

# LEADERSHIP CHALLENGED

FROM PARADOX TO NEW HORIZONS

BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS



ecocivilisation

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# LEADERSHIP CHALLENGED

From paradox to new horizons

By multiple authors



**ecocivilisation**

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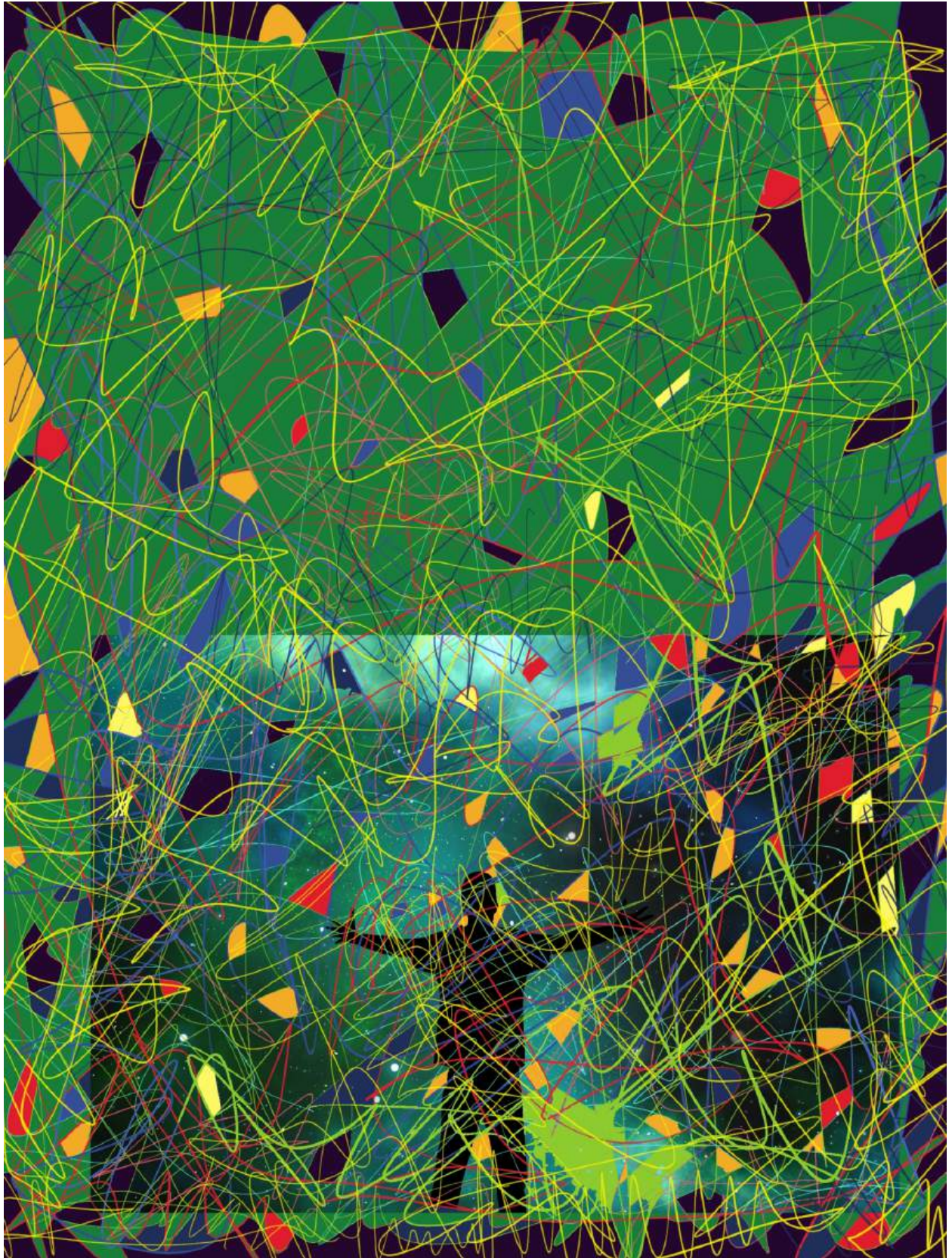
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## **Introduction to The “Year of Leadership Challenged” by the Ecocivilisation Movement**

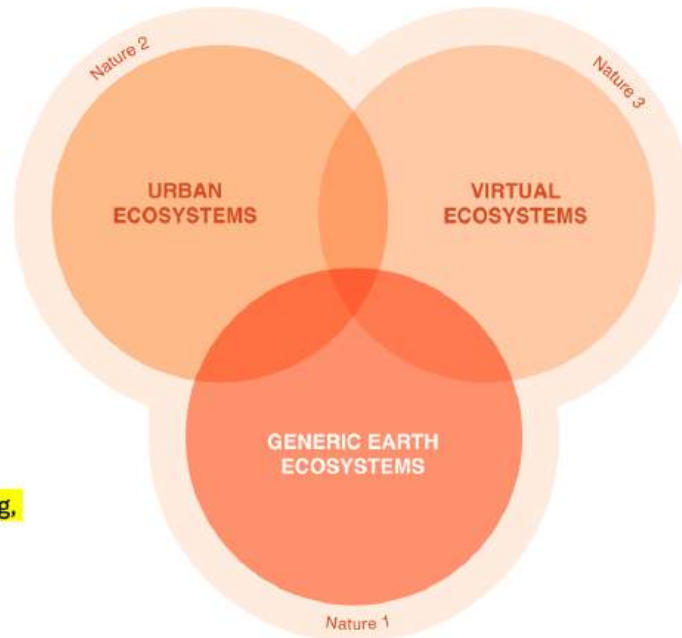
We live in a time of great instability, where attempting to predict the future is, at best, an exercise in speculation. Certainty in predictions has become elusive. Not only due to unpredictable human behaviour possibly influenced by the subtle yet powerful forces of nature, our planet, and cosmic constellations, but also due to some planetary shifts. It seems we are transitioning from 12,000 years of relative stability, known as the “Holocene”, towards more unstable natural conditions also influenced by human behaviour called “Anthropocene”.

The Holocene provided ideal conditions for a flourishing of biodiversity, humanity, and civilizations. It offered predictable weather, stable temperatures, consistent water cycles, and reliable seasons, allowing nature to evolve around these fundamental life-sustaining conditions.

But now, we have entered the Anthropocene, an era where unpredictability rules. We find ourselves uncertain, questioning how much of this change stems from reckless, short-term human behaviour and how much is a result of larger planetary cycles, solar eruptions, or even systemic cosmic influences. In times like these, it seems to me that human responses vary widely, reflecting our diverse levels of awareness and consciousness.

We are invited to acknowledge the positive and negative impacts of technological and industrial civilization, manifesting itself through 5 industrial revolutions, shaping life on this planet for centuries.

Indeed, we are reaching into the deep mystery of the Universe, diving into the most detailed particles of our existence, discovering new laws of nature, creating sophisticated organisational structures, social and economic models, valuable products and services. We have built parallel worlds to the original planetary ecosystem in a form of physical and virtual communities, with their own laws, values and aspirations.



Picture 1:  
3 Natures Co-Existing,  
Not Collaborating

Source: V. Bulic 2022

(Picture 1: 3 Natures Co-Existing, Not Collaborating)

The truth is that those three worlds do not exist in a collaborative spirit. I would even claim that they are working against each other, missing effective governance for enabling a systemic view and coherent co-existence. Which leads me to the negative side of the industrial age, the destructive side. We have caused appreciable damage to the invisible layers of humanity, especially to its emotional, spiritual and social fabric. We have been polluting the planet, contaminating the basic conditions for life, like water, air, and soil, creating enormous amounts of waste and depletion of the natural resources. Today we are finding ourselves at a crossroads, doubting humanity's own potentials while fixating on technological advancement.

It is no surprise, then, that one of the dominant visions for the future, proposed or rather infused through the tools of power, by technological giants, is *transhumanism*. The idea suggests that humans have fulfilled their role on this planet and that the next evolutionary steps are beings which are a fusion of organic and artificial intelligence.

However, history teaches us that every civilization has had its golden age, only to struggle when it failed to reinvent itself. Today, the dominant Western civilization appears to be reaching a similar turning point.

I have been an observer of the evolution of life on this planet all my conscious life. Observing systems, the way they function, transform, re-invent and ultimately destroy themselves. Observing also the behaviour of people placed so often at the core of the systems' transformative

behaviour. Step by step, shaped by a diversified set of teachings by beautiful global thinkers, profound moments of awareness and cross civilisational, cross-cultural experiential engagements, an idea has started to manifest. A thought suggesting that perhaps, for the first time, humanity has the capacity to consciously re-invent itself, seeking a more balanced self-organisation, well-tuned with nature, our planet, and the Universe.

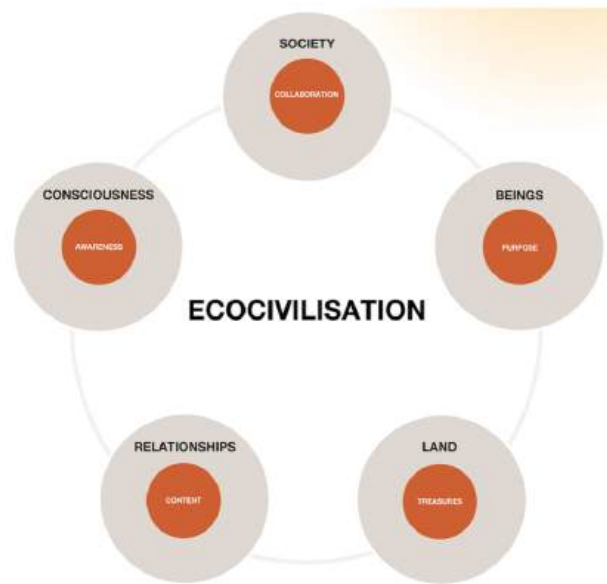
The **Ecocivilisation Movement** is built upon this possibility of re-inventing our civilisation(s), building on the cross-civilisational wisdom and knowledge of the past, instead of falling into destruction and rising from ashes again step by step. Ecocivilisation embraces the emergence of new ideas, born from the collective consciousness without rigid preconceptions. It sees itself as a global, disruptive cluster of people who care. People committed to fostering an ecological civilization that aligns with planetary and cosmic rhythms.

### **Ecocivilisation Movement**

In this spirit, I invite all to join us in reimagining a vibrant, interconnected relationship with our planet rooted in understanding, collaboration, and co-creation. Our values focus on sustaining life in all its forms, on learning from each other and from non-human communities alike.

The movement follows the core principles such as social technology, where technology serves as a tool, not a goal. We embrace systems thinking to grasp both opportunities and consequences. We advocate accountability and responsibility alongside spiritual transformation, engaging not just our intellects and physical bodies, but also our emotions and the quantum vibrations that connect us all.

Picture 2:  
Possible Model Of a  
New Societal  
Organisation



Source: V. Illari 2019, 2020

(Picture 2: Possible Model Of a New Societal Organisation)

A new civilizational paradigm cannot emerge without rethinking the very structures within which we operate. Instead of rigid, function-based organizations that fight for their own survival, I invite you to imagine self-organizing, network-based structures that revolve around fundamental life-supporting entities:

1. Land – encompassing both physical and virtual spaces
2. Communities – bringing together species in self-organizing ecosystems
3. Collective awareness and consciousness – drawing from accumulated wisdom
4. Dynamic relationships – the ever-evolving connections that sustain life

By mimicking the essential behaviour of Nature, these basic self-sustained and self-organisation entities, could continuously adapt to genuine needs of their elements and their inherited relationships.

Whether in education, industry, infrastructure, or culture, it is imperative that we ask ourselves: Are our actions strengthening the resilience and sustainability of beings, land, communities, consciousness, and relationships? Are we leading our actions in creating value which supports evolution, resilience and sustainability? Are we acting as responsible stewards, ensuring vital conditions of the basic pillars needed to sustain life for future generations?

I do not claim that the Ecocivilisation Movement is the ultimate solution, but it is a different enough approach that I hope it sparks new insights in your creative potentiality.

## **Leadership Challenged**

With this introduction, I hope I established the context for a better understanding of why we have dedicated the year 2025 to “*Leadership Challenged*”.

In modern society, we are almost obsessed with leadership theories, techniques, and schools of thought<sup>[1]</sup>. Yet, look around—in our current world we are becoming more chaotic, more disconnected from nature, from each other, and from ourselves. We glorify technology above Life, ignoring the wisdom that has sustained our existence for millions of years.

It is time for a profound shift in our perspectives.

So, many questions started emerging while engaging in various Ecocivilisation activities. Demanding discussions and answers were: Will leaders be able to reinvent, evolve, and transform? Are leaders even necessary? How are decisions made in the natural ecosystem? Is there anything leading the course of their evolution? How is Nature constantly finding a balance within given conditions? Do we have, as humans, capacities today for engaging and delivering results within dynamic communities and organizations based on emergence and unpredictable conditions? Can we possibly envision a shift from traditional leadership to a responsible stewardship?

While the concept of leadership may evolve, its essence, guidance, vision, and coordination, will possibly endure. Humans, and potentially AI or other advanced entities, will probably need new elements to navigate complex challenges. But can we still imagine, dream and deliver something beyond the known within, and, despite existing systems?

Our evolving civilization seems to call for a better balance between individual autonomy and collective action. So, will the future belong to disparate, inclusive systems where individuals contribute their unique skills and missions while serving a higher good?

I feel that we are called upon to create a safe, nurturing space, where collective engagement not only honours individual contributions but also elevates the group’s overall achievements, surpassing the capabilities of any single member.

Responsible stewardship may just be the next step in the evolution of leadership. The kind adopting a system-centric approach, holistic thinking focused on ecosystems, complex adaptive systems, and planetary boundaries. By nurturing systems that integrate human, natural, and technological elements, responsible stewards can foster an environment for continuous, balanced

innovation that transcends mere linear growth. This would reflect the inherent Wisdom of Nature and Earth, a timeless source of inspiration for our collective future.

All these questions and more have co-shaped the “Year of Leadership Challenged” put forward by the Ecocivilisation Movement. However, the topic is too big to be addressed only by one emerging network. That is why we have invited 4 more colleagues and networks to join. It was a great pleasure to co-shape the content of the year with Mar Introini, a fellow G100 Wing, leading the G100 Global Networking Group, Andreja Kodrin, founder and general manager of Quintaum, global network for evolution of organisational behaviour and individual holistic growth, and Lev Gordon one of the founders and a driving force of the global Living Cities Earth network.



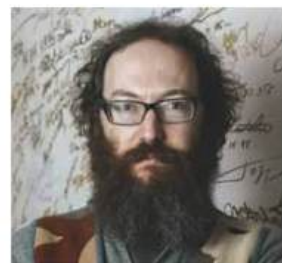
dr. Mar Introini  
Chair, G100 Global  
Networking



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Ecocivilisation and Water,  
Co-Founder, Living Cities  
Earth



dr. Andreja Kodrin  
Founder, Director  
Quintaum



Lev Gordon  
Co-Initiator,  
Co-Founder  
Living Cities Earth

The discussions in the “Year of Leadership Challenged” evolved around the following questions:

- Leadership Challenged – can today’s leaders still lead the new civilisational paradigm?
- Crises everywhere – what is missing?
- Reformation of Institutions - how can they serve better the needs of people on local, regional and global level?
- Responsible Stewardship for Civilisational Change – can we imagine the communities and organisations without leaders?

Together we were seeking the thoughts, ideas, solutions, and ways forward to support the main purpose of the discussion:

- Raise the Awareness
- Challenge the concepts
- Dare to go beyond
- Imagine and practice

The book that is in front of you brings together all those richly diversified views from all over the world which, more than solutions, are further opening possibilities, new questions on how to behave in this emerging world. All who gathered around the “Year of Leadership Challenges” and this book deeply appreciate all the contributions and are welcoming reflections of all of you who are opening your inner worlds to the challenges addressed. The journey has just started and only together can see where it leads next.

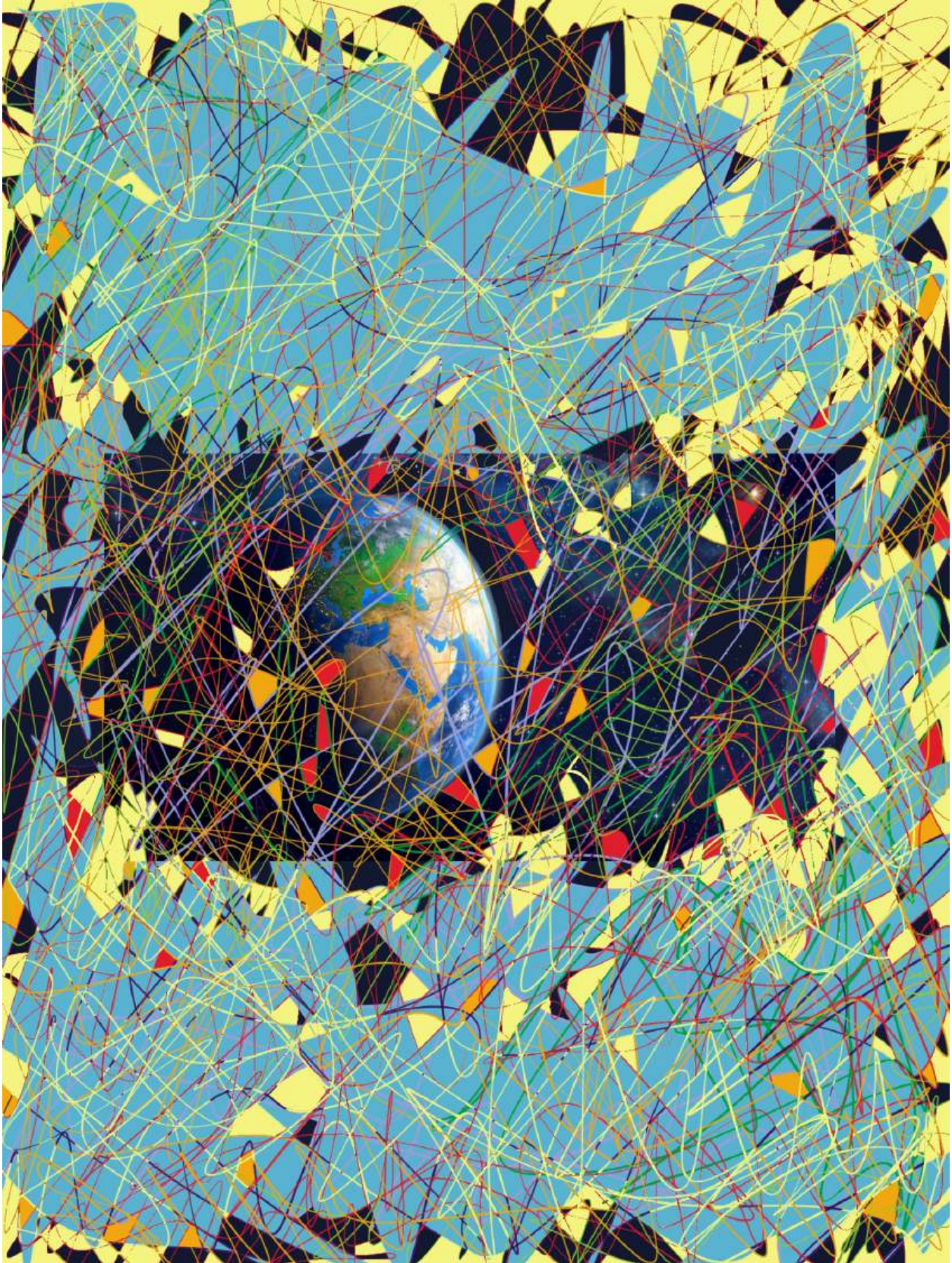
Osti Jarej!

Dr. hc. Violeta Bulc

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- [1] ChatGPT (August 2025) on Leadership Schools:
    - **158 universities** and **278 programs** (*mostly Western-focused*)
    - when you include **China, Russia, Latin America, and Africa**, the number of institutions and programs offering leadership education is **much higher—likely in the thousands worldwide**
  - ChatGPT (August 2025) on Leadership programs:
    - Altogether, we are realistically talking about **tens of thousands of leadership trainings worldwide**—possibly **50,000+** if you count everything from elite MBAs to short weekend workshops.
  - Safari search (August 2025) on the estimated market value of the leadership market:
    - It's impossible to pinpoint an exact number of leadership training programs globally, but the corporate leadership training market is a multi-billion dollar industry, valued at USD 32.96 billion in 2022 and projected to reach USD 63.19 billion

## **Chapter 1. The Crisis of Leadership (Why leadership is being challenged)**

*These chapters diagnose the limits of current leadership models and the conditions forcing change.*



## Alexander Laszlo: Becoming Antidystopian: Learning to Human Well in VUCA Times

### Abstract

This chapter introduces the pragmatic ideal of how to become antidystopian as a transformative stance for navigating the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) of the modern world. Rejecting both blind optimism and fatalistic despair, antidystopianism encourages a stance of being "optimistically concerned" — a conviction grounded in the perception that life itself conspires toward flourishing. Drawing on ancient wisdom traditions, evolutionary insights, and emergent responses to contemporary challenges, the chapter argues that humanity must cultivate the capacity for "full-spectrum humaning" — an integrated practice of cognitive, emotional, relational, and ecological wholeness. Central to this approach are "technologies of consciousness" that reconnect modern humans with the life-fostering intelligence of nature. Through heightened relational awareness, an ethic of care grounded in love, and collaborative creativity, this chapter calls for leadership that actively participates in creating conditions conducive to the emergence of a global ecocivilisation, shifting from individualistic reactionism to interdependent response-ability.

