

Leading People in the 21st Century

Session 1: Why study leadership?

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November 2025



Professor (Adjunct) Organisation Behaviour & HRM SPJIMR, Mumbai (INDIA)

Background

- MBA-HR: XLRI (INDIA), 1992
- PhD: IITB (INDIA) 2010
- Pursuing Post-doc: U-Lisboa
- ICF Certified Coach: PCC
- Certified facilitator: MBTI, Saville, EQi, NLP, Gestalt

Qualifications & Certificates

Leadership Positions

- Head HR – Corporate Centre: Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. (2001 – 2004)
- Head – Learning & Leadership Development: Siemens South Asia (2012 – 2013)
- Managing Partner – Bridgit Nterprise LLP (2014 – 2016)
- Chairperson – PGMPW, SPJIMR (2016 – 2017)

- HR Head: HR Business partner, Compensation management, HRMS and corporate re-structuring
- L&D Head: People strategy formulation and execution, performance & talent management, DC & ACs
- HR & OD Consultant: Organizational capability building and leadership development.

Corporate Experience (15 years)

Academics Experience (15 years)

- Professor – OB, HRM & Leadership
- Designed and implemented several medium & long term management courses for management education
- Founder Chairperson of award winning program PGMPW
- Publications: Several publications in peer reviewed international journals, book chapters and case.

Dr Sumita Datta



**Invited Professor – OB|HRM
ISEG, University of Lisbon
(PORTUGAL)**

**The wars – Ukraine-
Russia, Israel-Gaza**

2

**China – Western
decoupling**

1

7

**Trump Immigration
and Tariffs**

**Anti
Globalization
Sentiments**

3

6

**Inequities
rising**

4

Climate and Energy Crisis

5

**Right Leaning
Governments**



Profusion of Acronyms - An Unstable World

V: Volatile

U: Uncertain

C: Complex

A: Ambiguous

U.S. Army War College,
1987

B: Brittle

A: Anxious

N: Non-linear

I: Incomprehensible

James Cascio, 2016

T: Turbulent

U: Uncertain

N: Novel

A: Ambiguous

Oxford University, 2016

R: Rapid

U: Unpredictable

P: Paradoxical

T: Tangle

Center for Creative
Leadership, 2019

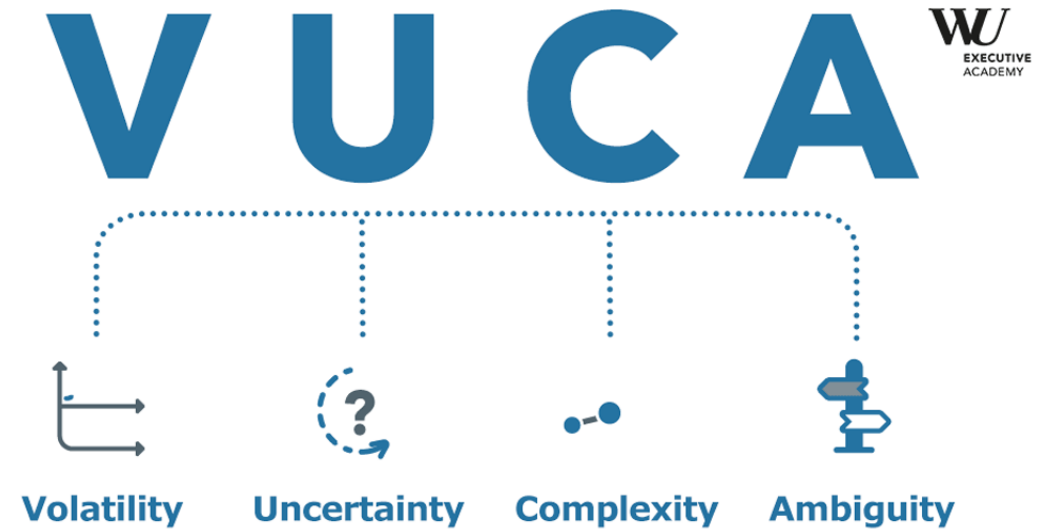
Permacrisis

Collins Dictionary, permacrisis is the word of the year 2022

Origin of VUCA



Image Source: <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/>



https://executiveacademy.at/fileadmin_synced_assets/images/01Content/00NewsEvents/Filler-gross/VUCA-01_gif

Volatile **U**ncertain **C**omplex **A**mbiguous
(**VUCA**)

