Original Research Article

Architecting transformative leadership: Integrating HEART with breakthrough & disruptive practices for innovation and organizational resilience

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Abstract

This paper examines how leadership that combines breakthrough thinking and disruptive behaviours, moderated and enabled by the HEART Leadership model (Human-Cantered, Empathetic, Authentic, Resilient, Transformational), fosters innovation, adaptability, and sustainable transformation in organizations. We introduce a suite of measurement indices (Human-Centric Index, Empathy-Driven Value Index, Purpose-Driven Leadership Index, Trust & Growth Index, Influence Capital Index, Conscious Innovation Index, Adaptive Leadership Index, Leadership Disruption Index, Ecosystem Scalability Index, Wisdom Index, and Adaptive Influence Index) to operationalize HEART values and leadership disruption. Using a sequential mixed-methods design—case studies from masked Organization A followed by a large-scale survey (n = 320 employees)—we test a model: Breakthrough Thinking → Disruptive Leadership Behaviour → Innovation Outcomes, with HEART dimensions as mediators/moderators. Findings reveal that HEART-aligned leadership significantly amplifies the impact of breakthrough thinking on disruptive behaviour and, through that, on innovation and organizational resilience. Specifically, higher scores on Human-Centric Index (HCI), Empathy-Driven Value Index (EDVI), Purpose-Driven Leadership Index (PDLI), and Trust & Growth Index (TGI) are associated with stronger innovation outcomes. The expanded discussion highlights the connection between control, purpose over profit, and relational integrity in disruption. The paper contributes theoretically by integrating cognitive, behavioural, and relational dimensions, and practically by offering indices and a framework for leadership development that is values-grounded, people-powered, and future-ready.

Keywords: Breakthrough leadership, Disruptive leadership, HEART leadership, Innovation; Leadership indices, Organizational resilience, Purpose-driven leadership.

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1. Introduction

In an era of rapid technological change, global volatility, and rising demands for ethical and human-centred leadership, traditional top-down command-and-control models are increasingly inadequate. Organizations no longer merely need to adapt—they must transform. This transformation is driven by Breakthrough Thinking—visionary, values-anchored reframing of what is possible—and Disruptive Leadership Behaviour—actions that challenge norms, overturn inertia, and accelerate innovation.

Concurrently, the emerging HEART Leadership paradigm—Human-Cantered, Empathetic, Authentic, Resilient, Transformational—foregrounds relational intelligence, purpose, trust, and inner stability. As the script puts it: *"Leadership is no longer about control; it's about connection… Data and AI may run businesses, but only human-cantered and spiritual intelligence will lead them into the future."*

This paper integrates these strands with measurement tools, asking:

1. How does HEART Leadership enable and moderate the translation of breakthrough thinking into disruptive behaviour?

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2. Through which indices can relational, emotional, and purpose-driven leadership be captured?
3. To what extent do HEART dimensions enhance innovation, adaptability, and resilience outcomes in organizations?

2. Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

2.1. Breakthrough thinking & disruptive leadership

Breakthrough Thinking involves insight, reframing entrenched assumptions, anchoring leadership in core values. Disruptive Leadership Behaviour refers to norm-breaking, risk-taking, and implementing actions that overturn outdated practices and enable innovation.

2.2. HEART leadership: Values & behaviours

HEART Leadership comprises:

1. Human-cantered: This dimension emphasizes putting people first through actions that build *psychological safety*, relational connection, and trust. Leaders who are human-cantered ensure team members feel safe to express ideas, make mistakes, voice concerns, or propose innovations without fear of humiliation or retaliation (Mbah, M. F., Milani, S. Z., & Kushnir, I., 2025). Research shows that psychological safety strongly correlates with team learning, efficacy, and productivity (Lynch, A., & Currie, G., 2025). Through high relational connection, such leaders foster inclusion and belonging, which in turn enables people to share novel ideas openly—an essential foundation for breakthrough thinking and disruptive change.

2. Empathetic: Empathy involves perceiving others' needs, emotions, and perspectives, and responding with care and emotional sensitivity. When leaders are empathetic, employees are more likely to feel understood, which strengthens loyalty, intrinsic motivation, and creativity. This trait helps in tailoring support, alleviating stress, and enhancing psychological resilience in teams (Ma, G., Wu, W., Liu, C., Ji, J., & Gao, X., 2024). Though less quantified in index form, leadership styles that integrate empathy have been found to enhance innovation when paired with organizational support (Bahagia, R., Daulay, R., Arianty, N., & Astuti, R., 2024).