### Keywords

*antidystopianism, full-spectrum humaning, leadership, relational intelligence, ecocivilisation*

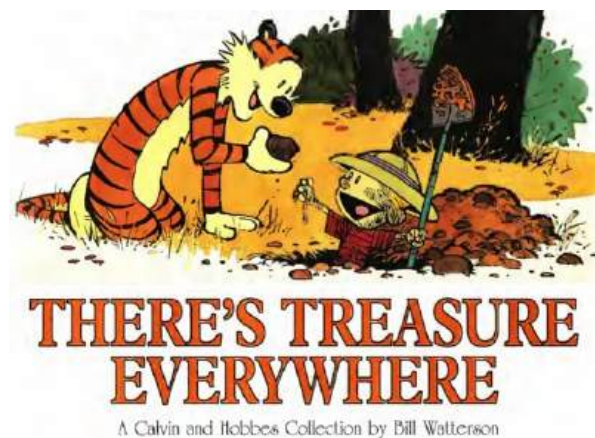
We live in times that inspire no blind optimism. And yet, if we don't give into the sensationalism and alarmism propagated by pundits and mainstream media alike, we may still find the deeper, richer, and more powerful sources that in-form our being and becoming. This kind of in-forming is truly a matter of allowing our form – our physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental being – to be nourished, held, oriented and connected. It's a subtle thing, though ... no one is there to do the holding and nourishing. But just as the roots of a tree may find rich veins of water and nutrients flowing through the earth, so may we. Only for us, the connection is both less material and more ethereal but nonetheless powerful and life giving.

Perhaps this is a time to be *optimistically concerned*. Such a stance is grounded in a conviction that the universe is conspiring in favor of life. What evidence do we have for taking such a stance? It is truly all around us and in us, as well ... if we know where to look and how to listen. Again, the non-stop barrage of "news" on social media, government sponsored media, and the "free press" may keep us from seeing and hearing. So, it's up to us to develop the evolutionary eyes with which to read the signs of change and evolutionary ears with which to hear their patterns.

When our planet formed some four and a half billion years ago, it was bereft of life. No life at all, just molten rock ... and no atmosphere to speak of (or in), either. And now just look at it!

For the last four billion years, life has been emerging on this planet, with over a billion years of multicellular beings swimming around and even in us, with our own bodies being comprised of more than half non-human cells. And there's life all over this planet! It's teeming with life – a blue/green ball of living matter. That's the pattern, you see. That's what life does. As Janine Benyus, founder of Biomimicry, says, "life creates conditions conducive to life." So, there's a part of the evidence to ground a stance for being *optimistically concerned*.

The other part comes from looking around with the eyes of our heart.



The amazing, awe inspiring, magical and mystical beauty of life – of any living, breathing being! How wondrous is that?!! When we stop to see it or to listen to the pulse of life in the beating of a heart, the rhythms of the rain, cycles of day and night or of winter and spring and summer and fall – then we connect with that knowing that runs deeper than the scandals in the tabloids. To do so we must *re-member* ... and make the effort to bring our membership back into the great hoop of life.

Again, the ancients knew this. It's time we remembered and re-storied or relations with life. It's time to become *Antidystopian*. Antidystopianism roots out cynicism and indifference, and especially fatalism and despair, and it sources them back to love, hope, and care. It is underwritten by an Ethic of Care, the closest stance on which is embodied by ancient wisdom traditions such as that of Ahimsa (which, in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jainist traditions, embodies and enacts respect for all living things and the avoidance of violence toward others). The

antidystopian looks at the world and what's going on in it with and is optimistically concerned. They know that we have forgotten so much of this ancient understanding. And they also know that it won't come by just wishing for it or waving a wand at it. It's going to take effort, and it's going to take collaboration. While we know that change begins with each one of us, we are fortunately living in times when we can now connect not only with nature and the deeper patterns of life, but also with each other through the Internet and in ways that bring us into engagement, inspiration, and mutual empowerment such as was never before possible.

Another thing that has already changed in favor of becoming antidystopian is that no generation on earth at this time is any longer embracing the stance of disinterested aloofness. It's no longer cool to be blasé and flip off the world with a cavalier shrug of "whatever". And while popular entertainment still teems with zombie apocalypses and dystopian futures, it's too in our face now and it stings (if we're fortunate enough for it not to be already causing deep pain, suffering, and anguish). Some use this sense of outrage to fuel divisiveness and other dynamics that fail to connect with source. And some use it to "fight back" or even to "fight forward" toward a utopian or more pragmatic protopian future, such as those staunchly engaged in establishing the vision of a solarpunk world within our lifetime. But one thing is certain: this won't be a traditional fight! We can't fight with the same aggression and violence that we are seeking to overcome. If we embody anger and violence, that will be what we see in the world because it will be what we bring to it. And anyway, that is not the way of the antidystopian...

The evolution of far-reaching social structures with powerful technologies is changing the surface of the earth and the nature of how we relate to everything. To deal with this changed reality, we won't need bigger, stronger, more far-reaching material technologies. Instead, we will need what shamans have at times referred to as "the technologies of consciousness." What are these? They are the ways of listening, of seeing, of connecting, and of knowing the patterns that bring forth life and abundance on Earth. They are always founded in the ethics of care, and as such, grounded in love. Not the mundane love of romantic human desire, but that which we can feel when the sun shines on our face or we witness any act of kindness and care, be it in the human world or the more-than-human world.

Here's where the notion of *full-spectrum humaning* comes into play. It invites a way of being that honours *unity without uniformity* and *diversity without fragmentation*. It is a practice of embodying our humanity across cognitive, emotional, relational, and ecological dimensions. And above all, it is a call to live as whole, integral beings in a world that constantly tries to split us into fragments, and to source the power to do so from a wellspring of love at the heart of the deeper relational intelligence now emerging at the depth of our species (even though on the surface it appears anything but evident). Teilhard de Chardin is oft quoted for predicting that "someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness ... the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." Clearly, as it is used here, "harness" does not imply manipulation or control; rather, it means holding, engaging, and aligning with the power of love. My friend and much

missed mentor Lawrence Bloom shared a practice for cultivating the ability to harness love in this way. Whenever faced with a difficult leadership decision, Bloom would pause and ask, “What would love do?” Then he would wait. And listen. And only then would he act.

Imagine what might happen if more leaders genuinely practiced this way to harness love – if they routinely paused long enough to let love, rather than fear or ego, inform their decisions. Such a shift in the popular paradigm of practice would call on us to draw more deeply on our sense of alignment with life-pulse of nature. Paying attention to the lessons of life-on-a-teeming-planet calls for devotion to the creation of conditions conducive to life; living simply so that others—be they human or more-than-human—may simply live. This cannot be done through material technology alone.

Till now, technological advances have tended to reinforce social inequities, political stresses, and unreflective uses of machines in ways that polarize humanity and degrade nature, creating problems of global dimension. Beyond the wars and social injustices that we inflict upon each other, global weirding, the attenuation of the ozone shield, the menace of deforestation and desertification, the destruction of many species of flora and fauna, the disruption of critical migratory patterns of major life forms on both land and sea, the extensive pollution of air, water and soil, and the poisoning of the food chain are threats that all societies now share in common. These are the characteristics of our current *problematique*— they represent the dangers to be averted and the opportunities to be seized upon in the global transition in which we find ourselves now. What is needed is a *solutionatique* that brings us into active and empowered engagement with life and the life-fostering dynamics of this planet.

What’s new is not so much that there are more “woke” people as that there are more “fed up” people. To engage in active and empowered ways that don’t contribute to the problem but help emerge viable futures means to think/sense/imagine how your entire life — past, present, and as you think it will be if things keep going as they’re going — could/should/will be if things changed. People will often ask whether things can change, or if it’s too late? But that’s not a helpful question, even if it is the first one that comes to mind. Just thinking about, and taking seriously, the question of defining the challenge facing humanity and considering our role in meeting it marks engagement with antidystopianism. Creating an awareness in yourself of the collective challenges we face is the first step to doing something about them.

Unfortunately, many modern humans have drifted from the ways of knowing afforded by heightened relational intelligence with nature. For instance, if you take a modern city-dweller and drop her or him in a forest at night, they would be lost, disoriented, reliant on technological devices, unable to navigate by stars, disconnected from the living context around them. This is what Richard Louv described as Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD) in his groundbreaking book *The Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin Books, 2005). Contrast this with the experience that many autochthonous indigenous people would have in a forest, almost any forest, at night: they are not lost. They are embedded; they are found. The trees “know where they are,” and they know how

to listen to the forest all around them. This contrast underscores the erosion of a certain kind of relational, embodied intelligence in the life of modern-day humans. Our capacities to human well have atrophied due to over-reliance on technologies and the distancing (and often removal) of natural habitats from our daily experience. Our senses have been narrowed and abstracted. Retaining awareness of our embedding realities calls for heightened attention and sharpened sense-abilities.

Now, to be sure, you can never be aware of all the challenges facing humanity, not just because they are so complex and multifaceted, but because they change from moment to moment! However, you can become aware of the nature of the challenges — of the attitudes and dispositions and even the type of thinking that contributes to the set of problems that define the contemporary challenge of existence for humanity, what the Club of Rome calls *the global problematique*. Taking stock of our collective contributions to (and detractions from) the overall dynamic harmony of this planet is the entry point to becoming an antidystopian. Through this book, at the threshold of conscious and creative contribution to evolutionary consonance, we step back, take a look at what is happening in the “big picture,” and find ourselves somewhere there. How are you contributing to that big picture? Are you over there with those who are heedlessly stamping down this earth, or are you over here, with the mindful walkers and insightful listeners? Mary Oliver writes of how “attention is the beginning of devotion.” Are you paying attention?

Yes, paying attention is the first of the steps to mastering the ability to *human well*. For the moment, the task is deceptively simple: make sense of the world around you — synchronically and diachronically. Do so in conversation with others — with your friends and family, with yourself, and with this book. Engage in the action-oriented, life-affirming, future-creating, and opportunity-increasing patterns of possibility it offers you. There is little doubt that you will be faced with more daunting tasks in the time to come. Your ability to meet the challenges will rest on how well you can walk this talk of engaging in antidystopian efforts with the real-world communities where you live, learn, work, and play. You will be asked to draw on the perspectives, skills, and other competencies involved in humaning well – both individually and with others. Cultivating evolutionary learning community will be a response, in and of itself, to the challenges we are considering right here. This response will be far more than a thoughtful answer to an abstract question. In this way, you will be able to embody the answer by taking on the roles needed to face the challenges. From attention to awareness to sense-ability to response-ability. Engaging in action-inspiration with those antidystopians you choose to run with.

There is a new paradigm that humans are emerging a world where strident individualism and self-righteous independence no longer make sense. The paradigm is embodied in the quest to create the conditions for a global ecocivilisation. Antidystopians are emerging shifting the paradigm and creating the conditions based on an ethic of care that cultivates a sentience of interdependence and Intrabeing comprised of the following values –

- truth
- loyalty
- justice
- freedom

These were not so important or relevant in ages past when global interconnectedness and was less immediate. Today, in our global village, we can reach out and connect with almost anyone from almost anywhere almost instantaneously. There is no “new frontier” to permit us to engage in a type of “slash and burn” occupation of territory – though some still operate as though we can simply abandon Earth once it is used up and move on to another planet for fresh opportunities. Since such approaches are in no way connected to spirit, love, or the dynamic of flourishing that undergirds the broader evolutionary patterns on this planet, the values listed above have become paramount to safeguarding both individual and collective human dignity entitlement – that birthright all peoples share in common.

Of course, your quest to human well is not limited to the sort of activities and systems of syntony envisioned in this book! After all, being optimistically concerned means playing the jazz of life in such a way that the improvisational jam sessions you join bring opportunity to contribute to shaping an ongoing harmony of evolutionary consonance. Weaving in your own hopes, visions, and ideals while encouraging and eliciting resonant responses from others is the way of the antidystopian. And remember, these ‘others’ won’t be just other people on the path to humaning well with you. You’ll be dancing, jamming, and flowing with all of creation — at work, at home, at school, in the city, in the forest, in the ocean. Listening to the patterns of change is not just for the Australian Aboriginals, the Polynesian seafarers, Native Americans or first peoples of any land. It’s what the birds and the fish do, and it really can’t be done without them! Remember Oliver’s words: attention is the beginning of devotion. Pay attention to the dynamics of change of which you are a part and move that attention into active awareness sourced in love and understanding devoted to life. This is your mission. It is our mission — mission possible.

Let's do this!

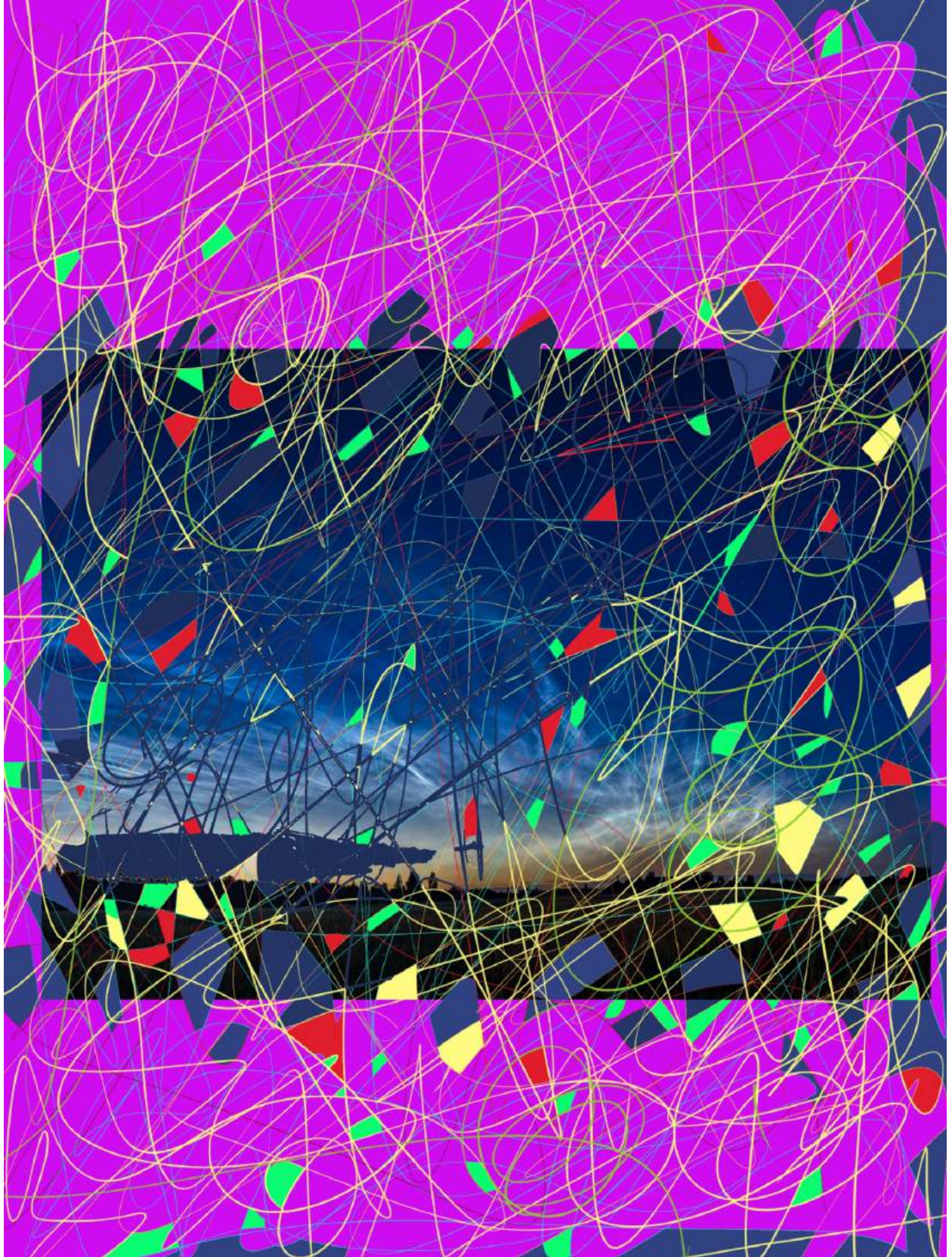


**Dr. Alexander Laszlo** is Professor of Sustainability Leadership in the School of Leadership Studies at Fielding Graduate University. He mentors doctoral students in leadership and systems thinking, with a focus on transformative learning and the design of thrivable systems. His mission is to advance meaning-driven, systems-informed scholarship and practice that translates complexity into life-affirming learning, evolutionary leadership, and systemic innovation.

He earned an International Baccalaureate in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the United Nations International School (New York City), a BA in International and Comparative Politics from Haverford College, and an MA and PhD in the interdisciplinary field of Science and Technology Policy from the University of Pennsylvania.

Across his career, Dr. Laszlo has held leadership roles in academic, research, and non-profit contexts, contributing to the evolution of systems science and systems-informed leadership education internationally. He **served as** the 57th President of the International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS) and **served as** Founding Director of the Doctoral Program in Leadership & Systemic Innovation at ITBA in Argentina, where he lives. He has **also served as** President of the Bertalanffy Center for the Study of Systems Science (BCSSS) and **as** Director of Research at the Laszlo Institute of New Paradigm Research (LINPR).

His research and practice span leadership, systemic innovation, sustainability, and education ecosystems, with engagements that include the Italian Electric Power Agency, UNESCO's Regional Office for Science and Technology for Europe (Italy), and Brookhaven National Laboratory (New York, USA). He continues to teach and consult internationally across MBA and doctoral programs, supporting scholars and practitioners to refine methodology, strengthen voice, and shape inquiry that makes a measurable difference.



## Ravi Chaudhry: Peopleism: A Pathway to Resolve Our Existential Crises

The panoramic arc of history is the story of the unfolding of human progress—a narrative of *civilizational advance*—with all its ups and downs. Progress is a trajectory, it does not always go up. When it goes down, it results in the deterioration of the lives of a large majority of the people. There is an increasing consensus that we are going through one such moment.

Among the many crises confronting humanity today, two stand apart in both scale and consequence. They are not isolated challenges, nor are they temporary disruptions. They are **existential threats**—capable of destabilizing societies, economies, and the future of civilization itself.

- 1) The first is the **global climate crisis**, now accelerating faster than even the most pessimistic projections of recent decades.
- 2) The second is the **deep social polarization caused by extreme inequality**, visible across almost all major economies, eroding trust, fragmenting societies, and hollowing out democracy.

We have more wealth and more advanced technologies than ever before, and yet 70% of the global population holds only 3% of the wealth, while the top 1% own over half the wealth. This is not just inequality, it is an economic apartheid—a systemic suppression of human flourishing on a global scale.

We keep expending nature for short-term greed. It is not just indifference - it is a pro-active complicity in what is perhaps humanity's greatest self-inflicted wound.

The Arctic is melting; there may be no summer ice in 2030s, leading to more hurricanes, wildfires, and floods. Sea levels are rising by 3.7 mm/year, will start displacing hundreds of millions from coastal cities. Ocean acidification, driven by absorbing 30% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, endangers the entire marine ecosystem. The sixth mass extinction is underway, with species disappearing 1,000 times the natural rate. Crop yields could decline by 30%, causing food insecurity. Catastrophe is writ large.

These two crises are often discussed separately—one as an environmental problem, the other as a social or political one. This separation is a mistake. They are, in fact, **twin outcomes of the same systemic failure**: a leadership paradigm shaped by an economic ideology that elevates profit above people and immediate gains above long-term consequences.

In my book, *Capitalism to Peopleism: Inspiring a Leadership Transformation*, I submit that neither crisis can be solved within the prevailing framework. Both demand a fundamental leadership transformation—from knowledge to wisdom, from extraction to stewardship, from capitalism as an end in itself to Peopleism as a way of governing, leading, and building.

### Climate Change and Inequality: Two Symptoms of One Disease

At first glance, climate collapse and social polarization appear to have different causes. One concerns carbon emissions and planetary boundaries; the other concerns wages, wealth concentration, and opportunity gaps. Yet their roots are deeply intertwined. Modern capitalism has been extraordinarily successful at generating wealth. But it has also normalized two dangerous patterns:

- a) **The externalization of costs**—to nature, to workers, to communities, and to future generations, and
- b) **The concentration of rewards**—increasingly captured by a small minority of people and corporations.

Nature has been treated as a free, expendable resource. Large segments of humanity have been treated as economic inputs rather than stakeholders. Both have paid the price.

The climate crisis reflects decades of extracting from the planet without restoring it. Extreme inequality reflects decades of extracting value from societies without distributing opportunity or dignity fairly. In both cases, the costs were deferred, hidden, or ignored—until they became impossible to contain.