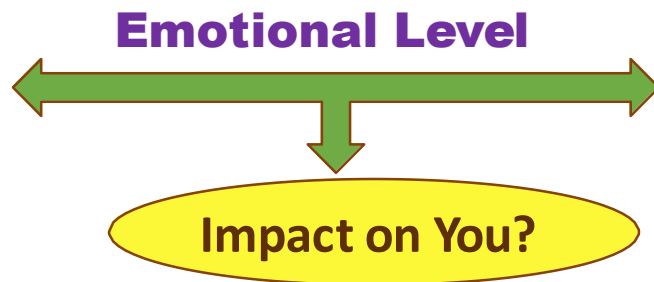
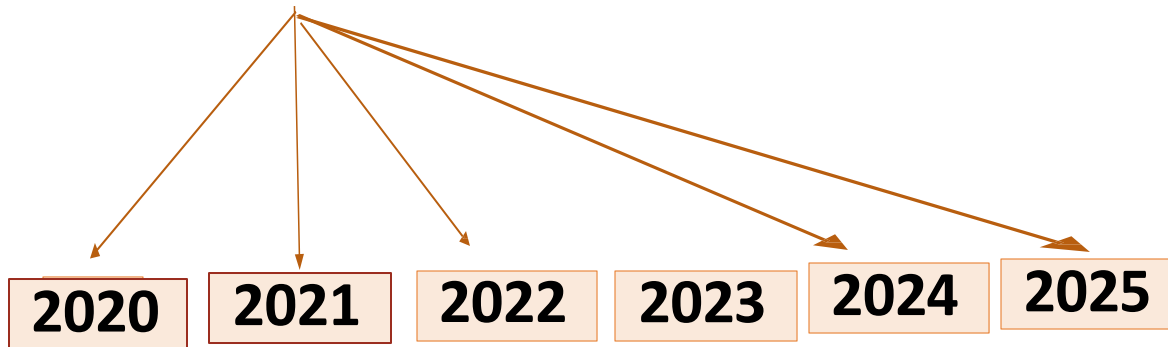
Term coined in 1992 at US Army War College

Source: Barber, H. F. (1992). Developing strategic leadership: The US army war college experience. *Journal of Management Development*.

VUCA: How To Succeed In A Chaotic World



Activity

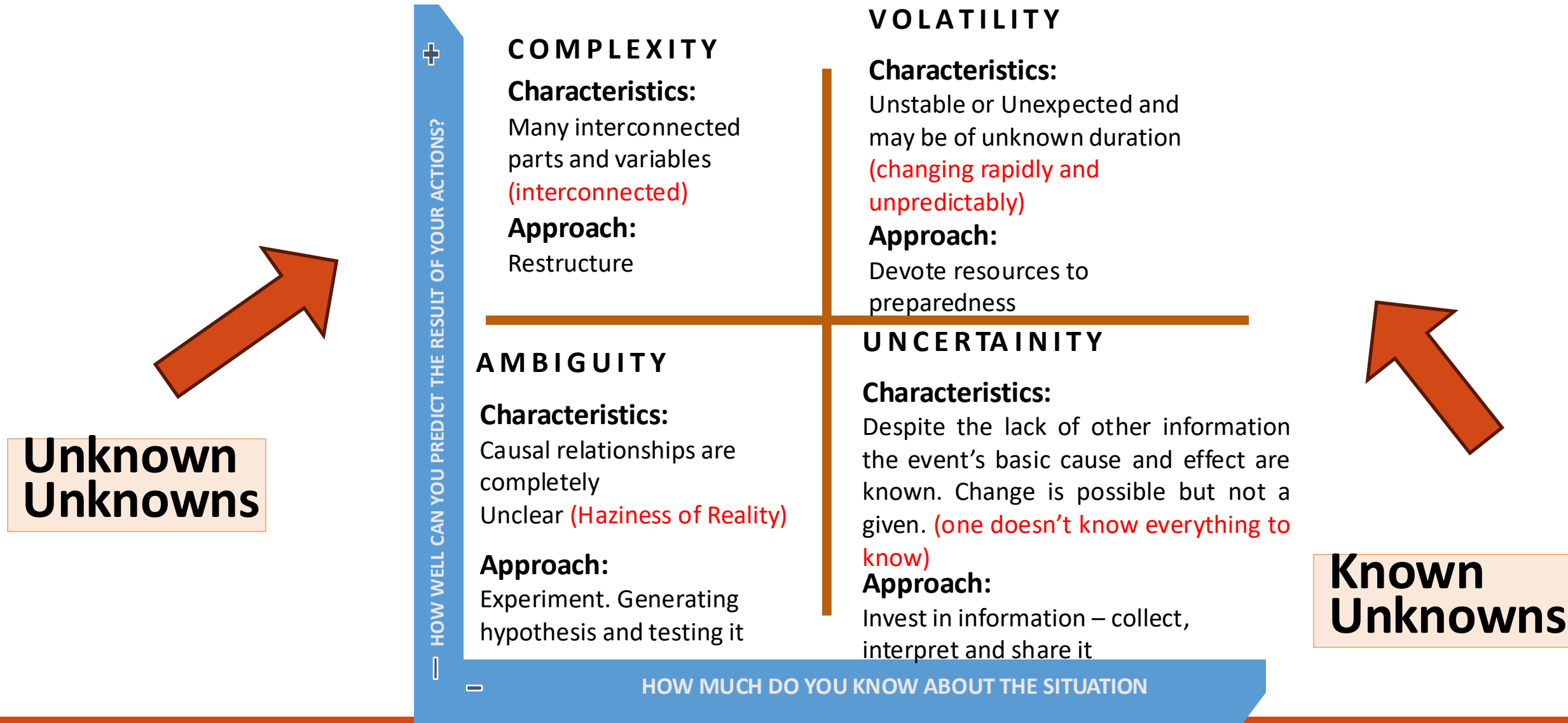


Complete the sentence:

The VUCA challenge I am currently facing is _____

<<be specific>>

What Does VUCA Mean?



