

The role of Visionary Innovators in moving towards innovative organisations

Tyrtza HOGEWONING^a, Barend KIJTSE^{a,b} and Christine DEUILLE^{a, b, c}

^a Delft University of Technology; ^b KLM Royal Dutch Airlines; ^c The Hague University of Applied Sciences

The urgency to innovate for organisational survival has become increasingly recognized, with the result that innovation has conquered a position high on the management agenda. However, the unfamiliarity around innovation pose a challenge for innovation management. No unique solution exists to building a successful innovation approach, such that firms are forced to experiment with innovation approaches. In analysing the innovation approaches of four large international organisations we find that these organisations share an essential common element: the presence of one or more 'visionary innovators' who are determined to lead a movement towards organisational change.

We present a theoretical framework to illustrate four core characteristics of a visionary innovator, based on empirical evidence. The visionary innovator possesses traits to discover and realise innovations, business and political know-how, the ability to create and share a vision and space to realise that vision. We propose that a visionary innovator determined to spread such a mindset is indispensable to successfully achieve innovation.

Keywords: Innovation leadership, visionary, organisational change

Introduction

In an ever-changing competitive world, the urgency around innovation for organisational survival has become increasingly recognised (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013, 2004; Yukl, 2008; Mumford et al. 2003; Dess and Pickens, 2000). With innovation high on the management agenda, shifts in resource allocation to more explorative activities are finally taking place, moving closer to achieving organisational ambidexterity (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013; 2004). However, a one-size-fits-all innovation approach does not exist, such that firms are forced to experiment in their approach to innovation. Such experiments take the form of innovation labs, hubs and internal accelerators, with varying degrees of success.

A widespread amount of literature is available on the possible forms of innovation and how organisations should structure themselves to facilitate innovation (Kwakman & Smeulders, 2012; Christensen, 1997; Damanpour, 1991; Burns and Stalker, 1961). However, in large-scale organisations barriers to successful innovation tend to include legacy systems and processes, a siloed structure and an abundance of stakeholders involved in decision making due to many hierarchical layers. Thus, these barriers need to be overcome to realise the fast-paced adaptations required to fit changing customer needs (Yukl, 2008; Kotter and Cohen, 2002).

Through preliminary research at four large-scale organisations in the aviation, consumer electronics, food retail and fashion retail industry, we identified and confirmed diverging innovation approaches in terms of scale, form and maturity. Our initial results indicated that a common denominator amongst these organisations is the presence of one or more individuals determined to lead an organisational 'countermovement' to create an organisation where innovation can take place. Years of inside-company experience have triggered their motivation to transform the organisational mindset and establish a new way of working that entails idea generation, experimentation and fast-paced implementations of incremental innovations. Their leadership position through which they provide vision coupled with their proactive involvement in bringing innovation inside their business is why we name them 'visionary innovators'.

Previous scholars have described key leadership roles in relation to organisational change and innovation. As such, Mumford (2003) states that 'Leadership can make a difference in the success of creative efforts'. Change management theory describes the key role of 'change leaders' for realising organisational change (Kanter, 1983). DiLiello and Houghton (2006) propose the presence of 'SuperLeaders', a leader that is self-aware and able to empower others, for higher levels of innovation in an organisation. Besides leadership roles, key roles to foster

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innovation are discussed. For example, Martin (2011) identifies the importance of 'innovation catalysts', to embed design thinking into organisations for successful innovation. However, we find that empirical evidence regarding who these individuals are and what makes them effective at innovating in the context of large-scale organisations specifically is lacking.

Therefore, in this paper we further explore the concept of the visionary innovator. A case study research has been carried out at the aforementioned organisations, with the aim to answer the following research question:

What are the attributes of the visionary innovators that make them effective in leading change towards innovation in large-scale organisations?

The purpose of this paper is to present the initial empirical findings of four case studies at four separate large-scale organisations. In introducing and illustrating the concept of the visionary innovator, we attempt to contribute to literature on leadership and innovation. The paper is organised as follows: we begin with a review of literature on innovation leaders in large-scale organisations. Subsequently, we describe the empirical setting and method used for collecting insights from our case studies. Based on our findings, we propose and discuss a model depicting the attributes of the visionary innovator.

