Achieving Organizational Longevity in Permacrisis: Five Leadership Principles

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Abstract

The turbulence and permacrisis in today's business environment require rethinking established organizational leadership approaches to achieve long-term growth and profitability. Drawing on insights from the current literature coupled with analysis of cases of organizations navigating extreme environmental conditions, this article identifies five foundational principles of longevity-centered leadership (Clarity, Proactivity, Alignment, Co-Creation, and Learning) that enable sustained value creation in tumultuous environments. Rather than introducing new tools, we argue that the effectiveness of leadership frameworks depends on their coherence with these enduring principles. Each principle is examined through conceptual grounding, empirical illustrations, and practical implications. While rooted in exceptional contexts, the findings offer broadly relevant insights for organizations navigating chronic disruption, volatility, and complexity. The article concludes by showing how these principles work as an integrated system and provides a diagnostic lens for guiding leadership action in the permacrisis era.

Moving from Tools to Principles in Leadership in Extreme Conditions

Today's business environment is increasingly defined by persistent turbulence. This state of "permacrisis" (which was declared the 2022 word-of-the-year by Collins Dictionary)[1] is characterized by overlapping disruptions in markets, technology, geopolitics, and supply chains. In such conditions, organizations cannot rely solely on leadership tools, frameworks, or best practices developed for stability.[2] What is needed instead is a principled foundation for decision-making that holds under conditions of extreme uncertainty, resource constraints, and systemic shocks.[3]

This article introduces the concept of longevity-centered leadership, a strategic orientation towards resilient value creation that emphasizes enduring principles over transient tactics. Rather than offering a new set of tools for crisis contexts, we advance a core proposition: tools must be selected and applied in service of foundational principles, not the other way around. Tools change; principles endure.

To derive and stress-test such principles, the current paper builds on the Global Business Models (GBM) Study, an ongoing longitudinal investigation of business model resilience and evolution across diverse regions and industries since 2015. In the current article, we extend the initial inquiry by integrating insights and cases from an extreme empirical context: Ukrainian firms across a broad cross-section of industries operating under wartime conditions between 2022 and 2025. Yet, this is not a study of doing business in war per se; rather, the wartime environment serves as an extreme context in which the core leadership assumptions identified in the broader GBM Study are tested under the most severe conditions imaginable. These insights, drawn from existentially pressured contexts, enrich our understanding of leadership in chronic disruption and are broadly relevant to firms facing volatility in conventional arenas such as digital transformation, geopolitical instability (consider the tariff wars of 2025), climate change, or unpredictable global competition.

This article identifies five foundational principles of leadership in turbulent contexts and links them to the notion of longevity-centred leadership:

(1) Clarity: Ensuring strategic specificity and eliminating ambiguity;
(2) Proactivity: Acting early and purposefully in the face of uncertainty;
(3) Alignment: Achieving coherence across teams, functions, and systems;
(4) Co-Creation: Grounding strategy in continuous stakeholder engagement;
(5) Learning: Building adaptive capacity through reflection and renewal.

These principles emerged inductively in our study, based on a qualitative, thematic analysis of the case data. They reveal the observeable, recurring patterns in how organizations sustain value creation and strategic resilience despite existential threats.

The current study has two primary goals. The first is to articulate the longevity-centered leadership principles with empirical and conceptual depth, linking them to existing frameworks in management literature. Second, to demonstrate how these principles can serve as diagnostic tools and design guides for leaders operating in turbulent environments. In doing so, we seek to move beyond the proliferation of leadership tools and return to the principles that should guide their selection, adaptation, and application, especially when the stakes are highest.

Principles for Leading Through the New Normality

In permacrisis environments where standard management approaches based on matching the organizational strengths with predictable opportunities or threats do not apply, leadership must be anchored not in transient tactics but in enduring principles. This article advances longevity-centred leadership concept, a strategic leadership approach dedicated to securing an organization's long-term prosperity and growth by ensuring the sustained value creation, resilience, and capacity to thrive when confronting the uncertainty and turbulence of the environment. It aims to maintain strategic continuity while also enabling timely adaptation to shifting external conditions, emerging risks, and evolving stakeholder expectations. This form of leadership allows organizations to withstand shocks, navigate complexity, and renew themselves without losing sight of their core purpose. It is manifested in the ability to evolve deliberately, ensuring that the organization not only survives disruption but continues to thrive through creating value in an unpredictable future.

At the core of our study lies the simple yet crucial premise that the longevity-centered leadership is grounded in a set of general principles. Unlike leadership and management tools that change, the principles endure. Leadership tools (whether frameworks for crisis response, digital transformation, or performance management) must be selected and adapted in service of foundational principles, not the other way around. These principles form the basis upon which organizations can assess options, maintain strategic focus, and thrive amidst uncertainty.

The five leadership principles we introduce in the next sections (Clarity, Proactivity, Alignment, Co-Creation, and Learning) emerged from empirical observation of real-world cases and thematic analysis across diverse contexts. They represent decision-making anchors that hold under extreme conditions, providing guidance when tools fail or become outdated. In the following sections, we explicate these principles, connecting them to both current leadership literature and the broader framework of sustainable value creation within the SVEO agenda,[4] a recently proposed approach to building robust strategic agendas in turbulent environments. SVEO stands for Specificity, Validity, Executability, and Optionality – the four interrelated criteria that help leaders design strategies that are not only aspirational, but also grounded, implementable, and adaptable. Unlike traditional planning models designed for stable contexts, SVEO was developed specifically to support strategic judgment under uncertainty.

Before turning to the principles themselves, we outline the research design that yielded these insights.

Box 1. Research Context and Methodological Note

This study synthesizes two streams of inquiry:

(1) The Global Business Models (GBM) Study, an ongoing longitudinal investigation launched in 2015, exploring business model resilience, organizational longevity, and sustainable growth across 500+ firms quantitatively and 50+ cases qualitatively, spanning North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia. The GBM Study developed frameworks such as the Business Model Value Matrix,[5] diagnostic tools for value creation[6] and proactive growth management,[7,8] offering a systemic approach to understanding how firms sustain value creation and competitive advantage in evolving markets.

