

DESIGNING TOMORROW

EXECUTIVE PUBLICATION SERIES

**ACTIVATE YOUR POWER BEFORE
YOU HAND IT TO AI**

PUBLICATION ISSUE & DATE

Issue: 004 | November 2026

DR. NAHLA KHADDAGE BOU DIAB

Award-Winning CEO | Enterprise Growth & Strategic Partnerships |
Board Director | Creator of Culture Risk Intelligence®
| Governance & AI Oversight | Author

Activate Your Power Before You Hand It to AI

How organizational culture can activate human creativity and help us retain our power to think, create and shape the future of AI.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are seeing so many great attempts to reskill humans with the aim to unleash their creativity and potential, but what if the creativity we are trying to develop in adults is the very capability we have been discouraging since childhood? We teach children to follow instructions, reward conformity and judge performance. Years later, they enter organizations where evaluations, hierarchies and decision processes may reproduce similar pressures.

In an era when artificial intelligence is challenging human capabilities, are we trying to restore what our own systems are suffocating?

Many people are afraid of artificial intelligence. They fear for their jobs, for their children's future and for their own ability to think. These fears deserve to be taken seriously, even some of those developing advanced AI have warned of serious risks. But fear is not a strategy. I believe the real solution is to address the issue driving the fear at its core, my response is to activate our human power. The good news is that we can do it if we understand the pattern that created the problem in the first place. Seeing it will help us understand it and understanding it will help us solve it.

Reaching a place where we are doubting the ability of humans to compete with AI is not a small issue. We need to dissect the situation so that we can define the exact root of the issue that could lead to human surrender to AI.

In this issue I examine a defining human trait that has helped humanity adapt, survive and evolve throughout history. I am talking about creativity, a capability we must nurture if we want to continue thinking independently, creating and shaping our future rather than surrendering our power to technology. I will dissect the process that suppresses human creativity and propose ways to activate it and protect it.

What concerns me is that we have been suppressing this creativity long before artificial intelligence entered our lives. The pressures begin in childhood and seem to continue through the organizational systems we create. I want to examine these pressures, understand why we reproduce them unintentionally and explore how organizational culture can help reverse their effects.



READING TIME

Approximately
27 minutes.

KEYWORDS

- Creativity Suppression Map
- Five mechanisms of suppression
- Childhood-to-organization link
- Culture, Leadership and Meaningful Work
- Creativity Reversal Framework
- Human power in the AI era

“My article will shed light on:

The human trait that has helped humanity adapt, survive and evolve throughout history

Creativity, a defining human capability that allows us to imagine, create and shape our future

Deterioration of creativity over the years

Systems that suppress creativity

A framework for addressing the systems that suppress it”

GLOBAL VIEW

The fear of AI advancement is not unfounded. In 2023, leading AI scientists and industry figures signed a statement (Center for AI Safety, 2023) that mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside pandemics and nuclear war. That same year, governments meeting at Bletchley Park (UK Government, 2023) recognised the potential for serious harm. These are warnings about possible outcomes, not predictions that they are inevitable.

The International AI Safety Report (2026) distinguishes possible loss of control through autonomous systems from a gradual weakening of human control through overreliance. This article concentrates on the latter, because it is the risk that organizations shape every day. Human development must complement technical safeguards, not replace them.

The professional services networks are responding. PwC combines technical and human skills within daily work, Deloitte describes enduring human capabilities, EY links badges with practical experience, and KPMG focuses on judgment and learning to work with technology (PwC US, 2026; Deloitte, n.d.; EY, n.d.; KPMG, 2024).

Their efforts show that the human question has entered the mainstream, but a question has to surface from these initiatives:

Training can introduce people to new capabilities, but what happens when they return to organizations where the same systems continue to discourage them from exercising what they have learned?

A programme has a beginning and an end, organizational culture does not. It surrounds people in their daily interactions, decisions, relationships and experiences. Unless these conditions support what training introduces, the desired change may never become part of everyday organizational behaviour.

Do these initiatives address the whole problem? What kind of environment allows a person to exercise judgment, reflection, creativity, connection and responsibility together?

“We are investing in teaching human capabilities at the very moment when we may be maintaining systems that suppress their use.”

Creativity, as a defining human trait, cannot be commanded. Its emergence depends on the person's state of mind and emotions. Emotions and state of mind are shaped in large part by the environment and culture that surrounds them.

Can we expect people to create in isolation from the environment?

This question will be dissected with the aim of providing clarity on not only our current situation, but more importantly on the solutions that we, collectively, must initiate. Comprehending how our educational, social and organizational systems may be discouraging the creativity we are trying to equip people with will enable us to create solutions.

If we do not question those systems, changing the content of training alone may leave the problem untouched.