VUCA PRIME coined by **Bob Johansen (2013)**, a distinguished fellow with the Institute for the Future in Silicon Valley



Source: Johansen, B. (2017). The new leadership literacies: thriving in a future of extreme disruption and distributed everything. Berrett-Koehler

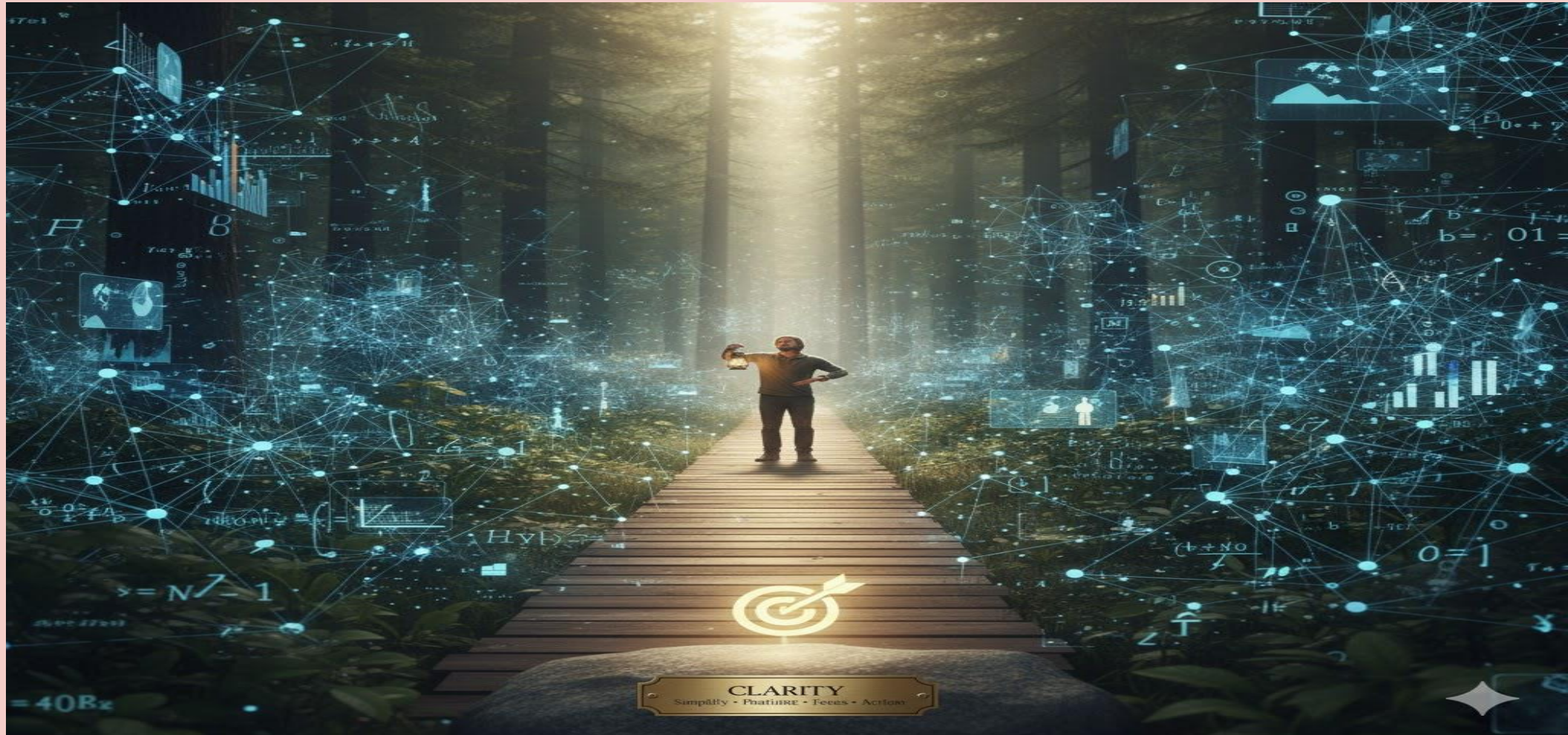
Pathways to Overcome VUCA Challenges



Bennis, Warren; Nanus, Burt (1985). Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge.
Barber, H. F. (1992). Developing strategic leadership: The US army war college experience. *Journal of Management Development*.