### **Why Leadership Failed — Despite Knowing Better**

This is not a failure of science or data. We have known about climate risk for decades. We have known about rising inequality, stagnant wages, and social fracture just as long. The failure lies elsewhere.

Many business leaders understood the risks but postponed meaningful action. Climate responsibility was delegated to public-relations teams. Inequality was rationalized as market outcome. Short-term profitability remained the dominant metric of success.

Political systems, increasingly influenced by concentrated capital and short electoral cycles, mirrored these priorities. Governments hesitated to regulate emissions forcefully or challenge inequality for avowed fear of disrupting growth or alienating powerful interests.

The result is a feedback loop: *capital shapes politics, politics protects capital, and both drift further from the lived realities of most people.*

When people feel excluded from economic progress, social trust collapses. When trust collapses, polarization rises. And when polarization rises, societies lose the capacity to act collectively—even in the face of existential danger—while more existential issues keep surfacing.

### **Peopleism: Reuniting the Social and the Environmental**

This is where *Peopleism* enters the conversation—not as a social or environmental movement, but as a leadership transformation.

Peopleism begins with a simple but radical reordering of priorities. It recognizes that every human enterprise—corporate or governmental—rests on three equally indispensable pillars: **capital, people, and nature**. To privilege one while degrading the others is not efficiency; it is systemic failure which leads to self-destruction.

Under Peopleism, economic success is no longer measured solely by growth rates or shareholder returns, but by whether growth improves the lives of all people, preserves the ecological systems on which life depends, and strengthens social cohesion rather than undermining it.

This is not ideology or philanthropy. It is realism in a finite world.

### **Worthy Capitalism: Leadership That Heals, Not Divides**

Peopleism does not call for the abolition of capital or markets. It calls for the emergence of **worthy capitalists**—leaders who understand that legitimacy, and ultimately their success, depends on how responsibly they treat society and nature. Paying fair wages, respecting ecological limits, abandoning tax avoidance, and committing to verifiable paths toward net-zero emissions are not acts of altruism; they are investments in systemic stability—not for others, but for their own survival.

For political leadership, Peopleism demands courage: the courage to resist corporate capture, to strengthen constitutional and institutional safeguards, and to prioritize intergenerational justice over instant popularity. Under Peopleism, parity of people and nature with capital is neither negotiable nor optional. It is foundational for good governance.

### **The Leadership Choices Will Shape Our Future**

Climate responsibility and social equity are not peripheral concerns in Peopleism. These are the **core leadership obligations**. Leaders are expected to balance short-term imperatives with long-term consequences, and to accept responsibility for the future that will be shaped by the choices they make today. This requires a shift from knowledge to wisdom—knowing not only *what* can be done, but *what must be done*, and acting despite personal reservations.

Peopleism also challenges a central myth that has paralyzed collective action: the belief that economic prosperity and environmental and societal issues are inherently in conflict. In reality, the greatest long-term threat to prosperity is their collapse. Climate instability and social insecurity exacerbate inequality, fuel social unrest, and erode trust in institutions. A planet in crisis cannot sustain stable markets for long.

We are at a watershed moment in human history. Like the transitions from agricultural to industrial economies, and from industrial to knowledge economies, we are now being forced—by planetary boundaries—to transition once again. This time, toward a **Wisdom Economy**, where success is measured not only by GDP or shareholder returns, but by human wellbeing and ecological sustainability.

The tragedy is not that we lack solutions. It is that we have tolerated leadership systems that reward delay, denial, and deflection. Peopleism offers a way out—not through disruptions, but through voluntary responsibility; not through ideology, but through wisdom.

The question is no longer whether these problems can be solved within the existing paradigm. It cannot.

The real question is whether leaders—especially business leaders—are willing to proactively act before the costs of inaction make civilizational progress impossible.

History will not judge this generation by what it knew.  
It will judge us by whether we had the wisdom to act.



~ **Ravi Chaudhry**

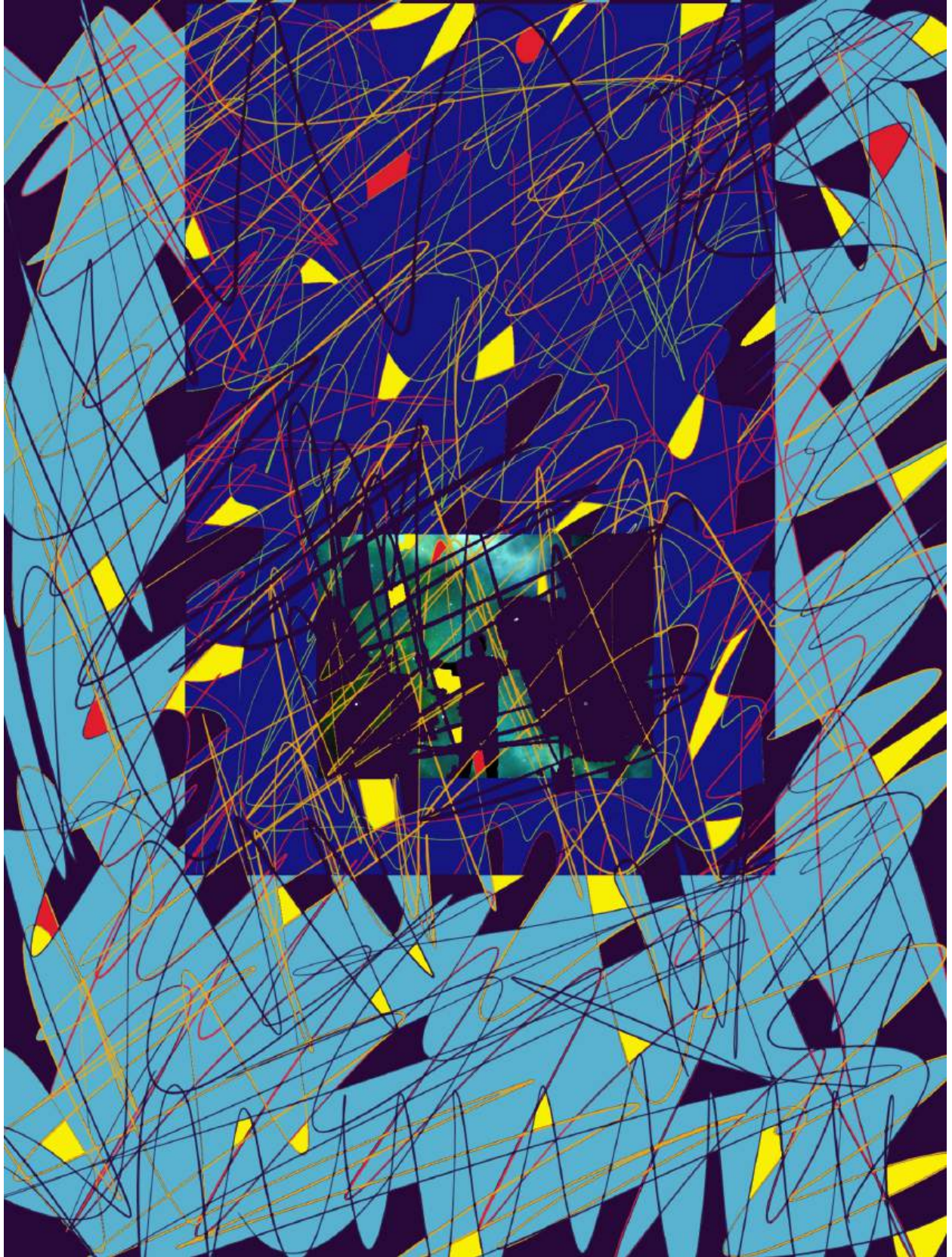
Leadership mentor & author, 'Business Book of the Year'.  
*Capitalism to Peopleism: Inspiring a Leadership Transformation*

**Ravi Chaudhry** is an Indian author, leadership mentor, thought leader, and advisor to corporate boards, governments and civil society—on instituting wisdom-led, people-centric, and eco-conscious cultures. He is best known as the founder-chairman of CeNext Consulting and former chairman of companies in Tata Group. He spends most of his time on conducting leadership dialogues, focused on realistically aligning short-term and long-term goals, to secure genuine trust of all stakeholders—a process that demands a rethink of decision-making principles and structures. He lives in New Delhi.

He is the author of two highly acclaimed books:

[Quest for Exceptional Leadership: Mirage to Reality](#)

[Capitalism to Peopleism: Inspiring a Leadership Transformation](#)



## **Sanchita Gairola Mishra: Leadership in the Age of Disruption: A Love Letter to Change**

There was a time when leadership meant power, hierarchy, and command. Leaders were seen as untouchable figures—always certain, always decisive, always in control. But today, that image feels outdated, almost archaic. The world we now live in is fast, unpredictable, and deeply interconnected. The old models of leadership no longer hold. The rules of the game have changed, and so must we.

I have lived and breathed leadership—not as a theory, but as a lived experience. As a woman entrepreneur, a management and sustainability consultant, and a co-founder of an organization built from the ground up, I have seen leadership tested in its rawest form. And I have learned that true leadership is not about standing above others—it is about walking with them. It is not about control—it is about trusting the collective intelligence of those around you.

### **Beyond the Ego: Leadership as a Symphony**

Leadership today is no longer a one-man orchestra—it is a symphony where every instrument matters. The strongest leaders I know are not those who dictate from the top, but those who create space for others to lead.

I have sat in boardrooms where decisions were made based on ego. I have seen leaders hold onto control because they feared letting go. And I have also witnessed the opposite—the magic that unfolds when leadership is distributed, when ideas come from every level, and when the smartest person in the room is not one individual, but the collective wisdom of many.

In my organization Vision360 Management Consulting, we have tried to build a culture where leadership is shared, not hoarded. Where the best ideas are not dictated from above, but through cross – pollination and co-created by teams who feel empowered to challenge, contribute, and innovate. Because the truth is, leadership is not about having all the answers. It is about asking the right questions and listening deeply.

This kind of leadership creates organizations that are resilient, agile, and adaptive. In an era where markets shift overnight, where global crises reshape entire industries, leaders who listen, collaborate, and empower are the ones who build companies that not only survive but thrive.

### **Disruption: The Great Unraveling—and Opportunity**

Disruption is an uncomfortable word. It shakes the ground beneath us, forces us out of our comfort zones, and demands that we adapt or be left behind. But what if we stopped seeing disruption as the enemy? What if we embraced it as our greatest teacher?

I have seen businesses collapse overnight because they were too rigid to evolve. And I have seen

organizations rise from the ashes because they leaned into the discomfort, adapted, and embraced the uncertainty. Disruption does not kill leadership—it reveals it. It strips away the superficial and leaves us with only the essence of who we are and what we stand for.

Some of the greatest innovations in history have been born out of crisis. When supply chains broke, new decentralized models emerged. When traditional office work was disrupted, remote work became the new norm. When environmental concerns became too big to ignore, sustainability was no longer a "nice-to-have" but a necessity. True leaders are the ones who see beyond the chaos and find the hidden opportunities.

The greatest leaders today are not those who resist change, but those who say, “Let’s walk through the fire together.” They don’t pretend to have all the answers, but they have the courage to ask the hard questions and create a safe space for others to contribute.

### Empathy: The New Leadership Currency

If disruption is the test, then empathy is the answer. Leadership is no longer about strength alone; it is about understanding, listening, and creating environments where people feel seen and valued.

For me, empathy has never been just a buzzword. It is the foundation of how I lead. We have worked with organizations that struggled with ESG goals, sustainability transitions, and leadership challenges. The turning point was never in hard numbers or cold strategies—it was always in the human connection, in listening to the real concerns of teams, in making space for difficult conversations. And believe me, it works. Magically! Most of the time!

However, I would also like to clarify that “Empathy” in leadership does not mean being “soft.” It means being deeply aware of the impact of decisions. It means recognizing that people perform at their best when they feel valued, heard, and supported. It means leading not just with the head, but with the heart.

One of the most profound leadership lessons I have learned is this: Leadership is a two-way street—it thrives in an environment where both leaders and teams are equally invested in a shared vision. However, in today’s fast-paced world, the expectations from leadership are evolving, and so is the dynamic between organizations and individuals. A true test of leadership is not just about inspiring others but about fostering a culture where commitment, responsibility, and a sense of shared purpose are embraced by all. The future belongs to those who can bridge this gap—who can lead not just with vision but also with the ability to instill values that sustain both individual growth and collective success. In today’s world, we do come across individuals seeking the best from their workplaces without truly investing themselves in return. The real challenge for leaders is not just about inspiring teams but about navigating an environment where value systems are shifting, discipline is fading, and entitlement sometimes overshadows

contribution. The future of leadership, then, is not only about empowering others but also about cultivating a culture of accountability, shared responsibility, and meaningful engagement. The best leaders today lead with heart. They understand that in an era of AI, automation, and digital transformation, the greatest competitive advantage is still human connection.

### Collaboration Over Control: The Future of Leadership

The days of the lone superhero leader are over. Leadership is no longer about one person carrying the weight of success alone—it is about the ability to bring together a diverse group of minds, talents, and perspectives to co-create solutions that are richer, more dynamic, and more sustainable. The future belongs to those who recognize that leadership is not about individual greatness, but about collective brilliance.

True leadership is not measured by how much power one holds but by how much power one shares. It is about nurturing an ecosystem where every individual feels empowered to contribute, where people don't just follow a leader, but actively shape the vision alongside them.

Think of the Avengers (one of my favourite movies)—each hero has their own strengths, but none can win the battle alone. The same applies to leadership today. A leader who hoards decision-making, controls every aspect, and operates in isolation will quickly find themselves left behind in an era where innovation, adaptability, and teamwork define success. The most impactful leaders will be the ones who cultivate an environment of shared ownership, where leadership is distributed and every team member sees themselves as an integral part of the mission.

This shift from command and control to trust and collaboration is not just an idealistic philosophy—it is a practical necessity. Organizations that resist this change will struggle to attract and retain talent, stifle creativity, and ultimately lose relevance. The businesses that will thrive are the ones where leadership is fluid, diverse, and dynamic—where people are not just employees executing tasks, but stakeholders shaping the future.

When I speak with young leaders, I tell them this: Your power does not lie in what you know alone. It lies in your ability to foster trust, create spaces for dialogue, and bring people together in ways that unlock their full potential. True influence is not about control; it is about connection.

In an era of uncertainty, leaders who embrace collaboration will build resilient, forward thinking organizations that not only navigate disruption but turn it into an opportunity for reinvention and growth. Leadership today is not about standing alone at the top—it is about lifting others alongside you to create something bigger than any one individual. And that is the kind of leadership that lasts.

## The Road Ahead: Leadership That Lasts

So, where do we go from here? What does leadership in the age of disruption truly look like?

1. It is humble. It acknowledges that we don't have all the answers—but we are willing to listen and learn.
2. It is courageous. It steps into the unknown, embraces discomfort, and leads with integrity even when the path is uncertain.
3. It is deeply human. It prioritizes connection over control, empathy over ego, and collaboration over competition.
4. It is adaptable. It sees change not as a threat, but as an opportunity to evolve, innovate, and grow.
5. It empowers others. It understands that true leadership is not about being in the spotlight, but about illuminating the path for others to rise.

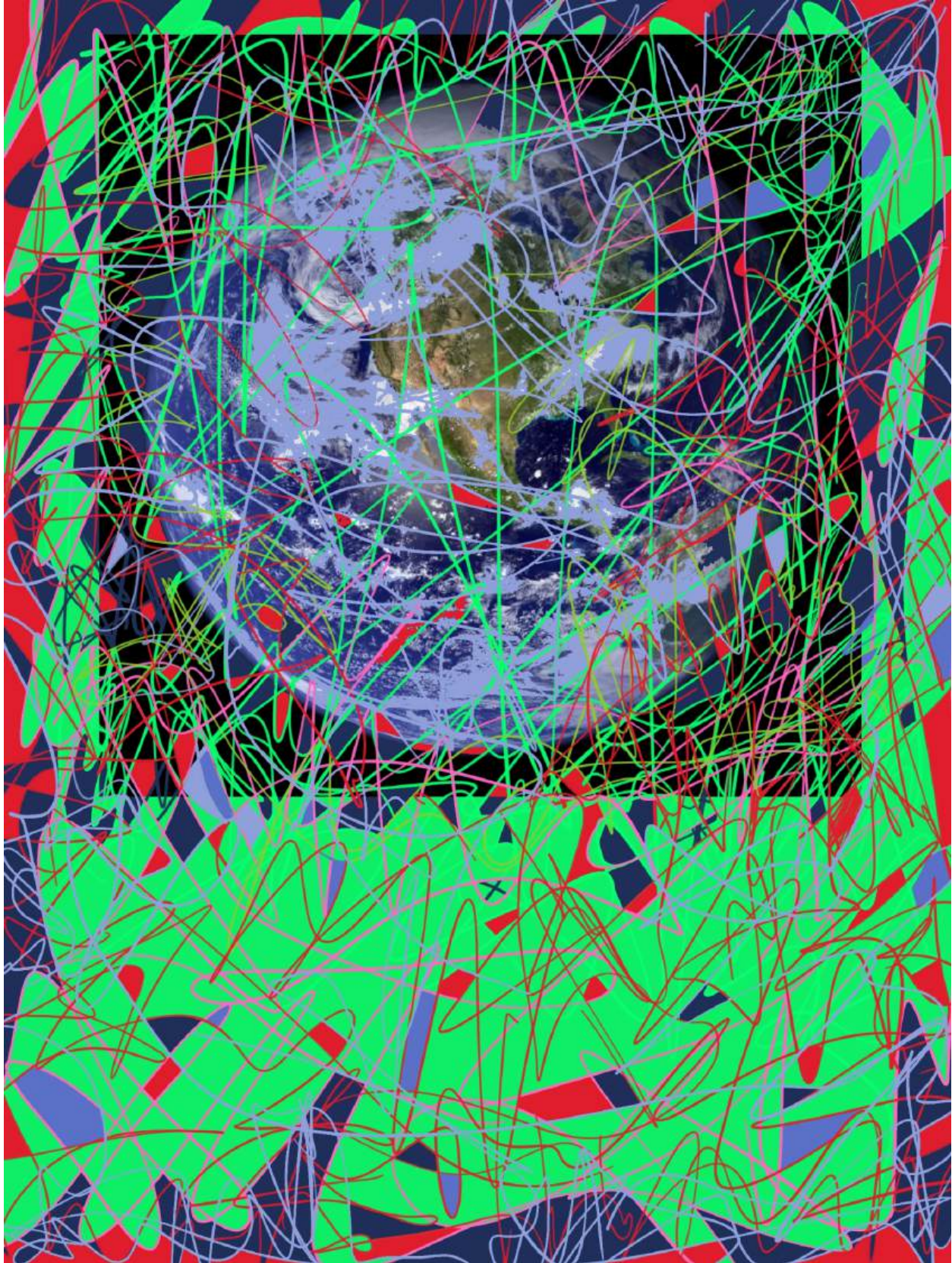
The age of disruption is not the end of leadership—it is its reinvention. It is our opportunity to redefine what it means to lead, to create cultures where everyone feels empowered, and to build organizations that are not just profitable, but purposeful.

And maybe—just maybe—that is how we don't just survive this era of change. That is how we thrive.



**Sanchita Gairola Mishra**

**Sanchita Gairola Mishra** is Co-Founder and Director of Vision360 Management Consulting and a sustainability, governance, and institutional transformation leader based in India. She also serves as National President of the Climate Action Council at WICCI, where she works across policy engagement, capacity building, and cross-sector alliances. Her work focuses on sustainability, governance, climate action, leadership, and entrepreneurship, with a strong emphasis on strategic collaboration and transformative institutional change.



## **Jan Peloza: Leadership Challenged: Living as Earth in an Age of Transformation**

When we speak about leadership today, we often do so as if the crisis were merely one of competence, style, or effectiveness. I have caught myself thinking this way too, especially in moments when results feel urgent. I believe the challenge is much deeper. Leadership is not only questioned because it fails to deliver results, but because it is increasingly misaligned with how life itself functions.

We are facing multiple, overlapping crises: ecological, social, economic, and existential. These challenges are not external disruptions; they are signals from systems that have exceeded their capacity to regenerate. Leadership, as traditionally understood, has been deeply entangled in this trajectory.

What if leadership is challenged not because leaders are inadequate, but because the underlying worldview no longer fits the reality we are living in?

### **From “on Earth” to “of Earth”**

We often talk about protecting the planet, as if Earth were fragile and separate from us. Yet Earth does not need protection in the paternalistic sense - it needs participation. A shift from acting *on* Earth to acting *as* Earth. This distinction matters profoundly for leadership.

If leaders see themselves as external managers of resources (human, natural, financial), then extraction becomes normalized. Growth is measured linearly, while success becomes increasingly decoupled from consequence. But if leaders understand themselves as expressions of the same living system they are shaping, then responsibility takes on a different meaning. Decisions are no longer neutral. Every intervention affects the whole.

Leadership, in this sense, becomes an act of alignment rather than control.

### **Beyond green growth: from extraction to regeneration**

Much of today’s leadership discourse revolves around “green growth,” sustainability, and efficiency. While necessary, these approaches often remain trapped in the same linear logic that created the problems they seek to solve.