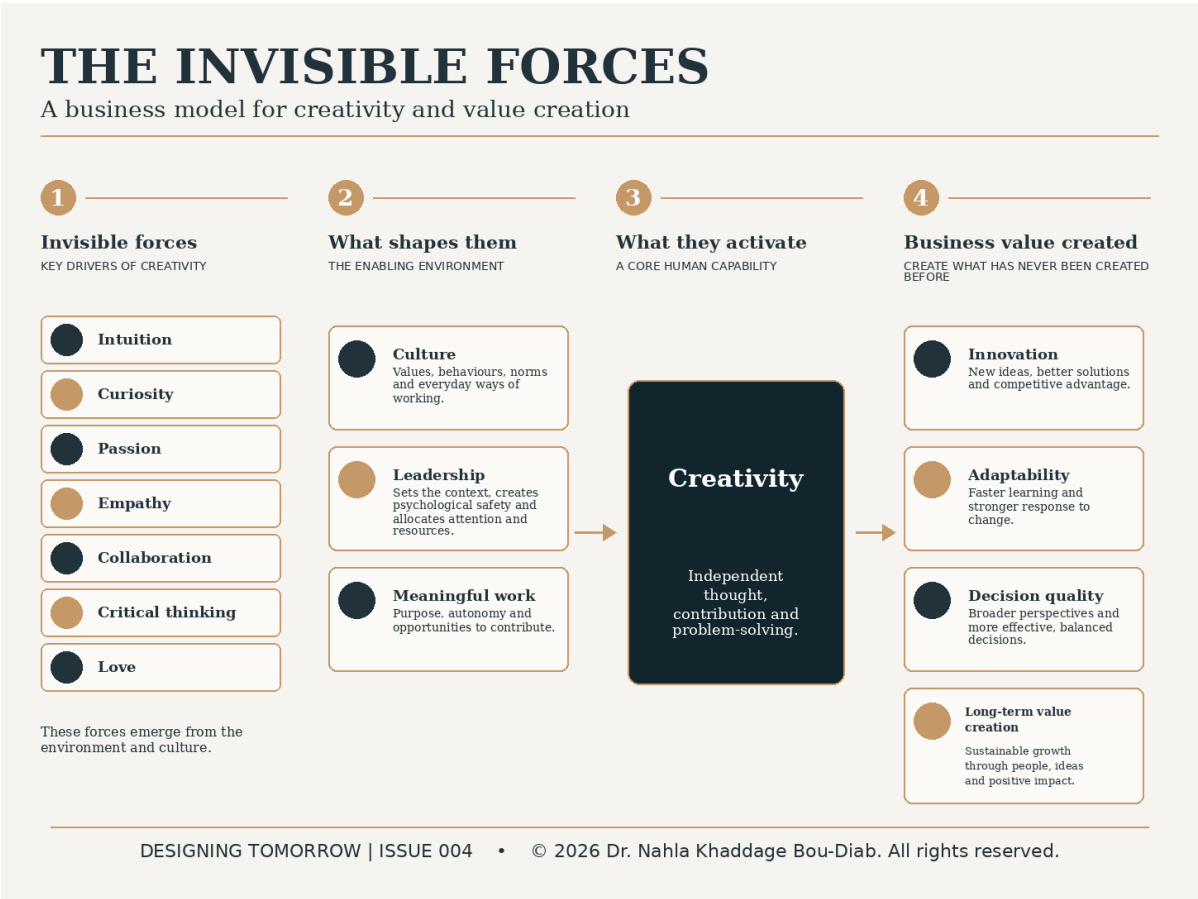
THE EVIDENCE

Creativity, passion and connection

In this article, I explore the connection of what I call the invisible forces to creativity and the environment in which it emerges. The invisible forces I am talking about include elements we cannot see or touch, but we feel. More importantly, they are forces that drive what we produce, how we produce it and the value we create as humans. These invisible forces include intuition, passion, collaboration, empathy, curiosity, critical thinking and love, which I regard as a basic human need. I want to note that some of these forces are included in training programmes being developed by industry leaders, which confirms the attention now being given to their importance. But teaching people about these capabilities is different from creating the environment in which they can exercise them.

When I speak about love within an organization, I mean the care people show for one another, respect in their relationships and willingness to support the growth and contribution of others. For me, it is visible in how colleagues respond to difficulty, how leaders preserve dignity and whether people can disagree without losing their sense of belonging. I believe that love emerges when multiple invisible forces come together. We can create awareness of these invisible forces and help people develop their understanding of them. But their expression depends on the individuals and the environment in which they live and work. They emerge naturally in alignment with the environment and the individuals' perspectives and belief systems. A training programme alone cannot create genuine collaboration and connection between people. The positive side of all of this is that we can create organizational environments that nurture these invisible forces. Organizational culture is the mechanism through which values, leadership behaviour, policies and everyday relationships come together to support their expression.

Figure 1.
THE INVISIBLE FORCES: PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS, CREATIVITY
AND POTENTIAL BUSINESS VALUE.



THE EVIDENCE

The question I pose is: are we addressing what is visible and neglecting the invisible forces that have produced the problem we are trying to solve? In *Untamable*, I wrote:

“Can anyone deny that we have intuitive abilities, learning abilities, and creative abilities? Yet, we typically talk about the achievements or the results that are triggered by these abilities; we rarely talk about nurturing such abilities.”

(Khaddage Bou-Diab, 2021)

I believe that because we have labelled invisible human traits as soft, we have learned not to see them, we don't measure them, we don't notice them. More importantly, we sometimes see them as misalignment with social norms. Instead of supporting these human traits we try to suppress them, thinking that we are aligning them with social norms. Yet a person's need to create, feel passion and learn may influence their abilities.

In this section I want to present credible scholarly evidence to support the claims I am making. I present evidence related to several interconnected elements and show their linkage to the solution I propose.

Creativity is a defining human trait

Of everything that sets humans apart from other species, creativity may be the most fundamental. It is the ability to imagine something that does not yet exist and then make it real. Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes (2019) described our ability “to imagine something completely different, and to try to make that reality.”

Although other animals solve problems and pass on traditions too, creativity alone is not what makes humans unusual. What is unusual is that human creativity builds on itself, as human culture improves on what earlier generations passed down and adds up across generations (Zwirner & Thornton, 2015). This cumulative process lets us produce knowledge and technology that no single person could invent in a lifetime (Paige & Perreault, 2024).

Throughout history, humanity has survived by adapting to changing environments, solving problems and creating new ways of living. Combined with collaboration and the capacity to build on knowledge inherited from earlier generations, creativity has helped humans respond to threats and opportunities that would otherwise have constrained their development. Human creativity is not a solo act, the capacity to imagine new possibilities and bring them about is widely seen as central to what makes us human.

Creativity is central to our ability to contribute to the future. Nurturing it can help us retain independent thought and use technology without surrendering our judgment. It cannot, by itself, resolve the wider risks of losing control of advanced systems. To activate creativity, we must first understand what fuels it.

The rest of this section looks at some of the best-studied drivers of creativity: passion, collaboration and connection. I will present selected research findings to support this discussion.

THE EVIDENCE

Passion, a driver of creativity

Vallerand and colleagues' (2003) model defines harmonious passion as a strong pull toward an activity that a person likes, values, invests time and energy in, and treats as part of who they are. In this article, when I refer to passion, I mean harmonious passion.

Passion has been positioned as a driver of creativity by multiple scholars, to name a few: Liu, Chen and Yao (2011) presented findings from two field studies directly connecting passion with creativity in workplaces of two different industries. Luh and Lu (2012) examined innovative cognitive style, passion for design and self-reported creative achievement and positively associated passion with creative achievement. St-Louis and Vallerand (2015) presented evidence to support the notion of a credible emotional pathway through which passion can sustain the creative process.

Collaboration and connection

No matter how strong our passion is, our ideas grow richer when they meet other people's perspectives, skills and challenges. Working together pushes us beyond what we could imagine on our own.

Studies have reported relationships between collaboration and creative performance, with results varying by task and context (Stolaki et al., 2023; Wu & Chen, 2022; Ebrahimi et al., 2026).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

I use Maslow's (1943) account of human needs to place passion, connection and creativity within the life of the whole person. I use Maslow's concept of self-actualization to explain the importance of developing and expressing human potential. Creativity is one way in which people may express this potential. In an era of artificial intelligence, nurturing our ability to think and create can help us retain our independence and responsibility for the future we shape.