Leaders in large-scale organisations

A form of leadership that has been proposed by previous scholars in relation to innovation is the concept of self-leadership, which focuses on autonomy, self-reflection and continuous learning (Manz and Sims, 2001). Within this body of literature, DiLiello and Houghton (2006) introduce the idea of SuperLeaders; leaders who bring out the best in others in promoting creativity rather than conformity, sharing information, collaborating with others and working interdependently. A SuperLeader is a self-motivated, positive thinker, and DiLiello and Houghton (2006) suggest that SuperLeaders are more likely to have higher levels of innovation potential.

Another leadership style that has been proposed in relation to innovation by previous scholars includes transformational leadership, which stems from literature on change management. Kanter (1999a) introduces the concept of Change Leaders in change-adept organisations. They innovate by helping in new concept development and are open to collaborate and make connections. They bring passion, conviction and confidence in others, 'offering a dream, stretching their horizons, encouraging people to do the same'. Kanter (1999a) states that they should be able to challenge the organisational wisdom, form a vision and share it in 'communicating a compelling aspiration'. They must also be able to build a coalition by identifying key supporters to sell the dream to and understanding the 'politics' of change. Finally, they are described to transfer ownership to a working team by providing 'the protection they need to implement change' and recognition. These skills are reflected in the eight required actions for successful organisational change (Kotter, 2007). However, even though Kanter (1999a) and Kotter (2007) describe the actions and skills required for successful change leaders, questions remain regarding who these leaders are.

Another key role described in the literature regarding innovation is that of innovation catalysts (Martin, 2011) and design innovation catalysts (Wrigley, 2013). The role of these catalysts is focused on embedding design in organisations to achieve design-led innovation. The catalysts are described to be influential but closer to lower levels of hierarchy in the organisation whereby they need manager's approval to create change. Similarly, Kanter (1999b) proposes 'change agents', leaders of the future coupled to top managers to find and lead innovation projects within many fields and functions. Both the change agents (Kanter, 1996b) and the catalysts (Martin, 2011) are selected from within the organisation. On the other hand, the design innovation catalysts (Wrigley, 2016) are described to be external designers embedded in the organisation to bring in design knowledge relevant to the business. Similar to the change agent and catalyst, the visionary innovator emerges from inside the organisation. But, in contrast to the catalysts does not necessarily possess design capabilities.

Wrigley (2016) introduces the design champion inside the organisation as an enabler of the design innovation catalyst by protecting them from organisational politics and assisting communication to the rest of the organisation. Matthews, Bucolo & Wrigley (2012) describe 'champions' as designers who promote a design approach in firms, sponsored by the executive team. They are described as employing change processes, such as formation of a coalition, aligning ideas to company vision and strategy and forming a larger group inside the organisation. Similar to these concepts, Kanter (1999b) describes the potential of 'network champions' to direct internal and external collaboration. Such champions are senior managers in possession of peer credibility, many connections, deep organisational knowledge, diplomatic skills, imagination to see opportunities for connections

and an openness to collaborate. In coming from inside the organisation, these champions are similar to the visionary innovators. As a result, they both possess organisational knowledge and connections to provide protection from organisational politics. However, empirical evidence regarding such champions is limited.

A summary of these roles and their attributes is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison of literature on leading roles in organisations

Leader Attributes	SuperLeader	Change Leader	Innovation Catalyst/ Change Agent	Champion
Innovator	x	x	x	x
Positive thinker	x			x
Connector and Collaborator	x	x	x	x
Self-motivated	x	x	x	x
Owner of a vision		x	x	
Communicator		x	x	x
Status quo Challenger		x	x	x
Political know-how and peer-credibility		x		x
Coaching and Empowering	x	x	x	
Learner and Reflector	x	x		
Leverage at executive level		x		x

Thus, we find varying forms of leaders described by previous scholars that foster innovation inside organisations. Our preliminary findings regarding the visionary innovator indicate similarities to a number of these leaders. However, a comparison of the descriptions of these leaders indicates differences in the attributes accredited to them. Furthermore, empirical evidence to illustrate such leaders is limited. Through our case study research, we aim to provide insights on how the visionary innovator compares to the leaders described.