(2) The Ukrainian Extension (2022–2025): a wartime stress test of leadership assumptions identified in the GBM Study, incorporating 14+ Ukrainian firms across industries (telecommunications, logistics, energy, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and military) operating under conditions of extreme disruption and existential risk. This phase focused on identifying leadership patterns that enabled organizational survival and resilience amid the full-scale Russian invasion, offering a context in which to test the broader principles of strategic longevity.

Through analyzing the structured interviews with senior leaders, complemented by secondary data (financials, market reports, strategic communications), we revealed the recurring patterns of leadership behavior that aligned with sustained value creation under extreme conditions. The five focal principles identified in this article emerged inductively as key drivers underpinning the longevity-centered leadership.

By grounding leadership in these enduring principles, we extend the work on value creation management, which underscores the need for continual alignment of customer value, business value, and strategic adaptability,[9] into the domain of leadership decision-making. The following sections elaborate on each principle, illustrating its role in tool selection, strategy design, and adaptive execution. Importantly, these principles serve as diagnostic guides, as leaders can assess which are robust within their organization and which require reinforcement to sustain strategic longevity.

Leadership principle #1.

Clarity: strategic specificity in high-uncertainty environments

Clarity refers to the leaders' ability to articulate the organization's strategic intent with precision and eliminate ambiguity across all levels of decision-making. In high-uncertainty environments, clarity becomes more than just good communication; it is a critical operating requirement. It ensures that everyone in the organization understands not only where the firm is going, but why, how, and on what basis decisions are being made. Clarity allows leaders and teams to align their actions, allocate resources intelligently, and recognize when a course correction is necessary. Without clarity, organizations become vulnerable to fragmentation, misexecution, and paralysis, especially under pressure. According to Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella, his first leadership principle is to "bring clarity to those you work with." [10]

Firms must be able to answer three foundational questions with specificity:

1) Whom are we serving?
2) What value are we delivering?
3) How do we capture and deliver that value at scale and sustainably?

Clarity thus goes beyond mission statements and includes the explicit definition of business models, competitive advantages, and performance objectives.

As shown in the seminal study by Michael Mankins and Richard Steele,[11] companies lose significant value due to the strategy-to-execution gap. Not surprisingly, strategic clarity addresses the most common shortcomings leading to execution gaps:

- Poorly communicated strategy (5.2%)
- Unclear action steps required for execution (4.5%)
- Lack of clear accountabilities (4.1%)
- Unapproved strategy (0.7%)

Without clarity, organizations face what can be described as "strategic drift:" the formal strategy exists, but key decision-makers cannot operationalize it. In extreme conditions, the consequences of such drift are immediate and severe, ranging from uncoordinated emergency responses to missed opportunities for resource redeployment.

The importance of clarity is also becoming essential within SVEO framework for strategic agenda formulation:[12] in it, Specificity is the starting point and prerequisite. A strategy must be articulated in precise terms before it can be tested for validity, translated into action, or stress-tested for flexibility.

The Clarity principle demands that strategic agendas:
(a) Clearly define targeted stakeholders and intended value outcomes;
(b) Identify core drivers of growth and differentiation;
(c) Articulate measurable results and decision criteria;
(d) Resolve internal strategic conflicts to avoid paralysis.

Box 2. Illustrations of Clarity principle

Case 1. Klarna's 2024 AI-Driven Strategic Pivot[13]
In 2024, the Swedish fintech leader Klarna replaced over 1,200 third-party SaaS tools with internally developed AI-powered solutions. While this move saved over $10 million annually, it was primarily a strategic clarity decision: a deliberate shift to streamline operations, eliminate fragmentation, and - crucially - to reposition Klarna as an AI-native company. This clarity was achieved through making a set of clear strategic decisions: (1) concentrating on a specific segment: A global, digitally fluent consumer base seeking seamless financial experiences. (2) defining the way Klarna delivers value through integrated, personalized, AI-augmented services across shopping, payments, and financial management. (3) defining the way value creation and delivery will be sustained: By building and leveraging proprietary tools that ensure faster deployment, tighter integration, and full control over data and user experience. Rather than managing a growing web of external applications, Klarna's leadership, under CEO Sebastian Siemiatkowski, aligned internal teams around a clear strategic intent. Engineers replaced tools like Zendesk, Figma, and Looker with Klarna-specific AI agents, integrated into a unified operating platform. This clarity of purpose and execution enabled the company to move decisively, reallocating resources, simplifying decision logic, and communicating a bold strategic narrative. The result: a more agile, scalable, and strategically coherent firm, better equipped to compete in an AI-driven future. Klarna's pivot illustrates how clarity serves as both a compass and a catalyst, sharpening priorities, enabling alignment, and accelerating execution in turbulent environments.

Case 2. Ukrenergo's Strategic Disconnection from the Russian Grid (2022)

Ukrenergo is Ukraine's state-owned electricity transmission system operator, responsible for managing the country's high-voltage transmission lines and ensuring the stability and reliability of the national power grid. As the sole operator of Ukraine's high-voltage electricity transmission system, Ukrenergo plays a critical role in maintaining energy security and facilitating electricity trade with neighboring countries.

Under the leadership of Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, Ukrenergo exemplified the Clarity principle by pursuing a clear long-term strategic vision: achieving energy independence from Russia and integrating with the European energy system. This vision was operationalized through the disconnection from the Russian-controlled energy grid and synchronization with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). The synchronization process, initially planned for 2023, was expedited due to the geopolitical situation. On February 24, 2022, the day of full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine disconnected from the Russian grid.[14] Subsequently, the Ukraine's power grid was successfully synchronized with ENTSO-E, marking a significant milestone in the country's energy independence journey.

This strategic clarity was evident in Ukrenergo's actions:

(1) Preparation and Testing: Prior to synchronization, Ukrenergo conducted isolation tests to ensure the grid's stability without connections to Russian or Belarusian systems.
(2) Infrastructure Resilience: The company invested in strengthening infrastructure, including setting up backup dispatch centers and training personnel to operate under isolated conditions.
(3) International Collaboration: Ukrenergo worked closely with European partners to meet technical requirements for synchronization, demonstrating a commitment to European integration.

By articulating a specific strategic objective and aligning operations accordingly, Ukrenergo showcased how clarity in purpose and execution can drive significant organizational transformation, even amidst crisis.