Looking at Maslow's hierarchy raises another question for me. Are we creating educational, social and organizational environments that allow people to develop their potential, or are we creating conditions that keep their attention focused on security, acceptance and survival? This leads us to expand our understanding of the invisible forces because, collectively, they can help us elevate the conditions regulating human creativity and fulfilment.

Although Maslow's account of human needs recognises that people can fulfil their needs at different levels simultaneously, the fact is that survival pressures can crowd out the time, attention and freedom needed to express passion and sustain creativity. Meeting basic needs removes barriers to creative engagement rather than creating creative potential from nothing.

HOW CREATIVITY IS SUPPRESSED

I want to explore the pressures beneath creative suppression in order to understand the invisible pattern that keeps people surviving instead of allowing them to express their innate human trait which is creativity.

Let's dissect the process and understand how it forms so that we can put an end to a problem we create and reinforce without awareness. By suppression, I mean conditions that discourage people from developing or expressing their creative abilities.

The Process

Suppression of creativity is a process that is initiated early in our childhood without our awareness. The process is reinforced by all stakeholders starting with the family system, the educational system, the social system and the corporate system. All done unintentionally and with all the good intentions in mind.

The Pattern of Decline

Research into children's creative thinking reveals a more complex picture than continuous decline. Said-Metwaly and colleagues (2021) examined 41 studies with 40,918 participants. Their meta-analysis found an overall increase in divergent thinking across school grades, with some interruptions and evidence of a seventh-grade dip. Kim (2011) reported flattening or falling scores in a large sample of Torrance tests, while Mangion and Riebel (2023) examined how pupils rated their own creativity.

The evidence justifies investigating why particular environments and expectations can discourage creative expression.

Social Expectations and Conformity as Suppressors of Creativity

Kim (2011) notes that many studies link the drop in creativity and curiosity to the age when socialization and conformity begin to be taught. She also suggests that as children grow, they worry more about whether their ideas are accurate and appropriate, and produce fewer of them. In a longitudinal study, Claxton, Pannells and Rhoads (2005) found originality scores fell in fourth grade and linked the fall to conformity pressure in school.

Judgment as a Suppressor of Creativity

In one experiment, girls aged 7 to 11 who competed for prizes made collages that independent artist judges rated as less creative than those of a control group (Amabile, 1982).

Anxiety and Stress as Suppressors of Creativity

A review of studies found anxiety was linked to lower creative performance, more strongly in children than in adults. The association was stronger for lasting anxiety than for momentary nervousness (Byron & Khazanchi, 2011).

Children do not leave behind everything they have learned when they become adults. They enter society and eventually organizations carrying their experiences, expectations and beliefs about what is acceptable. A child who has learned to fear being wrong may hesitate to express an unfamiliar idea. A child repeatedly rewarded for conformity may become an adult who seeks approval before exercising independent judgment.

This does not mean that every child experiences these effects or that they cannot change. But it raises an important question. What happens when these adults enter organizations where similar pressures continue to exist?

"A child repeatedly rewarded for conformity may become an adult who seeks approval before exercising independent judgment."

HOW CREATIVITY IS SUPPRESSED

Five mechanisms that complete the process of suppressing creativity

As we explore the five mechanisms, I can't help but reflect on the similarity between childhood creativity suppression and adult creativity suppression.

Different systems, but are we reproducing similar pressures? Children grow into adults carrying experiences and beliefs about what is acceptable, what is rewarded and what might lead to rejection. When they enter organizations, do our structures, culture and leadership reinforce those expectations, or do they give people the freedom to think, question and create?

The following five mechanisms give us specific places to look.

Mechanism 1: Evaluation and control

Experiments found that expecting evaluation could reduce creative performance among adults (Amabile, 1979), while competition for rewards reduced creative ratings among children (Amabile, 1982). The same pattern holds at work. In a large study of project teams, Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby and Herron (1996) identified organizational impediments to creativity: harsh criticism of new ideas, internal political problems, an emphasis on the status quo, conservative and risk-averse management, and excessive workload pressure. Projects rated as highly creative scored lower on these impediments than projects rated as low in creativity. A quantitative review of the research confirmed that a supportive climate, with autonomy, encouragement and room for risk, consistently predicts creative performance (Hunter, Bedell & Mumford, 2007). Organizations that control, monitor and judge harshly reproduce the conditions that suppressed creativity in the classroom.

Examine organizational attendance systems, productivity monitoring and time sheets, performance evaluation and salary scales.

Mechanism 2: Conformity pressure

Children and adolescents associated conformity with intelligence (Wen, Clegg & Legare, 2019), and adults may carry those expectations into organizations. Goncalo and Duguid (2012) found that conformity pressure can either help or hinder group creativity depending on the group and the norm being enforced; it hindered groups with highly creative members. In classic experiments, people brainstorming in groups produced fewer ideas than the same number of people working alone. Fear of evaluation by others and waiting for one's turn to speak were important causes (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Meetings can therefore discourage ideas when they reward agreement or allow only a few people to contribute.

Examine organizational policies and procedures, hierarchy and promotion paths linked with time served rather than contribution.

Mechanism 3: Bias against novel ideas

Organizations say they want creativity but often reject it. Across two experiments, Mueller, Melwani and Goncalo (2012) showed that people under uncertainty held a hidden bias against creative ideas, even while openly saying they valued creativity. That bias also reduced their ability to recognise a creative idea. Because organizations operate under constant uncertainty about costs, risks and results, decision-makers are likely to screen out the most original proposals. Employees learn quickly which ideas are rewarded, just as children learn which answers teachers expect.

Examine organizational policies and procedures, committee decision-making structures and layered hierarchies.

HOW CREATIVITY IS SUPPRESSED

Mechanism 4: Fear, silence and self-censorship

Children's fear of standing out has a clear adult equivalent: organizational silence. Morrison and Milliken (2000) describe how managers' fear of negative feedback and their beliefs about employees create a climate in which people withhold ideas and concerns. Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that employees follow unspoken rules of self-censorship, for example "don't bypass the boss" and "don't speak up without solid data," and hold back ideas even when their managers are open to them. Edmondson (1999) showed that teams with psychological safety, the shared belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, engage more in learning behaviours such as asking questions and proposing ideas. A later review confirmed psychological safety as a central condition for voice, learning and innovation at work (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Without it, adults suppress their own creativity before anyone else has a chance to.

Examine organizational authoritarian leadership style, layered hierarchies, formal authority and undeclared power structures.