Johansen, B., & Euchner, J. (2013). Navigating the VUCA world. *Research-Technology Management*, 56(1), 10-15.
George, B (2017) VUCA 2.0: Strategy for Steady Leadership in an Unsteady World. HBS Working Knowledge.
Johansen, B. (2017). The new leadership literacies: thriving in a future of extreme disruption and distributed everything. Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Pathway to VUCA Prime – Leading Self



The most in-demand behavioural skills in present times

5 Essential Soft Skills

Future MBAs want strategy, problem-solving and AI in the curriculum: GMAC's Prospective Student Survey 2025

Socio-emotional skills such as adaptability, teamwork and emotional intelligence are also gaining traction, indicating a shift in what it means to be a business leader in the post-pandemic world.

1. Problem Solving
2. Communication
3. Teamwork
4. Influencing without authority
5. Leadership

Harvard Business Review 2023

McKinsey – 7800 CEOs from 70 countries Report -2019

What stands out is how many of these practices go beyond technical competence—they require emotional intelligence, situational awareness, and the discipline to stay reflective under pressure.

18 BEST PRACTICES FOR CEOs		
	Excellent CEOs Do This	Weak CEOs Do This
Corporate Strategy	Focus on beating the odds - Reframe the definition of 'winning' - Make bold moves early in your tenure - Actively redistribute resources to strategy	Let a thousand flowers bloom - Make vague and generic statements of intent - Make small bets with unclear paths to scale - Maintain the status quo
Culture & Organization	Manage both health and performance - Match high impact roles with best talent - Actively drive organizational effectiveness - Decide what needs to stable and what needs to be agile	Diplomatically avoid social issues - Work around mediocrity and low performance - Assume desired behaviors and values will be followed - Put feelings before effectiveness
Team Processes	Put team ahead of meeting - Actively strengthen the team and its teamwork - Defend against bias (cognitive and social) - Ensure coherence across processes and levels	Avoid responsibility for the team - Allow silos, discord and passive aggressive behavior - Avoid debate and "final" decisions. - Become a captive of the bureaucratic system
Board Engagement	Help directors help the business - Promote an agenda beyond the financials - Build and foster active board relationships - Transform the board from passive and weak to active and capable	Stay hands off - Passively let the board control the agenda - Minimize interactions and avoid the board - Let the board evolve without a plan
External Stakeholders	Center on the long term 'why?' - Commit to making a positive big picture impact - Prioritize stakeholders and shape their views - Build capabilities/resilience before the crises	Minimize time with external stakeholders - Focus solely on shareholder value - Engage in ad-hoc, reactive manner - Assume crises aren't going to happen
Personal Norms	Do what only you can do - Seek out high-quality support and advice - Authentically connect purpose to leadership - Counter hubris with candid advice and practices	Let the world happen to you - Let the system define your schedule and priorities - Adopt a fixed mindset - I am who I am - Cultivate a "royalty" like status

- Social intelligence
- Problem-solving
- Conflict management
- Decision-making
- Setting and sharing a compelling vision
- Change management
- Innovation
- Entrepreneurship



- Interpersonal skills
- Emotional intelligence
- Coaching ability & trustworthiness
- Inclusiveness
- People management

- (Learning) Agility
- Industry expertise
- Managing yourself
- Courage
- Org citizenship behavior

Competencies in Focus for Management Education



Unstructured Problem Solving

Curiosity and Self Learning

Teamwork

Social Skills and Communication

Leadership without Authority

Grit - Resilience + Perseverance

Time Management

Hard Work - includes taking accountability

Creativity



“

Syllabus

Syllabus – Leading People in the 21st Century (LP21C)

Course Description:

Of all the management competencies, the one which is singularly critical is that of leadership. The definition of leadership is ephemeral, constantly evolving depending on context and time. Leaders inspire action and adaptability in an unpredictable world which requires us to rethink many of the traditional leadership frameworks. The course Leading People in the 21st Century therefore involves both the art and science of leading self and others while navigating the workplace labyrinth of interdependent forces. The main learning objectives of this course are to:

Course Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of the course, the participants will be able to –

01

Learn about the different facets of leading people effectively in the 21st century

02

Understand how leadership practices impact team and organizational success

03

Develop a sharpened awareness of one's own leadership capacities.

04

Understand how to effectively leverage leadership skills to increase one's field of influence.

Syllabus – Leading people in 21st Century

Topics

1. Why study leadership?

2. Becoming a Leader

3. Digital Leadership

4. Paradoxical Leadership

5. Responsible Leadership

6. Agile Leadership

Pedagogical method and lectures



The teaching methodology will be interactive and participatory, seeking to generate a dynamic classroom that allows students to learn by doing. The nature and rigor of the course would require willingness on the part of the participants to take an earnest and active part in the entire process, remain curious, open to introspection, reflexivity and sharing.

The LP21C lectures cannot be recorded.

Prescribed Text & References



Main

Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.

