistake that limits their potential as thought leaders. Often, clients will insist that you take on a specific role, and if you're not careful, you can become consumed by that one project. Real thought leaders do not allow themselves to become entirely consumed by a single project, as it diminishes their overall value.

My solution at the time was to leverage the trust the CFO had in my expertise. I committed to being fully accountable for the project, personally selecting the team to work with him, and spending half a day per week on-site. It's important to note that a salesperson would typically struggle to persuade a determined client to accept such an arrangement. Clients often push for full-time involvement, and salespeople may fear losing the deal. However, as a thought leader, you've earned the trust of the client. If you can confidently assume this level of accountability, clients are more likely to buy into your proposal.

Never underestimate the power of trust in the journey of a thought leader!

Recognising Your Own Value

Part of the sales process also involves recognising your own value and not being afraid to seek recognition for that value. One common pitfall for many experts is their pride in the knowledge they've acquired and their eagerness to share that knowledge (which ties back to the desire for recognition). However, a true thought leader understands that this acquired knowledge represents a value that should also be acknowledged by those receiving it.

I once encountered a situation where a participant proudly shared that a specific company had invited him to speak more than 10 times about his expertise. While this was undoubtedly an achievement, when we asked how often he had invoiced for his speeches, there was silence. He was so eager to share his insights that he hadn't even considered asking for compensation.

In the Netherlands, there's a saying: "If you want it for free, it probably doesn't have any value." So, if you're asked to share your expertise, make sure to negotiate with your counterpart for the compensation you deserve. This compensation can be in the form of monetary value, but it could also take other forms. Just ensure that it becomes something of value and try to assess what that value is truly worth.

Help Close the Deal

As previously mentioned, a thought leader inherently enjoys a higher level of trust from the receiving party compared to a salesperson. However, the challenge lies in how to facilitate the closing of a deal, especially when discussions can drag on due to the mingling of content and commercial aspects. As long as commercial discussions remain in the background, it becomes increasingly difficult to finalise the "what" of the deal that needs to be closed.

Two training approaches have proven valuable to me in this process, not only in business situations but also in my personal life.

The first technique is the art of reaching out. The key here is to first seek consensus on the "What," which is the content aspect of the deal. Avoid mixing it with commercial aspects; those can be addressed later, and the thought leader can potentially step

away from that part of the process. The trainer taught me to extend my hand now in the conversation when I believe we've reached an agreement from a content perspective. When you reach out your hand, the other person's instinct is to also reach out and shake it. It's a peculiar psychological phenomenon, but it has proven true in many situations. Once the other person has reached out, you can say, "So, from a content perspective, we have an agreement," and then close that part of the discussion. At this point, you only need to focus on the commercial aspects.

This approach helps solidify the agreement that you share a common understanding of what needs to be done and that you both want to proceed. Emotional commitment is established at this moment, making it easier to reach a resolution on the commercial side. This can also be an effective handover moment if you're working in collaboration with someone who has the formal commercial responsibility. You've closed the content part, and now it's up to the commercial colleague to finalise that aspect.

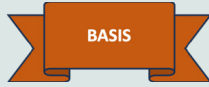
I once had the opportunity to attend the Oktoberfest in Munich, where a sales lead organised a party with clients. During the event, I found myself seated next to a Chief Information Officer (CIO) who was in the midst of a digital transformation project. We engaged in a lively discussion and challenged each other's viewpoints. Somehow, I managed to pique his interest, and we agreed to have a follow-up call where I could share more of my insights.

After this call, he invited me to meet with his team to explore potential collaboration further. During a three-hour workshop, I presented my thoughts and sought confirmation that this aligned with his needs. I convinced him that an architecture study should be the first step. We agreed on the approach, and I offered to help him identify the right individuals to drive the program. I also committed to remaining a sponsor in the background with participation in some of the workshops—once again, not selling myself into the project but taking accountability for the end result.

At this point, I reached out to him, confirming that we both understood what was needed and what we wanted. I told him that he could now discuss the costs with the sales team. This experience demonstrated that if you can genuinely deliver value, the cost becomes a consequence rather than the leading principle.

The Different Proficiency Levels

As described earlier, we will have three different levels for measuring one's proficiency level with regard to Sales.



A **Sales Participant**: An integral member of the sales team, the Sales Participant consistently contributes expertise by providing input on proposals as requested by the sales organisation.



A **Sales Expert**: A skilled Sales Expert who not only identifies this individual but also actively escorts them to engage with clients. Knows how to convince the client and based on the created trust increases the win ratio.



An **Active Funnel Creator and closer**: Clients seek this person actively and on regular basis also pro-actively seeks clients to discuss new ideas. Their adeptness drives the closing of the deal.

Sales Participant:

A sales participant is regularly invited to take part in sales processes. This individual contributes input to proposals, participates in calculations, and may also be involved in presentations. The request for their participation is based not solely on their established reputation but rather on their expertise in the field.

Sales Expert:

A sales expert is the go-to person in sales processes that touch upon their area of expertise. They possess extensive experience in responding to Requests for Proposal (RFPs) and play a leading role in the team responsible for calculations and the final wording of responses. They focus on crafting key messages that need to be conveyed.

In the end, the sales expert has a prominent role in client presentations where their expertise significantly influences the client's decision-making process. They can guide the client's thinking and help align their needs with the strengths of the proposal. Within the organisation, this individual is known for

their ability to make a substantial difference in the sales process, and it has become a major part of their role.

Active Funnel Creator and Closer:

A thought leader who excels in sales is not simply asked by their own organisation to participate in sales deals; they initiate the deals themselves. Through engagements within their network, participation in industry panels, and outstanding performances in keynotes, clients actively seek the thought leader's opinion and guidance on addressing specific challenges.

Even in cases where formal procurement processes must be followed, the thought leader can shape the client's questions to align with the organisation's capabilities, making the sales process smoother and increasing the likelihood of winning contracts.

The thought leader takes an active coaching role with the client, ensuring that they not only take responsibility for providing answers but also take accountability for delivering on their part of the deal. However, this is done on a part-time basis, as the thought leader also needs time to continuously develop their expertise and support the organisation's overall sales efforts.

When we did the analysis of impact on the participants of the Thought Leader training, we found that 76% observed that their sales performance have improved.

Exemplary Thought Leaders Who Have Mastered This Element

In this section, I will describe some people that in my opinion are world-class when it comes to the topic of sales.

Mark Cuban

Mark Cuban stands out in selling and thought leadership due to his sharp business acumen and strategic branding. As a shrewd investor and entrepreneur, he navigates markets with insight, making informed decisions that have propelled his success. His role as a “Shark” on “Shark Tank” highlights his negotiation skills, where he effectively seals deals with startups, showcasing his deal-making expertise.

Cuban’s thought leadership shines through his candid communication style and fearless risk-taking. He shares his insights on diverse subjects through books, interviews, and social media, challenging norms and sparking discussions. His willingness to embrace emerging technologies and take calculated risks underscores his influential thought leadership. Cuban’s charismatic approach to communication and his ability to bridge complex concepts to a broader audience further solidify his status as a thought leader.

Richard Branson

Richard Branson is a standout in selling and thought leadership, primarily driven by his adventurous spirit and strategic branding. His ability to create a captivating personal brand has made him a recognizable and relatable figure, drawing people into his ventures. Branson’s mastery of self-promotion is evident in his knack for PR stunts and innovative marketing strategies that garner attention and drive interest in his businesses.