Mechanism 5: Stress and threat

Anxiety reduced creative performance in children (Byron & Khazanchi, 2011), and stress lowers creativity across studies (Huang & Yu, 2025). In the workplace, a meta-analysis by Byron, Khazanchi and Nazarian (2010) found that stressors involving social evaluation and uncontrollable conditions reduced creative performance. Job insecurity, unpredictable demands and performance judgments are therefore not only wellbeing issues but direct suppressors of creative output.

The distinction between challenge-related and hindrance-related stress matters. A survey of 201 office workers in China found that harmonious passion was associated with challenge-related stress and stronger radical creativity, whereas obsessive passion was associated with hindrance-related stress and weaker radical creativity (Quan, Wang & Koo, 2021). These findings concern associations reported in one sample, not universal effects.

Examine organizational leadership approach and the organizational social systems surrounding people.

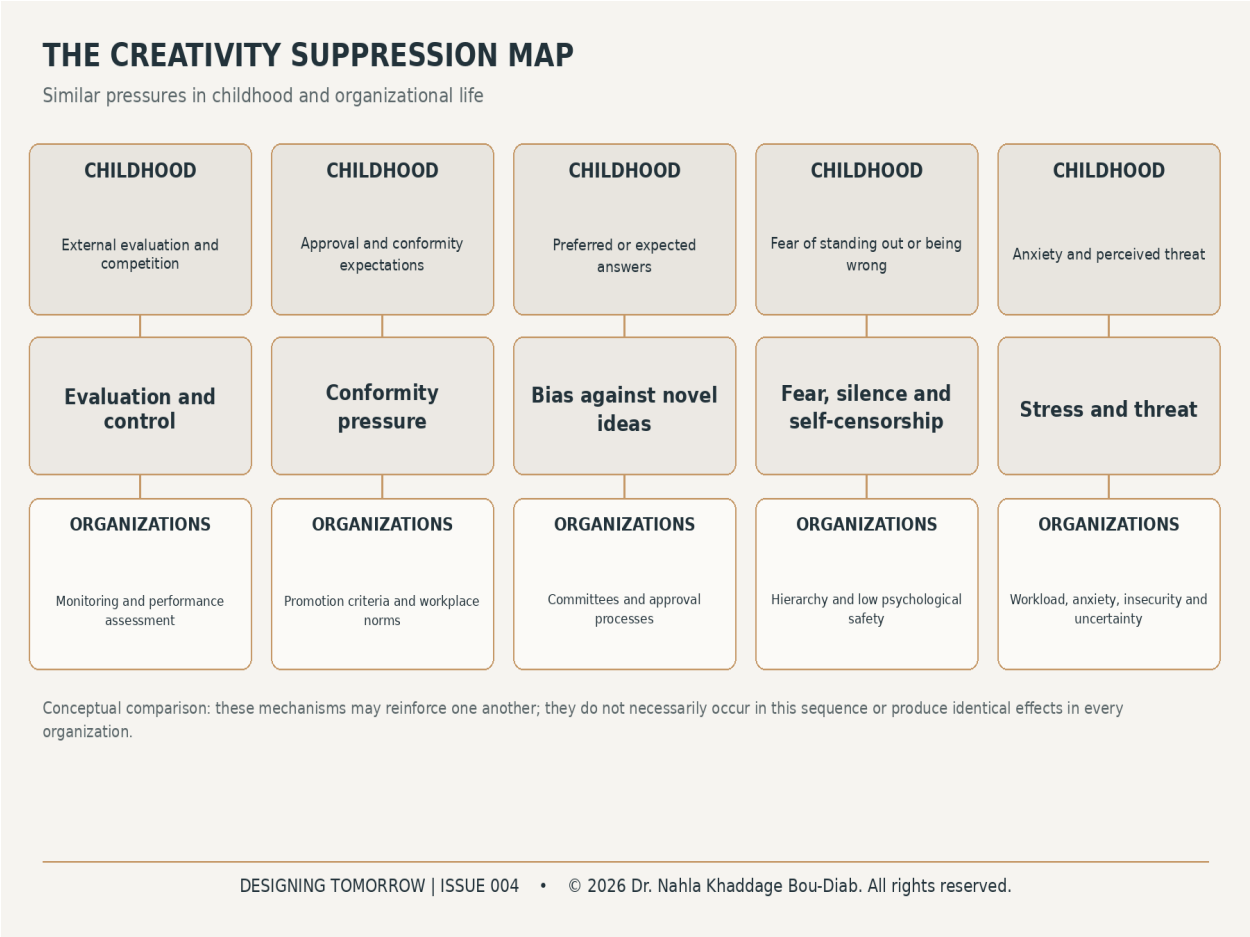
The Creativity Suppression Map: How Organizational Pressures Can Reinforce One Another

I bring these five mechanisms together to examine how organizational pressures may reinforce one another. They do not necessarily occur in a fixed sequence or produce identical effects in every organization.

Judgment and control signal that mistakes are costly. Conformity pressure makes the safest idea the most common one. Bias against novelty means original ideas are rejected when they are offered. Silence and self-censorship follow, as employees stop offering them. Stress and threat narrow thinking further.

HOW CREATIVITY IS SUPPRESSED

Figure 2.
THE CREATIVITY SUPPRESSION MAP.



“Conformity pressure makes the safest idea the most common one.”

THE DESIGNING TOMORROW FRAMEWORK

Reversing the cycle through the organization's culture

My doctoral action research explored how changes in the organizational environment could strengthen people's sense of belonging, and optimize an organization's resilience. Through that research, I developed a conceptual model built around three key pillars that drive Organizational Resilience: Culture, Leadership and Meaningful Work. This model subsequently informed the development of my Culture Risk Intelligence® methodology. I now return to that research and my executive experience to explore another question: how can these three pillars help organizations reverse the conditions that suppress human creativity? I find myself compelled to share key elements of my thesis to illustrate how culture can become a tool for activating the invisible forces inside the organization to trigger passion, creativity, collaboration and, yes, the taboo word that has been labelled as weakness throughout our history: LOVE (Khaddage Bou-Diab, 2020).

From Belonging to Creativity

The research included a literature review and empirical activities such as documented observations, interviews and workshops involving management and employees at different organizational levels. The organizational setting had over 500 employees and operated in a challenging, high-risk environment, on multiple levels. Through the workshop intervention, participants were taken through a process of understanding in which three key organizational pillars were identified: culture, leadership and meaningful work. The process took participants through facilitated sessions where they selected changes to organizational practices, as a solution to optimize the culture and trigger positive emotions of sense of belonging, collaboration, creativity and other forms of contribution. As reported in my thesis, these included amendments to policies, changes in performance evaluation parameters, changes to committee decision processes, changes to HR policies etc. (Khaddage Bou-Diab, 2020).