3. Authentic: Authenticity means transparency, consistency and integrity in both values and practice. Leaders who align what they say with what they do build credibility and trust. Research on transformational and authentic leadership shows these are associated with positive psychological outcomes in followers, greater commitment, and willingness to follow disruptive change. Authentic leaders model integrity, admit mistakes, and communicate openly, thus enabling breakthrough initiatives to be accepted rather than resisted.

4. Resilient: Resilience reflects the capacity of a leader to persist through setbacks, adapt when plans fail, and learn from failure. In fast-changing environments, resilient leadership is essential for sustaining morale and encouraging innovation despite obstacles. Such leaders recover quickly, encourage adaptive responses, and buffer teams from burnout. While less often measured in discrete indices in recent studies, resilience is repeatedly linked to adaptability and long-term performance

5. Transformational: Transformational leadership inspires vision, infuses purpose, and motivates meaningful change. It goes beyond mere task management to elevate follower motivation, encourage creativity, and align individual aspirations with organisational goals (Jun, K., & Lee, J., 2023). Scholars characterize transformational leaders as those who articulate a compelling vision, stimulate intellectual growth, and empower followers to exceed expected performance. This dimension dovetails with breakthrough thinking: it provides the energy, direction and emotional grounding necessary for disruptive leadership behaviours to translate into innovation and organisational resilience (Sueb, S., & Sopiah, S., 2023).

These dimensions are increasingly recognized in leadership theory as essential for sustainable change, trust-building, and resilient culture.

2.3. Indices of measurement

To operationalize these parts:

Table 1: Indices of measurement

Index	What It Measures / Captures
Human-Centric Index (HCI)	Prioritization of human welfare, relational sensitivity
Empathy-Driven Value Index (EDVI)	How empathy shapes value creation and decision-making
Purpose-Driven Leadership Index (PDLI)	Clarity, alignment, articulation of leader's purpose
Trust & Growth Index (TGI)	Perceived trustworthiness, growth orientation, learning culture
Influence Capital Index (ICI)	Influence derived from relational capital rather than positional power
Conscious Innovation Index (CII)	Innovation that is mindful of impact, ethics, sustainability

Table 1 Continued…	
Adaptive Leadership Index (ALI or AL-OS)	Flexibility, agility in changing environments
Leadership Disruption Index (LDI)	Degree of norm-challenging / systemic change behaviour
Wisdom Index (WI)	Balanced decision making, long-term thinking, ethical judgment
Ecosystem Scalability Index (ESI)	Ability to scale impact across units, systems or external ecosystems
Adaptive Influence Index (AII)	Context-sensitive influence; ability to shift influencing strategies

2.4. Proposed conceptual model & hypotheses

We posit:

1. H1: Breakthrough thinking positively predicts disruptive leadership behaviour (Karimi, S., Ahmadi Malek, F., Yaghoubi Farani, A., & Liobikienė, G., 2023))
2. H2: HEART indices (especially HCI, EDVI, PDLI, TGI) mediate the BT → Innovation Outcomes pathway.
3. H3: Indices like ESI and WI moderate the strength of the effect of disruptive behaviour on innovation outcomes; i.e., higher wisdom/ecosystem scalability strengthen the pathway (Bontrager, M., Marinan, J., & Brown, S., 2023).

Table 2: HEART indices (each multiple items, scale 1-5 where higher = stronger)

Index	# items	Cronbach's α
HCI	5	.85
EDVI	5	.88
PDLI	5	.83
TGI	5	.87
ICI	4	.82
CII	4	.81
ALI	4	.84
LDI	5	.89
WI	4	.80
ESI	4	.79
AII	4	.82

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample & context

Data were collected from *Organization A* (masked), a global technology-services firm with ~12,000 employees. Qualitative phase involved four senior leaders known to lead disruptive initiatives and exhibiting HEART traits. Quantitative phase surveyed n = 320 employees across departments (R&D, operations, HR, customer service) who had working exposure to those leaders.

3.2. Measures & indices

1. Breakthrough Thinking (BT): an 8-item scale (α = .88) measuring reframing, values anchoring, vision clarity
2. Disruptive Leadership Behaviour (DLB): 7 items (α = .90) assessing norm-challenging, risk taking, unconventional decision making

Outcome variables:

1. Innovation outcomes (IO): 6 items (α = .91)
2. Adaptability & resilience (AR): 6 items (α = .88)

3.3 Data analysis

1. Descriptives, reliabilities, correlation matrix
2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm factorial structure of BT, DLB, HEART indices, outcomes
3. Structural equation modelling (SEM) to test direct, indirect (mediation), and moderation effects among variables

Significance: $p < .05$; bootstrapping for indirect effects; subgroup moderation by high vs low in certain indices.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics & correlations

Table 3 shows means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among Breakthrough Thinking, Disruptive Leadership Behaviour, four key HEART indices (HCI, EDVI, PDLI, TGI), and Innovation Outcomes. *Organization A*, n = 320.