By anchoring strategic planning in specificity, organizations reduce interpretive ambiguity across leadership tiers.

Practical Takeaways: Clarity leadership principle is a precondition for coordinated execution and organizational capacity to grow under extreme conditions of the turbulent environment. Leaders should regularly test whether their organization can clearly state:

(a) What the strategy is, and what it is not;
(b) Who “owns” key decisions and outcomes;

(c) What success looks like, and how it will be measured.

Clarity principle reflected in a clear strategic script, communicated unambiguously and reviewed regularly, is especially vital in environments characterized by volatility, ambiguity, and contested priorities. It is not only a cognitive aid, but rather a practical enabler of execution.

Leadership principle #2.
Proactivity: Strategic action beyond reactive adaptation

In turbulent environments, organizational resilience stems not from the ability to withstand shocks, but rather from the capacity to act before shocks escalate into crises. Proactivity refers to a leadership posture that emphasizes anticipation, strategic foresight, and deliberate opportunity pursuit. Rather than reactively adapting to environmental change after it has already happened, proactive organizations systematically scan for emerging trends, test new ideas, and position themselves to benefit from volatility. They raise performance expectations not despite external uncertainty, but because the future demands it. In other words, proactivity is the organizational inclination to lead change rather than follow others, which is reflected, e.g., in initiating competitive moves and proactively exploring future options.

Reactive adaptation, by contrast, refers to a leadership posture in which organizations adjust only after external change has occurred, often under duress or pressure. It involves responding to events once the consequences are already unfolding and the competitors are leveraging these opportunities, rather than preparing in advance. While sometimes necessary, reactive adaptation limits strategic choices, increases vulnerability to shocks, and often results in rushed or fragmented decision-making. It can trap organizations in a cycle of short-term firefighting, preventing them from shaping their environment or investing in long-term positioning. In turbulent conditions, such lagged responses are frequently too late to secure resilience or advantage.

Box 3. Proactivity as the Driver of Strategic Renewal and Growth amidst Turbulence

Case 1. Raising the Bar Before the Market Does: GE's Proactive Leadership Mandate
Jack Welch's mandate at General Electric is a now-classic global benchmark of proactive leadership: every business unit had to be either #1 or #2 in its market – or face exit. This expectation radically shifted internal norms toward continuous improvement and early repositioning. By raising the bar, Welch incentivized managers to anticipate industry shifts and reposition GE's portfolio accordingly, well before external pressure forced their hand. The same spirit of preemptive

action is echoed by proactive leader CEOs of other companies, who redefine markets, reallocate talent, or rewrite delivery models before crises fully materialize.

Case 2. ASML Holding's Strategic Positioning During the Global Financial Crisis[15]

ASML Holding, a Dutch semiconductor equipment manufacturer, exemplifies the Proactivity principle through its strategic actions during the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. Rather than adopting a defensive posture, ASML proactively invested in innovation and capacity expansion, positioning itself for long-term growth.

Key proactive measures included:

(1) Continued Investment in R&D: Despite economic uncertainty, ASML increased its research and development expenditures to advance its lithography technology, ensuring readiness for the next technological wave.
(2) Strategic Partnerships: The company formed alliances with key customers and stakeholders to co-develop next-generation technologies, sharing risks and aligning future product roadmaps.
(3) Capacity Expansion: Anticipating a market rebound, ASML expanded its production capabilities to meet future demand, avoiding potential bottlenecks when the market recovered.

These proactive strategies enabled ASML to emerge stronger post-crisis, capturing significant market share and reinforcing its position as a leader in semiconductor equipment manufacturing.

Case 3. OKKO Group's Market Expansion During Wartime Crisis (2022–2023)

OKKO Group, one of Ukraine's largest fuel retail and logistics companies, exemplified the Proactivity principle by capturing significant market share and expanding operations during the profound disruptions of the 2022–2023 wartime period. Under CEO Vasyl Danylyak, the company refused to adopt a defensive posture. Instead, OKKO systematically anticipated market shifts, secured supply chains, and invested in growth initiatives even amidst existential risks.

Key proactive strategies included:

(1) Ensuring Constant Fuel Availability: While competitors faced severe fuel shortages due to destroyed infrastructure and supply disruptions, OKKO preemptively secured alternative supply routes, even at significant logistical and financial costs (e.g., purchasing fuel in Rotterdam with months-long supply chains). As a result, the company maintained continuous fuel availability, a key differentiator during a national energy crisis.
(2) Gaining Market Share Amidst Downturn: Despite a major drop in Ukraine's overall fuel market volume in 2022, OKKO reported a continuous increase in

its own fuel sales volume in 2022 and 2023. Much of this growth came from corporate and B2B clients switching to OKKO, drawn by its reliable supply during the crisis.

(3) Investing in Integrated Business Models: Rather than waiting for post-crisis recovery, OKKO advanced into adjacent markets. It expanded its agro-financing program, integrated mineral fertilizer trading, and grew its natural gas and biofuel production capabilities. These moves positioned OKKO not only as a fuel provider but also as an integrated energy and agricultural services company.

OKKO Group's proactive leadership exemplifies how early, deliberate action during crisis (rather than reactive adaptation) can yield market leadership, strategic renewal, and growth. By investing in future-focused projects (e.g., biofuels, energy diversification) and expanding market share while competitors retrenched, OKKO demonstrated that proactivity, even in extreme turbulence, drives both immediate advantage and long-term resilience.

A proactive leadership posture requires more than just setting optimistic aspiration; it demands an organizational system that shifts attention from backward-looking performance evaluation to forward-looking opportunity exploration. An practical approach for implementing the Proactivity leadership principle is the Opportunity-Based Growth Management (OGM) framework[16] for embedding proactivity into a company's strategic planning and decision-making processes. In contrast to traditional planning, which often focuses on reactive, incremental improvements of past results or rigid long-term projections, OGM reframes strategic management as a proactive organization-wide effort to identify, test, and act upon emerging opportunities before competitors. These can include underserved customer segments, new product niches, technological shifts, or evolving value chain dynamics. OGM encourages firms to treat change not as an external shock to absorb, but as a signal to investigate. This framework enables a dynamic and distributed mode of strategic action, where the responsibility for growth discovery does not sit solely with top executives but is diffused across units. Importantly, it allows firms to pivot from a reactive focus on lagging indicators (e.g., quarterly revenue) to a proactive system of leading indicators (e.g., tested assumptions about new customer needs or validated pilot projects). By continuously scanning for and testing new sources of value creation, firms prepare themselves not just to react to change, but to lead within it.

