

# Carla Enslin - Authenticity: How throughlines can guide creatives

 By [Dr Carla Enslin](#)

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One of McKinsey's top 10 takeaways from the 2024 annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos flagged the importance of matching top talent to their highest-value roles.



Image supplied. Carla Enslin, academic head of the IIE Vega School examines how being true to your 'throughline' will align you with being authentic in 2024

To implement this, businesses and their leaders need a deep understanding of talent and its professional value, while also organisations and project entities need pay more attention to the conditions to encourage people to open up, to extend their scope beyond the limitations of set disciplines and job titles, and become more truly participant.

## Complexity

Lately references to the term 'complexity' seem to be increasingly demanding our attention. The density and hybrid nature of the unknown, of course, is what confronts us most when trying to define complexity.

In this effort, being a positive and constructive participant is a vital part of assessing status, moving forward, or creating change.

Other important aspects might be exploring and practising intertwined ways of thinking and doing, with the ability to simultaneously navigate congruent and contradictory perspectives and always still being mindful of parts about each other.

No single tenet, ideology, theory, model, tool, or way of doing will address complexity by itself.



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## A personal reflection

We need each other to stand a meaningful chance of developing meaningful solutions.

This got me thinking – other than gaining more perspective and insight into the states of complexity, how am I reflected? How does our organisation, team and brand represent itself?

This reflection is more personal, stemming from a hopeful and energised start to the new year in January 2024.

## Your own distinctive throughline

It centres around the person and the professional ideal of ourselves that we bring to our teams and our work, sometimes under quite challenging circumstances.

I want to properly focus on how we can best position ourselves, our teams, and our brands for meaningful engagements.

The aim is to supply a guideline that I'm going to try hard to respect and follow: to reflect on your distinctive throughline and do your utmost to gain greater insight into others - in and beyond your team.

## Personal confidence to share your professional self-worth

I am presently part of a research unit exploring what it takes to be a productive transdisciplinary team engaged in solving complex challenges in online collaboratives.

The research involves final-year students in the brief period before they leave their learning institutions to launch their careers in the creative and marketing industries.

The most significant finding so far pertains to a stumbling block preventing or hampering successful collaboration under complex conditions, namely the personal confidence to share your professional self-worth (the hard and soft skills that you have developed within and beyond your discipline), and consequently the ability to fully participate.

This key result resonates loudly, and it is as relevant to the young professional as it is to the seasoned creative and strategist.



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## Collaboration highly leverage or hindered

Collaboration is highly leveraged when individuals can, confidently, and overarchingly position what they do uncommonly well and gain more respectful insights into the competencies and skillsets of others.

Collaboration is hindered most where individuals and teams are typically typecast, boxed in, or assigned strictly demarcated roles and narrowly defined involvement.

This raises some obvious questions:

- How do onboarding programmes in organisations profile or position the professional self-worth of new appointments?
- How do project heads create the space for members to individually position their professional self-worth before transdisciplinary team projects are launched?
- From a wider perspective, critically assessing the whole of the parts, how do companies avoid developing organisational cultures that narrowly define or label the individual's professional sense of self by department, unit, job title and annual key performance areas?

“ In essence, a throughline serves as a strategic statement of intent, pinpointing the unique reason for doing something and doing it (conceivably) uncommonly well. ”

## What's your 'throughline'?

In contemplating 2024, the daunting scales of complexity and my environment, I recalled an interview conducted by *CNN* journalist and host Christiane Amanpour.

She asked a guest what their 'throughline' was: the essence or core that runs through all that they stand for and all that they do.

This is not a foreign concept to strategic brand builders - we continuously uncover and invest in distinctive throughlines – e.g., vision statements, positioning, or purpose statements.

In essence, a throughline serves as a strategic statement of intent, pinpointing the unique reason for doing something and doing it (conceivably) uncommonly well.



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## Better understood throughlines

It seems to me a worthwhile effort to launch 2024 by positively and critically reflecting on our professional self-worth and by expressing our distinctive throughlines.

Team collaboration might be more productive and significant where distinctive throughlines are better understood and respected.

Surely, when we position what it is that we believe we do or wish to do uncommonly well, within and beyond our disciplines or positions, we will be better positioned to take part and contribute in full.

New members of the team should then be able to feel far more confident to follow suit, and so, as 'whole persons' bring their throughlines into the conversation.

In turn, the more experienced team members could be better motivated or 'nudged' to self-reflect and stretch beyond their confines before some older beliefs and perhaps more constricted tried and trusted ways of thinking and doing come to define the year.

New connections might then potentially arise and so enable better and more innovative solutions to complex challenges.

“ *The opportunities for creative strategic thinking and meaningful creative outputs would be strongly stimulated to grow* ”

## Opportunities for creative strategic thinking

Above all, the opportunities for creative strategic thinking and meaningful creative outputs would be strongly stimulated to grow.

And properly supported by more contemporaneous human resource perspectives and aware organisational leadership, top talent can gravitate towards the highest value roles.

Thus, guideline 1 for 2024: I am going to review and then focus on keeping my distinctive throughline front and centre. And I am going to do my utmost to gain greater insights into how colleagues experience theirs.

I anticipate that as you reflect on your distinctive throughline, you may reconfigure the supporting two guidelines that I have also set for myself.

### Guideline 1

Avoid field jargon and lean into what is in support of why. A throughline is after all a personal statement of intent – what it is that you do uncommonly well, the personal essence or core that runs through all that you are and the motivation for doing so. Your supporting guidelines would need to help you keep your unique throughline in 2024.

I feel the need to uphold my throughline by avoiding too much field jargon.

My guideline to self is to dig deeper and state what I do uncommonly well in clearer and more concrete terms and to remove or limit ambiguity.

According to online search queries, Merriam-Webster proclaimed “authentic” to be the word of the year 2023.

Interesting - why might this be the case? In our discipline, for a brand to be authentic, it needs to clearly express its uniqueness and deliver on this distinctiveness in all that it does over time.

We can't appropriate the term authentic for ourselves. Instead, it is bestowed upon us. Or in other words, we earn it.

### Guideline 2

For this reason, my guideline two is: to lean into what in support of why.

Personal purpose and brand purpose are driving forces – the central reasons to be and core to the throughline.

It is a robust strategic statement of intent, one that serves purpose throughout the organisation and that clarifies what it is that we do uncommonly well.

When we apply this principle to our throughline we need to specify what it is that we contribute within and beyond our disciplines that motivate and justify our distinctive throughlines.

The start of the year involves goal setting and submitting personal performance plans. May the throughline supply the guiding thread.

## ABOUT DR CARLA ENSLIN

Dr Carla Enslin is head of postgraduate studies & research at The Independent Institute of Education's Vega School. Carla's interest and experience in brand building includes the design and implementation of brand identity systems and brand alignment strategies. She lectures widely in Africa and abroad, conducts corporate training, consulting and coaching, and heads the Master of Arts and the Doctorate in brand leadership at IIE Vega.

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