Author: Brené Brown

ISBN-13 : 978-1984854032

Additional Readings

1. On Becoming A Leader

Author: Warren Bennis

ISBN-13: 978-0465014088

2. Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't

Author: Simon Sinek

ISBN-13: 978-1591848011

Evaluation

Evaluation will be composed of:

1. Continuous Assessment (Group assessment): **8 Teams will be formed for group assessment in this course – LP21C**
2. Exam (Individual assessment)

S. No.	Evaluation Component (Individual/ Group)	Weightage	Date of Announcing Evaluation	Date of Submission
1.	Point of view (POV) on a leadership theme - Group assessment	30%	31 th October 2025	5th Dec 2025
2.	In-class Debate on Leadership topics – Group assessment	30%	Topic will be announced one week before date of submission	Group 1&2: 7 th Nov Group 3&4: 14 th Nov Group 5&6: 21 st Nov Group 7&8: 28 th Nov
3.	Normal Season Exam - Individual assessment	40%	Already announced	9 th December 2025

Continuous Assessment (CA)

Form Groups
in the 1st
lesson

-
1. **Point of view (POV)** on a leadership theme - Group assessment **(30%)**
 2. **In-class Debate** on Leadership topics – Group assessment **(30%)**
 3. **Individual exam** – Normal season **(40%)**

To obtain CA (Continuous Assessment), it is essential to complete all the evaluative moments described above. All classes and continuous assessment sessions take place in person.

1. Continuous Assessment (CA)

Point of view (POV) on a leadership theme - Group assessment (30%)

Title: *“Leadership in Flux: Navigating Power, Purpose, and Paradox”*

Weightage: 30%

Group Size: 6-7 students

Submission Components:

- Video Podcast (8–10 minutes)
- Transcript (verbatim or lightly edited)

Theme Overview

Leadership today is no longer about command and control—it’s about navigating a power-driven landscape, aligning with purpose & resolving paradoxes. In this assignment, your group will explore a

Point of View (POV) using one or more of the following prompts:

1. Leadership based on non-Western or indigenous sensibilities
2. Role of the dark side of Leadership
3. Reverse Leadership

You can be creative by including interviews, visuals, role-play, or storytelling to enrich the narrative.

Criteria	%
Clarity of POV	25%
Theoretical Integration	25%
Real-World Relevance	25%
Creativity & Engagement	25%
Total	100%

Submission Guidelines

- ❖ Upload Video file (MP3 or WAV), exceeding 10 mins will not be accepted and transcript (PDF or DOCX)
- ❖ Every Team member must participate
- ❖ Include a brief note on the group roles of the team members and the collaboration process
- ❖ **Deadline: 5th Dec 2025**

2. Continuous Assessment (CA)

In-class Debate on Leadership topics – Group assessment **(30%)**

- Four In-class Debates
- Two Teams at a time to participate in the Debate, ***one for the motion and one against the motion*** using a presentation
- The topic for the debate would be announced in class one week in advance
- All Team members must be present and participate in the debate. Each team will get 10-12 minutes to present
- The presentation must be sent to instructor before the class

Criteria	%
Presentation	100%
Clarity, Argumentation, and Coherence	50%
Structure/Graphics/Data	25%
Feedback to other Presenting groups (Peer Groups)*	25%
Total	100%

* Attendance will be recorded

3. Exam

- **All students are allowed to go to the Normal Season Exam, whether or not they take part in the continuous assessments. For those who don't have CA, the exam will be weighted for 100%.**
- Minimum score on the exam required for availing CA: 8 points.
- The final grade (FG) obtained in the Normal Season, if the aforementioned requirements are met, will correspond to one of the following situations:
 - (a) $FG = \% \text{continuous assessment} + \% \text{grade normal season exam}$
 - (b) FG = grade of the normal season exam, if the grade obtained in this exam is higher than the FG of line (a)