Upon implementation and throughout the years that followed, participants not only kept reporting stronger feelings of safety and belonging, but organizational KPIs also showed a significant improvement in productivity, in international recognition, higher attraction to top international talent, lower attrition among top performers, lower operational costs.

Several factors contributed to these outcomes. What this experience demonstrated to me was the importance of addressing the organizational environment rather than treating people's behaviour as an isolated problem.

The research examined a sense of belonging, a positive emotional state that emerges when people feel connected to their organization, feel comfortable expressing themselves and develop genuine love for the environment in which they work.

This is where I connect belonging with creativity. When people feel accepted, valued and free to express themselves, they are more likely to exercise their imagination, challenge existing thinking, collaborate and create.

One of the changes we implemented concerned the performance evaluation system. We moved away from subjective evaluations and introduced quantified performance parameters linked directly to each employee's core job responsibilities.

The change was intended to make expectations more transparent and consistent, rather than to increase surveillance or penalise experimentation.

The impact on people's behaviour was significant. The new evaluation process triggered intense collaboration, greater trust and stronger feelings of safety.

For the first time, people believed that their success was no longer dictated by someone's subjective judgment. They felt they had control over their success through their own output and contribution.

This change illustrates how an organizational system can influence people's emotions and their relationships with one another. By changing the way performance was evaluated, we changed the conditions surrounding people's sense of safety, trust and collaboration.

I connect this experience to my creativity suppression framework because people who feel safe, trusted and in control of their contribution may be more willing to express their ideas, collaborate and exercise their creative abilities.

Belonging is therefore not separate from my present exploration of creativity. I see it as one of the emotional conditions that organizational culture can nurture to allow human creativity to emerge.

THE DESIGNING TOMORROW FRAMEWORK

Culture

Culture has been defined as the learnings of a group based on which they interact and solve problems (Schein, 1990). Schein provides further explanation of culture and refers to it as a manifestation of multiple layers in which values and assumptions materialise in people's behaviour.

Culture experts like Schein have provided insights on culture and explained it as being shaped by people's values, beliefs, assumptions and biases. It is moulded by the interconnectivity of such elements and results in unique interpretations that drive behaviour inside and outside the organization. Schein (1985) went on to explain that people interpret information by filtering it through their established value systems, the resulting understanding generates responses to the situation, making culture connected with emotions and feelings of people.

Culture is a powerful force shaping organizational behaviour, alongside leadership, incentives, individual differences and wider circumstances.

Leadership

Raelin (2003) took the leadership phenomenon further and introduced what he referred to as "leaderful" practice which moved leadership further away from command and more towards influence.

Leadership influences people's feelings and behaviour. Directing people only through routine tasks can disconnect them from their contribution to a larger purpose.

Leaders must be willing to challenge their own values and perceptions and practise reflection themselves before asking others to do the same.

Meaningful Work

Meaningful work has been defined as work that fulfils its owner on four different levels: first, the ability to apply their full capabilities; second, the ability to work without compromising personal values; third, to be satisfied with the value created through the job; and fourth, the capacity to fulfil different needs through the job, such as relationships (Veltman, 2015).

Can people see how their work contributes to something they value, and do they have room to use their abilities in doing it?

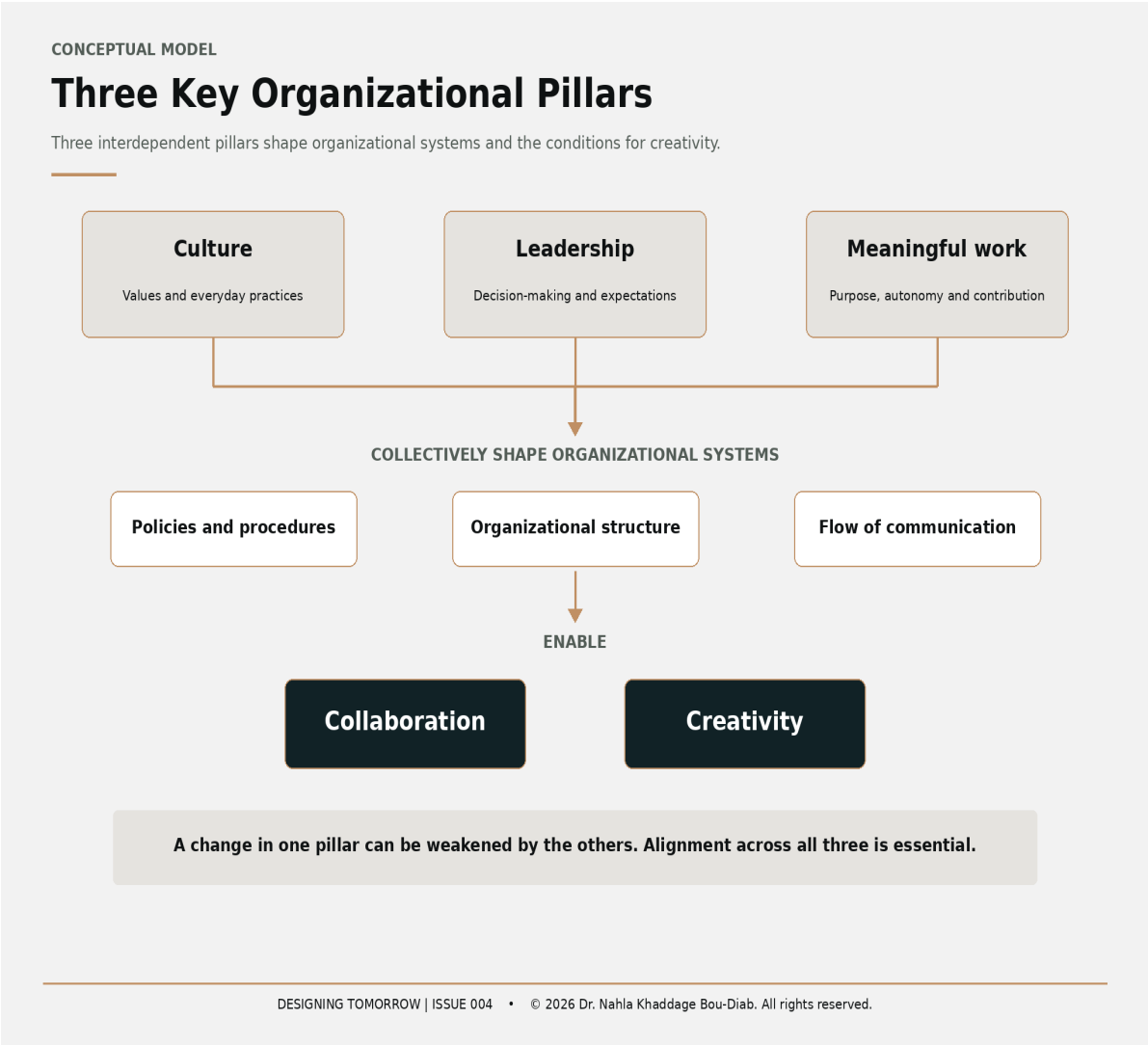
Connection to AI

This is where the connection to AI becomes practical. An employee who is encouraged to question assumptions is also more able to challenge an AI answer. A person whose ideas are dismissed may have little reason to exercise independent judgment, whatever training they have completed. This is a risk to examine, not a relationship these creativity studies measured directly. Organizational culture can support independent thought; it does not replace technical AI safeguards.