Practical Takeaways for Leaders. To lead proactively in high-uncertainty environments, organizations must:

(a) Implement systematic opportunity scanning processes across all levels;
(b) Translate long-term ambition into concrete experiments and pilot initiatives;
(c) Set ambitious, forward-looking goals and link them to incentive systems;
(d) Invest in optional pathways for growth and strategic redirection;
(e) Develop contingency plans and challenge-based assignments for emerging leaders.

By moving from a reactive posture to one of deliberate experimentation and foresight, proactive firms not just endure disruption but use it as a platform for reinvention.

Leadership principle #3.
Alignment: Strategic coherence across structures and stakeholders

In environments characterized by volatility and constrained resources, strategic success depends not only on clarity of purpose and proactive posture, but also on the deep alignment of internal structures, resources, processes and behaviors. Alignment leadership principle ensures that every organizational layer (from strategic decision-makers to operational teams) acts toward a shared and consistent objective. Without such coherence, even the most promising strategies collapse in execution.

These observations reflect a broader truth: strategic misalignment is among the most costly and invisible threats to performance. According to Mankins and Steele,[17] companies lose measurable value due to alignment-related execution breakdowns:

- 7.5% of potential performance is lost to inadequate or unavailable resources;
- 3.7% to organizational silos and cultural friction;
- 3.0% to inadequate performance monitoring;
- 3.0% to unclear or inadequate consequences or rewards;
- 0.7% to broader obstacles like capability mismatches and skills shortages

Beyond internal coherence, alignment with key external stakeholders (such as investors, regulators, suppliers, and community partners) is equally critical. In turbulent environments, organizations often face conflicting stakeholder demands. Alignment does not mean pleasing everyone, but ensuring that the firm's strategic agenda is clearly communicated, expectations are managed, and critical partners are mobilized around shared goals. Strategic alignment across organizational boundaries builds trust, accelerates decision-making, and enables coordinated responses to external shocks. In other words, longevity-centered leaders align not only teams and systems, but also relationships with those whose support is essential for strategy execution.

Within the SVEO model for strategic agenda setting, the Alignment leadership principle is linked to Executability, the critical test of whether a strategy can be translated into coherent action. Executability demands more than operational checklists, but also organizational alignment (within the organization and outside, with crucial stakeholders) in four dimensions:

(1) Resource Alignment: Ensuring that financial, technological, and human capital are allocated in support of strategic goals;
(2) Structural Alignment: Eliminating silos and clarifying interdependencies between departments and functions;
(3) Process Alignment: Establishing systems for performance monitoring, feedback, and course correction;
(4) Behavioral Alignment: Making individual incentives and team expectations transparent, consistent, and fair.

Alignment is often undermined not by disagreement but by disconnected execution logics. Common symptoms include: (a) Siloed KPIs that reward local efficiency but harm system-wide outcomes; (b) Resource bottlenecks that delay high-priority initiatives; (c) Fragmented communication that leaves front-line teams guessing at strategic priorities; (d) Cultures that discourage challenge or clarity around roles.

These challenges are magnified in turbulent contexts, where speed and precision are paramount. Firms that lack a coordination mechanism, such as centralized prioritization or shared KPIs, struggle to execute even well-scoped strategies. Conversely, alignment in high-performing firms became an engine for resilience. When people understood how their work contributed to a shared goal, and were empowered to act on that understanding, execution was not only faster, but smarter.

Box 4. Alignment as the Execution Backbone

Case 1. Unilever's Strategic Recalibration of ESG Under Hein Schumacher[18]
In 2023, Unilever initiated a deliberate shift in its sustainability strategy under new CEO Hein Schumacher. While the company had long been celebrated for its ambitious Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), Schumacher recognized that a growing number of fragmented environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives had created internal misalignment between ambitions and execution capacity, across business units, and between stakeholder expectations and business realities.
To restore coherence and execution focus, Unilever repositioned sustainability as a performance driver, not a reputational shield. Schumacher announced a

recalibration of ESG priorities, concentrating on initiatives with the most material relevance to Unilever's core businesses and operational levers. This move illustrates the Alignment principle in action: the company moved to ensure that strategic goals, organizational systems, and stakeholder relationships were working toward a shared, executable agenda.

Key alignment mechanisms included:

(1) Strategic Focus on Material ESG Goals: Rather than pursuing an expansive array of sustainability commitments, Unilever streamlined its priorities to focus on fewer, high-impact objectives (such as reducing virgin plastic use by 30% by 2026). These targets were linked directly to product lines and supply chain operations, ensuring they could be acted upon by business units with operational clarity.
(2) Scorecard Integration: The company implemented a new composite scorecard that merged financial and sustainability performance metrics for brand managers. This unified measurement system ensured that ESG efforts were not siloed from core business accountability, aligning individual performance incentives with strategic goals.
(3) Stakeholder Realignment: Schumacher made it clear to investors and external stakeholders that ESG would remain a priority, but one grounded in business logic and materiality. This communication helped reset expectations and reduce reputational risk associated with unmet or vaguely defined goals.
(4) Governance Restructuring: Unilever restructured internal governance to eliminate duplicative initiatives and clarify ownership of sustainability execution across global business groups, supply chain leaders, and regional managers.

The outcome was a renewed strategic coherence across the organization. ESG remained central to Unilever's long-term agenda, but was now embedded in execution structures, operational metrics, and leadership responsibilities. Schumacher's approach moved away from broad sustainability signaling toward integrated alignment, where sustainability and profitability were treated as complementary, not competing, outcomes.

Case 2. Kormotech's Integration of Social Responsibility and Global Standards

Kormotech, a family-owned Ukrainian pet food manufacturer, offers a compelling illustration of the Alignment principle. Under Rostyslav Vovk, Chairman of the Supervisory Board, the company exemplifies how strategic coherence across structures, values, and stakeholder relationships fuels both social impact and business success. Kormotech's trajectory demonstrates that alignment is not confined to operational processes; it spans values, ESG compliance, international governance, and cultural integration.