Thought leadership is a cornerstone of Branson’s persona, exemplified by his boldness and willingness to challenge the status quo. His visionary ideas and risk-taking attitude have led to groundbreaking ventures in various industries, showcasing his ability to inspire and lead by example. Through his books, speeches, and media presence, Branson shares his insights on entrepreneurship, leadership, and social impact, cementing his reputation as a thought leader who advocates for change and innovation.

Christine Lagarde

Christine Lagarde excels in both selling and thought leadership, driven by her extensive experience and strategic approach. As a skilled negotiator and financial expert, she has navigated complex international deals and agreements, showcasing her adept deal-closing abilities. Her leadership roles at organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank highlight her capacity to make informed decisions and guide significant financial initiatives.

Lagarde's thought leadership is exemplified by her insightful analyses of global economic trends and her ability to communicate complex concepts with clarity. Her speeches and writings on economic policy, gender equality, and sustainable development underscore her commitment to addressing pressing global issues. Lagarde's influence extends beyond her professional roles, as she leverages her platform to advocate for innovative solutions and promote collaboration among nations.

Exercises and Tips to Increase Your Proficiency

Below, you will find some beneficial exercises and some practical tools to help you improve your proficiency in the topic of sales

Your Working Life as a Playground

Perhaps the most important part for getting better in sales is recognising that you will always learn and can improve. If things go wrong, don't see it a failure but as a lesson to learn and improve. Whenever I have trainings, it is one of the first things I teach. Act everyday as if you are in a playground. Try new things, see the reaction of people and based on that adjust (or keep what really worked).

Viewing your professional life as a playground where each day presents opportunities to learn and grow is not just a mindset, but also a transformative approach that can lead to both personal fulfilment and career success. This perspective is founded on the belief that every task, challenge, and interaction offers a chance to expand your knowledge, skills, and horizons. Embracing this outlook can fuel your motivation, foster resilience, and empower you to thrive in an ever-evolving work environment.

First, treating your professional life as a playground of learning encourages a proactive attitude towards skill development. Just as children eagerly explore a playground, professionals can approach each workday with the curiosity of an explorer. This mindset opens doors to continuous improvement and a commitment to staying relevant in an increasingly competitive job market. By treating every project, no matter how routine, as an opportunity to enhance your abilities, you pave the way for a steady trajectory of advancement.

Furthermore, adopting this perspective nurtures adaptability, a vital trait in today's rapidly changing world. Just as a playground offers various play structures and activities, the professional landscape is dynamic and multifaceted. Embracing the idea that you are on a perpetual learning journey equips you with the resilience to navigate uncertainty and ambiguity. It allows you to pivot your skills, take on new challenges, and explore uncharted territories with confidence. This adaptability not only ensures your relevance but positions you as a valuable asset to your organisation.

Beyond individual growth, the concept of the professional playground encourages collaboration and innovation. Just as children interact and share ideas while playing, professionals can benefit from collaborative learning experiences. When you approach your colleagues, superiors, and subordinates as potential sources of knowledge and inspiration, you create an environment where ideas flow freely and creativity thrives. This collaborative spirit not only enriches your own understanding but contributes to a culture of innovation within your workplace.

Extend Your Hand to Close the Content Part of the Deal

The act of extending a hand to close the “content” part of a deal before discussing the price is a strategic manoeuvre deeply rooted in psychology, leveraging the power of human interaction and reciprocity. This approach taps into fundamental social dynamics that evoke trust, establish rapport, and foster a sense of commitment, ultimately setting the stage for a successful negotiation.

The handshake, a universally recognised gesture, transcends cultural boundaries and holds profound symbolic meaning. When one person offers their hand, they extend a symbol of friendship, cooperation, and sincerity. This simple yet potent act sends a message that transcends words: “I am here as an ally, eager to collaborate.” This instinctive response is deeply ingrained in human nature and is linked to our evolutionary need for cooperation and social cohesion.

When you reach out your hand to close the content aspect of a deal, you initiate a subtle yet powerful psychological chain reaction. By first addressing the content and details of the agreement, you demonstrate your commitment to mutual understanding and shared goals. This paves the way for a smoother negotiation process, as both parties recognise that they are on the same page in terms of expectations, requirements, and objectives.

However, it is the sequence of events that truly magnifies the impact. By shaking hands after discussing the content, you capitalise on the psychological principle of reciprocity. When someone extends their hand to you, there is a natural inclination to reciprocate the gesture. This subconscious response is deeply ingrained in our social behaviour and is often driven by a sense of obligation and fairness. When your counterpart takes your hand, they are not only acknowledging the shared understand-

ing but also subconsciously committing to a sense of collaboration and fairness in the forthcoming negotiation.

Furthermore, the physical act of shaking hands releases oxytocin, often referred to as the “bonding hormone,” which enhances trust and strengthens social bonds. This physiological reaction reinforces the positive feelings associated with the negotiation process, creating an environment conducive to open communication and cooperation.

In conclusion, reaching out your hand to close the “content” part of a deal before discussing the price is a subtle yet potent strategy rooted in psychological principles. By leveraging the universally recognized gesture of a handshake, you tap into the deeply ingrained human desire for cooperation, trust, and reciprocity. This approach not only establishes a strong foundation for effective negotiation but also creates a sense of commitment and collaboration that can significantly enhance the likelihood of a successful deal.

Customer Persona Creation

Customer persona creation is a powerful tool that allows businesses to humanise their target audience, gaining deeper insights into their needs, preferences, and behaviours. It involves crafting detailed and semi-fictional representations of ideal customers, enabling companies to tailor their products, marketing strategies, and sales approaches more effectively.

The process begins with research and data analysis to gather information about existing customers and potential markets. This data might include demographics, psychographics, buying behaviours, and pain points. Once gathered, this information is synthesised into a cohesive persona that embodies the characteristics and motivations of a specific customer segment.

A well-crafted customer persona goes beyond basic demographics; it delves into the persona’s aspirations, challenges, and values. This deeper understanding enables businesses to empathise with their customers, addressing their unique needs and providing tailored solutions. For instance, a tech startup aiming to sell a productivity app might create a persona named “Busy Brian,” a young professional seeking to optimise his work-life balance.

By referring to customer personas, companies can fine-tune their messaging, marketing channels, and even product features to resonate with the intended audience. Personas guide content creation, ensuring it speaks directly to the persona's interests and pain points. They also aid in selecting the most appropriate communication channels, from social media platforms to traditional advertising.

Ultimately, customer persona creation helps companies humanise their marketing and sales efforts, creating a stronger connection with their target audience. By understanding the motivations and challenges of their ideal customers, businesses can craft compelling narratives that engage, inspire, and drive meaningful interactions, ultimately leading to improved customer relationships and business success.

Elevator Pitch Refinement

Crafting a compelling elevator pitch and refining it is a skill that can make a significant impact on your ability to capture attention and convey your message effectively within a short timeframe. An elevator pitch is a concise, well-crafted introduction that succinctly communicates who you are, what you do, and the value you offer. Refining this pitch involves a process of honing your words, delivery, and overall impact to create a lasting impression.