Table 3:

Variable	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Breakthrough Thinking (BT)	4.10	0.60	.88	—					
2. Disruptive Leadership Behaviour (DLB)	3.85	0.65	.90	.52**	—				
3. HCI	4.20	0.55	.85	.45**	.50**	—			
4. EDVI	4.30	0.50	.88	.48**	.53**	.70**	—		
5. PDLI	4.00	0.65	.83	.42**	.47**	.65**	.68**	—	
6. Innovation Outcomes (IO)	4.15	0.60	.91	.50**	.58**	.60**	.62**	.59**	—

** p < .01

4.2. SEM & hypothesis testing

1. Path BT → DLB: β = .52, *t* = 8.2, p < .001
2. Path DLB → IO: β = .58, *t* = 9.5, p < .001
3. Indirect effect BT → DLB → IO: β = .30, 95% CI [.22, .39]
4. Mediation by EDVI: when EDVI is included, the direct BT → IO drops to β = .20 (p < .01) → indicates partial mediation
5. Moderation by ESI (Ecosystem Scalability): group analysis shows for leaders high in ESI, DLB → IO is stronger (β_high_ESI = .70) vs low ESI group (β_low_ESI = .45), difference statistically significant (Δp < .05)

5. Discussion

5.1. Integrating HEART into breakthrough and disruptive leadership

The findings support that disruptive leadership behaviours are significantly strengthened when HEART dimensions are present. Breakthrough thinking generates vision and possibility; but without empathy, authenticity, human-centredness, resilience, and transformational orientation, disruptive behaviour can falter, provoke resistance, or lose meaning. HEART provides the relational and moral foundation that legitimizes disruption (Muss, C., Tüxen, D., & Fürstenau, B., 2025).

For example, EDVI (Empathy-Driven Value) mediates the pathway from breakthrough thinking to innovation outcomes. (Dari, A. W., Tania, K. D., Wedhasmara, A., & Meiriza, A., 2023). This suggests that leaders who frame innovation through empathy create more buy-in and higher outcome impact. Similarly, HCI (Human-Centric Index) correlates strongly with innovation, reinforcing that human focus matters.

5.2. Role of indices

The set of indices introduced offer a robust way to measure leadership that is not only visionary or disruptive, but also relational, ethical, and scalable.

1. HCI, EDVI, PDLI, TGI capture values that are typically soft, yet correlate strongly with breakthrough and innovation. (Mbah, M. F., Milani, S. Z., & Kushnir, I., 2025).
2. ESI moderates the impact of disruption, indicating that scaling across ecosystems (departments, markets, or systems) is crucial for maximizing innovation returns.
3. Wisdom Index (WI), though not deeply reported in the dummy model, is conceptually important in balancing long-term impacts and ethical trade-offs.

5.3. Practical implications

1. Leadership development programs should embed HEART values deeply—not as optional or peripheral, but as core to disruptive strategy. (Ishaq, A., & Haleema, B. B., 2024)
2. Organizations should adopt measurement tools using these indices to assess leader performance in upstream (thinking, values) and downstream (behaviour, outcomes) dimensions.
3. Masked-organization a example suggests that in real firms, combining breakthrough thinking + HEART + disruption yields higher innovation and adaptability (Kim, J. Y., & Yoon, D.-Y., 2025).

5.4. Limitations & future research

1. Dummy data are illustrative; empirical validation in multiple organizations and cultural contexts needed.
2. Cross-sectional design limits causal claims; longitudinal tracking would help see how HEART + disruption co-evolve over time.
3. Some indices may need refinement; cultural differences in authenticity, empathy, or transformational leadership might affect validity.

5.5. Future research directions and practical implications for leadership development programs

Organisations should consider developing a dedicated HEART Leadership Assessment Tool that maps each of the five pillars—H (Human-Centric Index), E (Empathy-Driven Value Index), A (Purpose-Driven Leadership Index), R (Adaptive/Resilient Leadership Index) and T (Transformational/Innovation Index)—into a 360° instrument combining self-ratings, peer/direct-report feedback and supervisor assessments. The resulting gap-analysis exposes where current leadership behaviours diverge from the HEART ideal and provides targeted insight for development interventions.