Leadership challenged means asking a harder question: are our systems designed to regenerate life, or merely to slow down its depletion?

Regenerative leadership does not aim to minimize harm - it aims to create conditions for healing. This applies to ecosystems, communities, organizations, and individuals alike. It requires leaders to think systemically, to see interconnections instead of silos, and to accept that optimization of one part often weakens the whole.

This is uncomfortable work. In practice, it often means disappointing stakeholders, missing short-term targets, and letting go of simple metrics, heroic narratives, and the illusion of full control.

### **The emergence of new leadership from the margins**

Interestingly, some of the most advanced forms of leadership today are not emerging from established power centers, but from the margins - young people, social innovators, impact entrepreneurs.

They often do not articulate their work as leadership at all. They simply respond to problems as if the planet itself were sensing pain through them. Their initiatives resemble an immune response - localized, adaptive, creative, regenerative.

In my daily work within the Impact Hub Slovenia ecosystem, I witness this constantly. Ventures that restore local food systems, redesign materials for circular use, or rebuild trust in communities fractured by long-term neglect. These are not businesses operating *on* the planet - they function more like organs within a living body, contributing to its capacity to heal and adapt.

Here, leadership is distributed. Authority emerges from competence, trust, and contribution - not from position.

### **Power, compassion, and responsibility**

One of the most profound challenges for leadership today is the redistribution of power. Not as a political slogan, but as a structural reality. Complex systems cannot be governed through centralized control without collapsing under their own rigidity.

This demands a deep shift in mentality: from power over others to power with others. From decision-making concentrated at the top to participatory processes grounded in empathy, dialogue, and shared accountability.

Compassion becomes a leadership skill - not as softness, but as the disciplined capacity to perceive impacts across time, generations, and cultures. It allows leaders to integrate multiple perspectives and hold tensions without fragmentation.

Leadership, then, is no longer about having answers, but about creating spaces where collective intelligence can emerge.

### **Skills for transformation, not stability**

If leadership is challenged, so are the skills we value. The future does not belong to those best at maintaining stability, but to those capable of navigating transformation.

This includes systems thinking, regenerative mindset, collaborative entrepreneurship, courage to experiment, and impact literacy - the ability to understand, measure, and communicate change beyond financial indicators.

It also requires a deeper awareness of interconnectedness, echoing insights familiar from both systems science and physics: the observer matters, everything is connected, and multiple realities can coexist. Leadership decisions shape outcomes not only through action, but through attention.

### **From leadership to stewardship**

Perhaps the most important evolution ahead is the transition from leadership to stewardship.

Stewardship acknowledges that what we are shaping - organizations, economies, cultures - does not belong to us. We are temporary custodians within a much longer continuum. This perspective naturally extends responsibility beyond quarterly results to intergenerational and planetary impacts.

Stewardship-oriented leadership does not disappear. It transforms. It becomes quieter, more relational, more embedded in context. Its success is measured not by dominance or speed, but by resilience, coherence, and the capacity of systems to continue without constant intervention.

In this sense, leadership remains challenged - not because it is failing, but because life itself is asking more of us than our old models were designed to give.

And that, I believe, is an invitation worth accepting.



**Jan Peloza**

**Jan Peloza** is a Slovenian social entrepreneur, systems-change leader, and CEO of **Impact Hub Ljubljana**, where he supports innovators, entrepreneurs, and organisations working for social and environmental impact. With a background spanning social innovation, public health, advocacy, and capacity building, he has led and co-founded multiple national and international initiatives focused on sustainability, youth empowerment, and impact-driven transformation.

## **Chapter 2. Inner Evolution of Leadership (From ego-leadership to conscious presence)**

*This connects strongly with your emphasis on **inner development preceding systemic change**.*



## **Violeta Bulc: Re-imagining Leadership on the Road towards Ecocivilisation**

*“Civilisations do not collapse from lack of leadership, but from loss of coherence. Renewal begins when relationship replaces domination.” Ecocivilisation Movement, 2025*

### **The End of Leadership as We Knew It**

Leadership, as it has been practiced for centuries, is quietly dissolving. It appears that it no longer provides the solutions allowing people to *human well[1]*.

The familiar image of the strong, directive leader, decisive, predictive, commanding from above, is no longer sufficient for the world we inhabit. Not because such leadership was wrong, but because the conditions that shaped it no longer exist. We are no longer operating in stable systems that can be managed hierarchy, micro management, control, (linear) planning, and predictability. We are living inside emergence.

Ecocivilisation arises precisely at this threshold. It does not call for better leaders within old structures, but for a fundamentally different *quality of leadership*, one capable of holding complexity, uncertainty, and deep interdependence without collapsing into fear or domination. The one which is emerging at the top of the VUCA world[2], the world impacted greatly by Anthropocene era and the changing behaviour of nature.

Therefore, I feel leadership is no longer primarily a role, but a **quality of presence**. By acknowledging this deeply in my inner world, I suddenly felt so much closer to Nature[3] and the entire cosmic presence. For me, this shift marks a transition from leadership as authority to leadership as stewardship, from control to holding a coherence.

### **An Evolutionary Reframing of Leadership**

For much of modern history, leadership has been framed as hierarchical authority exercised from above: a top-down logic built around chain-of-command, hero figures, charisma, and control. This framing emerged from scarcity-based systems in which order was maintained through command, obedience, and concentration of power. It assumed that progress depended on exceptional individuals steering the collective, that direction must come from a few, and that decision-making should flow in one direction.

However, my rich life-experiences have thought me to look beyond the established lines and dominating walls, into the shadows of contemporary battels, allowing a different understanding to surface. One that reframes leadership not as leading people, but as holding *spaces of coherence*. In this view, guidance is less about commanding and more about *sensing*; less about directing outcomes and more about *maintaining alignment* between individuals, communities, spaces, and the living systems, including the planet Earth as a cosmic being.

Rather than rulers or figureheads, we become nodes in a living network, attuned to context, capable of integrating diverse perspectives, and skilled at aligning energies toward shared purpose without imposing our will. Influence becomes fluid, relational, and situational. Leadership does not disappear, but dissolves into the collective sphere, becoming almost invisible, but fully present. It follows the rhythms of system evolution revealing the behaviour of systems where all the elements are in a constant dynamic state, leadership included, readjusting to the conditions around and capacities within.[4]

### **Lessons from the Past**

For most of human history, leadership was wisdom evolved within tight social and ecological feedback loops. In small, close and strongly interdependent communities, wisdom, care, competence and behaviours were immediately visible. Leaders who abused power were quickly corrected or removed, because trust and reputation were matters of survival[5].

The drift began gradually and at one point accelerated into a dominance. *Agriculture* enabled the accumulation of resources, introducing asymmetries of power. Population growth transformed communities into cities, abstracting authority into roles, titles, and institutions, and weakening direct individual accountability. Empires and standing armies rewarded domination and expansion rather than care and cohesion. Industrial and capitalist systems later amplified short-term gain, competition, and extraction, normalising leadership that prioritised accumulation over service. Female energies of wisdom, care and natural whispers have been pushed aside as a sign of weakness, and later, at least in Europe, badly punished with prosecution and death[6]. Women were removed from the decision-making table. Even in some positive examples, participation at the core is possible only when male logic and behaviour is accepted and demonstrated. Such societal behaviour caused imbalances on every level of our existence, decreasing the capacity of humanity for addressing the challenges by and to only 49% of entire population.

*Industrialisation* has deepened the gap even further, strengthening the hierarchical, masculinity type of structures and behaviours. For the industrial model based on competition and elimination to work, people needed to be first alienated from the processes of Nature. Workers were moved to special neighbourhoods where they lived similarly exploited lives, trapped in 10, 12 hour working schedules without real rights and time to relax and reflect. The next step that followed to be able to control people further was an alienation of people from each other. That was music to the ears of consumerism and further focus on *what I have* relationship with life which paved the way for a digitalised world which alienated people further from themselves, living the world of imaginary avatars and computer logic.

Yet, these cold, logical, and rigid structures are being challenged by the same values and behaviours once denied the value and importance: emotions, care, quality of relationships. We are beings of nature, and this inner call is awakening, allowing people to remember, and to connect again on the frequency of authentic-self and inner purpose. What it dawned on me

during the year of intensive discussions about mental health was that every civilisational shift passes through the field of individual and collective emotions[7]. Confusion, grief, fear, hope, anger, excitement. These are not side effects of change, as often presented in public discussions, but *the medium through which change moves*[8].

Along those lines, I had an interesting discussion with one of my friends who is close observer of this ever-changing world. Without wanting to be mentioned, since the insights came from the collective wisdom of many, he shared with me an important message for the future of leadership: “We are returning back to silence”, because it is opening us to a shared point in which we are sensing the wisdom of the past in the acknowledgement of the future for the life today. In such a realm even freedom is a conscious decision. Within such wisdoms a new leadership is emerging.

This is why leadership in the Ecocivilisation context requires more than skills or strategies. It requires a *heart-set*, a connection between our hearts and minds in a balance with our souls. Such coherence cannot be delivered within hierarchical frameworks. It seeks more decoupled, airy, network-like structures.

### **Networks Matter**

Network-based societies with distributed communities and decomposed power offer a way to restore what was lost. By organising around semi-autonomous, interconnected units, they reintroduce visible feedback loops and limit the concentration of power.

Like ecosystems, such systems scale horizontally through cooperation rather than vertically through domination. Diversity becomes a source of resilience rather than a problem to be managed. I have learnt and fully grasped these concepts when studying computer science and telecommunication, followed by my first job as digital networks performance analyst. I saw the new world emerging, the shift from line switching to packet switching telecommunications, based on network logic, decomposing the hierarchical structures with distributed, self-organising imbedded capacities. Being part of the first internet-based generation[9] largely impacted my view on organisations and consequently leadership as well.

The magic of the internet logic that a failure in one node does not collapse the whole network but the network instead re-ruts itself, allowing the damaged or destroyed node to recover and come back when ready again, continues to be my inspiration for self-organised communities and organisations. At the same time the learning and adaptation, spreading organically across the network, offers a polygon for endless innovation and search for a greater balance of human-made systems.

### **The Emergence of Holders of Coherence**

In network-based environments, it is easy to imagine how authority gives way to stewardship. Certain participants naturally take on the role of coherence-holders, people who sense

misalignment, facilitate dialogue, and maintain relational balance across the system. Their task is not to decide for others, but to cross-pollinate and help the collective to sense its own direction.

Decision-making becomes a living process grounded in relationships. Conflict and difference are no longer treated as threats, but as signals carrying information about what the system needs to integrate next. Structures remain fluid and dynamic, evolving as conditions change rather than solidifying into permanent hierarchies.

Accountability emerges through transparency and mutual responsibility, not top-down enforcement. Knowledge and wisdom circulate openly as shared commons, supporting distributed intelligence rather than dependency on gatekeepers, yet, not losing the relationship with the source, which is especially important for the new conditions set by the AI apps.

In transitional periods, people who operate as holders of coherence are frequently marginalised or pushed out of formal structures. This is not a personal failure, but a predictable response of systems whose stability depends on hierarchy and control. I kept experiencing this personally repeatedly in almost every job I had. For a long time, I thought that there was something wrong with me, that I could not adjust properly. And at the end I realised that I just was not a right fit. Legacy institutions reward obedience, predictability, and problem-solving that does not question underlying assumptions. No matter how successful in delivering beneficiary results I was, along with teams that I had a privilege to steward, I was hearing in between the lines that, since nobody can control me, I am not fit to do the jobs within the system. Now I understand that I was a coherence-holder, working across boundaries and authority fences, bringing together people that were needed to address the recognised challenges in the best possible way, and cross-pollinating along the way. I know now, that by sensing misalignment between purpose, structure, and lived reality, I implicitly revealed truths the system could not absorb.

I can still see such familiar pattern of hierarchical, dominating leadership everywhere: ideas are praised but not implemented, access to decision-making quietly closed, the individual labelled as naive, difficult, or impractical. These behaviours are organisational immune responses, protecting existing power dynamics from deeper transformation.

Over time, repeated rejection leads to exhaustion. This fatigue is not a weakness but a signal. It indicates that the individual has outgrown the containers available to them. The evolutionary move is often not to push harder, but to withdraw energy from closed structures and redirect it toward nurturing new, parallel spaces where coherence is not punished but required and appreciated. What I also know now is that coherence-holders rarely thrive at the centre of collapsing systems. Their role is preparatory rather than managerial: seeding alternative patterns, holding memory of alignment, and creating conditions for emergence once old structures lose legitimacy. I feel lucky to be able to make such a move and continue sensing and creating the new reality. I recognise myself in this coherence-holder role. Finally[10]!

## **Balancing Feminine and Masculine Energies**

As I have already indicated earlier, a post-leadership paradigm cannot fully emerge without restoring balance between feminine and masculine energies in how societies sense, decide, and act. This is not about gender roles or representation alone, but about integrating complementary modes of intelligence[11] that have been historically separated and hierarchically distorted in the dominance of agricultural or industrial societies.

The return of the balanced of male and female principles to decision-making, creates space for life affirming, coherence holding qualities to come forward in a form of relational intelligence, intuition, contextual awareness, and the capacity to hold complexity without forcing premature closure. Balanced governance does not replace one energy with another. It integrates both. Masculine energy provides direction and the ability to act, while feminine energy provides coherence, meaning, and care. Without this integration, systems either stagnate or self-destruct. When in such a flow they are unable to deliver needed solutions for resilience and sustainability that are desperately needed for a quality response to evolving global conditions like climate change, natural disasters, pandemic outbursts, or demonstration of aggressiveness.

At its heart, this shift towards higher level of coherence, asks a simple but radical question: *How can we human better?* The answer lies not in more sophisticated control, but in leadership as humanity in action, men and women jointly sensing direction, sharing responsibility, and continuously reinventing themselves in service of life. Lies in our capacity to hold the balance with the laws of nature and the cosmic wisdom[12].

### **Ecocivilisation as a Relational Paradigm**

The Ecocivilisation movement arises as an intuitive response to the early twenty-first century condition: growing detachment of humans from nature, from one another, and from themselves. It honours the call for disintegration of the old and regeneration of the new, in service of awakened awareness and evolving consciousness[13].

Inspired by the quantum world, cellular intelligence, the known and hidden forces of the universe, and nature's extraordinary ecosystem architectures, Ecocivilisation proposes a civilisational model built on relationships rather than domination. It functions as an umbrella for diverse initiatives, communities, and networks seeking collaborative, regenerative ways of living and governing.

Rather than enforcing uniformity, it supports calibrated action, many aligned efforts, locally grounded and globally connected[14]. Its aim is not only to prevent collapse, but to enable humanity and planet to thrive together, holding space for the emergence of new tools, organisational structures, holistic understandings, and deep listening.

I have launched the Ecocivilisation Movement with a clear mission in mind:

- firstly, to create Planet Earth as an eco-zone of the Universe with its rich biodiversity at its core

- secondly, to populate the Universe by using technology, curiosity, and greatness to drive it.
- To engage in discovery of laws of physics and hidden connections that could explain the nature of relationships, what drives them, inspires them and what are the properties of the space in between

As the movement evolved, the first new understandings started to emerge, and the collective wisdoms started to prevail.

We see now the main driver of change in the strength of relationships. Consequently, we see re-invention of organizational design as the key enabler of new civilisation. As a result, we seek structures based on network logic, a nurturing a society that values quality relationships as the essence of value-creation. The concept of competition retreats and gives way to endless collaboration, where the only principle is that collaboration never ends[15].

Every being, society, space, consciousness, or relationship has a unique path of evolutionary development, its own behaviour, purpose, and its own dreams. They are all deeply interconnected through interdependence, content, properties and projects.

We no longer focus on tools, as in the past, where economy, security, education, art, science, and similar were the focus. In the past we worried about GDP instead of well-being, we worried about the value of our currencies instead of people, we developed economic systems instead of societies.

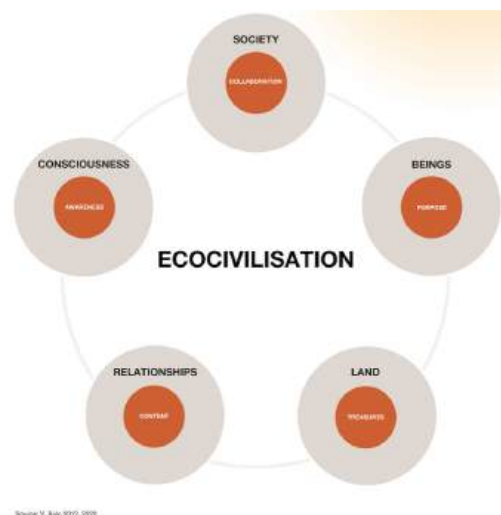
Ecocivilisation uses functions as tools, as properties of relationships that are focused on the evolution of the basic entities: beings, land, society, consciousness. So, functions become dynamic structures, re-adjusting to the needs of those entities.

Consequently, and as a proof that we can imagine organizational structures differently, Ecocivilisation places in the foundation *five pillars*, guiding the cultivation of a world in harmony with life:

1. *Beings* – Honouring human and non-human life, nurturing awareness, well-being, and growth by focusing on all six dimensions of being and evolving them in spiral balanced way, i.e., physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social and the energy one.
2. *Communities* – Creating networks of trust, care, and collaboration that transcend borders and hierarchies and are based on collective awareness, understandings and experiences while integrating in a transparent way individual uniqueness and creativity.
3. *Spaces* – Designing regenerative environments, cities, and economies aligned with natural systems.

4. *Consciousness* – Expanding awareness, intuition, and systemic thinking to guide our collective choices based on cross-civilisational integration of wisdom and practices, cross-cultural and cross-generational integration of experiences and world views.
5. *Relationships* – Cultivating empathy, mutual responsibility, and coherence in every interaction and within various processes like science, education, value creation, etc., always serving to a harmonious, holistic evolution of the other 4 pillars.

These pillars are deeply interconnected, forming the architecture of a civilization rooted in life, not in extraction, or control, or short-term gain. I feel that the emerging stewardship type of leadership could flourish within such structures. They hold space for a planet, people, relationship, wisdom focus, serving the coherent evolution within which the imbedded, dynamic relationships keep the balance of life in tacked.



### A Viable Next Step

I have a dream where, Ecocivilisation is not merely aspirational, it is a practical and necessary response to the converging crises and opportunities of our time. Unlike collapse or transhumanist futures, it is rooted in biological, social, and ethical realities. It acknowledges that humans are part of a larger web of life, and that our survival and thriving depend on our ability to nurture, regenerate, and collaborate.

It offers a path forward that is coherent with both natural laws and human potential, integrating ancient wisdom, modern science, and emergent technologies. It provides a framework for resilient communities, regenerative and circular economies, acknowledging the Earth's boundaries, and conscious governance. And it recognizes that the evolution of humanity is inseparable from the evolution of relationships, with oneself, with each other, with the Earth, and with the cosmos. To walk this path, we are invited to re-imagine the leadership within, in peaceful spaces in nature, in the silence of our own spirit, reconnecting across generations and civilisations.

To become worthy ancestors requires courage to let outdated structures dissolve, to learn humility from nature and each other, and to commit to place the quality of relationships at the centre of thinking, feeling, imagining, and doing.

The call is not abstract. It is embodied, relational, and alive. The drums are already calling. The question is not whether change is coming, but how consciously we choose to engage.

Dr.hc. Violeta Bulc, MSc in Information Systems, Bc in Computer Engineering and Information Systems; Founder and one of the Curators of the [Ecocivilisation Movement](#)

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[1] the term introduced to me first by Alexander Laszlo

[2] the word **VUCA** is an acronym for **Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity**, a term that describes the unpredictable and turbulent nature of the modern world

[3] It is worth mentioning at this point that the Nature is my great teacher but also a field of frustration, because I simply can not understand where her capacity to keep the planet in balance, even after great disasters, is coming from. With this shift in perception I feel something much bigger is there waiting to be understood and experienced

[4] More about the system evolution you can read here:

<https://www.ecocivilisation.earth/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/e-BULC-Rhythms-of-Business-Revolution-min.pdf>

[5] The stories of the early authentic community structures from the territory of Slovenia and surrounding areas, whose history goes back 60.000 years, are telling us about the community decision-makings where all families had the right to sit in the community decision-making circle. All the leaders had to be approved of people in direct confrontation and give up its belongings for the time of leading the community.

[6] It is believed that more than 8 million women were killed during the witchcraft prosecutions to enforce the dominance of church and manhood

[7] A series of sessions as part of Year of Mental Health 2025 organised and delivered by the Ecocivilisation Movement [www.ecocivilisation.earth](http://www.ecocivilisation.earth)

[8] Discussed by: **Ilya Prigogine** in Dissipative Structures; **Brené Brown** in Emotions as Portals; **Otto Scharmer** in Theory U and many more

[9] Internet technology is based on TCP/IP protocol designed by DARPA as a security protocol in the case of a nuclear war, so one part of a country would not jeopardise communication capacities of the whole (as it was the case with the old telecom infrastructure). This logic can be transpositioned to a societal structures as well.

[10] [Leadwrsnip within](#)

[11] Humans have an enormous capacity of creativity which is fed by multi-dimensional intelligence within: physical, emotional, mindful, spiritual, societal, cosmic and quantum intelligence, all intertwined in our inner realm of decisions and creative inspirations.