Begin by distilling your message to its essence. Identify the key elements that define your offering and resonate with your audience. What problem do you solve? What unique value do you bring? By pinpointing these elements, you create a solid foundation for your pitch.

Next, focus on clarity and simplicity. Avoid jargon or technical language that might confuse or alienate your audience. Use straightforward, relatable terms that instantly convey your message. Remember, the goal is to make your pitch easily understood by anyone, regardless of their background or expertise.

Craft a memorable hook that grabs attention right from the start. Consider starting with a thought-provoking question, a surprising statistic, or a bold statement that addresses a common pain point. This hook should spark curiosity and encourage your listener to engage further.

Practice and refine your delivery. The tone, pace, and enthusiasm with which you deliver your elevator pitch are crucial. Speak with confidence, maintaining eye contact and a friendly demeanour. Avoid rushing through your pitch; instead, give each element its due attention.

Adapt your pitch to your audience. Depending on the context and who you're speaking to, you might need to emphasize different aspects of your offering. Tailor your pitch to address the specific needs or interests of the person you're speaking with, showcasing how your solution can benefit them.

Lastly, seek feedback and iterate. Test your elevator pitch with friends, colleagues, or mentors and gather their input. Pay attention to their reactions and suggestions, and be willing to make adjustments based on their feedback.

Negotiation Role Play

Negotiation role-plays provide a dynamic and practical way to enhance your negotiation skills and develop your ability to navigate complex interactions with finesse and confidence. Role-playing scenarios simulate real-world negotiation situations, allowing you to practice and refine your strategies, communication, and problem-solving techniques.

Start by selecting a range of negotiation scenarios that mirror the challenges you might encounter in your professional or personal life. These scenarios could involve salary negotiations, contract discussions, or even purchasing decisions. Assign roles to participants, designating one as the negotiator and the other as the counterpart. This structure allows you to experiment with different roles and perspectives, broadening your understanding of the negotiation process.

During the role-play, focus on several key elements:

- **Preparation:** Research and gather relevant information about the negotiation scenario. Understand your interests, goals, and potential points of compromise. This preparation will enhance your confidence and ability to respond effectively during the negotiation.
- **Active Listening:** Pay close attention to your counterpart's statements, concerns, and objectives. Effective negotiators listen actively to uncover underlying interests and uncover potential areas for agreement.

- **Communication and Persuasion:** Practice clear and concise communication. Articulate your points logically and persuasively, focusing on the benefits of the proposed solutions. Adapt your communication style based on your counterpart's responses and cues.
- **Problem Solving:** Embrace a collaborative mindset and work together to find mutually beneficial solutions. During the role-play, focus on creative problem-solving, exploring options that satisfy both parties' needs.
- **Managing Emotions:** Negotiations can evoke emotions, both in yourself and your counterpart. Practice maintaining a calm and composed demeanour, even in challenging situations. Emphasise empathy and understanding to build rapport and reduce tension.
- **Adaptability:** Be prepared to pivot and adjust your approach based on new information or unexpected developments. Flexibility is a crucial skill in negotiation, allowing you to seize opportunities and address challenges effectively.
- **Closure:** Aim to reach a satisfactory agreement that meets the interests of both parties. Practice summarising the agreed-upon terms and confirming the details before concluding the negotiation.

After each role-play session, take time to reflect and debrief. Discuss what went well, areas for improvement, and strategies you can apply in future negotiations. Learning from each experience and receiving feedback from your role-play partner can help you refine your negotiation techniques over time.

By engaging in negotiation role-plays regularly, you can develop a versatile skill set that empowers you to negotiate confidently and skilfully in various contexts. The practical insights gained from these exercises will serve you well in your professional endeavours, enabling you to approach negotiations with strategic thinking, effective communication, and a collaborative mindset.

Lessons Learned from Followers of the Thought Leader Development Trainings

Tim Lücke - Thought Leader Innovation

When I started out on the thought leadership journey, I was quite focused on the content dimension. After all, I was an architect and proud to deliver sound and well-thought-out content. To be honest, the other dimensions did not sound too interesting to me at first. Especially regarding personal branding and sales, I even felt a reluctance within me to approach these topics.



The program gave me the headspace to think more about where this reluctance within me came from. It also provided some valuable, alternative perspectives on these pillars I did not have before. Especially one sentence during the program regarding Sales triggered something within me: "If you cannot sell it, it probably is not worth much." Reflecting on this, I noticed that I was hesitant to put my thoughts out in the world, although I was somewhat proud of them. This led to further questioning within myself. I noticed the relation towards personal branding. I always considered myself a humble person. To advertise myself and my personality outwards seemed to contradict this characteristic of me.

Digging deeper, however, I finally found out, that it was not modesty. This was rather a mask I put around the actual root cause. The mask allowed me to think of it as a noble and fine trait of myself. Looking behind this veil, I identified the real reason. I was feeling a fraud. Or to put it in more modern terms: I was suffering from the impostor syndrome.

What really helped me in this case was the arrow breaking exercise. With the realisation in my mind, I wrote in simple terms "I am a fraud" on the arrow. Breaking the arrow by impaling my throat against it, was a real challenge and I think triggered something in my unconsciousness providing me with a new found confidence. I started to seriously work on my thoughts, to put them into written words with the clear goal of publishing in one way or the other. However, I was not quite ready yet. Surprisingly, the final push for me came with the final pitch exercise and the special demand to go extra crazy. This is where I really jumped out of my comfort zone and which made me realise that I can do it.

In conclusion, the program made me come up with the courage to test and validate my thoughts, as well as my personality, against the real world instead of hiding from it. In the end, I can only learn and grow if I put myself out there and develop my thoughts also from the outside world.

Plan your growth !

AS-IS	_____	_____
	Participant	Closer
TO-BE	_____	_____
	Participant	Closer

What strength do you already have on Sales

Where do you need to develop

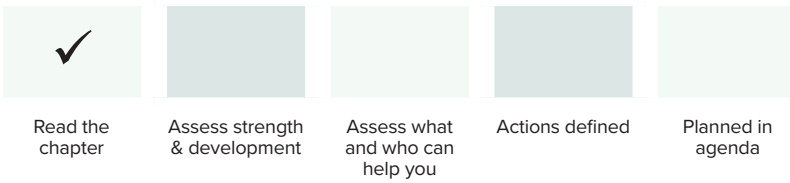
Which Exercise could best help and why

Which sources could help you

Who can best help you in your growth and why

What are the concrete actions to you will take

Checklist



CHAPTER 7

MOBILISATION: EMPOWERING THOUGHT



Introduction

One of my favourite books on management is Jack Welch's book *Winning*. Although there are always some good comments to make on whether he really left a better corporate world behind, there are some very good lessons to learn from him.

The story that I liked most was the story about the 3E's. During a period within General Electric, Jack and his team came up with a new corporate strategy for the management team which they defined as the 3E's. They consisted of the following elements:

ENERGY

"Energy is the ability to go, go, go—to thrive on action and relish change. People with positive energy are generally extroverted and optimistic. They make conversation and friends easily. They're people who don't complain about working hard—they love to work. They also love to play and overall just love life."