Key alignment strategies include:

(1) Animal Welfare as Core Value: At the heart of Kormotech's business model is a deep commitment to animal welfare. Initiatives such as pet adoption programs and rescue projects are integrated into the company's operating model not as peripheral CSR activities, but as strategic pillars aligned with the company's mission. This alignment extends across marketing, operations, and community engagement, reinforcing trust with customers and partners globally.
(2) Sustainability Compliance and ESG Readiness: Anticipating EU ESG regulations, Kormotech proactively aligned its operations with global sustainability standards. The company established a Supervisory Board with independent directors (primarily from Western Europe) to oversee the implementation of ESG frameworks and ensure readiness for evolving regulatory environments. This alignment between governance structures and strategic priorities ensures that sustainability is not an afterthought but an embedded component of decision-making.
(3) Cultural and Organizational Integration Across Borders: Kormotech's expansion into other countries presented cultural and operational alignment challenges. The company addressed these by sending Ukrainian managers with Kormotech's "DNA" to bridge cultural gaps, ensuring that the company culture, operational standards, and strategic goals remained coherent across the borders.
(4) Community Engagement and International Visibility: The company's social initiatives, including pet welfare campaigns during wartime, gained international recognition. For example, their programs were featured on the cover of Petfood Industry Magazine, and they collaborated with Forbes to enhance global visibility. This alignment between community impact and brand positioning helped Kormotech strengthen both its market presence and stakeholder trust.
(5) Governance Alignment Through a Professionalized Board: Recognizing the need for strategic alignment at the governance level, Kormotech leadership was keen on assembling a Supervisory Board with international experts experienced in family business governance, ESG, and global commercialization. This ensured alignment between family ownership, professional management, and global best practices, positioning the company for international expansion and resilience.

Kormotech's experience illustrates that alignment (between values, operational structures, governance, and stakeholder relationships) is foundational to executing complex strategies in volatile environments. By embedding animal welfare, ESG compliance, and cross-border cultural integration into its core operations, Kormotech ensures that its strategic ambitions are not only clearly defined but also consistently executed across every organizational layer.

Practical Takeaways for Leaders. Leaders seeking to build strategic alignment under pressure should consider:

(a) Clarifying strategic ownership: Who owns the outcome? Who has authority to act? Is there an accountability vacuum?
(b) Synchronizing incentives and outcomes: Are success measures reinforcing collaboration or competition?
(c) Creating shared dashboards: Do all functions see the same performance picture?
(d) Instituting fast-cycle alignment routines: Are alignment gaps caught early through regular, structured conversations?

Leadership principle #4.

Co-Creation with Stakeholders: Strategic development through engagement and validation

In turbulent environments, the traditional "inside-out" approach to strategy (developing plans in isolation and pushing them into the market) is no longer sufficient. Instead, sustained success hinges on co-creation: actively engaging customers, suppliers, partners, and even regulators in shaping offerings, business models, and strategic priorities. Co-creation is not about relinquishing control but about validating assumptions, refining solutions, and creating shared ownership over outcomes.

Co-creation is a longevity-centered leadership principle that emphasizes the continuous involvement of key stakeholders (customers, partners, suppliers, and public institutions) in shaping the organization's strategic direction, offerings, and operational priorities. Rather than relying solely on internally generated assumptions, co-creation ensures that strategy is built through iterative engagement with those who affect and are affected by the firm's decisions. This participatory approach enhances both the relevance and resilience of strategic agendas by grounding them in real-time insight, fostering mutual ownership, and accelerating adaptation. Co-creation is not about consensus-seeking or outsourcing strategy, but about reducing blind spots, validating assumptions early, and building trust-based networks capable of weathering disruption together.

Co-creation serves as a vital mechanism for adaptive resilience. Firms that create real-time customer feedback loops, collaborate closely with suppliers on logistical rerouting, or work with public agencies to unlock new value streams are more successful in retaining relevance and adjusting value propositions quickly. In contrast, firms that remain insular often misread demand shifts, waste resources, or lose stakeholder trust.

This aligns with broader global shifts in strategic thought. As mature, longevity-centered organizations increasingly adopt startup-inspired management practices, many draw from lean innovation principles that emphasize continuous stakeholder validation. As Eric Ries argues in The Start-Up Way,[19] even the most established enterprises must internalize entrepreneurial systems of discovery and iteration to remain agile and relevant. Co-creation lies at the heart of this transformation.

Notably, even the foundational paradigms of marketing have evolved to elevate co-creation as a central principle. Philip Kotler, long regarded as the father of modern marketing, redefined the core logic of marketing in his 2016 book Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital (2016). Instead of the classic 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), the new model is built around 4Cs, with the first "C" being Co-Creation. This reflects the imperative that in modern value systems, customers do not simply consume; they contribute, influence, and shape value alongside firms.

In the SVEO framework, Co-Creation directly enhances the Validity of the strategic agenda. Validity is about grounding strategy in external realities by making sure that a firm's plans resonate with customer needs, stakeholder expectations, and ecosystem dynamics. Co-creation is the mechanism through which these external insights are gathered, tested, and incorporated. This ensures that strategic assumptions are constantly tested against market facts, increasing the likelihood of both adoption and execution success.

The successful firms usually emphasize that they "grow with the client"; this is not a slogan, but a strategic discipline. Co-creation serves as:

(1) A validation engine for refining solutions in real-time;
(2) A stakeholder trust accelerator, especially during moments of crisis when traditional contracts and lead times failed;
(3) And a network amplifier, enabling firms to tap into partner resources, customer networks, and shared capabilities.

Box 5. The Co-Creation Imperative

Case 1. PepsiCo's Co-Creation with Farmers to Scale Regenerative Agriculture[20]
PepsiCo, one of the world's largest food and beverage companies, has emerged as a leading example of co-creation through its extensive partnerships with farmers to scale regenerative agriculture. Rather than developing a top-down sustainability agenda, PepsiCo embraced a stakeholder-engaged model that integrates farmers as co-designers of new practices, grounding its global climate strategy in localized knowledge, mutual trust, and shared value creation. In 2023, PepsiCo announced it had partnered directly with over 40,000 farmers across 30 countries to implement regenerative agriculture practices across more than 900,000 acres of farmland. The company's long-term goal is to reach 7 million acres by 2030, equivalent to its entire agricultural footprint.