Method

Preliminary research on successes in innovation at large-scale organisations pointed to the essential role of individual leaders in successfully overcoming the barriers to innovation. In other words, those involved in the preliminary research within the organisations pointed to the pivoting role of a notable leader in making or breaking the innovation approach and creating momentum around innovation. This triggered our interest in further investigation into the visionary innovators.

In this paper, we describe an empirical study of four individuals who we identified as visionary innovators through interviews at four large-scale organisations with more than 4,000 employees and established over 50 years ago. Further criteria for the selection of each of the four individuals were that they held a management position such that they were responsible for managing a team of two or more employees.

The first three individuals were approached as they had experience collaborating with the second and third author of this paper. They were selected based on their leading position in innovation inside a large-scale organisation with a long-standing heritage. The fourth case was selected as a theoretically useful case (Eisenhardt, 1989), thus it was selected in filling the conceptual category of a visionary innovator. Thus, the individual was approached after being referred to by two employees in the organisation who were posed the question: 'Can you indicate a leader who inspires you and has a vision on how the company should adapt the coming years?'.

Our main subject of interest was the visionary innovator, as they play a pivoting role in our research. The main aim was therefore to capture rich insights of these individuals in their working environment. For each case study, information was collected through semi-structured one-hour interviews with the individual at hand. Furthermore,

for triangulation purposes (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003) besides a first-hand interview with the potential visionary innovator, a team member and an employee from another department were interviewed.

To structure the interviews, the following themes were discussed:

1. **Background:** Current management role, previous roles, relations with top management.
2. **Vision:** The individual's personal future vision for the organisation and experience in expressing the vision.
3. **Approach:** Methods to express the vision, challenges and learnings on activating others and in realising the vision.
4. **Result:** Motivation to work within the organisation and aspirations for the coming years in terms of their role and vision development.

In interviews with other employees, the main themes discussed were their perception of the leader's vision, characteristics and actions.

Case studies of four additional visionary innovators are currently being conducted, but as research is ongoing they will not be discussed in this paper.

Background

An overview of each of the organisations and the interviewees is provided in Table 2. For an understanding and as a means of comparison between the visionary innovators, we provide information regarding their personal vision, reach in terms of team size, the number of years inside the organisation, whether they have a design background and who they report to.

Interestingly, even though each of the visionary innovators has a vision attuned to their organisation, their visions are similar in their focus on how innovation should be done and the proposal of a way of working that fosters innovation. Furthermore, even though each of the visionary innovators sees the potential value of applying design inside the business, and elements of design such as user-centeredness and experimentation are incorporated in their vision, only one of them has a background in design. One may also observe that despite the variation in team size and experience, each of the individuals report to a member at the executive level in the organisation.

In analysing the data collected from the interviews, we identified several main themes based on cross-case comparisons which will be presented in the following section.

Table 2 Overview of the interviewed individuals (names adapted to ensure anonymity).

Type of Organisation	Airline (Company 1)	Food retail (Company 2)	Consumer electronics (Company 3)	Fashion Retail (Company 4)
Name	Sam	Charles	George	Charlotte
Interviews	2 semi-structured interviews 1 team member 1 other department	2 semi-structured interviews 1 team member 1 other department	2 semi-structured interviews 1 other department	1 semi-structured interview 1 team member
Vision	Foster innovation from within operations through a new user-centred, sprint-based way of working involving our ground staff	Create innovative mindset inside company through a new iterative, experimental way of working focused on quick implementation of short-term innovations	Make our company innovative and user-centred through embedding design thinking	Enable fast-paced digital innovation through a new way of working that entails ownership and prototyping
Reach	Manage team of 90 people	Manage team of 4 people	Coaching all product managers	Manage team of 120 people
Experience	10 years	8 years	20+ years	6 years
Background	Non-design	Non-design	Design	Non-design
Report to	COO	COO	CEO	CEO

Results

Based on the information collected during the interviews, we identify four recurring themes that the individuals have in common: shared traits, a strong vision combined with an urge to share this vision, political and business know-how, and lastly, space provided by their 'superiors' to move freely and carry out the first steps towards realising their vision. Each of these themes are key to achieving impact in a large-scale organisation.