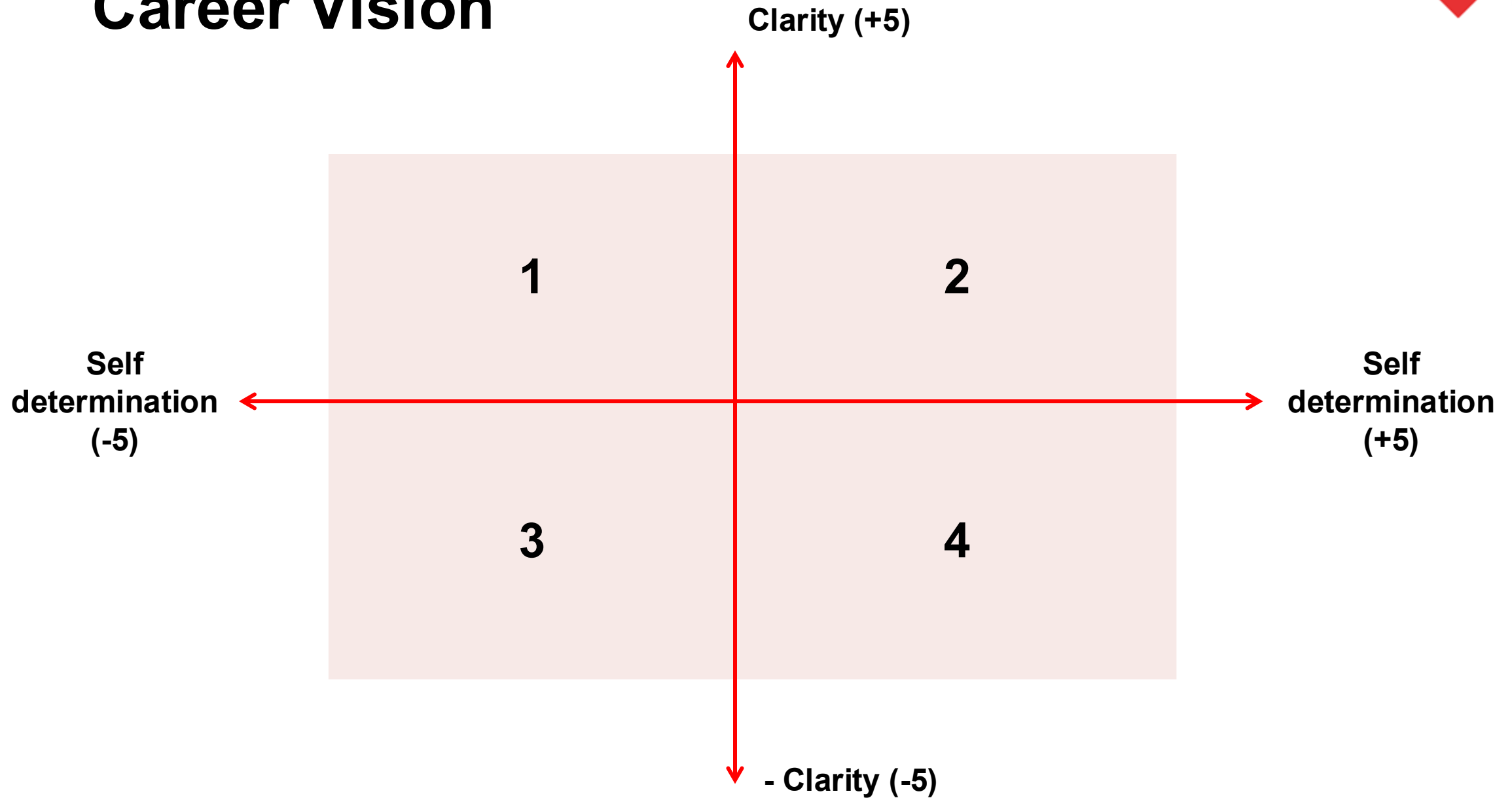
Second Season Exam

The second season exam may be done by students who:

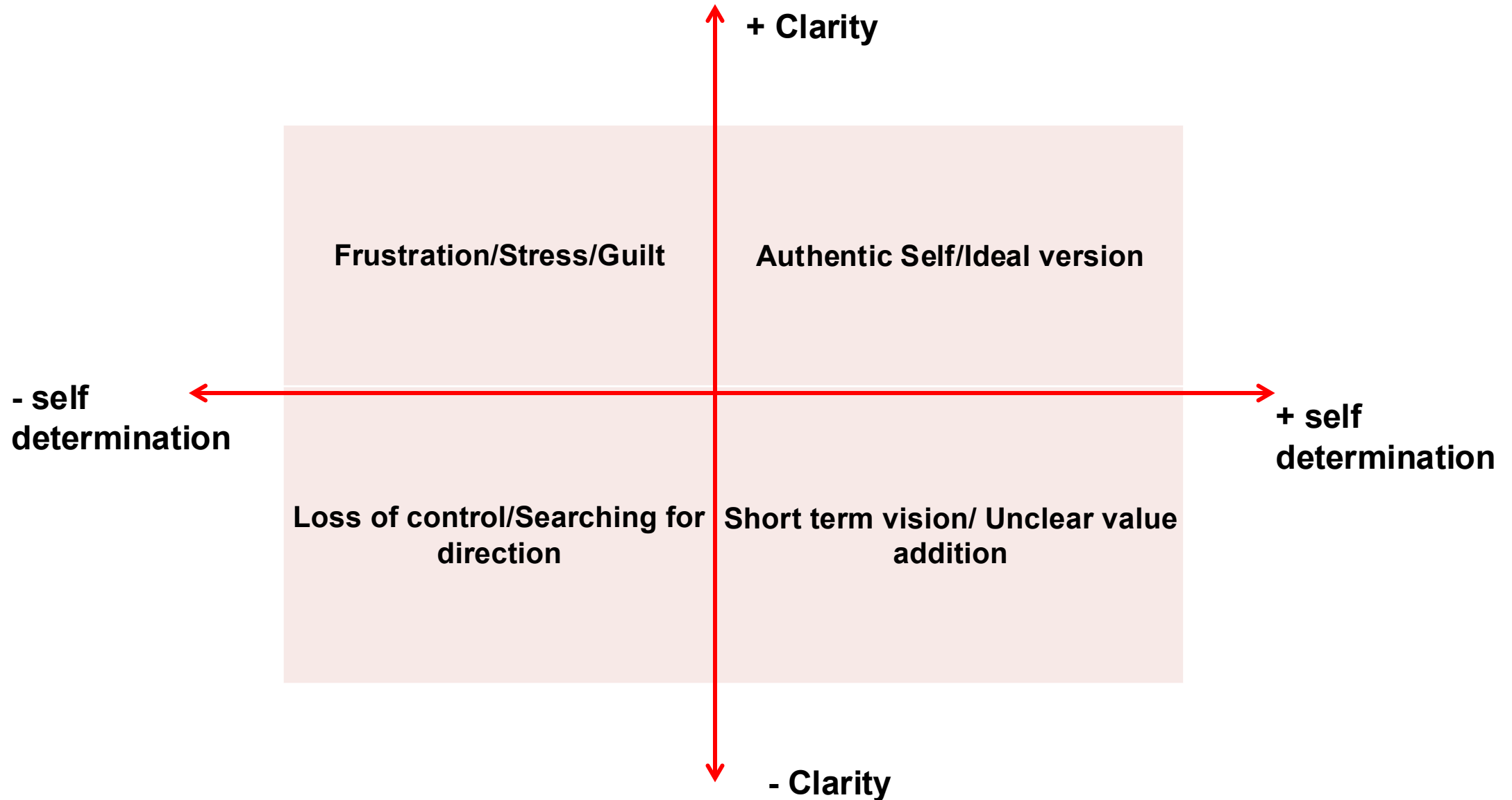
- ❖ fulfilled the requirements of CA but did not obtain the minimum score of 8 in the normal season exam;
- ❖ did not obtain a final grade in the normal season equal to or higher than 10 values (out of 20);
- ❖ wish to improve their grade (please note that, in this case, the CA grades do not count).