[12] [Density of consciousness](#)

[14] »Engage Globally, Act Locally«

[15] [Finite and Unfinite Games](#), A vision of Life as Play and Possibilities



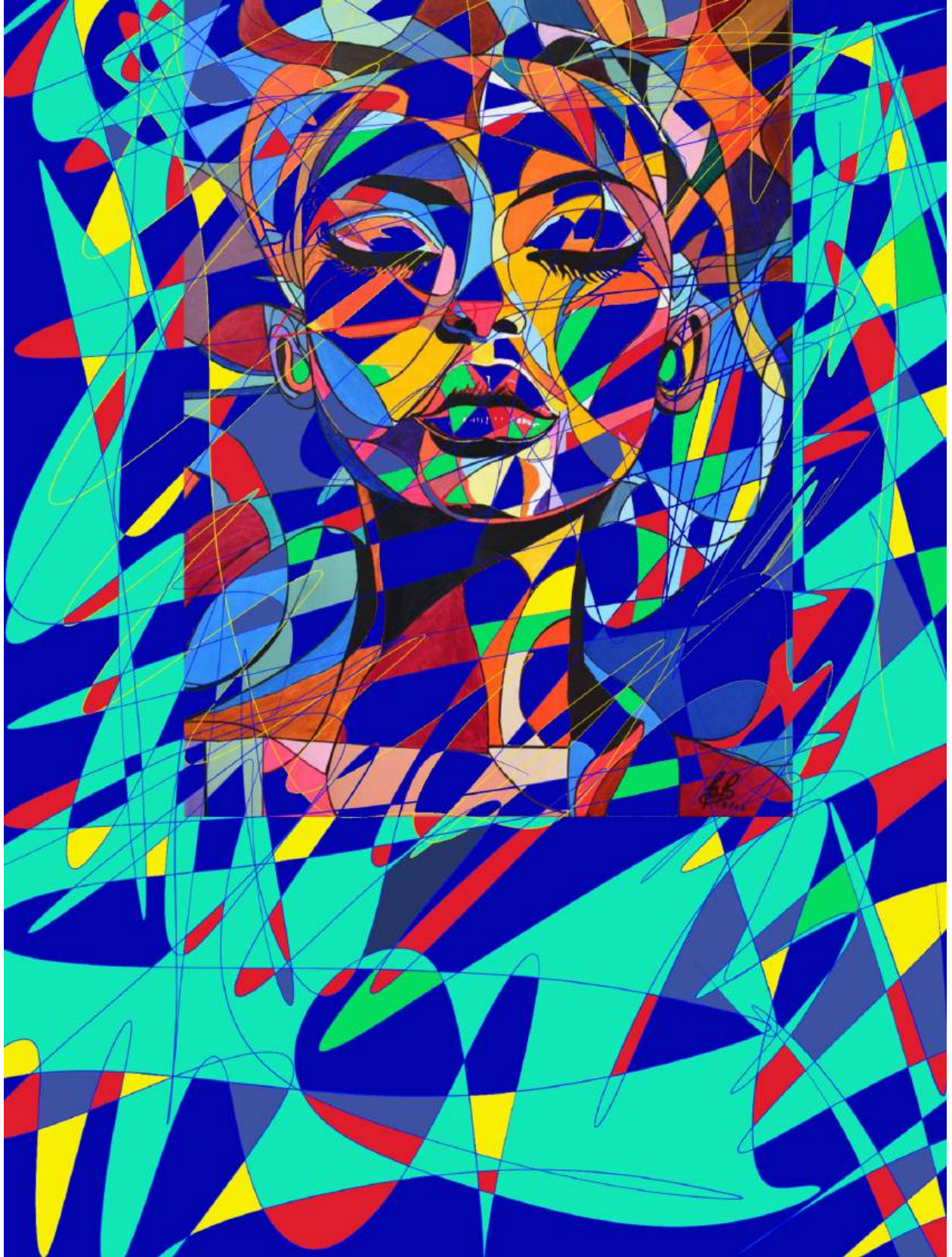
**Dr. h.c. Violeta Bulc** is a visionary thinker and systems observer who deeply contemplates the interconnectedness of all things and maintains a profound awareness of humanity's evolutionary shifts. She approaches the world with curiosity and sensitivity, balancing scientific reasoning with intuitive insight.

She is the founder and curator of the global Ecocivilisation movement, currently active in 52 countries, connecting people who care and who are committed to harmonizing humanity's relationship with Nature, communities, with each other, and with oneself.

Dr. Bulc is a former European Commissioner for Transport and Deputy Prime Minister of Slovenia, an entrepreneur, leader and innovator, an engineer, lecturer, established international speaker, and a philanthropist. She is also a former professional basketball player, Slovenian champion in javelin, and holds black belts in Tae Kwon Do and Hap Ki Do. She has also successfully completed a Shamanic Academy.

She is the author and co-author of several professional books and book chapters, publications, and articles, she is a member of professional and business boards and is a respected international speaker. She holds several domestic and international awards for innovation, leadership, professional partnerships, among others International Women Leadership Award (2025), European Railway Award (2023), Honourary FIA award (2020), 2 FENIKS awards for best national consulting projects and many national rewards for business and social innovation.

She approaches life with **curiosity and sensitivity**, balancing scientific reasoning with intuitive insights. Quantum physics and nature inspire her perspective, reinforcing her belief in the **power of thought, collective consciousness, and the observer's effect** in shaping reality. She is **committed to learning, cross-pollination of ideas, and fostering meaningful dialogue to co-create new understandings.**



## **Andreja Kodrin: Leadership Beyond the Mask: Why Inner Work Is the Hardest Work**

### **Abstract**

This article examines how leaders can reinvent themselves for a world defined by permanent turbulence. Drawing on two Ecocivilisation dialogues from 2025 – *Leadership in the Age of Disruption – End, Transformation, or Something Else?* (March 12, 2025, featuring Prof. Dr. Miha Škerlavaj, Laure Blanchard-Brunac, Mitja Jermol, Nataša Heror, Natalija Petrović and Dr. Demchenko, curated by Dr. Kodrin with Sanchita Gairola as key listener), and *What Defines New Leadership?* (September 3, 2025, with panelists Sonja Klopčič, Edith Doosje, Nate Regier, Dr. Marina Demchenko, Sanchita Gairola and moderated by Dr. Andreja Kodrin, with opening and closing remarks by Dr. Violeta Bulc) and integrating Quintaum’s comprehensive 2025 diagnostics of thousands of employees and managers, it outlines key challenges facing leaders today. The analysis considers which habits must be unlearned, which qualities should endure, and how future generations might view our leadership debates. It then proposes a systems-oriented, people-centric paradigm of stewardship that transcends heroic leadership.

### **Keywords**

Leadership Transformation, Systemic Disruption, Inner Leadership, Organizational Resilience, Human-Centered Leadership

### **A Personal Reflection on Leadership**

In 2025, I felt as if the world had turned upside down, inside out—more than once. Every month brought a new disruption and a pace of change that outstripped every previous playbook. Even seasoned leaders found themselves navigating unfamiliar terrain, where certainty dissolved overnight and resilience became a daily discipline.

For me, this was not a story of exhaustion as much as it was a story of disruption demanding a different kind of leadership. I realized I could no longer rely on the strengths that had served me for decades. The paradox that emerged again and again was this: the most disruptive thing a leader can do today is slow down, turn inward, and transform themselves.

This article brings together insights from two Ecocivilisation panels I introduced that year—“Leadership in the Age of Disruption” (March 12) and “What Defines New Leadership?” (September 3). Across both conversations, one message echoed unmistakably: no amount of organizational innovation will matter if leaders neglect the inner innovation of mindset, presence, and emotional maturity.

### **Leadership in the Age of Disruption (March 2025 Panel Insights)**

In March 2025, a panel convened under the provocative title “*Leadership in the Age of Disruption – End, Transformation, or Something Else?*” This conversation confronted whether

traditional leadership was on its deathbed. The panelists – ranging from a business school professor to a tech innovator, a civil society leader, a communications expert, and a young activist – ultimately concluded that **leadership is not ending; it is evolving**. But the evolution they described demands significant shifts in mindset.

**Post-heroic leadership.** Prof. Miha Škerlavaj, an organizational behavior expert, argued that the era of the lone hero CEO is over. “*Leadership is not disappearing – it is **decentralizing**. The best leaders create conditions where leadership emerges everywhere, not only at the top,*” Miha explained. His point was clear: in a disrupted world, no single leader can possibly have all the answers or respond fast enough. Instead, **leadership must be distributed**. Miha gave examples of companies where frontline employees are empowered to make decisions and solve problems without waiting for higher-ups – these organizations adapt faster to change. The new leader’s job is thus to **cultivate other leaders** at all levels, acting more as a gardener of talent and culture than a heroic problem-solver. Hearing this, I reflected on how much ego a leader must shed to truly embrace a post-heroic model. It means celebrating others, taking charge and being comfortable, **not** being the smartest person in the room. That is inner work! The panel agreed: *unlearning the “hero reflex”* is one of the hardest but most crucial transformations for modern leaders.

**Leading through uncertainty.** Laure Blanchard-Brunac spoke from her experience in strategy and policy, warning that in times of disruption, **clinging to certainty is a failing strategy**. “*Leadership fails when it clings to certainty. We need leaders who make courageous decisions while still holding space for complexity,*” Laure said. This captured a delicate balance: leaders must act decisively, yet they must remain open to latest information and adaptable if conditions change. In practice, this might look like a CEO who lays out a bold strategy, but explicitly acknowledges the assumptions and unknowns, and invites colleagues to critique and adjust the plan in real-time. Laure’s point about “*holding space for complexity*” is essentially about **emotional resilience and humility**. It takes inner strength to say, “I’m not 100% sure” or “this might not work, but here’s our best bet and we’ll learn as we go.” The panel noted that employees actually gain trust in leaders who display this honesty, rather than false bravado. In a disrupted era, *certainty* can be a trap – what is needed is **courage plus flexibility**.

**Technology and evolution, not replacement.** Given the buzz about AI potentially taking over jobs, Mitja Jermol offered a refreshing perspective: “*AI will not replace leaders. It will replace leaders who refuse to evolve.*” Mitja’s work with AI in education has shown him that technology is a tool to *augment* leadership, not a substitute for human touch. But his deeper message was about adaptability: only the leaders stuck in old ways need fear being left behind. Those willing to **learn and evolve** can harness new tools to become more effective. Mitja’s one-liner underscored that *the mindset of continual learning* is now a non-negotiable leadership trait. Adaptability is not just about processes; it is about the leader’s own willingness to grow. In essence, **leaders must unlearn the comfort of the status quo** and embrace the mindset of a student, perpetually curious and open to change.

### **Community, Co-Creation, and Emergent Leadership Patterns**

The panel highlighted a new form of leadership emerging from grassroots action, not just boardrooms. This was powerfully illustrated in the student-led anti-corruption protests in Serbia, where young people organized themselves into sustained, peaceful civil actions that drew

nationwide participation and international media attention. The movement began after the tragic collapse of a Novi Sad railway station canopy in late 2024 and, by early 2025, had spread to hundreds of towns with blockades, marches, and symbolic pauses in traffic that *paused entire cities* in collective reflection and protest. **Nataša Heror** stressed that legitimacy today does not come from title or hierarchy but from one's willingness to listen, engage, and empower communities. This echoed a pattern seen in the protests themselves: decisions were often made collectively through plenaries and assemblies, and actions were coordinated horizontally rather than directed from a single leader.

**Natalija Petrović**, sharing her first-hand experience with the Blockade movement, described “*Young people are no longer waiting for leaders to change the world. We are already doing it – and we want leaders who walk with us, not ahead of us.*” Their leadership was about enabling agency in others, not issuing directives from above. *The Guardian* observed that Serbia's students “have joined a global Gen-Z front of defiance,” and that their refusal to remain silent was reshaping public engagement and civic responsibility in the country's political life. In essence, the Serbian student protests offer a live case of leadership through co-creation and community engagement — one that challenges organizations and leaders everywhere to consider whether they are crafting spaces that *enable others to lead*, or simply expecting leadership to come from the top down.

By the end of the March panel, a clear picture emerged. **Leadership is not dying; it is disrupting** – breaking out of the old mold and transforming into something more collective, transparent, and empathetic. Each insight from these leaders pointed back to inner qualities: humility to decentralize power, courage to act amid uncertainty, curiosity to embrace tech and change, and sincerity to engage deeply with others.

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### What Defines New Leadership? (September 2025 Panel Insights)

Six months later, another panel – titled “*What Defines New Leadership?*” – confronted a question at the heart of the 2025 leadership crisis: *What must leaders become when old styles fail?* Four panelists from diverse backgrounds shared remarkably convergent answers.

**Presence over pretending.** The first theme was authenticity, or as **Sonja Klopčič** put it, shedding the *mask of invulnerability*. “*The old leadership quality that expired is the belief that leaders must always be strong. Today, the most powerful act is to stay present – even when vulnerable,*” Sonja noted. Her statement landed like a challenge to every executive in the room. We had all been taught to project confidence at all costs, but Sonja exposed the price of that facade. When leaders pretend everything is fine, problems stay hidden. Several panelists agreed that genuine **presence** – showing up with one's whole, imperfect self – is far more powerful than a polished charade. New leadership, they argued, starts with dropping the mask and facing reality with humility.

**Compassion with backbone.** If the old model was tough-as-nails leadership, the new model balances empathy with accountability. **Edith Doosje** highlighted a misconception: “*Compassion is not softness. Compassion with accountability is the most advanced leadership skill of our*

*time.*” This resonated strongly. Edith and Nate emphasized that caring about people – listening to their struggles, supporting their growth – actually **drives performance** when paired with clear expectations. In practice, that means a leader might flex deadlines when a team member is in crisis but still hold them responsible for quality work. Emotional intelligence, once dismissed as “fluff,” emerged in our discussion as a strategic asset. Several panelists shared personal stories of how **leading with love and truth together** turned around a struggling project or healed a fractured team. The consensus: in new leadership, *kindness and accountability go hand in hand*, and neither can thrive without the other.

**Systems awareness.** Our conversation also tackled the complexity of today’s world. **Dr. Marina Demchenko** urged leaders to expand their view beyond quarterly reports. *“Leadership today means taking responsibility at the intersection of human well-being, ecological reality, and technology. Anything less is incomplete leadership,”* she observed. This was a wake-up call: a leader who ignores the broader system – whether it’s the mental health of employees, the community impact of a policy, or the carbon footprint of operations – is not truly leading, no matter how good their P&L looks. Marina’s point about integration struck a chord with me. It is daunting to realize you must care about *everything* (people, planet, profit, tech) all at once. But that is the new reality. The panel agreed that effective leaders now need to be **systems thinkers**, comfortable holding complexity. This means unlearning the old habit of siloed thinking – where the CFO minds the finances, HR minds the people, etc. – and instead seeing connections everywhere. A decision in R&D might affect employee morale; a policy in marketing might have ecological consequences. New leadership requires seeing those webs of impact clearly.

**Deep listening.** The simplest yet most profound insight came from **Sanchita Gairola**. Sanchita remarked that *“the most profound shift today is not what leaders decide, but how deeply they listen before deciding.”* In a time of noise and haste, this hit home. How many times have we, on stage, rushed to a decision fueled by ego or anxiety, rather than taking time to listen – to customers, to employees, to that quiet inner voice of intuition? Sanchita’s reflection underscored a pattern: *New leadership is less about big decisions and more about creating space for big understanding.* A leader’s listening skills – the ability to pause, ask, absorb, and reflect – may actually be the determining factor in whether their decisions succeed. This idea connected back to the inner work theme: listening requires patience and presence, qualities cultivated on the inside. It is hard to genuinely listen when you are impatient, distracted, or secretly convinced you already know the answer.

In summary, the September panel painted a picture of “new leadership” defined by **inner qualities and relational skills**: authenticity over image, empathy with accountability, holistic awareness, and deep listening. None of these start with an MBA textbook – they start within the leader’s own character and mindset. As I noted, it was ironic and refreshing that a discussion on “leadership” revolved not around market share or innovation pipelines, but around **humanity**. In an age of high-tech disruption, it seems we were rediscovering some very ancient wisdom about leading from the heart.

### **Unlearning the Old, Preserving the Timeless**

Hearing both panels, I sensed a dual mandate for today’s leaders: **unlearn the habits that no longer serve and preserve (or rediscover) the qualities that must endure.** In other words,

transformation does not mean tossing out everything. It means being discerning about what to shed and what to keep. Here are some takeaways that crystallized from the dialogues:

- **Unlearn the Lone Hero:** The notion that a leader must be the infallible hero or the smartest person in the room is obsolete. Complex challenges demand **collective intelligence**. Leaders should swap pride for curiosity – as Sanchita quipped, “*leaders must unlearn faster than they learn,*” putting ego aside to tap their team’s wisdom. This also means unlearning the reflex to **micromanage**. In fast-changing environments, hovering and controlling every decision simply does not scale. It is far better to **empower capable people** and trust them to lead in their areas.
- **Unlearn Perfectionism:** The panels urged leaders to drop the mask of perfection and invincibility. Admitting uncertainty or fatigue is not a weakness; it is a gateway to trust. Edith’s insight about compassion with accountability exemplifies this – you can be **vulnerable and firm at the same time**. By unlearning the idea that “leader = always confident, never wrong,” we make space for authenticity. And when leaders model authenticity, it gives everyone permission to be honest, which is the foundation for real solutions.
- **Unlearn Linear Thinking:** Siloed, short-term thinking has to go. Challenges like climate change, digital disruption, and mental health crises are **systemic**; a leader must connect the dots across domains. Dr. Demchenko’s call to integrate human, ecological, and technological perspectives is a call to abandon the blinders of narrow expertise. In practical terms, this might mean unlearning the habit of solving problems in isolation (“fixing” one department or KPI) and instead looking at ripple effects and root causes across the entire system.

At the same time, certain core elements of leadership remain vital – perhaps more than ever:

- **Preserve Vision, Purpose, and Values:** Leaders still need to articulate a clear “*why*” for their people. What’s changing is *how* vision is defined and shared. It should be co-created and continually refreshed with input from others, rather than handed down as a static decree. A sense of purpose fuels resilience, and the values bond us.
- **Preserve Trust and Integrity:** In any era, a leader’s credibility hinges on trust. The panels echoed that **living your values and being transparent** are non-negotiable. If anything, today’s climate of misinformation makes integrity even more critical. Trust is the currency that buys you your team’s engagement and creativity. No fancy vision will matter if people do not trust the person speaking it.
- **Preserve Empathy and Connection:** Finally, the very human act of caring about your people can never go out of style. As Dr. Violeta Bulc reminded us through the Ubuntu philosophy “*I am because we are,*” leadership is fundamentally about relationships and community. Empathy – listening, understanding, seeing your team as human beings – is not a soft bonus skill; it is a strategic necessity for cohesive, motivated organizations.

In short, new leadership calls for a kind of **mindset reset**: unlearning ego-driven practices and doubling down on timeless principles of purpose, trust, and care. It is less of a revolution and more of a homecoming to what leadership should have been all along.

### **Conclusion: Data, Diagnostics, and the Hardest Work Ahead**

After all the insightful words from our panelists, one might ask: *Is this just talk, or is something really changing?* To answer that, we turned to data – a mirror held up to our organizations. In 2025, our team at Quintaum conducted comprehensive diagnostics on organizational health, spanning **36 countries** and over **17,800 respondents**. The results were a punch in the gut, even for those of us who expected bad news. They showed that while leaders often speak about lofty ideals – *presence, courage, systemic insight, humility, co-creation* – many organizations are **quietly struggling** with the opposite: disguised burnout, misalignment, exhausted managers, fragile communication, disappearing trust. In one finding, **58% of managers** were at high risk of burnout, only **33% of employees** felt their company was agile enough to adapt to change, **50-60% of sick leave is due to stress, one in three employees is considering quitting**, and employees struggle with regeneration. Microsoft’s Work Trend Index<sup>1</sup> revealed that 80% of the global workforce said they lacked the time or energy to meet their job demands, and employees were being interrupted on average every two minutes.

Despite alarming signals, we noticed the “*Everything is OK*” mask everywhere – polite cultures where people smile and say “*we’re managing*,” even as their **resilience leaks away like a slow puncture**. Our data confirmed what the panels posited: the cracks are there, if only we have the courage to see them.

This is why inner work is the hardest work – because it requires leaders to take off their own blinders and confront uncomfortable truths. It is far easier to chase the next client or deploy a new software tool than to ask your team, “How are you *really* doing?” and sit with the answer. But the evidence is undeniable: when leaders skip the inner work, the **cost is immense** – in disengagement, lost innovation, and human toll. Conversely, when leaders do inner work – practicing self-awareness, empathy, active listening – the entire system benefits. They become what Violeta Bulc calls “*custodians, not commanders*,” guiding possibilities rather than just people. Such leaders use data and intuition together as a radar to detect problems early, and they rally their teams around meaningful solutions.