We present a framework in Figure 1 of the key attributes of the visionary innovator. The combined possession of such attributes leads to the desired impact in a large-scale organisation.

Figure 1: The visionary Innovator

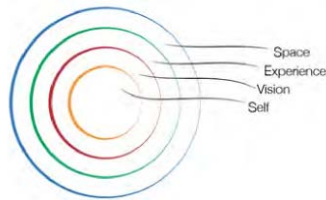


Figure 1 The four essential attributes of the visionary innovator.

We note that in selecting individuals with a management position, it is not surprising to find that they have several years of inside-company experience, as a management position is often accomplished after several years of experience. However, we focus on experience gained inside their own organisation and the resulting organisational know-how that comes with that. Furthermore, the individuals were selected based on their leading roles in innovation. In selecting the fourth individual, we purposefully selected someone described to have a vision. Thus, it is not surprising to find a vision regarding the future of their organisation as a key attribute. Thus, we focus on the similarities regarding the content and the actions around the vision.

In the following sections, we elaborate on these themes and provide illustrations in the form of quotes. Furthermore, we compare our findings with the extant literature.

Traits

In comparing the actions of the four individuals, we find that they can be characterised as holistic thinkers, daring challengers, smart connectors and pragmatic doers. These traits combined are essential for the discovery of opportunities for innovation, and for the realisation of innovations. Thus, the visionary innovators possess the ability to move from the discovery phase towards the active realisation phase, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Key Traits of the visionary innovator



Figure 2 The visionary innovators move from discovery towards realisation.

In terms of 'holistic thinkers', (George, Company 4) explains that he constantly considers 'what is the impact on short term and long term, direct and indirect, to our business. Why is it relevant?'. Such holistic thinking is discussed by Smith & Tushman (2005), who describe the ability to deal with strategic contradictions between, for example, the short-term and long-term, exploration and exploitation, focus and flexibility as crucial managerial skills. Kanter (2011) further describes the ability to switch interchangeably between 'zooming in' and 'zooming out' as a necessary managerial skill. Furthermore, the visionary innovators are able to translate the contradiction

between short and long term thinking into short and long term actions. They are described as strong analytical thinkers, but prefer to call themselves 'pragmatic doers':

I really love thinking. But what I noticed, I get disappointed when nothing becomes of it. So I taught myself to think, how can I make sure my ideas get realised. Then, at some point I discovered that you need to go do it yourself. So I actually became very good at that, if I may say so. (Sam)

You can think a lot but in the end you need to start doing. So the first quarter I was in thinking mode, and then I thought 'start now. Just do it.' So I deflected from lots of strategizing and thinking to just doing. (Charles)

We try to do as many things as possible simultaneously, because if you don't start now with the things in 2 years then you will not get there. So I try to combine a pragmatic approach and a more long-term approach. (Charlotte)

This is key to what makes the visionary innovator so effective; their urge to realise their thoughts and ideas. Kotter (2007) describes the required action of creating a vision and developing a strategy for realising the vision. However, a focus on immediate translation to action is lacking in the leaders described in the literature.

Another key trait is their shared ability to make connections to spot relevant trends and developments and to bring people together for fruitful collaborations:

One of the learnings I got is that again I think differently. [...] I see connections [...] you have to continually translate what you see to others and what that connection could be to others. (George)

[Charles] is a really good connector. He is always able to connect people or companies of which he knows they could benefit from each other. He is very social and thoughtful. [...] And his strength is being able to switch between all levels, from the executives to us and recruiting interns. (Team member, Company 2)

The connector role is further characterised by an optimistic mindset. These traits are summarised by Charlotte herself, when she describes her own qualities and qualities she looks for in others:

I really believe that the people you need are very positive and think in terms of solutions instead of problems. Of course they should have an analytical side but especially be pragmatic. And possess the ability to see and understand the bigger picture instead of building a small solution in silo. (Charlotte)

Through their opportunism they are 'smart connectors', a factor that makes them indispensable in a large-scale organisation, where chance is not enough to bring the right people together. This is in line with Kanter (1999)'s notion that leaders in change-adept organisations share an openness to collaborate and make connections. Furthermore, Kotter and Cohen (2002) state that in highly successful change efforts 'you take away a pessimistic skipper and give the crew an optimistic boss.'