ENERGIZE	“This is the ability to get others revved up. People who energize can inspire their team to take on the impossible—and enjoy doing it. The ability to energize is apparent in someone with an in-depth knowledge of their business, who sets a powerful personal example, and has strong persuasion skills.”
EDGE	“Having edge means having the courage to make tough “yes or no” decisions. Smart people can assess a situation from every angle—but smart people with edge know when to stop assessing and make a tough call, even without all the information.”

However, after a year, it didn't bring the results they hoped for. So, being Jack Welch, he went digging into the issue and found out that the 3E's were excellent, but they forgot the most important E of them all: Execution:

EXECUTE	“Being able to execute means having the ability to get the job done. It turns out a person can have positive energy, energize everyone around them, make hard calls, and still not get over the finish line. Being able to execute is a unique and distinct skill. It means the person knows how to put decisions into action and push them forward to completion, through resistance, chaos, or unexpected obstacles. People who can execute know that winning is about results.”
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You can have such a good network, strong brand, be good in sales, and your content in perfect perspective, if you are not able to mobilise other to help you, you will not get the most out of your thought.

Or looking at it from a different perspective, your ability to mobilise others will also help you in building up your brand, create a larger active network, get more content inspiration from others and help in closing the deals.

For me the element of Mobilisation is the grease in the motor of a thought leader and hence perhaps the most important part.

Understanding Politics

In the dynamic landscape of organisational intricacies and interconnected networks, the art of mobilising others has emerged as the linchpin skill for propelling collective advancement. However, beneath the veneer of shared objectives and apparent harmony, a veiled force exerts its impact – enter the realm of organisational politics. Unravelling the labyrinthine corridors of power dynamics, interpersonal entanglements, and decision-making intricacies is not just an advantage; it's the quintessential foundation for those aspiring to wield mastery in the craft of mobilisation. This composition elucidates the pivotal rationales why an astute grasp of organisational politics is the compass guiding individuals toward true excellence in the endeavour of mobilisation.

Intrigue lies at the heart of comprehending organisational politics, offering a conduit to magnify the mobiliser's influence. Discerning pivotal stakeholders, deciphering their incentives, and mapping their spheres of impact empower a mobiliser to bespoke strategies and messages. This personalised approach cements authenticity, instills confidence, and secures endorsements from a diverse array of players. Absent this astute acumen, a mobiliser meanders, bereft of the insights that can either launch their endeavours into orbit or leave them grounded without propulsion.

Furthermore, the virtuosity of a skilled mobiliser extends to orchestrating the symphony of collaboration. An entity, be it an organisation or a network, resembles a mosaic of divergent perspectives and competing interests, often punctuated by clashes and disharmony. By unravelling the convoluted political fabric, a mobiliser adeptly mediates discord, harnesses synergies, and nurtures an ecosystem primed for unity and harmonious cooperation. The finesse with which organisational politics are navigated equips the mobiliser with a toolkit to span chasms and channel collective vigour towards a shared zenith.

Crucially, a deep dive into organisational politics arms the mobiliser to pre-empt and surmount obstacles that could otherwise derail progress. In the throes of mobilisation, hurdles invariably surface – resistance from established power bastions, or unexpected eruptions of internal dissent. Armed with insights into the underlying political currents, the mobiliser charts proactive courses, crafts contingencies, and adroitly steers through impediments. This state of preparedness not only safeguards

the propulsion of mobilisation but positions the mobiliser as an avant-garde conductor, expertly navigating their collective expedition through the tempestuous waters of organisational intricacies.

In summation, the enigmatic realm of organisational politics presents mobilisers with a trove of revelations and tools. Proficiency in this domain unlocks the gateway to heightened influence, adept collaboration, and foresighted troubleshooting, propelling mobilisation efforts towards triumphant fruition. As aspirants in the symphony of collective endeavour, understanding and harnessing organisational politics emerges as the keynote that harmonises the composition of transformative change.

Red Versus Green Organisational Structures

In order to master the politics in an organisation, one needs to understand the difference in the formal organisational structure and the informal organisational structure, also known as the red and green organisation.

Red Organizational Structures:

Red organisational structures refer to hierarchical and centralised organisational setups where authority and decision-making are concentrated at the top levels of management. In a red organisational structure, there is a clear chain of command, and communication and directives flow from the top management down to lower levels. This type of structure is often characterised by strict adherence to rules and procedures, with a focus on maintaining control, discipline, and stability. Red organisations typically have well-defined roles and responsibilities, and employees are expected to follow established protocols. While red structures can provide clear direction and coordination, they can also be slow to adapt to change and may stifle innovation and creativity.

Green Organisational Structures:

Green organisational structures, on the other hand, emphasise decentralised decision-making, collaboration, and empowerment at various levels within the organisation. The concept of a green organisation is rooted in principles of flexibility, adaptability, and employee participation. In a green structure, there is an emphasis on teamwork, open communication, and a flat hierarchy. Decision-making authority is distributed across the organi-

sation, allowing for quicker responses to changing circumstances and a greater ability to capitalise on emerging opportunities. Green organisations often value employee input and encourage innovation, which can lead to a more dynamic and creative work environment. However, managing a green structure may require strong coordination mechanisms to ensure alignment and avoid chaos.

It's important to note that these terms are often used metaphorically to describe organisational philosophies and approaches rather than literal colours. Organisations may exhibit elements of both red and green structures to varying degrees, and the choice between them depends on factors such as the industry, organisational culture, and strategic goals. The distinction between red and green structures serves as a framework for understanding different managerial styles and their implications for how authority, communication, and decision-making are managed within an organisation.

Understanding the Role of KPI's

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) wield a remarkable influence over human behaviour within organisational landscapes, acting as powerful guides that shape our actions and priorities. These metrics, carefully chosen to quantify and measure progress towards specific goals, have a profound psychological impact on individuals and teams. This influence stems from our innate drive to achieve, coupled with our desire for recognition and success. When KPIs are strategically integrated into an organisation's fabric, they become more than just metrics – they transform into drivers of behaviour, nudging us toward alignment with desired outcomes.

Aligning one's message with the KPIs of another person represents a strategic manoeuvre that can yield substantial benefits, especially when seeking support or collaboration. This approach leverages the principle that individuals tend to invest their time, resources, and efforts where they perceive direct alignment with their own goals and priorities. When your message resonates with someone else's KPIs, you tap into a shared objective, creating a symbiotic relationship where both parties stand to gain. By articulating your proposal or initiative in terms of how it directly contributes to the achievement of their KPIs, you establish a compelling rationale for collaboration. This not only captures their attention but also establishes a bridge of

relevance and common purpose, significantly increasing the likelihood of garnering their support.

In practice, this alignment can be a potent tool for negotiation, stakeholder engagement, and project buy-in. For instance, if you're seeking funding for a project, framing your pitch to highlight how the project aligns with the decision-maker's KPIs – whether it's revenue growth, cost savings, or customer satisfaction – can resonate more deeply and motivate their endorsement. Similarly, when forming partnerships or seeking assistance from colleagues, tailoring your request to align with their KPIs can create a win-win scenario, where each party's goals are advanced. In essence, aligning your message with someone else's KPIs is a strategic alignment of interests that taps into human psychology and enhances the potential for collaboration, making your endeavour not just desirable but integral to their path of success.