Key co-creation elements included:

(1) Localized Design: Rather than imposing standardized methods, PepsiCo co-developed region-specific soil health protocols with farmers, universities, and local agronomists, ensuring practices were practical and rooted in existing knowledge systems.

(2) Risk-Sharing Mechanisms: Recognizing that regenerative transitions can involve short-term yield uncertainty, PepsiCo launched incentive programs, including cost-sharing schemes, technical assistance, and access to new markets, to de-risk experimentation for growers.

(3) Real-Time Learning Platforms: PepsiCo established farmer-facing digital platforms to share field data, best practices, and performance benchmarks, enabling peer learning and continuous refinement of techniques.

(4) Trust-Based Relationships: The company built long-term partnerships with producers by including them in policy discussions, pilot design, and measurement frameworks. This built ownership and credibility, not just compliance.

This model illustrates the Co-Creation principle by shifting the role of external partners from recipients of directives to active co-architects of strategy. Rather than pursuing ESG goals through isolated corporate action, PepsiCo embedded its climate agenda within a distributed network of collaborators, creating a resilient, adaptive, and locally relevant system of value creation. The program not only strengthened PepsiCo's climate credentials and supply chain resilience, but also fostered innovation, increased farmer loyalty, and unlocked new sources of brand differentiation.

Case 2. WOG's Financial Resilience through Co-Creation with Creditors and Government

WOG, a leading Ukrainian fuel retail and logistics company, demonstrates that co-creation extends beyond customer engagement; it can also be a lifeline in collaborating with financial institutions, suppliers, and government stakeholders. Under the leadership of CEO Andriy Pyvovarskyi, WOG navigated multiple crises, including a significant financial downturn (2018–2019) and the wartime fuel supply disruptions (2022–2023), by fostering transparent, trust-based relationships with stakeholders.

Key co-creation strategies included:

(1) Debt Restructuring through Transparent Dialogue (2018–2019): Faced with mounting debt and liquidity constraints, WOG paused payments to banks in 2018–2019; this was done not to default, but to stabilize cash flows and avoid bankruptcy. Rather than imposing unilateral decisions, Pyvovarskyi engaged each creditor bank individually, leveraging trust and his reputation in the financial community. He co-created restructuring agreements that balanced

creditor interests with WOG's need for operational breathing room, extending payment terms and reducing interest rates. This consensus-building process, rooted in open communication and transparency, enabled WOG to restructure its debt portfolio over two years without entering bankruptcy proceedings.

(2) Supplier Re-engagement and Trust Restoration: Alongside banks, suppliers were critical stakeholders. Many had experienced delayed payments, eroding trust. Pyvovarskyi engaged suppliers directly and consistently, sharing operational data and demonstrating WOG's roadmap toward financial recovery. This iterative dialogue led to suppliers providing fresh product deliveries on delayed payment terms, helping stabilize operations and gradually pay off historical debts.

(3) Government Relations as Co-Creation: Pyvovarskyi's experience as a former Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine shaped WOG's approach to government engagement during crises. Rather than lobbying or making demands, WOG structured conversations with policymakers to align business needs with national priorities (e.g., fuel supply stabilization, infrastructure resilience). This empathy-driven stakeholder management enabled smoother cooperation with authorities during wartime disruptions (e.g., re-routing supply chains and securing petroleum imports amidst collapsed logistics networks).

(4) Shared Crisis Management with Banks during Wartime (2022–2023): During the full-scale Russian invasion, WOG's existing relationships with banks paid dividends. Some banks proactively asked, "How can we help?" and provided fresh liquidity, understanding the systemic risk posed by WOG's potential collapse. Others negotiated payment pauses, again trusting the company's transparent data sharing and demonstrated operational discipline. Pyvovarskyi maintained continuous, open communication with all stakeholders, ensuring that financial recovery milestones were clear and verifiable.

WOG's experience highlights that co-creation is not limited to product innovation or customer feedback loops. It is also about forging trust-based, iterative relationships with creditors, suppliers, and governments, especially in high-stakes contexts. By engaging these stakeholders as partners in recovery and growth, WOG not only stabilized its business but also reinforced its strategic resilience.

This principle becomes even more important in a world where competition increasingly occurs between networks and ecosystems, not just firms. A well-aligned ecosystem that co-creates together can respond faster, scale more efficiently, and withstand shocks more robustly than isolated organizations.

Practical Takeaways for Leaders. To embed Co-Creation into their strategic routines, leaders should:

(1) Treat customer and partner engagement as inputs into strategy, not only marketing;
(2) Build multi-party feedback mechanisms that span the full lifecycle of offerings;
(3) Ensure that strategic initiatives go through external validation loops before major resource commitments;
(4) Reframe stakeholder relations as collaborative design processes, not transactional exchanges;
(5) Use co-creation as a real-world litmus test for the Validity of strategic hypotheses.

By building their strategic agendas with (not just for) their stakeholders, firms increase the realism, resonance, and resilience of their value propositions. In turbulent environments, Co-Creation transforms stakeholder engagement from a soft skill into a hard strategic asset.

Leadership principle #5.
Learning: From response to reflection and renewal

In rapidly evolving environments, the most valuable competitive advantage is not a specific product, process, or asset, but the organizational ability to learn faster and deeper than competitors. The fifth longevity-centered leadership principle, Learning, refers to a systematic process of extracting insights from experience (both successful and failed) and embedding them into future decisions, practices, and strategic design. It distinguishes resilient firms not just by what they do, but by how they learn to do it better, sooner, and more insightfully.

Organizational learning is essential to avoiding paralysis and repetition of failure. High-performing firms engage in structured debriefs, cross-functional reflection sessions, and scenario reviews to understand what worked, what did not, and – most importantly – why. This deeper insight allowed them to adapt rapidly and incrementally, rather than relying on reactive or ad hoc corrections. In less resilient organizations, learning is either informal or absent, leading to firefighting, disconnected initiatives, and unchallenged strategic assumptions. Without mechanisms for intentional learning, setbacks remain isolated incidents rather than turning points for renewal.