Finally, a common recurring theme is their courage to challenge the status quo and to take risks in trying something new, making them 'daring challengers':

If you really want to do something, you need to tell your own supervisor 'whatever, I am going to just do it.' You need to dare to act on the edge. (Charles)

It's kind of a countermovement against all the people who drink coffee at the office [...] who sit at the office and decide from there what needs to happen. (Sam)

One of the senior-VPs said to me '[Sam], you're supposed to check such a presentation before you send it to us.' And I told him 'well, that's something I am never going to do.' I think that's such incredible nonsense. (Sam)

I notice there's a strong culture of 'Yes-ism' and doing what you are told by the boss. I prefer that my team says 'no, we're not going to do that'. And adding that rebelliousness of 'you have to use the system' 'we're not going by the system'. (Charles)

In line with these findings, DiLiello and Houghton (2006)'s state that challenging the status quo are needed to redesign bureaucratic processes. Kotter (2007) similarly describes that leaders who successfully transform businesses are able to convince managers that 'the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown', and should 'encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas and actions'. Moreover, the visionary innovators stand to challenge anyone, independent of hierarchy; 'I challenge my CEO too sometimes, regarding his idea of Horizon 3 projects' (George). The tone of voice of some of the visionary innovators goes beyond challenging the status quo to rebellion, which we goes further than descriptions from previous scholars.

Experience

In comparing the experience of the visionary innovators, we found that they have more than five years of experience inside their organisation. As a result, they have accumulated specific and general business expertise. Furthermore, during years inside their own organisation they accumulated political know-how. This experience is what triggered their motivation to initiate change and a new way of working inside their organisation.

I worked beside our COO. I saw how it goes in terms of culture towards her vs. me. Everyone is used to nodding yes. But I like thinking differently. (Charles)

In his previous roles he learned what it is like to have to make profits. And also to collect evidence that something works and will yield profits and not only costs, because he knows then it is not going to last. (Team member, Company 2)

[Sam] is extremely good at politics. Don't forget that he is one of the youngest directors at [Company 1], ever. There's a reason for that. (Team member, Company 1)

Deep organisational knowledge and peer credibility are described as attributes of Network Champions (Kanter, 1999b). Additionally, organisational and political understanding are described as required capabilities for Change Leaders (Kanter, 1999a). However, the intrinsic motivation triggered by years of inside-company experience is not evident in leadership roles described in the extant literature.

Additionally, visionary innovators share an ability to dream big but to simultaneously translate ideas into the corporate language and actions required to receive support from executive management.

My main focus and my biggest allies, and I'm creating them, will be the business leads [...] because they have the budgets to make things happen, make changes in organisations. (George)

The [name of the department], that's also a pragmatic solution of mine[...] We received a lot of push-back from the organisation and by wrapping it as a 'support department', people thought 'fine, there's only so much harm they can do'. So then we positioned it that way, to then continue powerfully to ensure we could realise that change. (Sam)

They are well-aware of the urgency to run a business and deliver in the short term as is expected in large-scale organisations. They describe purposefully focussing on innovations that fit within the organisation's overall vision.

Go go go, win with everything we've got because we are part of a corporate, and we want to get our way because otherwise we cannot realise our dream. (Sam)

So this is my dream in the future, but first let's go back to the company's strategy, because then we have another hook and then everyone can say it falls within the strategy. And experiments help too. And it's that language you have to understand. (Charles)

In these large-scale corporates you often do not have two years' time to deliver nothing, so you need to deliver in the short term. (Charles)

Such translation of new ideas to the organisation's vision is also described by Wrigley (2016) as a capability of Design Champions. Furthermore, business know-how is described as essential by Kanter (1999a) and Kotter (2007).

Vision

An important factor that characterises the visionary innovator is the possession of a strong vision regarding the future of their organisation. Even though all four individuals have a vision attuned to their organisation, a common factor between the visions is that they understand very well the urgency of the customer and the ability to adapt to changing customer needs. Furthermore, they believe direct and quick realisation are key to remain competitive. Also, they believe in empowering people inside the business to innovate. To do so, they actively restructure departments to remove silos, get rid of abundant decision makers and protect their teams from organisational politics.