As I reflect on these lessons, I imagine a future scenario. What if, 15 years from now, a new generation of leaders were to overhear our 2025 debates about vulnerability, compassion, and systemic change? Perhaps they would applaud us for finally dropping the macho pretenses and planting the seeds of stewardship and collective leadership. Or maybe they’d scratch their heads and ask, “Why did it take you so long to see the obvious?” – the obvious being that true leadership is about *honoring the whole system and the whole person*, something that should be common sense. The answer to that question depends on what we do *now*.

From the personal reflections of a panel host who finally embraced vulnerability, to the voices of experts and young changemakers, the message is consistent: *inner transformation is the key to*

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<sup>1</sup> Microsoft. (2025). *2025 Work Trend Index Annual Report: The Frontier Firm Is Born*. Retrieved from Microsoft Work Trend Index website.

*outer transformation*. Future generations are listening, and they will judge us not by how eloquently we talked about new leadership, but by how bravely we *embodied* it. Let us make sure we give them something good to say.

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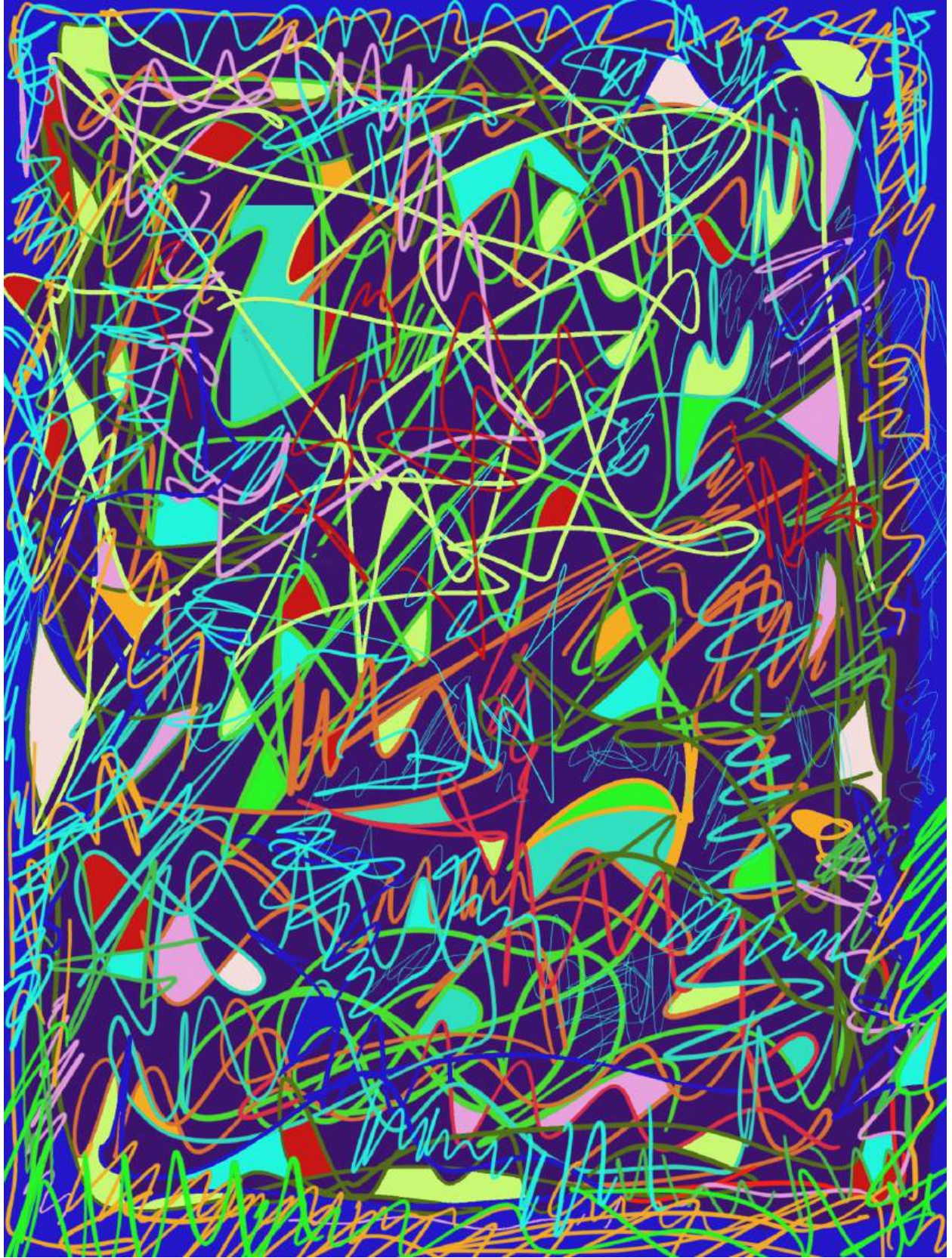
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**Andreja Kodrin**

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## Manica Čelofiga: Intuitive Leadership: Time to Step Up and Tune In in the AI Era

### Abstract

The pace of time has surpassed slow, conscious rational thinking, alienated from wellbeing. It is time to leap into multidimensional intuitive thinking and prevent falling back into AI-driven systems. Leadership has never been more important. We have to know the true "technology of self", set a loving example and preserve life.

Do we know what intuition really is? Do we falsely use it when we are talking about subconscious re-actions that we automatically do? That is not intuition. That is programming; it is the opposite. It is the subconscious mind running you. Intuition is freedom of creative ways, inventions, resilient to programming; it is remembrance of what was potent, strong and healthy. Intuition is being connected to the atomic powers of Earth energies and the source intelligence of the Universe through the third-eye coherent with the heart systems. The key is love (Pogačnik, M. 2023).

A definition leading to understanding of the meaning and role of intuition that I also want to emphasise is the explanation of Chester Irving Barnard (1886–1961), an American business executive and public administrator, who was also one of the pioneers in management theory and organizational studies. He separated mental processes into two distinct categories: (1) logical and (2) non-logical. "By 'logical processes' I mean conscious thinking which could be expressed in words, or other symbols, that is, reasoning. By 'non-logical processes' I mean those not capable of being expressed in words or as reasoning, which are only made known by a judgment, decision or action." His findings were compatible with the existing psychological theories, as well as being easily understandable and highly useful (Erenda I., Metelko A., 2018).

From the point of view of INTUWAY by Manica Čelofiga, Model of Intuitive Leadership, which I will outline in the next pages, the categorization 'non-logical' also invites you into open up to the fact that tune-ins usually cannot be mentally and rationally explained; they have to be felt, experienced and then comprehended. They also can have no logic, but the decisions and understandings of the information coming from the causal unconscious mind are correct and meaningful – we can call it the paradox of multidimensional thinking. You know the message is right with every cell of your body and the "aftermath" reveals the method to this "madness" that is not, but absolute beauty.

*"Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." —Carl G. Jung*

This sentence of C. G. Jung goes beyond words. You can feel the love code in his writings. You can feel, that he knows what he is explaining; he experienced it. What is not spoken is – you

envision clearly when you tune into objects or subjects with your inner eyes – third-eye system – but never without an activated heart system. Yes, they are systems and when you understand/know/master them, you become resilient to the outside disruptive noise that holds you in the old, when it is time to transcend into the next level of evolution of consciousness. All ancient wisdom keepers updated their wisdom to the now (Pogačnik, M., 2023)!

The INTUWAY, Model of Intuitive Leadership includes 4 main centers to activate the fifth:

1. identity
2. intuition/true self
3. energy
4. relationships
5. expansion

Identity: knowing the meaning and the mechanism of your identity objectively (something one can reflect on and manage), looking at positive and negative sides of it, gives you perspective that you are able to upgrade it when a version of your identity no longer serves your well-being. The intuitive perspective of identity is the awareness that we need it to experience individuality, which is a beautiful thing when nurtured and aligned with our true self's ability to lead and evolve. Although in psychological descriptions identity is our survival safe space, in my experienced opinion it can also not be, when we stand in our identity that is a very alienated state from our true self state. It is our act, mask, deception and therefore a threat to our authenticity. It is our perception, belief about us; it is not real, it is not the "technology of us". That is why it is dangerous for us to identify with our identity. Yes, the paradox. Identity never offers us sustainable solutions to our problems. Identity is something we created with our mind and we have to reshape it through the clearing of our limiting beliefs, aligning it and evolving it into our true self. We can scream, fight, get angry at life happening to us, when our old identity has to dissolve, yet we are also experiencing the biggest gift of them all – a learning experience of life lessons upgrading our skills and competences. You can compassionately see your ego-identity outbursts as a flashlight, flashing out what needs to be cleared in our consciousness, so we can rise above the old structures that slow us down and step into evolution of our consciousness.

True Self: is us. The technology of self, the entangled individual quantum field of everything we are, with limitless ability of creation that is at our disposal here in and around this body, to discover who we really are and what is possible. True self is the safest space for the human being. It gives you access to key survival and growth information and action tips. Its access goes beyond the body, its mind and through its consciousness into the space of endless possibilities of the quantum field of the whole Universe. That is why we can most easily reprogram ourselves from this space. Using only our logical mind and 5 basic senses is just using the basic program of technology of us, when we limit ourselves to the perception that we only are conscious mind, emotions and body. In the space of true self, we get access to all the knowledge of the Universe. That truth calms us down and heals our nervous system like nothing else. We are hardwired to

the truth, that is why our body does not like lies and loses its vitality and life-energy when not in truth. That is why we constantly lose energy or get sick when we are doing something that is not good for us and we thrive when we follow the guidance of our true self. The body's intelligence "speaks". Sometimes true-self guidance is painful, because we have to disintegrate an artificial world built on the perception of our ego identity, which is mostly alienated from our true self. Through our life experiences we learn to let go of the old identities faster and easier. We are also hardwired to evolve ourselves and the systems, so I can tell you right now, our true self will not stop evolving.

Energy: one magnificent aspect of being connected to the true self is also the massive increase of energy for doing things. To an inexperienced person, the rise of energy can feel scary, especially when we step from an ego-identity direction that does not serve our wellbeing to the true-self purposeful path. The energy flows and we are used to controlling everything, that is why we can experience all sorts of reactions, so be prepared for some turbulence. But we do not want to stay stagnant, we are made for development and moving, we crave to evolve, although sometimes we are so tired that it feels like we do not, but that is not true. That is why energy-management competences are necessary to not slide back into the trap of our obsolete identity, which uses our energy in misalignment with us, usually not to our gain. Our energy is closely connected to our body and so what we do to our body makes a big difference in our energy flow. Our energy flow defines the state of our body. When we drink too much coffee and we lose mindfulness, we are unconsciously losing a lot of energy to distractions. On the other hand, when we eat too much because we believe that we need a lot of energy to be up to all assignments, we actually overload our metabolism and again, we lose energy to metabolism. There are many ways to understand the direction of the energy flow through diverse practices of mindfulness and awareness, but mostly we gain energy when we release trapped energy in our subconscious or unconscious mind. A thing I always do with my clients at the Intuitive Leadership courses is bring them to their starting point, so they know what is their real level of energy. We are so full of stimulants and tranquilizers that we actually have no idea what is our authentic energy and real emotional state. Emotions are energy in motion, and when we calm down, we may be for the first time in our lives in the know about how we really feel about many things. Life-changing.

Relationships: this is where real intuitive leadership starts. Relationships with others are like standing in a room with mirrors. Everyone, every time, is mirroring to you who you believe you truly are. Sometimes that looks beautiful, sometimes it is disappointing. It is not hard to accept good personality traits, it is the hardest thing in the world to accept that some traits you condemn in someone else are actually, on some level of your consciousness, yours. That is why there is violence in the world. We are just not empowered and aware enough that all things happening to us – are actually us. So the first step is to forgive ourselves for negative feelings that we are developing toward ourselves and then toward others! This is a perfect start on how to end all violence in the world. What this pillar does to you is, it sends you back to the first, second and third center to deepen your inner capacity to deal with intense energies that happen between

people. At this center your true self teaches you how to set boundaries and how to start loving yourself. How will you be able to be compassionate to someone in their negative ego-identity burst and how to stand strong in your truth and do the right thing, if you condemn yourself? Most and foremost, you do the master's in knowing who you truly are and that becomes the path of pure sustainability and longevity for you and your organisation or movement.

Expansion: when relationships trigger you, if you do not resolve them, you go into contraction, ignorance or rapture. You return into past identity and miss your opportunity to thrive. At this center we are fully equipped and empowered to turn the contraction into expansion by clearing what is still keeping us from living our true self full on. Your identity might still be stronger than your connection to your true self. What you do at this stage is use all the competences obtained in the first 4 centers. You are able to decide what is best for you; the self-mastery is within your reach. Intentionally and with a high capacity of attention that you developed through all 4 centers, you work on all conscious, subconscious, unconscious and collective limitations still stopping you from living your full potential. Expansion is the path to living your life mission full on. It does not necessarily mean that it is big, for everyone to see, but you will know it and you will feel the fulfilment, joy, vastness, energy flow, vitality, radiance, spaciousness, loving action, all the results (visible and non-visible), completion, continuation, satisfaction. Although expansion of your true self is always mildly limited by your old identity, in this beautiful thing we call human life of creation, the experience of individuality that is given to you through identity makes it worth the limitation. This spiritual being, having a human experience, is every employer and every employee doing what it feels to do from the space of wellbeing for all. The paradox is that what is right through the knowing of your true self – for you – is at the same time good for the business and your colleague. And here the linear system falls.

Intuitive leadership invites leaders to move beyond ego-based identities and fear-driven reactivity into a deeper connection with the true self as the "technology of self." A leader for the AI era deepens basic five-sense observation with intuition as multidimensional knowing and becomes awakened to the unconscious. Through the five INTUWAY, Intuitive Leadership center activations, leaders learn to clear outdated patterns and align their choices with inner truth and wellbeing for all. In this state, leadership becomes an act of loving, resilient co-creation with people, organizations, ecosystems and all the beings of life and consciousness of AI. Such intuitive leaders are best equipped to navigate the AI era, evolving human potential, building resilience and preserving the diverse life forces of the loving Universe.

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## **Ferial Puren: Leadership & Communities: The Medicine Is Whole, but the First Sip Must Taste Like Healing**

### **Abstract:**

This article reimagines leadership as an act of presence, resonance, and relational inter-becoming—an offering of healing rather than performance. Rooted in personal story, ancestral philosophy, and embodied insight, it challenges the high-pressure, performative models that dominate today’s leadership landscape. Drawing from the Zulu wisdom of *Sawubona* and *Sikhona*, the piece invites leaders to step into a space of mutual visibility and intuitive attunement. It explores how true leadership arises from sensitivity, self-alignment, and overflow—not effort or status—and how, regardless of scale, it begins with a single, healing sip.

### **Keywords:**

authenticity, presence, intuitive leadership, ancestral wisdom, healing leadership

We are living in a time where leadership has become louder, faster, and increasingly performative. Often, the ones who rise to the front are those with the sharpest soundbites, the biggest followings, or the most refined strategic messaging. Leadership today is frequently mistaken for visibility, and influence is confused with resonance. We watch as many leaders—often with good intentions—feel compelled to constantly respond, to fix, to be seen doing, rather than being.

But what is the cost of this pace, this unsustainable posture? In trying so hard to lead, many forget how to listen. In striving to be effective, we lose the ability to be affective—to sense into, to move, to touch, to connect at depth. The world, though noisy and moving at a pace, is hungry for something different, wiser, more resonant, more attuned with Life itself. Something that doesn’t demand spreading oneself even more thinly, but invites gracefilled transformation.

The pressure on leaders today is immense. A 2024 survey by Businessolver found that 55% of CEOs reported experiencing a mental health issue within the past year—a figure that represents a significant increase from previous years. Additionally, 81% of CEOs in the same study acknowledged that companies still view someone with mental health issues as weak or a burden, revealing just how deeply stigma and therefore showing up unauthentically continues to shape the culture of leadership.

This is not just a theoretical concern—it’s deeply personal and widespread. A 2015 study on entrepreneurs revealed that 49% reported having a mental health condition, with depression being the most commonly reported, often resulting in suicide. These insights illuminate a critical

truth: **many of our most visible leaders are suffering in silence**, held captive by a model of leadership that prizes productivity over presence and performance over wellness.

This is why I suggest we remember. Or perhaps, awaken.

That there comes a point in your life, as a leader, when you realise, as I have, that the essence of leadership has nothing to do with the size of the group you are leading or addressing. Whether you're guiding a team of five or a city of five million, the core question remains the same: What is needed here, and how can I bring it in a way that will be felt as healing?

Leadership is not performance. It is presence. And presence is not about being impressive, but about being authentic.

In the Zulu language, there is a greeting—**Sawubona**. It means, quite simply, “I see you.” But this seeing is not casual. It is not surface. It is sacred. Sawubona is an invocation of recognition that extends beyond the physical; it says: I acknowledge your essence, your ancestors, your joys, your burdens. I choose to see the entire truth of who you are—not just who you present to the world. To say Sawubona is to honour someone’s full humanity and journey here. **It is a kind of soul-greeting, one that pulls another person into dignity, into visibility, into mattering.**

And it carries more still. In many interpretations, Sawubona is a recognition not just of the individual, but of their entire lineage, human and non-human ancestry.

1. 55% of CEOs reported mental health challenges in the past year, and 81% believe companies still stigmatize mental health.<sup>1</sup>
2. A 2015 study found that 49% of entrepreneurs reported mental health conditions, especially depression.<sup>2</sup>

It acknowledges that you stand before me not only as yourself, but as the living embodiment of those who came before you. Your ancestors, your people, your traditions—they live through you. They chose you to be their representative in this moment in our story. And in saying Sawubona, I honour them as I honour you. **I acknowledge the gifts, the insight, the wisdom passed through you. And I call it forth.**

In response, the other replies Sikhona, which means, “I am here. I make myself available to be seen.” But again, this is more than a phrase—it is a moment of deep consent. It is not just a return of greeting—it is a declaration of availability. To say Sikhona is to say: Because you see me, I exist here more fully. I allow myself to be witnessed. I make myself visible. It is a brave offering.

And more than that, Sikhona is the moment when something relational begins to stir. **When one person says Sawubona, and the other says Sikhona, a bridge is formed**—not only of sight, but of trust. One becomes the space-holder, the other the one who arrives into that space. And then the dance begins. The dance where presence evokes presence. Where one person's grounded leadership makes room for another to step into their own. Where seeing and being seen becomes mutual, and leadership becomes shared.

This exchange is not transactional—it is transformational. To say Sawubona is to offer deep presence. To respond with Sikhona is to accept that presence and show up more wholly. It is a ritual of mutual recognition, of trust, of visibility.

When we think of leadership through this lens, it reshapes everything. Leadership is no longer about standing above—it is about standing with. To say Sawubona as a leader is to acknowledge that those before you are whole, worthy, and complex. To embody a presence that sees deeply, and in doing so, invites a deeper showing up in return.

This exchange—Sawubona, Sikhona—reminds us that presence is the beginning of transformation. And when we practise it in spirit, even without the words, we open up the possibility for a different kind of leadership: one that is relational, reciprocal, and real.

In many ways, this is what leadership truly is. To say Sawubona—I see you—not with our eyes only, but with our full being. And to create the kind of presence where others feel safe enough to say Sikhona—I make myself available to be seen.

Leadership, then, is not about commanding attention. It is about offering presence that evokes authenticity in others. It is about being so grounded, so real, so open, that others feel safe to become visible, too.

Years ago, I was developing a programme I hoped would make a significant impact. I poured myself into it—not just time and energy, but a deep part of my hope, my longing, my sense of response-ability. I wanted to create something meaningful, something that would move people and allow them to heal to their greater expressions of themselves. So I structured it meticulously. I drew upon frameworks and best practices, shaped each section with intention, and rehearsed my delivery with care. When it was ready, I invited a group of people who knew me well to experience it first, and I asked them for honest, unfiltered feedback.

What they offered was both a gift and a sting. “It’s good,” they said. “It’s thoughtful. It’s strong. But... something’s missing. It doesn’t move us. **It lacks that je ne sais quoi.**”

I was disappointed that my hard work had not produced the results I wanted. I had given them my best—or so I thought. But as I sat with their words, something inside me shifted. I realised I had shown up with my polish, my preparation, and my professionalism—but not with my presence. I had tried to impress rather than to express. I had given them my intellect, but not my essence.

That moment turned something inside me. I let go of the need to perform and decided instead to trust. I knew the steps. You see, I'm a dancer, and I know once you know the step you can begin to dance with your soul and not just your feet. I knew the content. But more importantly, I knew what it felt like to care. So I scrapped the slides. I threw away the scripts. I walked into the next session, not with answers, but with presence. I offered myself—the whole of me, unguarded and real.

And what followed was something I can only describe as alchemical. People cried. They laughed. They lingered. They came up afterward not with comments on content, but with reflections like, “I felt seen,” or “That reminded me of who I am.”

Lives began to shift. Not because I taught them something they didn't know, but because something in me gave them permission to remember what they already did know. That—that—is the first sip.