In the thought leader training, the KPI discussion pops up on a regular basis. In particular, since the thought leader is so full of his/her own idea, that it is hard to grasp why for instance a salesperson is not willing to bring that idea to the client. Having had a sales background, I always try to explain that in this particular case, the salesperson probably has a large part of his/her salary based on the variable part of their salary, e.g. the bonus. And since it is a sales, this variable part is probably significant.

In this case, the expert was frustrated since he was convinced about the power of his idea, but just could not get the support he needed. I asked him how he pitched his solution. He explained that with his solution, a process could be optimised, this could be done quick and probably against a sales price of about 50K Euro. I asked him what the lead time was for such deals. He explained that most of the time we had to find out who the right business owner was, try to convince that person, then move to the IT department to get support for the right tool needed, probably since it was new then to also get support from procurement.

I stopped him after this first introduction and tried to explain that in our business, this meant a lot of meetings for a relatively small amount of money. If the salesperson had a sales target of five million plus, why would he/she start doing a lot of work for something that was still in an infant stage. He acknowledged and saw the disappointment on his face.

Naturally, I was willing to help and asked him what potential next stages could be. And this is where things got interesting. Once a client would see what the power of the tool and process optimisation was, they could save money which they could invest in optimising the next process, and then to next process etc. I asked him, whether this would require expertise to be built by the client themselves and how they would maintain this tool and all the processes. He convinced me that we could support that and help the client build an expertise centre with us. Suddenly, this one off 50K Euro project was now transformed in potentially a three million Euro deal with a yearly recurring revenue. It goes without saying that this revelation intrigued numerous salespeople.

This shows that if you understand the KPI's of your counterpart, whether it is internal or the KPI's of the client, you will find more support and cooperation.

The Social Sales Pyramid

One of the main lessons I have learned from my coach, Bert Aardema (and confirmed in real life), is what I call the Social Sales Pyramid. It also supports the Holden sales methodology.

It basically addresses three different levels in which decision makers will decide whether to go ahead with a certain proposition.

The basic level is whether they agree on the content. This is very important because if the content is not good, it will be very difficult to come to an agreement. Thought leaders thrive on this, but also make the mistake of thinking that this is the main differentiator in winning a deal. Hence, why the other two levels are more challenging for them to grasp. However, if they do, they can mobilise anyone for their cause.

The second level is "Business". Will the proposal contribute to the business goals? Here is the link with the KPI's as described in the previous chapter. Do you really know the KPI's your counterpart wants to achieve? Can you describe the benefits of your thought in the terminology that they work with?

Once I was responsible for a beer brewer, and always addressed the benefits in a technological perspective, until I got coaching from one of the smartest guys in our company. He just kept pushing me on what the real KPI's were. As he stated, "You

should always be able to address whether the outcome of your project addresses the real business drivers of the company”. In the beer brewers business, this was the profitability per hecto-litre beer. We started the discussion with the client on how we could calculate this. Just the sheer fact that we wanted to have this discussion already positively changed the dynamics with the client dramatically.

So, let’s assume we have addressed the content in the right way and we have aligned our proposal with the real business drivers of the client. Still, it can go wrong, and this is why the third layer is so important: the layer of Personal.

In the end, everyone is a human being with his/her unique needs. These can be political ones or personal ones. Think about someone doing a project because he/she thinks it will help in getting a new promotion. Or that the success of a project will be the reason why he/she can still stay relevant. If you don’t address this, you can have great content and good alignment with business KPI’s, yet will not win the heart of the one you need to persuade.

This doesn’t mean that you should only focus on the personal needs. If it is counterproductive to the business needs or goes against ethics, you should of course not propose anything. However, you should be aware that there is always an extra dimension.

In Holden, they call it the Personal Value Statement. What is the personal value statement for your counterpart?

You see that although this pyramid has a strong focus on sales, I think it is even more important to use in the mobilisation part. Sometimes we don’t want to sell a service, but we want to make sure that others will support us, bring our ideas to others, or bring in connection with people in their network. In each of these cases, you need to be able to understand the pyramid of that person in order to get that person to become active for you.

Creating a Clear Vision

Having a clear vision is an essential cornerstone for effectively mobilising others, as it provides a compelling and coherent narrative that unites individuals towards a common goal. A clear vision acts as a guiding light, illuminating the path forward and creating a sense of purpose and direction. When people can

vividly understand and align with the overarching goal, their energies, efforts, and enthusiasm become synchronised, resulting in a powerful collective force.

A clear vision fosters clarity and reduces ambiguity, making it easier for mobilisers to communicate their objectives and expectations. It serves as a focal point around which ideas, strategies, and actions can coalesce, enabling individuals to work together with a shared understanding of the end goal. This common understanding not only streamlines decision-making but also empowers individuals to make autonomous contributions, as they know how their efforts fit into the larger picture.

Moreover, a well-defined vision taps into the human propensity for inspiration and aspiration. A compelling vision stimulates emotions and triggers a sense of purpose, motivating individuals to overcome challenges, push their limits, and invest themselves wholeheartedly. It helps create a narrative that instills a sense of urgency, sparking enthusiasm and commitment that transcends obstacles. A clear vision not only attracts supporters but also retains their loyalty and dedication over time, sustaining momentum even when faced with setbacks.




In conclusion, a clear vision is a linchpin in the mobilisation process, providing a roadmap that guides and galvanises individuals towards a shared destination. It channels energies, clarifies objectives, and evokes inspiration, acting as a catalyst for collective action and transformative change.

Think about how Elon Musk was not in the business of selling cars, but for creating a better world.

The bigger the vision (however supported by some realism), the more attractive your thought becomes and the easier it is to mobilise others.

The Different Proficiency Levels

As described earlier, we will have three different levels for measuring one's proficiency level with regard to mobilisation.

	<p>A Mobilisation Explorer: Just starting the journey, aware of the need to dive deeper into the politics but has no clue yet how the organisation really works.</p>
	<p>A Mobilisation Prodigy: Understands the red and the green organisation, is aware of the different KPI's but not yet fully able to create personal messages whilst having the holistic story.</p>
	<p>A Mobilisation Guru: Understands the organisation in and out. Knows the personal drivers for each stakeholder and can create a compelling vision that aligns them all. People are keen to help this thought leader in achieving success.</p>

Mobilisation Explorer:

This category typically includes experts who possess limited awareness of the organisational politics within their workplace. They remain primarily focused on their own expertise and have not yet grasped how to garner support for their ideas and thoughts.

This position can be quite precarious, as these experts may hold tremendous value for the organisation but receive minimal recognition, potentially leading to retention issues. Therefore, my advice is to always be on the lookout for individuals in this situation and provide them with additional guidance on how to proactively gain traction. However, it's essential to provide them with clear guidelines for navigating this journey.

Mobilisation Prodigy:

The Mobilisation Prodigy has developed a deeper understanding of the organisational dynamics. They have often identified a sponsor, typically at lower levels within the organisation, who helps create some space for the thought leader.

Mobilisation Prodigies are actively engaged in expanding their network and are gaining insights into the inner workings of the organisation. They are familiar with concepts such as the “red and green organisation” and actively apply this knowledge.

Additionally, they are beginning to practise the concept of personalised messaging.

Mobilisation Guru:

The Mobilisation Guru possesses a comprehensive understanding of the organisation, including its internal politics. They have a deep awareness of the personal motivations of key players within the organisation and skilfully leverage this knowledge to position their ideas effectively.