I bring these three pillars together because a change in one can be weakened by the others. A leader may invite new ideas, while the evaluation system rewards only following instructions. Work may have a meaningful purpose, while people feel unable to question how it is done. The question is whether culture, leadership and meaningful work support the same freedom to think, contribute and create.

THE DESIGNING TOMORROW FRAMEWORK

Figure 3.
CONCEPTUAL MODEL: CULTURE, LEADERSHIP AND MEANINGFUL WORK AS THREE INTERCONNECTED ORGANIZATIONAL PILLARS.

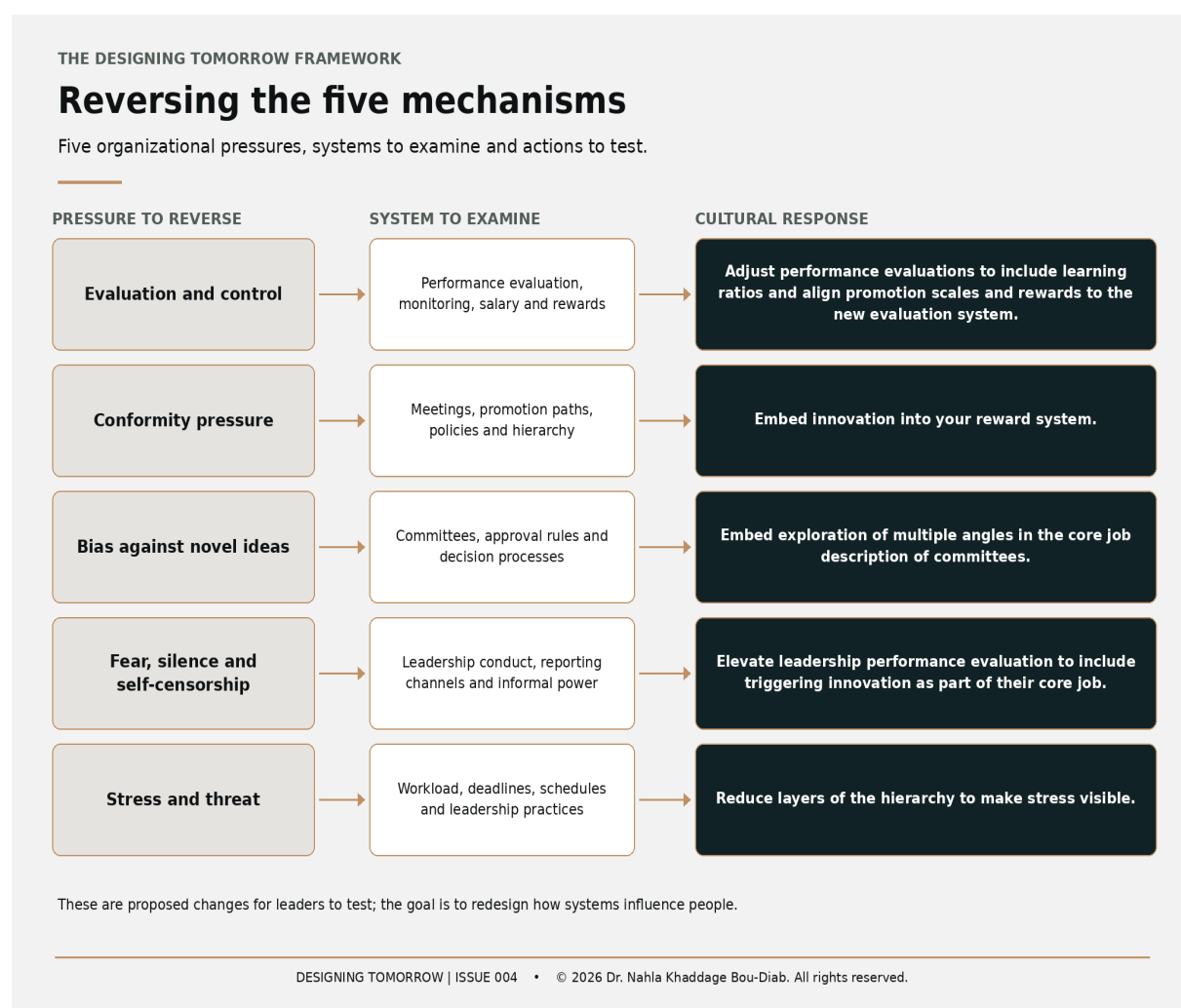


THE DESIGNING TOMORROW FRAMEWORK

Reversing the five mechanisms

Figure 4.

THE CREATIVITY REVERSAL FRAMEWORK: ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS TO EXAMINE AND CULTURAL RESPONSES TO TEST.



The suppression map can become a practical cultural examination. The actions below are proposals for leaders to test.

The objective is not to remove evaluation, control, hierarchy or decision processes. Organizations need them. What needs to change is the way these systems influence people. We need to examine whether they are encouraging human creativity or discouraging it. A performance evaluation system can reward conformity or encourage initiative. A committee can reject unfamiliar ideas or help develop them. A leader can create fear or provide the confidence people need to contribute.

The difference lies in the culture shaping these systems.

These conditions also raise commercial questions. When evaluation discourages initiative, organizations may lose opportunities to learn; when committees reject unfamiliar proposals without fair consideration, potential products, services or improvements may go unexplored; when employees remain silent, risks and alternatives may never reach decision-makers. And they may carry hidden costs that senior leadership cannot see in their financial reports.

These are potential enterprise costs for leaders to investigate, not financial outcomes demonstrated by the five-mechanism framework.

THE DESIGNING TOMORROW FRAMEWORK

Reversing the five mechanisms

What does this mean in an era of artificial intelligence? If people are afraid to question, reluctant to challenge and accustomed to following instructions, how do we expect them to exercise independent judgment when using technology? Activating human creativity is not about competing with machines at everything they do. It is about ensuring that people continue to think, create, question and take responsibility for what technology produces.