Ownership, that's his ultimate dream. Clearly a vision is present. (Team member, Company 1)

I believe in the culture change of making your own people more effective. Just get rid of all those meetings and make sure you start thinking yourself, because people are capable of doing that themselves. (Charles)

I strongly believe in respecting people's expertise. So instead of saying 'this is what you should do, build this' more 'how would you solve this, what do you see?' And using everyone's input in that manner. (Charlotte)

[Sam] is very good at protecting his people against bureaucratic hassles. [...] That means he does not bother us with abstract objectives from the top such as KPI's. (Team member, Company 1)

In most cases, [Charles] clears the road for us. He is a kind of gatekeeper that literally protects us from all the barriers. (Team member, Company 2)

In line with these findings, Kanter (1999a) states that change leaders must transfer ownership to a working team, 'provide coaching and resources and patrol the boundaries within which the team can freely operate'. They must 'Set boundaries for collaboration, autonomy and sharing of knowledge and ideas'. Kotter and Cohen (2002) describe empowerment as being 'all about removing barriers'. Furthermore, DiLiello and Houghton (2006) advocate environments that support innovation through encouraging autonomy.

Part of their vision is also to stimulate others in 'thinking big'. Thus, a common theme is their ability to coach others: 'You need to facilitate and coach them so that they become masters' (George).

That's leadership, go somewhere that otherwise does not exist, search for people who believe in it and who develop and improve from the journey in itself. And that's how I try to shape it. (Sam)

In a way you have to be a thought leader. [...] A point on the horizon needs to be provided, some form of a framework such that the energy that everyone possesses can be harnessed into one direction. (Charlotte)

Moreover, they share the urge to actively propagate this vision through presentations and workshops. In empathising with their audience they are able to translate their vision so that it catches on. Similarly, Kanter (1999a) describes that leaders must identify key supporters and sell their dream.

'Repetition does not spoil the prayer', I better over-communicate than under-communicate, because you can't expect the message to always land in large teams as these. (Charlotte)

It's inspiring them and showing them also that other companies are doing it, and they're doing it successfully. [...] Again it's not new in transformation changes, but it's something that you have to be very practical at, very concrete. (George)

Space

Finally, a recurring attribute is space to realise their vision. Each of the four individuals receive support from executive management to enact their vision. Such mandate is essential to achieve the impact they desire.

[My COO] is not the easiest person. But she gives me space, and I have to take that space. (Charles)

The believer community is growing bigger and bigger, because also it's endorsed from the top! Because again the CEO is pushing it too [...] so I'm not alone in this. (George)

It grew organically, but because I report directly to the executive board so there is little choice not to do so. (Sam)

Such mandate is described in relation to Change Leaders (Kanter, 1996a) and by Kotter (2007) who recommends a coalition with enough power to lead the change. The Champion is described to have sponsors from executive management (Kanter, 1996b; Wrigley, 2016). However, Change Agents and Innovation Catalysts are not necessarily in possession of such power.

Reflection and Development

Besides common traits, we found reflection and development to be a recurring theme. On a personal level each of the four individuals value learning and reflection highly. They spend weekly moments reflecting on their vision, strengths and weaknesses and aim to constantly develop themselves.

I tend to reflect on my role, my actions and how I appeared. I really believe that you can't be a good leader without understanding who you are. (Charlotte)

I really enjoy taking a moment to reflect on what I think should happen next and that can concern anything; from paving stones to world peace. And that's what actually gives me energy. (Sam)

Furthermore, they constantly contemplate new sources of inspiration externally and internally. As such, they are not bounded to the limits of their organisation.