Securing funding and support for new ideas comes naturally to the Mobilisation Guru because they address the right individuals with the right messages at the right time. They tailor their messaging to each person involved in the mobilisation effort, ensuring a consistent and unified message.

Furthermore, they have the ability to swiftly grasp the true business drivers of the organisation and can adapt their pitch to produce positive outcomes related to these drivers, regardless of the industry or role involved.

Exemplary Thought Leaders Who Have Mastered This Element

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg excels in mobilising others due to her unique combination of unwavering dedication, authentic passion, and powerful communication skills. At a young age, Greta recognized the urgency of the climate crisis and decided to take a stand, igniting a global movement. Her unapologetic commitment to her cause has resonated with people across generations, cultures, and backgrounds.

Greta's authenticity is a cornerstone of her mobilisation prowess. She speaks from the heart, openly sharing her fears, frustrations, and hopes regarding the climate emergency. Her candidness not only establishes a deep emotional connection with her audience but also empowers others to confront their own concerns and take action. By embodying her message, Greta sets a compelling example that drives others to join her in advocating for environmental preservation.

Furthermore, Greta's ability to communicate effectively cannot be understated. Her concise and impactful speeches, often delivered with unwavering determination, cut through the noise and capture global attention. Greta's words are a rallying cry, encouraging individuals to question the status quo, demand accountability from leaders, and participate in grassroots movements. Her speeches and activism galvanise people to mobilise, from participating in climate strikes to engaging in policy discussions and environmental initiatives.

In essence, Greta Thunberg's exceptional mobilisation skills stem from her genuine commitment, relatable authenticity, and compelling communication style. Her influence extends far beyond her age, demonstrating that anyone, regardless of their background, can make a significant impact by harnessing their passion and using their voice to mobilise others toward meaningful change.

Elon Musk

Elon Musk is a master mobiliser, driven by an unparalleled combination of visionary ambition, innovative thinking, and an uncanny ability to inspire and galvanise diverse audiences. His remarkable success in mobilising others can be attributed to

his exceptional leadership, disruptive ideas, and magnetic communication style.

At the core of Musk's mobilisation prowess is his visionary ambition. He consistently sets audacious goals that challenge the boundaries of what's possible, from revolutionizing the electric vehicle industry with Tesla to redefining space exploration through SpaceX. These visionary objectives act as rallying points, captivating the imagination of people worldwide and motivating them to support his ventures.

Musk's capacity to disrupt industries and ignite change is equally pivotal. His groundbreaking ideas, such as the development of reusable rockets or the concept of a high-speed transportation system with Hyperloop, push the envelope of innovation. By disrupting traditional norms and proving that radical concepts can become reality, Musk not only mobilises teams of talented individuals to work alongside him but also attracts a global community of supporters eager to be part of transformative change.

Moreover, Musk's communication style is a potent mobilisation tool. He is renowned for his candid, unfiltered approach to sharing his thoughts and insights on social media and in public forums. This transparency humanises him and establishes a direct connection with his audience, allowing them to feel part of his journey. His ability to distil complex concepts into relatable terms fosters a sense of involvement and empowerment, prompting people to rally around his endeavours and advocate for his ventures.

Amal Clooney

Amal Clooney is a prominent human rights lawyer and activist celebrated for her mastery of mobilization. With a global reach, she tackles significant cases involving human rights violations, advocating for justice and accountability on an international scale. Through effective communication, she adeptly conveys complex legal and social issues, engaging both the public and media.

Her high-profile cases often attract media attention. She has utilised this attention to her advantage by strategically engaging with the media to shine a spotlight on her cases and the broader issues at hand. This media presence has helped raise awareness and drive public discourse on matters of human rights and justice.

She has collaborated with various organisations, governments, and NGOs to amplify her advocacy efforts. By forming strategic partnerships, she has been able to pool resources and expertise to create a more significant impact.

Furthermore, her deep understanding of international law and human rights allows her to navigate complex legal frameworks and utilize them in her mobilisation efforts. Her legal acumen gives her a strong foundation to advocate for justice and accountability.

Amal Clooney's success as a professional woman, alongside her commitment to justice and human rights, has made her a role model for many. Her example inspires others to get involved in activism and mobilisation efforts, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Exercises and Tips to Increase Your Proficiency

Take a Sherlock Holmes week

This sounds very strange, but I would recommend that you take a specific time (let's say a week) to try and really understand the dynamics in the organisation. Find out what the key stakeholders in your organisation or at your client are, what are the key drivers that make them tick and how people look at each other.

Here's a concise guide on how to effectively delve into understanding the politics within an organisation:

- **Observe and Listen:** Begin by opening your senses to the nuances around you. Pay close attention to interactions during meetings, casual conversations, and even non-verbal cues. Listen attentively to what is said and unsaid, as understanding the unspoken hierarchies and power dynamics is crucial.
- **Identify Key Players:** Pinpoint influential individuals within the organisation. These might include decision-makers, opinion leaders, and those who wield behind-the-scenes influence. Observe their roles, alliances, and communication styles to better grasp their impact on the organisational landscape.
- **Map Relationships:** Create a visual representation of the relationships between key players. Note connections, alliances, and potential conflicts of interest. This will help you comprehend the network of influence and power that shapes decision-making.
- **Study Communication Channels:** Analyse how information flows within the organization. Understand formal communication channels like official emails and meetings, as well as informal avenues such as coffee breaks and social events. Recognising how information is disseminated can provide insights into who holds sway over crucial information.
- **Uncover Motivations:** Dig into the motivations of different actors. What drives their decisions and actions? Are there underlying personal or professional agendas? Understanding these motives can reveal the reasons behind certain power dynamics and strategic manoeuvres.

- **Document Patterns:** Keep detailed notes of your observations throughout the week. Record patterns, trends, and recurring behaviours. These records will be valuable when piecing together a comprehensive understanding of the political landscape.
- **Seek Different Perspectives:** Engage in conversations with colleagues across various levels and departments. Their perspectives can offer a well-rounded view of the organisation's politics, shedding light on different dimensions you might not have initially considered.
- **Reflect and Analyse:** At the end of your investigation week, take time to reflect on your findings. Analyse the data you've gathered, looking for connections, conflicts, and power structures. Consider how these factors influence decision-making and overall organisational dynamics.

Remember, investigating organisational politics is an ongoing process, and your one-week immersion is just the beginning. Continuously observe, engage, and reflect to deepen your understanding of how politics shape the functioning of the organisation. By investing time and effort into deciphering these dynamics, you can navigate the intricate landscape more effectively and make informed decisions in your professional endeavours.

Build Your Own Pyramids

If you have done your Sherlock Holmes week, you can take the next step and try to draw the individual pyramids for each of the main stakeholders and try to describe the personal value statement out of it.

Start with the content. This will be easier based on the strength you already have and probably based on the discussions you already have had.

Next step is to derive the true business drivers that are of interest for the specific stakeholder. Try to create some kind of waterfall for yourself:

1. Start with the Company KPI's
2. From there drive the BU KPI's
3. Then to Department KPI's

4. And finalise with the Personal KPI's

Check on consistency and if possible, also personally validate this. You will be amazed how open it will be if they see you are sincere in trying to understand you.