The foundation of organizational learning lies in the distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning.[21] In single-loop learning, organizations correct immediate errors based on observed outcomes, e.g., adjusting a project or an initiative that underperforms. In double-loop learning, organizations question and adjust the underlying assumptions that shape those actions, e.g., reassessing the strategy behind the project or the customer insights that informed it. The firms that showed strategic longevity during the war were those that institutionalized double-loop learning, not only adjusting their tactics, but also challenging their strategic hypotheses based on what they observed in the field.

To operationalize this approach, the Learning from Execution Matrix[22] offers a practical framework. It classifies outcomes of strategic initiatives based on two dimensions: (a) whether goals were achieved; (b) whether the organization understood the reasons underpinning this result.

This matrix yields four distinct quadrants:

I. Hit (goals achieved, reasons understood): the ideal zone for scaling.
II. Luck (goals achieved, reasons not understood): the danger zone for complacency.
III. Learning (goals not achieved, reasons understood): the productive zone for insight.
IV. Defeat (goals not achieved, reasons not understood): the failure zone requiring immediate intervention.

Firms that systematically review initiatives through this lens can build cumulative knowledge across cycles, fostering both strategic memory and organizational humility. Within the SVEO framework, learning reinforces both Validity and Optionality. First, learning increases Validity by helping firms refine their understanding of what stakeholders actually value and how markets evolve. Second, learning builds Optionality by capturing lessons that expand future strategic choices, reduce the cost of experimentation, and accelerate pivot cycles.

Box 6. The Case for Learning in Turbulent Contexts

Case 1. Amazon’s Culture of Experimentation and Resilience[23,24]
Amazon’s success demonstrates the imperative of organizational learning, embedding experimentation and iterative improvement into its core operations. This approach has enabled the company to navigate and thrive amidst market volatility, technological shifts, and global disruptions. At the heart of Amazon's strategy is a commitment to "learning how to learn." The company fosters a culture where experimentation is not only encouraged but expected. This ethos is encapsulated in their practice of "working backwards," starting from customer needs and iteratively developing solutions through continuous feedback and testing. Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, emphasized the importance of embracing failure as a pathway to learning and innovation, stating in a 2015 letter to shareholders that "failure and invention are inseparable twins. To invent you have to experiment, and if you know in advance that it's going to work, it's not an experiment". This perspective has cultivated an environment where calculated

risks are taken, and failures are viewed as valuable learning opportunities rather than setbacks.

Amazon has institutionalized learning through various mechanisms:

(1) Small, autonomous teams empowered to innovate and make decisions rapidly.
(2) PR/FAQ Process: Before developing a new product or feature, teams draft a press release and a list of frequently asked questions to clarify the customer benefits and operational implications, ensuring clarity and alignment.
(3) Postmortems and Correction of Errors (COEs): When failures occur, Amazon conducts thorough analyses to understand root causes and disseminate lessons learned across the organization.

These practices ensure that learning is not incidental but a deliberate and structured process.Amazon Web Services (AWS), the company's cloud computing arm, exemplifies this learning culture. AWS continuously tests its systems through "game days," simulating failures to assess and improve resilience. This proactive approach allows AWS to identify vulnerabilities and implement improvements before issues impact customers.

Amazon's example illustrates that embedding learning into the fabric of an organization equips it to navigate uncertainty, adapt to change, and emerge stronger from challenges.

Case 2. Kyivstar's Learning Culture as the Backbone of Resilience

Kyivstar, Ukraine's leading telecommunications company, exemplifies how a disciplined learning culture underpins resilience and strategic adaptability in turbulent environments. Under the leadership of CEO Oleksandr Komarov, Kyivstar institutionalized learning mechanisms that transform both successes and failures into actionable insights, reinforcing the company's capacity to navigate crises, from cyberattacks to active war.

Key learning mechanisms include:

(1) Systematic Post-Decision Reflection: After every supervisory board meeting, Kyivstar conducts a structured debrief involving Komarov, board members, and the corporate secretary. This 30-minute session addresses: (a) What worked well? (b) What went wrong? (c) What could be improved next time? This reflective loop allows the board and management to continuously fine-tune their governance, ensuring alignment and agility.
(2) Business Case Review and Iteration: Every significant initiative at Kyivstar is grounded in a quantitative business case, reflecting Komarov's belief that "numbers don't lie." After initiatives are implemented, the team revisits the original business case to assess the gap between expected and actual outcomes. This feedback loop prevents complacency and fosters double-loop

learning, challenging the underlying assumptions behind decisions, not just the decisions themselves.

(3) Debriefs Across Operational Levels: Kyivstar promotes a culture of debriefing beyond boardrooms, integrating it into operational routines. Whether addressing crisis responses (e.g., the cyberattack on Kyivstar in December 2023) or day-to-day decision-making, the company embeds structured reflection across leadership tiers. As Komarov notes, "A mistake is not as bad as failing to understand its root cause."

(4) Risk-Based Learning Framework: The company applies risk reviews as learning moments. For example, Kyivstar began preparing for the risk of full-scale war in fall 2021, months before the Russian invasion, thanks to its proactive risk register updates. The system worked not because of extraordinary foresight, but because Kyivstar embedded regular risk assessment and scenario planning into its strategic learning processes.

(5) Quantitative Decision Discipline: Komarov fosters a data-driven decision-making culture, preferring quantitative arguments over qualitative opinions. He encourages teams to support strategies with scenario-based modeling and numerical analysis, reinforcing both clarity and learning. This analytical rigor ensures that lessons learned are not anecdotal but rooted in measurable evidence.

Kyivstar's disciplined commitment to structured learning and reflection has been instrumental in fostering its resilience. This approach enabled the company to recover from a devastating cyberattack in late 2023 while maintaining both customer trust and operational continuity. It also allowed Kyivstar to adapt effectively to wartime conditions by revising its risk scenarios and implementing pre-emptive mitigation measures well ahead of critical disruptions. Most importantly, the organization continuously refines its strategic decision-making processes, ensuring that failures do not result in repeated mistakes but serve as opportunities for deeper insight and improvement.