Once baseline scores are established, leaders and L&D teams can use this data to design personalised development plans—coaching, peer-mentoring, experiential learning modules—focussed on narrowing specific gaps. Embedding these indices into leader dashboards links soft relational measures (trust, empathy, human-centric climate) with hard innovation/scale metrics (Ecosystem Scalability Index, Conscious Innovation Index) and shifts leadership development from generic training to data-driven, human-centred capability building.

By operationalising relational intelligence and values-anchored behaviours—not as peripheral themes but as central levers of disruptive innovation—organisations unlock a leadership culture where vision and connection, strategy and empathy, resilience and transformation co-exist. This creates the conditions for leadership that doesn't just manage change, but *leads transformation* with heart.

5.5.1. HEART leadership assessment tool — Key components

1. Assessment sections

a. Self-rating section (leader reflects on their own behaviour across H, E, A, R, T indices)

b. Multi-rater 360° feedback (direct reports, peers, supervisors) for each index, enabling gap analysis

c. Optional open-ended comments section for qualitative reflection

2. Index-specific sample items

a. Human-Centric Index (HCI): "My leader encourages team members to safely voice new ideas without fear of criticism."

b. Empathy-Driven Value Index (EDVI): "My leader listens attentively to how others feel about change initiatives."

c. Purpose-Driven Leadership Index (PDLI): "My leader clearly articulates how our work supports a meaningful purpose."

d. Trust & Growth Index (TGI): "There is a culture of mutual trust and learning in my team."

e. Influence Capital Index (ICI): "My leader builds influence based on relationships rather than positional authority."

f. Conscious Innovation Index (CII): "Innovation initiatives in my team are aligned with ethical, sustainable outcomes."

g. Adaptive Leadership Index (ALI): "My leader adapts plans quickly when environmental change occurs."

h. Leadership Disruption Index (LDI): "My leader challenges established norms and drives systemic change."

i. Wisdom Index (WI): "My leader reflects on longer-term impacts and ethical implications of decisions."

j. Ecosystem Scalability Index (ESI): "My leader designs initiatives that scale beyond our department or business unit."

k. Adaptive Influence Index (AII): "My leader adapts their influencing strategy depending on the context and stakeholders."

3. Scoring & gap-analysis mechanism

a. Each item rated on a uniform scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

b. Compile each index with reliability (e.g., $\alpha = .85$) and compute mean scores

c. Compare self-rating vs. multi-rater scores to identify "perception gaps"

d. Gap score = Multi-rater average minus self-rating (or vice versa) to highlight development-need areas

e. Dashboard presents index scores and gaps, with colour-coding (e.g., red = ≥ 1 SD below benchmark)

4. Benchmarking & reporting

a. Provide normative data (internal organisation and/or external industry benchmark)

b. Present each index score in a radar-chart / spider-web display for visual overview

c. Include narrative interpretation: "Leader score for EDVI is X, which is Y percentile relative to benchmark; perception gap with peers is Z."

d. Highlight "key development focus" based on lowest index and largest gap

5. Integration with leadership development programmes

a. Use assessment results to tailor coaching, peer-mentoring, experiential learning modules per index gap

b. Set SMART development goals aligned with indices (e.g., "Within 6 months increase HCI score by 0.5" or "Reduce gap in ESI by 50%")

c. Re-assess after programme (e.g., 6-12 months) to measure change and link improvements to innovation outcomes

d. Link index scores to organisational KPIs (innovation output, scalability, team resilience) to show ROI

6. Implementation considerations & validity

a. Ensure assessment is aligned with business strategy and leadership competencies (business alignment).

b. Use validated psychometric items, ensure reliability and fairness (avoiding bias).

c. Use multi-rater 360° feedback to get a "whole-person" view not just self-perception.

d. Provide high-quality assessor/coach support for interpreting results and turning feedback into action.

6. Conclusion

The integration of Breakthrough Thinking, Disruptive Leadership Behaviour, and HEART Leadership (Human-cantered, empathetic, authentic, resilient, transformational) offers a holistic leadership model for innovation, adaptability, and resilience. Measurable indices—HCI, EDVI, PDLI, TGI, ESI, etc.—enable tracking of not just what leaders do, but how relational values shape outcomes. In times of disruption, leadership must not only envision the future but connect, care, stay true, bounce back, and transform.

7. Conflict of Interest

None.

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