Finally, try to identify the personal motives. This is different than the KPI's they have received from the company. Here, we are touching upon the real personal motives. These are more difficult to derive but will help you to tailor your message towards you audience.

Lessons Learned from Followers of the Thought Leader Development Trainings

David Rutter – Thought leader, Generative AI

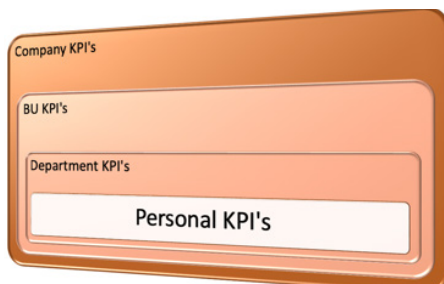
The biggest challenge that Capgemini, its competitors and many of our clients are facing is Generative AI. How do we raise awareness, share knowledge, provide training and adapt to new ways of working.

Since I am aware of its potential to assist us and our clients, the question is this: Do I have the ability and capability to help shape our future? Prior to the course, I thought my efforts, my experience, and my voice would have been lost in the noise.

The challenge is how to help mobilise, and achieving this requires a brand to be recognised, content that assists, and a network of listeners to enable my voice being heard, and how to feed this into the sales process.

Reflection on the Course Impact:

Throughout the course, several key takeaways have significantly contributed to my professional growth:



- **Expanding Networks:** The course provided a valuable opportunity to expand my network and more importantly to network with our leadership team on Generative AI.
- **Content Development:** I've honed my skills in creating compelling content that I have shared in numerous internal, client-facing presentations, and also on LinkedIn.
- **Enhancing Brand Visibility:** Through engaging presentations, I've improved my brand within the company through presentations which have led to increased opportunities through word-of-mouth referrals.
- **Facilitating Adoption:** I've played a pivotal role in assisting internally and with clients to mobilise in different aspects of Generative AI.

Outcome and Evolving Impact:

The end result is that I have become one of the key people in Generative AI in the UK and have made many new contacts within Europe. I lead regular meetings on Generative AI to help shape our approach. It has provided me with a much broader platform with which to share my experience and guide our collective thinking on Generative AI, and ultimately has made my day job a much more interesting and rewarding experience.

This is very much a Work in Progress, so I haven't reached the end result.

Matthew Morris – Thought Leader, Salesforce Innovation

Two weeks ago, on a Thursday lunchtime, I was given a preview by a Cloud CRM company of an upcoming announcement that they would be making at their global conference the following week.

The announcement involved a change to product licensing, with a new free tier being introduced that would open the door to many new users wanting to explore how this could add value to their business.



My team had been working for the past year with clients using this product, and my colleagues were undoubtedly some of the leading experts in the world. We immediately had some good ideas about how to get new users started. The challenge was how we could get the message out in just a few days to support our colleagues who would be attending the conference as well as making a splash on social media. I applied my lessons from TLDP. Content! When it comes to sharing an idea with other people, writing it down is a great starting point. In a few hours, I had created a draft of a single page that summarised to readers how we could help them begin their journey. After a little collaboration and refinement, the page was ready to be used in public. This is when I applied the second lesson from TLDP. Mobilisation!

To get the message, I needed to mobilise people into action. Using internal channels, I shared the timeline with my network. Some would be posting the content with their own observations; others would be engaging with the posts to extend its reach. I made sure also to share and brief the approximately 20 people who were attending the conference to make sure that

they had a copy, and also were familiar with the story when they were asked questions by excited conference goers.

It was Tuesday lunchtime, the Cloud CRM Company had released the announcement on the news wire, and as their CEO made the announcement at the conference keynote, I published my social post. In just 72 (working) hours since we received the announcement preview, we had taken an idea and shared it at the right time with the right audience. Feedback was positive, social engagement was good, and my colleagues at the conference thanked me for giving them the tools to have a point of view that they were able to share on this hot topic.

Plan your growth !

AS-IS 	_____	Explorer	Guru
TO-BE 	_____	Explorer	Guru

What strength do you already have on Mobilisation

Where do you need to develop

Which Exercise could best help and why

Which sources could help you

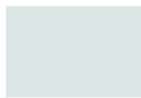
Who can best help you in your growth and why

What are the concrete actions to you will take

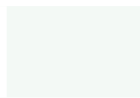
Checklist



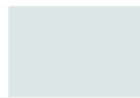
Read the chapter



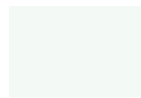
Assess strength & development



Assess what and who can help you



Actions defined



Planned in agenda

HOW TO LEVERAGE AI IN YOUR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Why Leveraging Generative AI

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has unveiled new horizons for personal and professional development. As a thought leader, there are many ways to benefit from this technology, as it can enhance your capabilities and help you become more productive. By augmenting creative ideation, amplifying content generation, facilitating research, fostering collaboration, and enabling adaptive learning, GenAI becomes an indispensable tool for those seeking to carve a path of influence and inspiration in the ever-evolving landscape of thought leadership.

Augmenting Creative Ideation:

Generative AI can act as a catalyst for the creative process, assisting thought leaders in ideation and brainstorming. By providing novel concepts and unique angles, generative AI serves as a thought-provoking companion, stimulating unconventional thinking and broadening the horizons of thought leaders. Through the synthesis of diverse ideas and concepts, generative AI encourages individuals to explore uncharted territories and unearth innovative solutions to complex challenges.

Amplifying Content Generation:

A cornerstone of thought leadership lies in effective communication. Generative AI can aid thought leaders in producing high-quality content at an unprecedented pace. Whether it's writing articles, speeches, or social media posts, generative AI streamlines content creation by generating drafts, suggesting

improvements, and fine-tuning language. This amplification of content generation empowers thought leaders to maintain a consistent and impactful presence, thereby expanding their reach and influence.

Facilitating Research:

Thought leaders are distinguished by their depth of knowledge and insights into their respective fields. Generative AI accelerates the research process by sifting through vast amounts of data, identifying relevant sources, and summarising key findings. By automating the preliminary stages of research, thought leaders can dedicate more time to analysing and synthesising information, elevating the quality and originality of their contributions.

Fostering Collaboration:

Generative AI transcends individual efforts by fostering collaborative engagement. Thought leaders can leverage AI-powered platforms to facilitate virtual brainstorming sessions, enabling global participation and cross-disciplinary interactions. These collaborative endeavours not only enrich thought leaders' perspectives but also foster a culture of collective intelligence, where diverse voices converge to shape innovative narratives.

Enabling Adaptive Learning:

Thought leadership demands continuous growth and adaptation. Generative AI serves as a personalized learning companion, tailoring content and recommendations to the thought leader's interests and knowledge gaps. By tracking trends, analysing feedback, and suggesting relevant resources, generative AI supports thought leaders in refining their expertise and staying ahead of the curve.

In a world where thought leadership is a dynamic and sought-after pursuit, generative AI emerges as an indispensable ally. By augmenting creative processes, amplifying content generation, facilitating research, fostering collaboration, and enabling adaptive learning, generative AI empowers individuals to chart a course of influence and innovation.

As generative AI continues to evolve, the symbiotic relationship between human thought leaders and AI-driven augmentation promises to reshape the boundaries of intellectual exploration, enriching the global discourse with fresh perspectives

and groundbreaking insights. Aspiring thought leaders who embrace generative AI stand poised to redefine the art of influence in an age of limitless possibilities.