“Activating human creativity is not about competing with machines at everything they do. It is about ensuring that people continue to think, create, question and take responsibility for what technology produces.”

CALL TO ACTION

Issues 001, 002 and 003 connected resilience with people, education and capital. Parents, educators, organizations, investors and policymakers are participants in the same human system.

Parents may need to rethink their approach. Shifting from directing and instructing to guiding and supporting may be more effective in an AI era. Educators need to shift from teaching information to teaching a process of reflective thinking. Leaders must align learning with a culture that supports applying the learning in the organizational environment. This entails linkage of policies, hierarchy, decision-making, performance evaluation and rewards to their strategy. Investors should examine what their expectations reinforce. Policymakers can support education and safeguards that preserve human responsibility.

Stakeholders need to come together to build new systems founded on cultures that unleash human potential.

I invite leaders to test this framework in their own organizations.

Select one organizational process where creativity and independent judgment matter. Appoint an accountable business executive and conduct a 30-day review.

During the first week, identify which of the five creativity suppression mechanisms may be present in that process.

During the second week, examine the organizational conditions surrounding it. Review policies, performance evaluation, decision-making processes and leadership practices. Identify what behaviours these systems encourage and what they may discourage.

During the third week, introduce one specific change aimed at reversing an identified suppressor. For example, modify how alternative proposals are considered in a decision-making committee, or how managers respond when employees introduce unfamiliar ideas. More importantly define the ratios you will use to measure the results.

During the fourth week, examine what changed. Compare assess the KPIs and compare them to your observations, to employees feedback and determine whether the intervention should be continued, adjusted or discontinued.

The objective is not to transform organizational culture in 30 days. It is to begin understanding how our systems influence people's behaviour and whether changing those systems can create greater freedom to think, collaborate and create.

BOARD REFLECTION

Are we investing in human skills while maintaining systems that suppress their use? Do training programmes teach critical thinking while performance pressure penalises disagreement? Are we teaching collaboration while incentives reward individual competition?

Boards need to understand culture and demand visibility into its risks, using carefully defined indicators reviewed alongside strategic objectives. Culture Risk Intelligence® offers a way to frame this responsibility as part of governance, rather than as an isolated personnel initiative. It has become necessary to select CEOs capable of understanding and managing culture. A CEO who continues to believe that managing a company's strategy and its P&L is isolated from managing its culture may struggle to lead the company successfully in the era of AI.

Boards should also ask about the environment: what conditions does the organization's culture produce? These conditions may impose costs on the enterprise. How many proposals never reach decision-makers? How often do employees avoid challenging an assumption? How many opportunities remain unexplored because unfamiliar ideas receive no serious consideration? What is the cost of slow decisions? What is the cost of high attrition of talent? These are questions about adaptability, decision quality, risk and innovation, not only employee satisfaction. Directors should ask management to review such indicators alongside business results, without treating them as proof of a simple causal relationship.

Boards cannot eliminate every technological risk, but they can govern the conditions that allow human capability to emerge. Understanding the suppression of creativity gives boards a reason to examine the full organizational system. Training budgets, courses completed and technology adoption rates show activity. They do not establish whether people can apply what they learn or whether organizational conditions support them. Culture Risk Intelligence® indicators may help provide that view when their measures and interpretation are clearly defined.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

When leaders recognise the role of culture in enabling creativity and collaboration, they have reason to examine it with the same attention they give their strategic objectives. Culture management cannot remain a secondary initiative. It is like taking care of the car while neglecting its engine.

Evidence linking organizational pressures with reduced creative contribution gives leaders a reason to review the environments they create and the behaviours they reward, because the culture of the organization is their responsibility and they need to be accountable for what it produces.

This is an invitation for leadership to become interested and curious about culture given its great impact on organizational performance.

It is culture awareness that will differentiate leaders of the past from leaders of the future.

AUTHOR'S REFLECTION

Artificial intelligence may give us an opportunity I have spent much of my life hoping for: a reason to take human potential seriously. I feel the urgency, but I also feel excitement at the possibility of moving from convincing people of our potential to creating systems that nurture it.

What troubles me most is how easily we shift attention from why we exist to how much we produce. I believe humans exist to create and collaborate to improve human life. When we do that well, we can also create financial value.

Doing the right thing does not mean neglecting financial gain. Instead of creating needs solely for profit, we can define the products and services that support human potential instead of suppressing it, and we can trust that these will also create financial value.

Change is hard, but artificial intelligence has left us no choice. Instead of worrying, let us recognise the opportunity and treat the obstacles ahead as triggers for human evolution. After all, throughout history, major changes have driven human evolution.

CONCLUSION

My concern is that the systems we create may suppress the creativity we need. The comparison between childhood and organizational life gives us reasons to examine how judgment, conformity, silence and stress shape people's willingness to contribute.

Drawing on this research and my practitioner experience, I have proposed a framework for addressing the conditions that suppress creativity and for creating an environment in which human power can emerge.

Now it is up to us to act with urgency. How can we understand the pressures our systems create and remain silent?

We must transform the educational and organizational systems from a source of suppression to a source of inspiration, passion, collaboration and creativity.

Culture does not change simply because we announce a new value. It changes when policies, decisions, leadership and rewards support the behaviours we want to see.

Humanity has used creativity to adapt and evolve throughout history, yet the systems we have created may discourage this very capability.

Instead of investing only in teaching human skills such as empathy, creativity and others, why don't we also examine what prevents people from exercising these skills? We may discover that the problem is not always the absence of these skills, but the absence of an environment that allows people to exercise them.

The opportunity before us is to transform the cultures surrounding people so that creativity, passion and collaboration can flourish. This is how I believe we can activate human power and remain responsible for what we create with technology.