The small technical side, I'm trying to be on the business side, and also try to do the design side. Trying to have a global view, I read a lot in those three components this gives me the richness to be able to talk with our business leads. (George)

Fly to SF and then go talk to the founder of a start-up, a conference [...] And then on the contrary also talk to the plumber, to see if I am able to explain to him that same dream I have and then check his response and then learn from it. [...] I try to do that every day. (Sam)

I tend to marinate it for a while. I use Wunderlist and literally when I read an article or talk to someone and I think 'That's interesting, I need to put that in my vision document' then I write it down. [...] I block two to three hours to put it to paper. I make sure that I make time every week to tackle something important like this. (Charlotte)

The self-leadership literature advocates that an effective leader must 'have an intimate knowledge of oneself and must be able to self-reflect, self-evaluate and self-direct' (DiLiello and Houghton, 2006). Furthermore, Kanter (1999a, 1999b) stresses the importance of improving competence by learning, and connections in the form of collaborations. This corresponds to the reflection and development of the visionary innovator, and their contemplation of information outside the organisation.

Figure 3 illustrates how the visionary innovator sets in motion a change, which may start small in their own teams but spreads with the aim to eventually reach the entire organisation. Their impact increases as they grow with the team. Through continuous reflection, the visionary innovators develop their qualities over time. Comparing one visionary innovator to another, one may be further developed in one of the four attributes. Thus, reflection is an integral part of the visionary innovator that determines one's size, and as a result the impact within the organisation.

Figure 3: Impact of the visionary Innovator

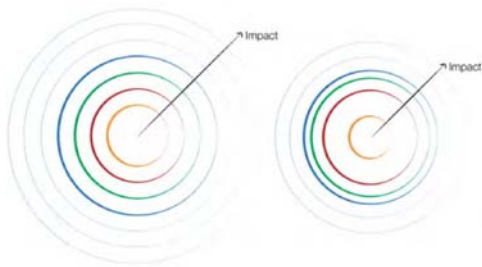


Figure 3 The 'ripple effect' of change achieved by the visionary innovator. A visionary can develop over time, thus the size of each layer may differ. As the size increases their impact increases.

Conclusion and Further Research

Large-scale organisations are recognising the importance of innovation to adapt to the dynamics of changing customer preferences, technological developments, competition and economic turmoil. However, leading innovation in the environment of large-scale organisations can be challenging. Therefore, leadership that understand the urgency of a rapid response and possess the know-how to enable realisation of such innovations is required. This research provides exploratory findings of visionary innovators, individuals who aims to create organisational change to foster innovation. In answering our research question: What are the attributes of the visionary innovators that make them effective in leading change towards innovation in large-scale organisations?

We find that these attributes are traits, organisational and political know-how, a guiding vision and space to realise their vision. Specifically, based on the traits of the visionary innovator they can be characterised to be holistic thinkers, daring challengers, smart connectors and pragmatic doers. Compared to leaders described in the literature (Table 3), holistic thinking and pragmatic action-orientation are unique for visionary innovators. The combination of these traits are what characterise the visionary innovator's ability to switch between discovery of innovation opportunities and rapid realisation of innovations.

The case studies described in this paper serve as a starting point. Further research regarding the construct of the visionary innovators is required. Case studies of four more visionary innovators are currently being conducted. Through these additional case studies we hope to extend insights regarding the visionary innovator, and to iterate on current conclusions.

Upon proposing the value of visionary innovators for large-scale organisations, further questions arise. Is it possible to easily identify such visionary innovators inside large-scale organisations? Would it be possible to select people who could be visionary innovators in development? If so, a training trajectory to develop visionary innovators could be offered to young individuals inside the organisation. Furthermore, would it help further development of the visionary innovators if they were identified and connected internally or externally? We therefore recommend further research on identifying and connecting to the visionary innovators present in large-scale organisations.

Table 3: Comparison Visionary Innovator to other leaders

Leader Attributes	Visionary Innovator	SuperLeader	Change Leader	Innovation Catalyst/ Change Agent	Champion
Innovator	x	x	x	x	x
Positive thinker	x	x			x
Connector and Collaborator	x	x	x	x	x
Self-motivated	x	x	x	x	x
Owner of a vision	x		x	x	
Communicator	x		x	x	x

Status quo Challenger	x		x	x	x
Political know-how and peer-credibility	x		x		x
Coaching and Empowering	x	x	x	x	
Learner and Reflector	x	x	x		
Leverage at executive level	x		x		x
Holistic thinker	x				
Pragmatic Doer	x				

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