Acknowledging the Pitfalls of AI

Despite all the benefits Generative AI can bring as described above, it's important for thought leaders to be aware of some pitfalls that come with it.

First, data in most Generative AI tools are driven from the public domain. Although companies are working on more secure solutions where people can benefit from the open data while keeping their input within firewalls, using open tools means your data will be stored within the large Language Model. Hence, someone could easily leverage the data you have put in. Be aware of the data you expose to the Generative AI tool and refrain from any sensitive data.

A second issue we are currently facing is the intellectually property rights. As I recently learned from a lawyer who spoke at an AI summit, "this is heaven for lawyers". Be aware that the content that you might create will be referring to text from others or pictures from other sources. Be aware of this risk and take some extra checks when you feel insecure.

A third issue might be the devaluation of your brand. If you use Generative AI for creating your content, you run into the risk of generating more "generic" content. The value you deliver as a thought leader is your specific insights, not just what the generic content of the web is generating. You can secure your "uniqueness" by putting in personal experiences and lessons learned. It shows that you have taken care of the content, and that you just didn't generate it from a Generative AI tool.

Last but not least, be aware that Generative AI can also give you wrong information, or in other words lie to you. I personally experienced this when I was working on a keynote presentation and wanted to open my different sections with a quote from Pearl Jam songs. I used some wording in the prompt that were relevant for the section and then asked to find me lyrics from a Pearl Jam song. As expected, it came back with some great suggestions. However, I felt worried that my knowledge of Pearl Jam's lyrics had been deteriorating. Or to be more precise, I didn't recognise the text. As a check, I went to the original song text and it turned out that ChatGPT had added new sentences to the texts.

Again, be aware of these pitfalls. It doesn't weigh up to the advantages, but be aware of the negatives that are part of using this technology

Lastly, remember, ***what is being generated is always a “generic view” from what the AI has found on the internet. Hence, make sure that you use it as a support to help you fine tune your thinking, accelerate and correct your writing, but always put your own perspective into it!***

Here Are Ten Generative AI Tools for Thought Leaders to Consider:

- **OpenAI's GPT-4:** GPT-4 is a powerful language model that can generate human-like text based on prompts. Thought leaders can use it for content creation, idea generation, and even drafting speeches or articles.
- **Copy.ai:** Copy.ai employs AI to assist with content creation by generating blog posts, marketing copy, social media content, and more. It can save thought leaders time and help maintain a consistent online presence.
- **Rephrase.ai:** This tool uses AI to convert spoken content into written text, making it useful for thought leaders who want to repurpose their podcasts, videos, or interviews into written articles or reports.
- **Canva's DesignAI:** DesignAI by Canva employs AI to suggest design elements and layouts for presentations, infographics, and visual content, aiding thought leaders in creating visually appealing materials.
- **Quillionz:** For thought leaders looking to enhance their research, Quillionz utilises AI to generate quiz questions from textual content, assisting in summarising and extracting key information.
- **Talk to Transformer:** Similar to GPT-4, Talk to Transformer allows thought leaders to engage in conversational prompts, making it a valuable tool for brainstorming and exploring ideas through dialogue.
- **Wordtune:** Wordtune employs AI to suggest improvements in writing style, tone, and grammar. Thought leaders can use it to enhance the clarity and impact of their written content.
- **Artbreeder:** Artbreeder combines AI with creativity, enabling thought leaders to generate unique visual artworks by blending and modifying images. This tool can add an artistic dimension to their content.
- **WriteSonic:** WriteSonic offers AI-generated content for various purposes, including ads, product descriptions, and creative writing. It can help thought leaders with crafting compelling marketing materials.

- **DeepDream:** DeepDream uses AI to transform images into surreal and visually captivating artwork. Thought leaders can use it to create eye-catching visuals that align with their brand and messaging.

Remember that while these generative AI tools can be valuable assets, thought leaders should use them thoughtfully and ensure that the output aligns with their personal voice and message. The integration of AI tools should complement, rather than replace, the authentic insights and expertise that thought leaders bring to their respective fields.

A FINAL WORD!

As mentioned in my opening, this book is the culmination of a years-long odyssey—a journey that began with assembling a group of eager individuals, uncertain about what lay ahead in their pursuit of skill growth. Today, it stands as a testament to the evolution of a program that has found a home in the curriculum of one of the world’s largest consulting firms.

Even more significant is the vast network of emerging thought leaders, spanning various fields of expertise, who have not only enriched my life and insights but have left an indelible mark on numerous clients. The program’s impact is eloquently captured in the heartfelt quotes we’ve received post-course—an affirmation that it has indeed enriched their lives.

Taking this opportunity to distil my thoughts, compile the exercises, and incorporate the perspectives of others into this book is a momentous step. It’s not only a chance to share with a broader audience but also a personal milestone, prompting reflections on my own growth as a thought leader.

Because a true thought leader never ceases to evolve. The pace of change in technology, economies, and worldviews exceeds anything witnessed in the past. This demands a commitment to constant learning, ongoing collaboration with peers, and the discovery of fresh sources of inspiration—a daily ritual in your professional journey.

Hence, I implore you to schedule dedicated activities for your development. Regularly revisit the exercises and annually map yourself on the Thought Leader model. What’s the next step you need to take, and who can assist you on this journey?

Allow me to conclude with a mantra I share with all participants of my courses:

“Life is serious enough, so don’t take life and business too seriously. Consider your professional domain as a playground. Embrace experimentation, welcome change, and every now and then, embrace failure. And if you fall, analyse why, brush off the dirt, and learn. Learning and experiencing fuel the heart and mind.”

For continuous inspiration, explore
www.thoughtleaderdevelopment.com.

Enjoy your journey, both professionally and personally. Your thoughts are worth it!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and "J".

Frank

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Embark on a journey through the career of Frank Wammes, a distinguished figure with over 25 years of expertise in the dynamic realm of Innovation and Information Technology. Throughout his extensive tenure, Frank has seamlessly navigated a diverse tapestry of companies, collaborating with highly skilled professionals and making impactful strides in the corporate landscape.

Frank's footprint in the industry extends to engagements with numerous Fortune 500 companies across various sectors. He managed Profit and Loss statements for different units within Capgemini and spearheaded a specialized unit dedicated to crafting innovative "New Business Models & IP". His transformative leadership then led him to the coveted role of Chief Technology Officer at Capgemini Europe, where his fervor for business development and technology innovation found an expansive canvas.

In the wake of his experiences, Frank's fascination with thought leadership burgeoned. Faced with the challenge of identifying suitable successors for his speaking engagements, he embarked on a quest that would birth his own model and subsequent course. Recognizing the untapped reservoir of talent within his organization, Frank set out to crystallize his vision, ensuring the seamless creation of adept replacements.

For the past seven years, Frank has tirelessly refined and deployed his model through "The Thought Leader Development Course," now an integral component of his company's curriculum. Frank's philosophy, encapsulated in the course, stands as a testament to his belief that thought leadership is not a mere illusion or enchantment but a tangible capability attainable through practice, belief, and an unwavering passion for the craft. Join Frank on this transformative odyssey and unlock the secrets to becoming a thought leader in the ever-evolving landscape of business and technology.