The medicine we carry as leaders—the insight, the wisdom, the guidance—may be whole, but it can only be received if the first taste lands. **And for it to land, it must meet people where they are. It must taste like healing.**

You see, to offer that first sip, you have to do more than prepare. You have to perceive. You have to read the room, yes, but also feel into it. To sense what is moving beneath the words. This is not about stillness, per se. You can be quiet and still miss the moment entirely. No, what's needed is sensitivity. Sensitivity is not fragility. It's an alertness of soul. A focussed awareness that feels the pulse of a room, the tremble in a voice, the unseen question lingering just behind someone's eyes.

And from that sensitivity, another quality is born: intuitive acumen. A kind of tuned-in knowing that isn't gathered from data analysis, but received in the spaces between. The leader with intuitive acumen doesn't just respond—they recognise. They don't guess—they discern.

This is not magic. It's maturity and skill.

3. “It's good... but something's missing.” – Feedback received during an SRG Journey leadership programme pilot session, referenced with permission for illustrative purposes.

**But none of it—none of it—is available to the depleted leader.** You cannot pour medicine from an empty cup. And still, the world rewards those who give without ceasing, who burn their candle at both ends and call it commitment. That is not leadership. That is exhaustion.

The turning point for me came when I began to prioritise my inner world—not as an indulgence, but as a responsibility. I couldn't lead others to presence if I hadn't cultivated it in myself. I didn't always know if it was “working,” but I could feel something shifting. My leadership stopped being about pushing forward and became about tuning in.

In my younger years, I often felt inadequate. I looked at others and thought, “They know more. They speak better. They belong.” I wore comparison like a second skin. I watched as others filled rooms with their charisma, and wondered if I had missed some essential ingredient. I questioned whether what I carried inside me would ever be enough.

There was a persistent sense of being on the outside of something essential. Like I was knocking on a door that wouldn't open—not because I was uninvited, but because I was afraid of walking through.

But over time, something began to change. In my mid forties, I began to feel a quiet but definite arrival. I stopped measuring my worth by how many people clapped or how many eyes were on me. I began to notice a different kind of feedback—one that had nothing to do with approval and everything to do with resonance.

While travelling, I noticed strangers began to approach me—offering hugs, telling me that I was one of the most beautiful people they have met, complimenting my dress sense, pausing to say they felt a different frequency when I appeared in their space or walked into a room. At first, it felt odd. Almost surreal. It had never happened to me before, especially so frequently. I remember thinking, “What is this?” In most instances I hadn't said a word. I hadn't even introduced myself. And yet, something in me was being met.

It happened again and again, more and more often. Airports, Lobbies, Shopping malls, Restaurants, Side streets. People didn't always have words, but they felt something. Eventually, I realised: it wasn't about me. It was about what I had become available to transmit.

### **Sawubona. Sikhona.**

**I saw them. And they felt seen.** I made myself available, and they arrived. Not because I called them in, but because I had opened something in myself that made room for them to meet me there.

This, I believe, is the real work of a leader. Not to fix. Not to perform. But to become available. Available to the moment, to the people, to the quiet wisdom that arises when you stop trying to be impressive and start being here.

In this moment, I am reminded of what one of my great mentors, Alan Watts, would probably say. He would smile at all this and remind us that we take ourselves far too seriously. He might say, “Trying to be a great leader is like trying to bite your own teeth.”

And he’d be right.

There is something delightfully disarming about that image. Because what is it, really, to try to bite your own teeth? It’s an impossible act. A paradox. And yet, this is exactly what many of us attempt when we pursue leadership through control, image, and self-imposed pressure. We try so hard to be “great” that we lose touch with the innate greatness within us and the natural grace that made us trustworthy in the first place.

Watts would remind us that the greatest wisdom often emerges not from striving, but from surrender. From leaning into the flow rather than gripping the wheel. Leadership is not something we do to others—it is something we participate in, with life. It is a rhythm, a resonance, not a performance.

To try to lead by effort alone is to fight your own nature. To lead from presence, by contrast, is to remember that what makes you magnetic is not your effort—it’s your ease. Your coherence. The way you stop trying to prove something and start simply being what you already are.

That is the paradox of power. When you stop trying to be powerful, you often become your most impactful.

Alan Watts would call this the art of playing the game without getting lost in it. To smile at the illusion of control, and instead, dance with the moment. To trust the intelligence of life, of spirit, of the unseen conversation between souls.

That’s not to say leadership is passive. No. It’s profoundly intentional. But it is not manufactured. It arises. It flows. It becomes. And the more we try to force it, the more we miss its essence.

That’s why Watts’ words ring so true. Because true leadership cannot be forced. It cannot be faked. And it certainly cannot be bitten into with clenched teeth.

It must be lived. It must be embodied.

People don't need to be fixed. They need to be met. They don't need answers imposed—they need space to arrive at their own. They need to be seen, felt, held in resonance.

That's why the first sip matters. Because it's not about downloading information alone. It's about also offering something that tastes truthful.

4. "Trying to be a great leader is like trying to bite your own teeth." – This quote is attributed to philosopher Alan Watts, who frequently used paradox to illustrate the folly of over-effort and the beauty of surrender.

And to do that—to really do that—you need to be full. You need to flourish. You need to let your own life be so rooted, so aligned, so utterly yours that what spills over is not effort, but essence.

In the end, it doesn't matter if you're leading ten or ten thousand. What matters is: Are you available? Are you present? Are you real?

**Because the medicine is whole. But the first sip must taste like healing.**

Let your presence be the sip.

Let your sensitivity be the guide.

Let your intuitive knowing be the compass.

And in doing so, may your leadership become not a performance, not a healing from, but a permission.

A bridge.

A tuning fork.

A healing to what is waiting to be remembered.

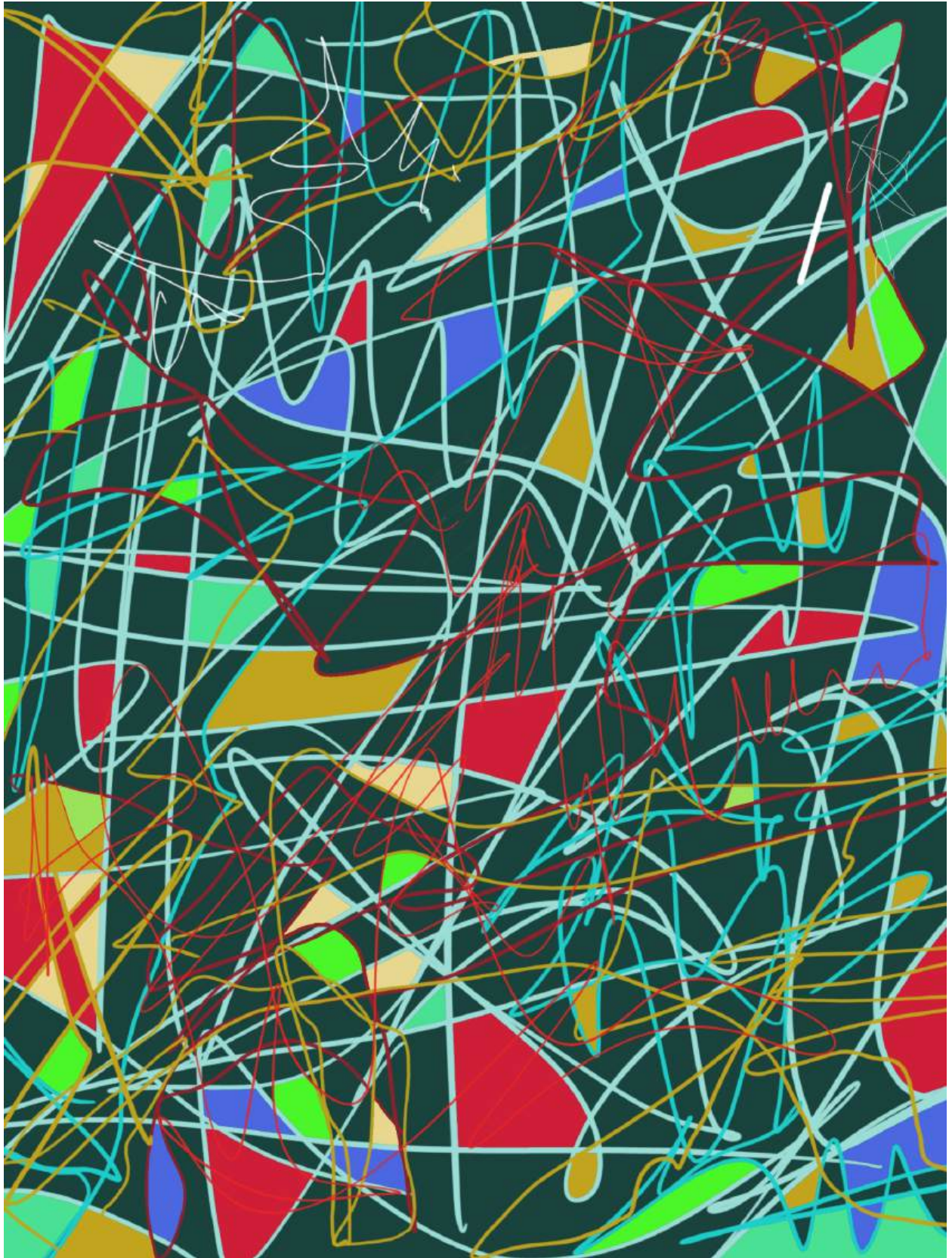
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**Ferial Puren** is a visionary systems thinker and social innovator, serving as CEO of Living Cities Earth (LCE). Through integrative leadership, she and her team catalyse regenerative urban transformation by weaving together systems design, ecological wisdom, inner development, participatory governance, zero-emission infrastructure solutions, and community-rooted innovation. Ferial views cities as living ecosystems and therefore nurtures entangled development of people, place, and planet. Under her stewardship, LCE operates as a global action-research ecosystem dedicated to “Humaning Well” — aiming to enable 10,000 cities to thrive. Her work supports unprecedented collaboration and futures grounded in equity, resilience, and deep reverence for Life.



## Nataša Heror: The Codes of the New World

March 12, 2025. Novi Sad, Serbia

"There are no big changes without big efforts.

There are no big changes without new rules, creativity and determination.

Big changes do not happen by themselves, evolutionarily, by growing one system into another. They happen through discontinuity, breaking shackles and establishing new relationships."

These are the words of Zoran Djindjic, the progressive Prime Minister of Serbia who was a professor of philosophy by profession, killed on this day in 2003.

Serbia is currently at a major turning point.

More than four months have passed since the tragedy that happened in Novi Sad when the canopy at the Railway Station fell and killed 15 people, and the two people who survived are permanently disabled.

The cause of the tragedy is incompetence and corruption.

Since November 1, 2024, Serbia has not calmed down.

Out of sadness and anger, the students of the University proved to be the most determined and ready to establish discontinuity, break shackles and establish new relationships. They started their activity with blockades of all faculties in the country, which started at the end of November and continue.

They established the Plenum as the governing body. Direct democracy in action.

For me, as a citizen and mother of two students, the biggest impression is the following:

- 15 minutes of silence; honoring the victims at the railway station in the period 11:52-12:07. The beginning of the silence is the time when the tragedy happened.

Silence ushered in public dialogue. She is very powerful. She asks people to stop and be with him or herself for those 15 minutes.

- On the eve of Novi Sad City Day on February 1, the first march of students from Belgrade to Novi Sad (80 km) took place. Passing through smaller towns on their way, the locals welcomed them as liberators. They brought food, refreshments and their hearts. People cry and hug them.

Since then, over 300 protests have taken place in smaller towns every week. Big protests are organized every two weeks; February 15 in Kragujevac (central Serbia), March 1 in Niš (southern Serbia). On Saturday, March 15, there is a protest in Belgrade, the capital.

Walking through small towns, students remove the media darkness and give people a long-forgotten sense of connection, new relationships are established.

Society is awakened. New golden threads of solidarity between people were created.

- They think strategically, are creative, witty, calm, and resist tremendous media pressure by ignoring them. They know how to communicate, they stick to their demands, which is why they started the blockades. They gained great trust and respect among citizens.
- They have no leader. Someone else comes to every public performance they are invited to.

In the end, I would just broaden my view of the present world by looking at the iron hands of the current political and economic system that is still dominant.

We see that today's leaders are conceited, focused on their own interests and the interests of their closest associates. They think that the set of things they have imposed will last forever.

They won't. Just look back 10 years. As if two centuries had passed. Nothing is the same anymore. New relationships and new rules are established. We are in the process of a paradigm shift.

The responsibility of free-thinking people is enormous. It triggers the urge to engage. Calls to action.

Students from Serbia seem to know the codes of the new world.

Description: The photo was taken on January 27, 2025, during the 24-hour blockade of Autokomanda in Belgrade, Serbia. Photo: Luka Stojković





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## Yiannis Chrysostomidis: Un-Forgetting: Leadership from the Depths

### Abstract

This essay argues that the most consequential shift in leadership is not from one style to another but from surface to depth. It takes as its organising principle the Greek word *aletheia*, un-forgetting, and proposes that connecting with source is a form of remembering what was always there but had been obscured. Four thinkers, David Bohm, Carl Jung, Martin Heidegger, and Plato, each describe a different aspect of this un-forgetting. The essay explores what their convergence might mean for leadership and systems change, and reflects on the author's experience of working in multi-stakeholder facilitation while training as a Jungian analyst.

**Keywords:** *aletheia*, implicate order, depth psychology, systems change, leadership, synchronicity

### 1. Introduction

The Greek word for truth is *aletheia*. It is literally *a-letheia*, un-forgetting. *Lethe* means forgetting, oblivion, it is one of the five rivers of the Underworld (Hades) that souls drink from before being reborn. Truth, for the ancient Greeks, was not the discovery of something new. It was the recovery of something already there but forgotten.

I want to suggest that this old idea still has something to say about leadership. Most conversations about leadership begin with ego, strategy, competence, vision statements, organisational design. These matter. But they operate at the surface of things, and the surface is always an expression of something deeper. The shift I am interested in is not from one leadership style to another but from surface to depth, from forgetting to un-forgetting, from managing the explicate to reconnecting with source.

What follows draws on four independent thinkers who, working across different centuries and disciplines, arrived at remarkably similar conclusions about what lies beneath the surface. What they point toward, independently, is something like a shared intuition (and I use the word cautiously) that beneath the surface of experience lies a unified depth from which everything unfolds and to which everything returns. Each described a different aspect of what connecting with that depth involves.

David Bohm, the quantum physicist, proposed a physics-based account of how the depth might be structured. Plato and his tradition described how fidelity to the source is lost with distance and how recovering it is an act of remembering. Carl Jung, the depth psychologist, showed that the depth speaks, that it communicates with us through dreams, synchronicities, and symptoms. Martin Heidegger, the philosopher, showed that we do not stand outside of this depth and observe it. We are the place where it becomes conscious of itself. He also warned that any

attempt to fully capture it in a theory will conceal as much as it reveals, because concealment is built into the structure of disclosure. All four, from different vantage points, are describing parts of *aletheia*.

## **2. Bohm and the implicate order**

David Bohm (1917–1992) was arguably one of the most significant quantum physicists of the twentieth century. He worked with Einstein, made foundational contributions to plasma physics, and wrote a standard textbook on quantum mechanics. His 1980 book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* proposed an ontological framework that has not, as far as I can tell, been surpassed in its ambition.

Bohm argued that what we experience as separate objects and distinct events, what he called the *explicate order*, is always an unfolding from a deeper ground he called the *implicate order*. At this deeper level, everything is enfolded into everything else. Space and time as we know them do not apply. The movement between these orders is constant: things unfold from the implicate into the explicate, become manifest, and enfold back. He called this continuous movement the *holomovement*. Matter, energy, life, and mind are relatively stable patterns within it, temporary forms that persist for a while before folding back.

Part of this insight came from studying holograms. In a holographic plate, the information for the whole image is encoded in every fragment. Cut the plate in half and each half still contains the whole image, at lower resolution. The whole is enfolded in every part. Bohm saw this not as metaphor but as a structural description of how reality is organised. In terms of *aletheia*, the holographic plate works as a model of un-forgetting. The whole is never lost, only reduced in resolution. The further from source, the more has been forgotten but it is still there.

Bohm also argued that the separation of mind and matter is itself a feature of the explicate order. At the implicate level, they are not two things but two aspects of the same underlying movement. He called this *soma-significance*. This means that every physical process carries meaning and every mental process has physical correlates, not because one causes the other but because both express a deeper unity.

## **3. The Platonic tradition and truth as remembering**

The Platonic tradition introduces a vertical dimension, which is worth pausing over. Plato himself argued that every particular thing participates in a deeper, eternal Form. But it was the later Neoplatonists, particularly Plotinus (c. 204–270 CE), who developed this into a full account of emanation: reality flows outward from a single source, the One, through successive layers of decreasing wholeness. Nous, World Soul, Matter. Each level is a genuine expression of the source, but at lower resolution. This gradient bears a strong resemblance to Bohm's implicate/explicate distinction.

Plato's own theory of knowledge, developed in the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus*, is explicitly a theory of *anamnesis*, recollection. We do not learn new things. We remember what the soul already knows. Knowledge is un-forgetting. This maps onto Bohm's holographic model. Every fragment of the holographic plate still contains the whole image, but at lower resolution. The information is not lost, only obscured, reduced in fidelity. The further from source, the more is forgotten but the possibility of connecting with it is always there.

#### 4. Jung and the spirit of the depths

Carl Jung (1875–1961) spent the last decades of his life on a question that psychologists tend to avoid. What is the relationship between psyche and matter? His answer, developed primarily in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1955), drew on the alchemical tradition, specifically the work of the sixteenth-century alchemist and physician Gerhard Dorn (c. 1530–1584). It was Dorn who first articulated the concept of the *unus mundus*, the one world, a unified ground beneath both mind and matter where the two have not yet separated.

For the alchemists, the *opus*, the great work, was not just a chemical procedure but a process of transformation aimed at recovering unity from fragmentation, both in matter and in the soul. Jung recognized in this tradition a serious psychology of depth disguised in symbolic language, and he adopted the *unus mundus* as the most precise term available for the unified ground he was trying to describe. He used it to account for phenomena that reductive psychology could not explain, particularly synchronicity which is a meaningful coincidence that lacks causal explanation. His point was that inner and outer events sometimes correspond because, at a deeper level, they have not yet divided into two things. The *unus mundus* is that undivided ground. Related to this, Jung used the term *psychoid* to describe the quality of archetypal processes at their deepest level, where they are neither purely psychic nor purely material but something prior to both.

What makes Jung's contribution distinctive here is that he insisted the depth is not passive. It communicates through dreams, symptoms, synchronicities, and the compensatory function of the unconscious in relationship with consciousness. And it comes through most clearly when we learn to listen.

The bridge between physics and depth psychology was already being built in Jung's own lifetime, through his correspondence with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli (1900–1958), who won the Nobel Prize in 1945. They corresponded for twenty-six years and co-authored *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche* (1952). Pauli was both Jung's most rigorous scientific interlocutor and his sharpest critic. He pushed Jung to clarify the ontological status of synchronicity and to move beyond phenomenology toward a genuine principle of acausal ordering. Pauli was also critical of Bohm's hidden variables theory, published in 1952, which proposed a deterministic account of quantum mechanics. Pauli saw this as too narrowly physical. What he wanted was a neutral language that applied equally to matter and psyche, a framework in which the observer is not merely measuring reality but participating in its unfolding. Bohm's

later work on the implicate order, published in 1980, moved closer to what Pauli had been reaching for, but Pauli did not live to see it. He died in 1958, aged 58, in a hospital room numbered 137, the number that had preoccupied him throughout his career as the inverse of the fine-structure constant. Jung would probably have called it synchronicity.

## 5. Heidegger and truth as unconcealment

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) returned to the same Greek word, *aletheia*, but heard something different in it. Where Plato understood *aletheia* as recollection, the soul recovering what it already knew, Heidegger understood it as the event of unconcealment itself, the happening by which something comes into presence. For Plato, truth is something stored and recovered. For Heidegger, truth is something that reveals itself.

His distinction between Being and beings mirrors Bohm's distinction between the implicate and explicate orders (though Heidegger would probably have resisted the comparison). Both suggest that reality has depth and that the surface is a genuine disclosure of that depth, but never the whole. For Heidegger, we do not stand outside of Being and observe it. We are always already in it. We are the beings through whom Being becomes an issue, through whom the question of depth can be asked at all. Heidegger called this *Dasein*, being-there.

That four thinkers, working independently across different fields and centuries, arrived at such similar conclusions is worth taking seriously.<sup>[1]</sup>

It is also worth being honest about the differences. Bohm gives us a physics, the implicate order is an ontological claim about how reality is structured. Plato gives us an epistemology: *anamnesis* is about how we know, not about what exists. Jung gives us a psychology: the *unus mundus* is not a theory to be proved but a clinical reality encountered in the consulting room, and unlike Bohm's implicate order, it has something like intentions, since it sends dreams and compensates for conscious one-sidedness. Heidegger gives us an event: *aletheia* as unconcealment is not a structure, not a memory, not a communication, but a happening. And he insists that concealment is built into every disclosure, which makes him more cautious about access to depth than any of the others. These are genuinely different claims, not just different vocabularies for the same thing. What I find striking is that the differences do not weaken the convergence but they make it more interesting.