These practices demonstrate that resilience is not solely about having robust processes in place but also about cultivating organizational humility, or the willingness to interrogate assumptions, reflect on outcomes, and adapt accordingly. As CEO Oleksandr Komarov emphasizes, it is this discipline in learning that forms the bedrock of Kyivstar's ability to thrive amidst volatility.

Practical Takeaways for Leaders. To activate the Learning principle, leaders should:

(1) Institutionalize structured post-mortems and pre-mortems for strategic initiatives.
(2) Evaluate both what happened and why (not just performance, but insights).
(3) Promote a culture that values transparent reflection over blame.
(4) Use tools like the Execution Matrix to formalize learning processes.

(5) Measure organizational learning not only by speed of action, but by depth of insight.

In organizations that learn systematically, even failures become assets, yielding rich with data, hypotheses, and future growth paths. In turbulent contexts, learning is not a retrospective ritual; it is a forward-looking engine of renewal.

From Principles to Practice: Leading for Strategic Longevity

The five principles (Clarity, Proactivity, Alignment, Co-Creation, and Learning) do not operate in isolation. Together, they form an interdependent system that supports effective value creation and strategic resilience under conditions of turbulence. Each principle amplifies the others: Clarity defines direction; Alignment ensures coordinated movement; Proactivity prepares the organization to act early; Co-Creation validates and evolves the agenda with external insight; and Learning closes the loop, generating knowledge for continuous refinement. When treated as a system, these principles help organizations move faster without breaking, respond without overreacting, and adapt without losing direction.

Box 7. Five Principles in Action: CEO Expectations of the Sales Team of a Ukrainian Company

Format: Stop / Improve / Intensify / Start

This structured communication from the CEO (adapted from a real internal directive document) translated the five principles of longevity-centered leadership into clear behavioral expectations for the Sales Team during a period of disruption. Each category reflects a targeted type of behavioral shift, grounded in the principles of Clarity, Proactivity, Alignment, Co-Creation, and Learning.

STOP

Purpose: Eliminate behaviors that create ambiguity, misalignment, or prevent learning.

- Stop delaying the identification of key execution gaps (e.g., in resources, information, authority, service, or new logistics solutions), without which expectations for planned results quickly become unrealistic (Alignment).
- Stop formulating strategic intentions using vague, non-committal language such as “expectations,” “forecasts,” or “wishes” (Clarity).
- Stop assuming that a successful outcome alone is enough, without analyzing what specifically contributed to success and what latent areas still need improvement (Learning).

IMPROVE

Purpose: Strengthen proactive engagement with market signals and strategic partners.

- Improve assessment of opportunities for growing sales through partner companies, and anticipate risks that may reduce them (Proactivity).
- Improve articulation of reasons that could motivate partner managers to initiate or deepen cooperation with us; this includes clearly defining our "winning hypotheses" (Co-Creation).
- Improve the way we present reasons for partners to continue collaboration, even when our pricing may be less competitive than others (Co-Creation).

INTENSIFY

Purpose: Expand behaviors that support collaborative insight gathering and execution discipline.

- Intensify the creation of compelling reasons for partner managers to proactively share information with us, especially where collaboration depends on speed and depth (Co-Creation).
- Intensify attention to unusual behavior among market players (partners, end-customers, competitors, suppliers, and regulators) and identify early-stage threats and opportunities (Proactivity / Co-Creation).
- Intensify the habit of seeking structured feedback from your manager, peers, and partners to reflect on your performance and uncover improvement areas (Learning).

START

Purpose: Launch new routines and practices that embody proactive and reflective leadership.

- Initiate quarterly Opportunity Audits within your assigned partner territory to identify unmet potential and emerging risks (Proactivity).
- Initiate reviews of routine processes that could be automated, delegated to other units, or handled by sales support staff to enhance time use and focus (Proactivity).
- Initiate new standards of accountability by clearly formulating which excuses for lack of results will no longer be accepted (Proactivity).

This case demonstrates how the five principles of leadership under turbulence can be translated into clear, targeted, and principle-aligned team actions, not as abstract values, but as direct inputs into execution, adaptation, and relationship management.

As illustrated above, these principles are not abstract ideals; they are diagnostic and design guidelines. Leaders can use them to:

(1) Assess organizational blind spots: Which principle is least evident in current operations?
(2) Anchor decision-making: Are strategic choices consistent with these foundational principles?
(3) Guide capability investments: Where do systems, structures, or behaviors need reinforcement?
(4) Embed into routines: Use reflection sessions, stakeholder check-ins, and pre-mortem analyses to regularly surface misalignments.

Critically, the selection of specific leadership tools, frameworks, or interventions should be guided by these principles. In other words, the tools are optional and context-dependent, but the principles are not. They offer a stable reference point for making sound decisions in unstable environments.

Conclusion

Longevity-centered leadership in turbulent contexts demands more than agility; it demands judgment rooted in enduring principles. While tools may lose relevance or fail to transfer across contexts, the five core principles (Clarity, Proactivity, Alignment, Co-Creation, and Learning) remain broadly applicable and highly actionable. Taken together, these principles provide the behavioral and organizational infrastructure for executing on the promise of longevity-centered leadership: a strategic leadership approach dedicated to securing an organization's long-term vitality in the face of uncertainty by: (a) sustaining value creation, and (b) fostering resilience.

Specifically, Clarity and Alignment anchor execution in *sustaining value creation*. They ensure that strategy is well-defined and coherently enacted across the organization, minimizing drift and maximizing focus. Proactivity, Co-Creation, and Learning, in turn, enable *resilience* amidst uncertain future. They allow the organization to anticipate disruption, engage meaningfully with stakeholders, and continuously evolve in response to shifting realities.

Together, these principles operationalize longevity-centered leadership by equipping organizations to evolve deliberately without losing strategic continuity, to thrive rather than merely survive disruption, and to lead with purpose and coherence in a world defined by complexity and change.

In the current study, we present a stress test of foundational leadership thinking. We hope the article will stimulate a rich discussion along the two questions: Which of these principles is strongest in your organization today? Which one is missing when your next disruption hits?

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