Lets Do An Exercise

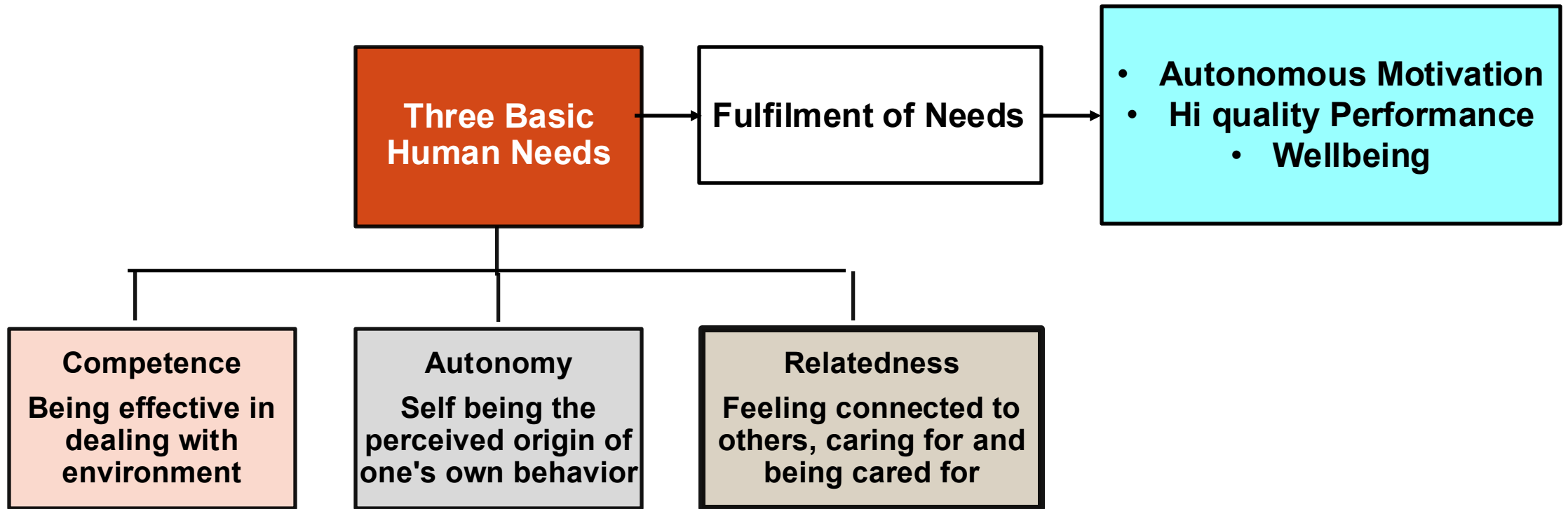
Career Vision



Career Vision



Self Determination Theory



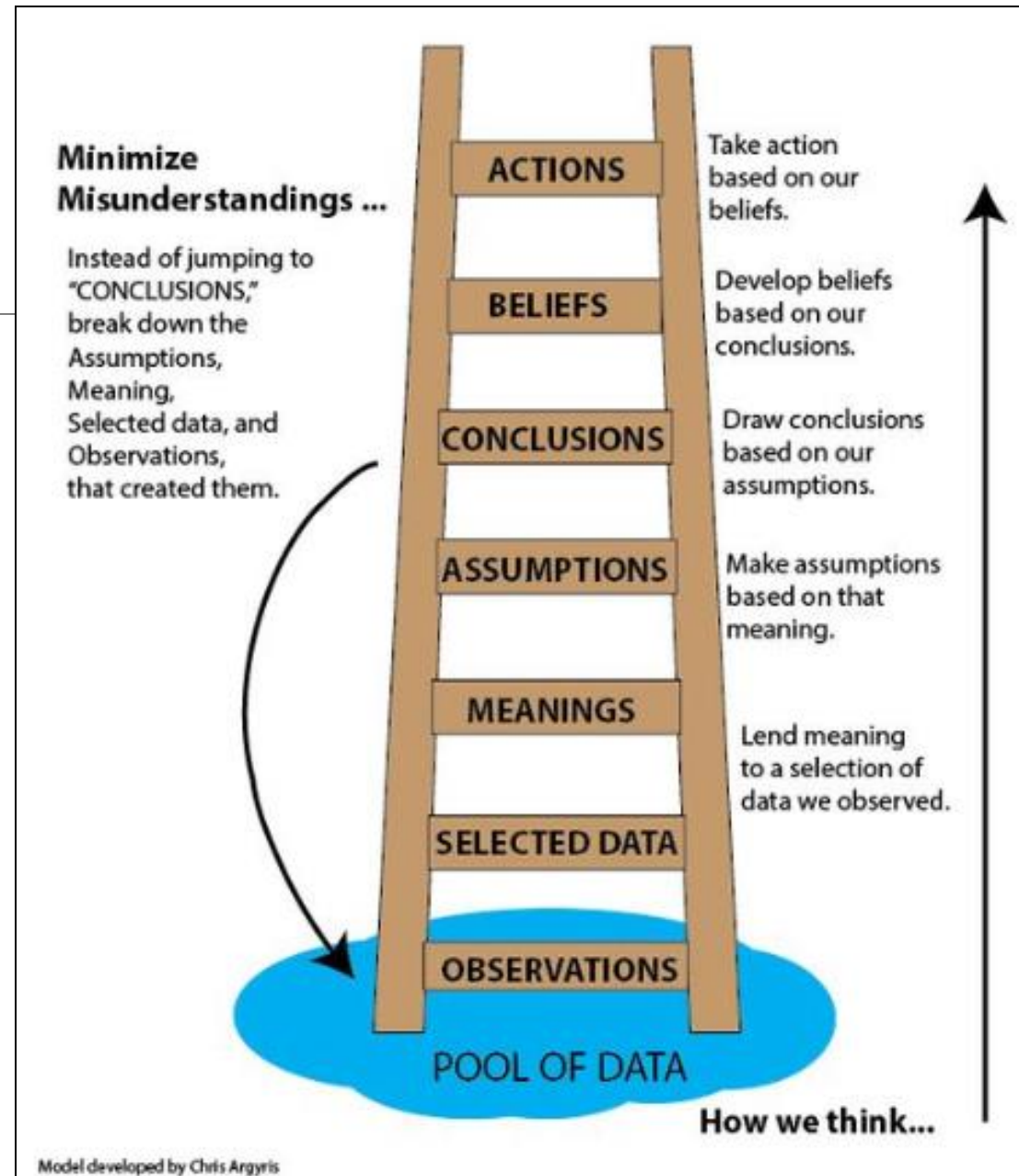
Deci & Ryan (1985)

Ladder of Inference

Building Self-Awareness

People unconsciously climb a mental ladder of assumptions and beliefs based on experiences. For developing leadership capacities, one needs to:

- Pay attention to your own biases
- Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and action
- Challenge your assumptions
- Interrupt your habits and default thinking
- Develop empathy for better decision-making



Debate Topic - Groups 1 & 2

Transformational vs Transactional Leadership

Debate motion

- This House believes that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership for building long-term organisational performance during a rapid scaling crisis.

Scenario overview

- A mid-size fintech company headquartered in Europe is expanding across Southeast Asia. Rapid growth has exposed problems: new markets are underperforming, middle managers are reporting low morale, and rising customer churn. The top management team must choose whether to prioritise transactional systems and tight incentives to hit short-term targets, or to lead a transformational change to rebuild trust, capability, and innovation.
- The company Board of Directors wants a clear plan for the next 90 days and KPIs for 6 months.

Key challenges for the debating groups

- **Argue** which leadership style is better now and show practical trade-offs, immediate actions, timelines, and measurable outcomes.

Roles and required focus

- **Group 1- Proposition Team (Transformational Leadership)** — Argue that transformational leadership, plus concrete organisational actions, is the best path to sustainable performance, innovation, and engagement. Provide immediate steps, ownership, and short-term KPIs.
- **Group 2- Opposition Team (Transactional Leadership)** — Argue transactional leadership and system fixes as the fastest way to stabilise revenue and enforce performance; show implementation plan, timelines, and measurable outcomes.

THANK YOU
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