REFERENCES

- Amabile, T. M. (1979). Effects of external evaluation on artistic creativity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(2), 221–233. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.2.221>
- Amabile, T. M. (1982). Children's artistic creativity: Detrimental effects of competition in a field setting. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 8(3), 573–578. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167282083027>
- Amabile, T. M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J., & Herron, M. (1996). Assessing the work environment for creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(5), 1154–1184. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256995>
- Byron, K., & Khazanchi, S. (2011). A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship of state and trait anxiety to performance on figural and verbal creative tasks. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(2), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210392788>
- Byron, K., Khazanchi, S., & Nazarian, D. (2010). The relationship between stressors and creativity: A meta-analysis examining competing theoretical models. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(1), 201–212. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017868>
- Center for AI Safety (2023). Statement on AI Extinction Risk. <https://www.safe.ai/work/statement-on-ai-risk>
- Claxton, A. F., Pannells, T. C., & Rhoads, P. A. (2005). Developmental trends in the creativity of school-age children. *Creativity Research Journal*, 17(4), 327–335. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1704_4
- Deloitte (n.d.). Growth and Development at Deloitte. Enduring Human Capabilities. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/careers/deloitte-life/growth-and-development.html>
- Detert, J. R., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(3), 461–488. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61967925>
- Diehl, M., & Stroebe, W. (1987). Productivity loss in brainstorming groups: Toward the solution of a riddle. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3), 497–509. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.53.3.497>
- Ebrahimi, Z., Bergström, K., Jaarsveld, S., Wüstenberg, T., & Lachmann, T. (2026). The maze of creative thinking: Creative production in independent versus collaborative settings. *Creativity Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2026.2701894>
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305>
- EY (n.d.). Personalized professional growth. EY careers. https://www.ey.com/en_us/careers/personalized-career-development
- Fuentes, A. (2019, October 22). Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes on human imagination and creativity. University of Notre Dame, College of Arts & Letters. <https://al.nd.edu/news/latest-news/video-anthropologist-agustin-fuentes-on-human-imagination-and-creativity/>
- Goncalo, J. A., & Duguid, M. M. (2012). Follow the crowd in a new direction: When conformity pressure facilitates group creativity (and when it does not). *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 118(1), 14–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.12.004>
- Huang, Y., & Yu, R. (2025). The double-edged sword of stress: A systematic meta-analysis on how stress impacts creativity. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 172, Article 106113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2025.106113>

REFERENCES

- Hunter, S. T., Bedell, K. E., & Mumford, M. D. (2007). Climate for creativity: A quantitative review. *Creativity Research Journal*, 19(1), 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400410709336883>
- International AI Safety Report (2026). International AI Safety Report 2026. Published 3 February; sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.2. <https://internationalaisafetyreport.org/>
- KPMG (2024). 2023 transparency report: Professional judgment framework and development. <https://kpmg.com/kpmg-us/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2024/2023-transparency-report-apr-2024.pdf>
- Khaddage Bou-Diab, N. (2020). Spirituality in the Organization. University of Liverpool doctoral research.
- Khaddage Bou-Diab, N. (2021). Untamable: Claim Your Power, Live Fearlessly, and Become Unstoppable. Oneness Offshore.
- Kim, K. H. (2011). The creativity crisis: The decrease in creative thinking scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. *Creativity Research Journal*, 23(4), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2011.627805>
- Liu, D., Chen, X.-P., & Yao, X. (2011). From autonomy to creativity: A multilevel investigation of the mediating role of harmonious passion. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(2), 294–309. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021294>
- Luh, D.-B., & Lu, C.-C. (2012). From cognitive style to creativity achievement: The mediating role of passion. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 6(3), 282–288. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026868>
- Mangion, M., & Riebel, J. A. (2023). Young Creators: Perceptions of Creativity by Primary School Students in Malta. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(3), 53. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11030053>
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. Original article reproduced by York University. <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>
- Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 706–725. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259200>
- Mueller, J. S., Melwani, S., & Goncalo, J. A. (2012). The bias against creativity: Why people desire but reject creative ideas. *Psychological Science*, 23(1), 13–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611421018>
- Paige, J., & Perreault, C. (2024). 3.3 million years of stone tool complexity suggests that cumulative culture began during the Middle Pleistocene. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11214059/>
- PwC US (2026, 5 February). PwC Learning Collective Reimagines Development for the AI Age. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/learning-collective-ai-workforce-development.html>
- Quan, X., Wang, B., & Koo, J. (2021). The relationship between passion, creativity and routine performance: Mediating effect of challenge-hindrance related stress and moderating effect of decision authority. *Journal of Organization and Management*, 45(4), 85–105. <https://doi.org/10.36459/jom.2021.45.4.85>
- Raelin, J. A. (2003). *Creating Leaderful Organizations: How to Bring Out Leadership in Everyone*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Said-Metwaly, S., Fernández-Castilla, B., Kyndt, E., Van den Noortgate, W., & Barbot, B. (2021). Does the Fourth-Grade Slump in Creativity Actually Exist? A Meta-analysis of the Development of Divergent Thinking in School-Age Children and Adolescents. *Educational Psychology Review*, 33, 275–298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-020-09547-9>
- Schein, E. H. (1985). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational Culture. *American Psychologist*, 45(2), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.2.109>

REFERENCES

- St-Louis, A. C., & Vallerand, R. J. (2015). A successful creative process: The role of passion and emotions. *Creativity Research Journal*, 27(2), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2015.1030314>
- Stolaki, A., Satratzemi, M., & Xinogalos, S. (2023). Examining the effects of creativity, collaboration, creative diversity and autonomy on team creative performance. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 50, 101415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2023.101415>
- UK Government (2023). The Bletchley Declaration by Countries Attending the AI Safety Summit, 1 and 2 November 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-safety-summit-2023-the-bletchley-declaration>
- Vallerand, R. J., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G. A., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Léonard, M., Gagné, M., & Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passions de l'âme: On obsessive and harmonious passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(4), 756–767. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.756>
- Veltman, A. (2015). *Meaningful Work*. Oxford University Press.
- Wen, N. J., Clegg, J. M., & Legare, C. H. (2019). Smart conformists: Children and adolescents associate conformity with intelligence across cultures. *Child Development*, 90(3), 746–758. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12935>
- Wu, C. L., & Chen, P. Z. (2022). Differences in online creative performance of single and paired players in cooperative and competitive task situations. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 44, 101037. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101037>
- Zwirner, E., & Thornton, A. (2015). Cognitive requirements of cumulative culture: teaching is useful but not essential. *Scientific Reports*, 5, 16781. <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep16781>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Nahla Khaddage Bou Diab

Dr. Nahla Khaddage Bou-Diab completed her doctorate at the University of Liverpool in 2020, researching belonging and its relationship with organizational performance. In 2021, she published *Untamable* to assist people in connecting with their power and exiting survival mode. In 2022, she launched *Activate Your Power* to explore human functionality and show how innate power can be activated. In 2024, she published *A Leadership Shift* to help leaders nurture human potential through organizational culture.

As a CEO, she implemented these concepts in her organizational system, connecting the development of culture with the organization's pursuit of innovation, creativity and agility. She also observed changes in financial performance.



CONNECT

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-nahla-khaddage-boudiab-7a260875/>

Website: <https://nahlaboudiab.com/>