

Fostering Societal Leadership towards Impact@scale

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The idea of a community coming together to build something has always fascinated me. It is reminiscent of my passion for temple architecture. It brings to mind the reddish-brown natural caves of Badami and the stunning, enormous sculpture of Trivikrama, depicting one of the avatars of Vishnu (God of preservation in Hindu mythology) morphing from dwarf Vamana into Trivikrama to measure the universe in 3 steps. In this remarkable art form, many craftsmen work together over decades to leave their mark, even though they may remain unrecognised as individuals. What fascinates me is that unlike many other art forms, this one is a true community effort.



Last year, Sanjay asked me to create a leadership forum at Societal Thinking. I got curious to understand the type of leadership forum that Societal Thinking aimed to build and, most importantly, why it was necessary. With many leadership forums already in existence, I wanted to know what we need to do to make “solving together” a habit. So, I reached out to 30 leaders within our ecosystem from all across the globe to learn about their journeys. Some of these leaders have shifted the paradigm with their groundbreaking contributions, including creating UPI and protocols such as [Beckn](#), while others have excelled at building purposeful communities, such as [Agami](#).

I also met young leaders who believed in the power of collective action and radical collaboration towards a better future. Their stories helped me understand the purpose and motivation that drives a leader. For example, Pramod Varma, a sought-after mentor in our ecosystem, always says yes to those seeking his guidance. His motivation became clear when he spoke about his family’s teaching legacy spanning two generations. Or the story of Fermin Reygadas – owing to the deep connections he forged with rural communities in his early-life travels, Reygadas steered away from a conventional career in Physics and, instead, is devoted to tackling the pressing issue of water scarcity in underserved areas with his organisation Fundacion [Cantaro Azul](#).

As I listened to these remarkable individual journeys, a common theme emerged, which I visualised as expanding circles of capacity and influence. Many of these individuals had initially volunteered for causes they deeply cared about, and later started their own social enterprises to address these issues. What set their journeys apart was the ambition to create impact@scale. They realised that one solution alone couldn’t solve everything and, instead, orchestrated the wisdom and capacity of the ecosystem to restore the agency of multiple solvers who could tackle the unique challenges they faced.

These leaders coordinated action among all societal actors, maintaining the momentum of change while patiently driving impact at population scale. They excelled at inducing network effects, inspiring ecosystems of diverse solvers, and establishing infrastructure that brought together communities, civil society, government, and the private sector. Their ultimate vision was to build a better society that restored agency, nurtured dignity, and enabled choice for all the members of society. I synthesised these insights into a framework we call ‘9 dimensions of Societal Leadership’.

Additionally, I explored a second line of questioning to understand their perspective on the need for a leadership forum. While I was aware that leadership journeys could be often very lonely, I was struck by the strong desire for such a forum. I categorised this desire into 2 compelling needs.

The need for 'self'

To find safe and supportive spaces

- Which enables individuals to ask questions, experiment, grow, and improve
- Which nurtures exploration, collaboration and networking for meaningful and generative conversations and interactions
- To self-reflect and grasp their profound societal purposes

The need for 'future self'

To find safe and supportive spaces which enable individuals to

- Test new future-oriented ideas while working on current ones
- Hold on to a longer-term perspective and universal consciousness by thinking beyond immediate outcomes, recognising the interconnectedness of social challenges and embracing continuous improvement toward emerging societal goals

Acting on these insights, we are excited to announce the launch of our leadership forum, deliberately named 'Leader's Lab'. The Lab will curate a space where leaders can come together for organic and experimental activities, fostering conversations that lead to the emergence of new ideas. Our aim is to document and present to the world the power of these ideas that result from collaborative efforts within this innovative space.

Our first gathering will take place from 16-18 November 2023 and will bring together a diverse group of leaders. Our goal is to gain insights that will guide us in shaping the field of Societal Leadership and its ecosystem.

In my interview with Lisa McCormick, she highlighted that creating a nurturing environment for like-minded individuals to freely connect and share ideas is possible, but a community cannot be gathered; it is always self-identified. Individuals choose to be part of a community, actively building trust, providing support, and collaborating. Our hope is that, from this gathering, such a community will organically emerge – one rooted in trust and abundance.

As we advance our efforts to highlight and refine the dimensions of Societal Leadership, we are eager to engage with leaders in your ecosystem who share a belief in the need for Societal Leadership and bring new perspectives into this framework. This collaborative

approach aims to enrich and evolve the idea further. If this resonates with you, please feel free to reach out to me at aruna@c4ec.org.