## 6. Implications for leadership

If any of this holds, it has implications for how we think about leadership. The standard model operates entirely at the explicate surface i.e. strategy, systems, structures, metrics, behaviours etc. Working only at the surface means managing symptoms rather than connecting with source.

Vision, meaning, and purpose sit closer to source than all this. Every organisation has a founding impulse, an original animating purpose. As it grows, that impulse gets refracted through

structures, processes, roles, and politics. Each layer adds distortion. By the time it reaches the surface of daily operational behaviour, the original purpose may be barely recognisable, like an archetype buried under layers of complexity. It seems to me that the leader's job is to maintain or recover fidelity to that source. In the language of this essay, the leader's job is staying close to *aletheia*: un-forgetting the founding impulse that has been obscured. What a leader pays attention to is what becomes real for the organisation.

Genuine presence creates conditions under which people can bring their full depth rather than their surface compliance. As Bill O'Brien put it: the success of the intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor. This has been a guiding principle in the tradition I now work within at Reos Partners, and in my experience it holds up. Bohm spent his later years trying to articulate something related through his work on dialogue. A group of people, attending carefully enough, can access a quality of collective intelligence that none of them could reach alone. I have seen this in facilitation work, though I would not claim to fully understand the mechanism. Something shifts when attention deepens. The presenting issue stops being the real issue. The group touches something underneath.

One experience stays with me. Some years ago I was working with a small group of executives in Mongolia. On one of the workshop days we invited a Rinpoche of Mongolia to join the group. He did not give a presentation or offer advice but simply sat with us in a circle of chairs. What happened was hard to explain in conventional terms but unmistakable to everyone in the room. The quality of the conversation changed. The ideas became more honest, more surprising. Relationships between people who had been guarded with each other softened. There was a spirit in the room that had not been there before and that none of us had manufactured. It was not that the Rinpoche did anything in particular. He was operating from a depth that most of us did not touch at that moment, and his presence created conditions under which the rest of us could go deeper too. He was creating conditions under which we could remember and connect to something we already knew.

What I noticed in that room, and what I keep noticing in this work, is that connecting with source is not something a leader does intentionally through skill or practice (though a mindful practice may help). It is closer to what Lewis Hyde, in his book *The Gift* (1983), describes as the nature of a gift: something given, not earned, that does not belong to the receiver and must be allowed to keep moving. Hyde's central insight is that a gift loses its nature the moment it is hoarded or claimed as personal property. It must circulate. What comes from source works the same way. The moment a leader treats depth as a personal achievement, as evidence of their own development or superiority, it stops flowing. It becomes an ego possession rather than something passing through. The quality most needed is not competence or even wisdom but receptiveness, a willingness to listen rather than to lead from the front. Jung understood this. The unconscious does not communicate with the wilful but with the receptive. Dreams arrive unannounced and synchronicities are not engineered.

## **7. Listening to the depths**

When the depth communicates, as Jung argued, then a leader who wants to operate closer to source needs to learn to listen. The history of discovery has examples. Kekulé (1829–1896) saw the ring structure of benzene after dreaming of a snake seizing its own tail, the ouroboros, an ancient alchemical symbol delivering a scientific breakthrough through the unconscious. Mendeleev (1834–1907) reportedly dreamed the arrangement of the periodic table. These are not stories about mystical inspiration. They are stories about what happens when a prepared mind stays in relationship with its own depths. R.D. Laing (1927–1989) put the question sharply:

“Ask yourself who and what it is that dreams our dreams? The Dreamer who dreams our dreams knows far more than we know of it. It is only from a remarkable position of alienation that the source of life, the Fountain of Life, is experienced as the It. The mind of which we are unaware is aware of us. It is we who are out of our minds.”

In my own experience, I have often had important dreams, intuitions, and synchronicities before a significant workshop or facilitation, that carried a specific and useful message about the work ahead. I do not always understand them in advance. Sometimes the meaning only becomes clear during the event itself. But I have learned to pay attention. A leader who dismisses this material, who treats intuitions and dreams as noise and synchronicities as coincidence, is cutting themselves off from one of the most direct channels the depth has available. Jung’s contribution to leadership, though he never framed it in those terms, is the insistence that the unconscious is not an obstacle to clear thinking. It is a source of higher intelligence that the conscious mind cannot access on its own.

## **8. From Bohm to leadership practice**

These ideas found their way into leadership practice. In 1980, the year Bohm published *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Joseph Jaworski met Bohm in London. Jaworski was a lawyer who had founded the American Leadership Forum. What he took from Bohm was not a technique but a worldview: that leadership has more to do with the quality of our being than with what we do. His book *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* (1996) applied this to leadership practice, and his definition of leadership as “a journey to wholeness” is one I have found useful. He also drew on Jung, particularly on synchronicity.

Jaworski later led the scenario planning team at Royal Dutch Shell, where he worked alongside Adam Kahane. Together with Bill O’Brien, they co-founded Generon Consulting, and Joe McCarron joined them later. Jaworski went on to collaborate with Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer on *Presence* (2004). Scharmer, who grew up on a biodynamic farm near Hamburg, developed a related metaphor for this, that what grows above the ground depends on the quality of the soil beneath it. He applied this to social systems, arguing that the visible outcomes of any organisation or community are a function of the quality of the “social soil”, the relationships, awareness, and attention underneath. This is another way of saying what the present essay is trying to say. Kahane and McCarron later co-founded Reos<sup>[2]</sup> Partners, with others, where I now

work. I did not come to this story and history through study but through my work, and only later understood the philosophical ground it stood on.

## **9. A personal note**

I was born in 1980, the year Bohm published the book and met Jaworski. I did not know this when I joined Reos Partners or when I began training as a Jungian analyst.

For twenty years I worked in consulting and transformation across more than twenty countries. Strategy, visioning, narrative development, sustainability. Useful work, and much of it mattered. But I kept running into the same difficulty. The most careful strategy makes no difference if the people implementing it are operating from the surface. Compliance is not commitment and a well-designed process is not the same thing as a living one.

Separately, I began training as a Jungian analyst. My own analyst, who is now retired, trained at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, and his analyst had trained directly with Jung. Through that work I encountered Jung's thinking not as theory but as something practiced, in the consulting room, in the quality of attention between analyst and analysand.

When I began training, the two areas of my life started to look less separate than I had assumed. The clinical work follows a symptom through its complex to its archetypal root, and ultimately toward the *unus mundus*. The systems change work follows a stuck situation through its structural dynamics toward the founding impulse that has been distorted or forgotten. The direction of travel is similar, even if the language differs.

I now find myself working at an organization whose intellectual roots run back through Kahane and Jaworski to Bohm, while training in a Jungian tradition that runs back, only two links, from Jung himself. For most of my career these were parallel tracks. I am now beginning to see how they connect. I offer this not as a claim to any special position but as an observation that sometimes the convergences in one's own life mirror the convergences in the ideas that grow in them.

## **10. Conclusion**

The ecocivilizational project, as I understand it, is a project of reconnection. Reconnection with the planet, with each other, with the deeper structures that sustain life. But reconnection cannot happen at the surface. If we try to build a new civilizational paradigm using only strategy, policy, design, and measurement, we will probably reproduce the same fragmentation in new packaging.

What Bohm, Jung, Heidegger, and Plato independently point toward is the possibility that reality is already whole. The fragmentation is at the surface. The depth is already unified. The task is not to create wholeness but to recover fidelity to a wholeness that was never lost but only obscured.

Leadership that takes this seriously is slower. It listens more. It creates conditions for depth to come through rather than imposing solutions from the surface. It trusts unfolding rather than trying to control outcomes. The Greeks had a word for this. *Aletheia*.

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<sup>[1]</sup> There is also a suggestive neurobiological pointer in Penrose and Hameroff's Orchestrated Objective Reduction (Orch-OR) theory. The theory proposes that consciousness is generated through quantum processes occurring in microtubules within neurons. When these quantum states undergo objective reduction, or collapse, the result is a moment of conscious experience. Penrose and Hameroff argue that these collapse events connect local neuronal activity to the fine-scale geometry of spacetime itself, suggesting that consciousness is not merely a computational by-product of brain activity but has roots in the fundamental structure of the universe. If this is the case, then each moment of consciousness can be understood as a point of contact between the local and the deep, which bears at least a structural resemblance to what Jung was describing with synchronicity. The theory remains empirically contested, but it points in an interesting direction.

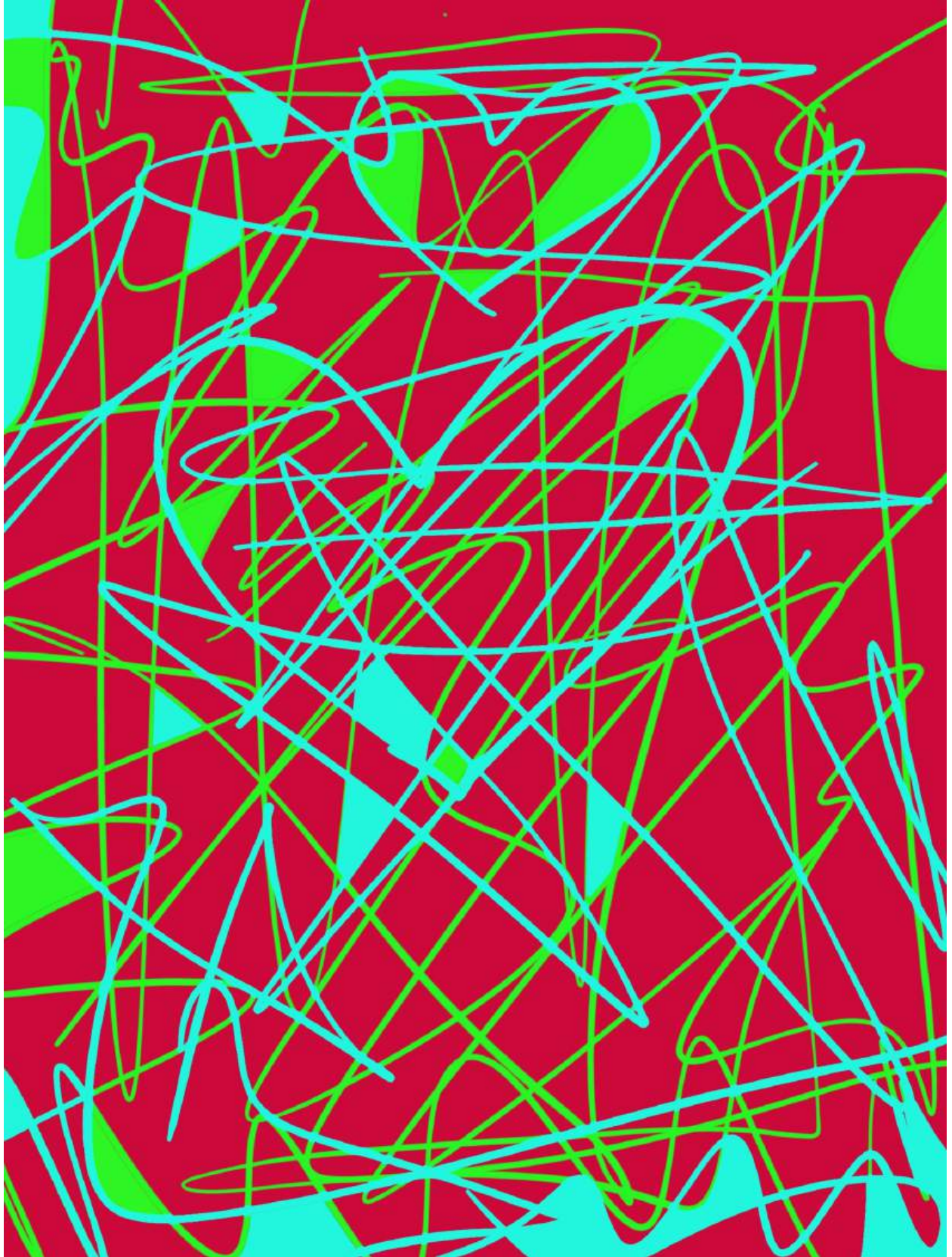
<sup>[2]</sup> Reos from the Greek rheo, to flow, a word Bohm himself used for his experimental verb-based language, the rheomode



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Yiannis has led many of Reos Partners' flagship projects, including the Inclusive Insurance Innovation Labs (with A2ii and CGAP), the Syria Justice Innovation Process, and the Western Indian Ocean Transformative Scenarios Process. His work consistently addresses situations in which no single actor can solve the problem alone, and in which lasting change requires attending to depth rather than managing surfaces.

He holds degrees and has completed professional trainings at the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, and the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) and is currently training as a Jungian analyst, a path that has deepened his understanding of the relationship between inner transformation and systemic change. His chapter in this volume reflects the convergence of these two streams of work.



### **Chapter 3. Relational & Collective Leadership (From leadership to shared coherence)**

*This cluster reflects what you call “Coherence-Holding”.*

## **Claudia Cataldi: The Quiet Revolution of Leadership: From Control to Care**

### **Abstract**

This essay explores the evolution of leadership from a paradigm rooted in control, dominance, and performance toward one grounded in care, empathy, and interdependence. It argues that the crises of the 21st century: ecological, social, and emotional, cannot be solved by hierarchical power, but by a collective awakening to compassion as the true form of intelligence. Drawing on indigenous wisdom, emotional ecology, and the balance between the feminine and the masculine, the text calls for a humanitarian approach to leadership that listens, nurtures, and co-creates. Leadership, in this vision, is not an act of authority but an act of belonging, a shared commitment to sustain life with integrity and tenderness.

Keywords: Leadership, Humanity, Ecology, Empathy, Transformation

### **Introduction**

We are living in a time when the word leadership has become both overused and misunderstood. Too often, it is associated with dominance, charisma, performance, and the ability to move others through willpower. Yet, the crises that define the 21st century: ecological collapse, inequality, displacement, digital alienation, cannot be solved by the same type of leadership that helped create them. The Earth, in her silent wisdom, is asking for a new kind of leader: one who listens before speaking, who builds before conquering, and feels before deciding. This is leadership that finds its strength in care, not in control. From Ego-Systems to Eco-Systems, humanity is slowly awakening to an interdependent truth: we exist within ecosystems, not apart from them. Traditional leadership models have long revolved around the self: maximizing profits, asserting control, achieving personal legacy, but this approach no longer serves a planet that depends on balance and connection. The leader of the future is not the hero at the top of the pyramid but the gardener of relationships, the weaver of interdependence that sustains the whole. Leaders will need to speak the language of ecology, not only environmental but social and spiritual ecology. They must recognize that every decision creates ripples through people, communities, and generations. In this shift from ego to eco, leadership becomes less about control and more about care, an act of stewardship toward all forms of life. (RITTER, Luea, and ANAIS Sägeser,2025) Emerging leadership paradigms are deeply rooted in emotional intelligence. Empathy is no longer a soft skill; it is a survival skill. In a fragmented world, the ability to recognize and validate another's pain is revolutionary. Leadership that heals requires humility to admit, "I don't have all the answers, but I am willing to listen." The humanitarian leader practices presence. They create environments where individuals feel seen, heard, and safe to express truth. This trust becomes the foundation for innovation because people only dare to create when they feel they belong.

Many indigenous cultures never separated humanity from nature. Leadership, in these communities, emerges not from authority but from service. The Maori concept of *kaitiakitanga*, for instance, speaks of guardianship, the sacred duty to care for the land and for future generations. Among the Guarani people of South America, the notion of *teko porã* (“the good way of living”) defines leadership as harmony with all beings. These worldviews remind us that leadership is not about managing others; it is about belonging responsibly to the web of life. Perhaps the most urgent lesson we can learn from them is this: the Earth does not need leaders who are brilliant, but leaders who are kind. For centuries, leadership was coded as masculine: rational, competitive, vertical. Yet, the crises of our time are demanding the reemergence of feminine principles: cooperation, intuition, empathy, circular thinking. This is not about gender; it is about balance. The feminine is what connects the mind to the heart, the power to the purpose. The humanitarian leader embodies this integration. They understand that compassion is not weakness; it is strategy. It builds sustainable institutions because it honors the human pulse within them. Leadership that nurtures instead of dominates becomes regenerative by nature; it gives more than it takes.

The ecological, social, and spiritual challenges before us require not superhuman strength, but human honesty, the courage to say, “I am scared too, but let’s act anyway.” When leaders express vulnerability, they invite authenticity in others. This mutual openness builds collective intelligence, a force far greater than individual brilliance. Leadership, then, becomes less about control and more about co-creation. The humanitarian perspective teaches that solutions emerge not from authority, but from relationship.

Our civilization measures progress through growth curves and GDP graphs, but what if we measured it through well-being, inclusion, and ecological balance? Imagine if leadership awards were given not for expansion, but for restoration; not for efficiency, but for empathy. In this new paradigm, success is defined not by what we accumulate, but by what we repair. The humanitarian leader asks, before every decision: Who benefits? Who is left out? What will this mean for the next generation? This shift from extraction to stewardship is the ethical foundation of the ecocivilization we must now build. (HAYDEN, A., 2022).

If leadership must evolve, so must education. Schools and universities that still train young minds for competition are preparing them for a world that no longer exists. We need learning spaces that teach emotional literacy, critical empathy, and cross-cultural understanding. We need mentors, not bosses; facilitators, not authorities. Every child should learn that leadership is not about being followed, it is about ensuring that others can flourish. The classroom, like the forest, must be a place of mutual growth. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital ecosystems are redefining what it means to be human. In this context, leadership must become the moral compass of innovation. The humanitarian leader asks not, “Can we?” but “Should we?” Technology guided by empathy can heal, connecting rural schools to global knowledge, giving voice to the marginalized, protecting biodiversity. But technology without compassion isolates, manipulates, and dehumanizes. The next generation of leaders will have to code not only algorithms, but ethics.

Every breakdown carries within it the possibility of breakthrough. Pandemics, wars, and climate disasters are not only warnings; they are invitations to maturity. They remind us that our species has survived not because we were the strongest, but because we learned to cooperate. Leadership in times of crisis requires both inner resilience and collective vision. It is the art of finding coherence amid chaos, of keeping faith in humanity even when fear becomes the dominant language. The humanitarian leader does not deny pain; they transform it into purpose. Leadership for an ecocivilization is not the task of a few enlightened individuals. It is the awakening of the collective. Every teacher who listens, every nurse who comforts, every activist who plants a tree, each one embodies this new paradigm. The humanitarian leader recognizes that leadership is no longer a title; it is a responsibility shared by all conscious beings. We are co-leaders in the evolution of life on Earth. As we step into this uncertain century, let us remember that the true measure of leadership is not how high we rise, but how gently we lift others. If our civilization is to endure, it will be because we learned that to care, deeply, wisely, and together, is the most radical form of leadership there is. (MIRVIS et al., 2010)

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## Eleonora Bonacossa: Teamship and the Human Factor: A New Model for Leadership 5.0

### Abstract:

This chapter explores the shift from traditional, top-down leadership to *Teamship*—a shared, human-centered approach at the core of Leadership 5.0. Rooted in five revolutionary drivers—education, innovation, civil society, AI & technology, and art—Leadership 5.0 integrates sustainability, innovation, and humanity. At the heart of this transformation lies the *Human Factor: a set of relational Power Skills that are essential, not optional*.

Drawing from professional coaching practice and thought leaders like Keith Ferrazzi, the chapter introduces the *Social Contract*—a co-created agreement that anchors trust, feedback, and psychological safety. The text emphasizes that real cultural change begins with *inner work* and is sustained through simple but powerful practices.

Three actionable rituals—*Yoda in the Room*, *Intimacy Dinner*, and *Peer Celebration*—illustrate how everyday behaviors can unlock co-elevation, belonging, and shared accountability. In the age of AI and hybrid work, the Human Factor is no longer a “nice to have” — it is a foundation for inclusive, resilient, and purpose-driven leadership.

Leadership 5.0 is not just a model. It’s a movement. And it starts with people—leaders and teams—choosing to rise together.

### Keywords:

Leadership 5.0, Teamship, Co-Elevation, Social Contract, Power Skills

### Human Factor and the Six Power Skills of Leadership

*What if the future of leadership is not about leading at all — but about rising together?*

**Leadership 5.0** represents an evolutionary paradigm shaped by five revolutionary drivers — **education, innovation, civil society, AI and technology, and art** — that together foster a new model integrating **sustainability, humanity, and innovation**. It transcends traditional command-and-control structures, embracing a conscious commitment to co-create shared value with deep care for people and the planet.

And yet, while this vision is emerging, we still see many examples of **toxic role models** — leaders who are divisive, egocentric, and indifferent to the common good. Amid this apparent

chaos, however, something powerful is emerging: new patterns, virtuous practices, and human-centered principles that elevate both individuals and teams.

This chapter presents **Teamship** as a central concept for Leadership 5.0 — one that requires courage, collaboration, and a commitment to mutual growth.

As we move into this new age, **success is no longer defined by authority, status, or strategy**, but by a leader's ability to **connect, include, and empower**. This is what I call the **Human Factor**: the relational and emotional intelligence that fuels trust, collaboration, and transformation.

Contrary to the outdated notion of "soft skills," these are anything but soft. They are **Power Skills** — essential human capabilities that help teams thrive, adapt, and co-create impact. They are also foundational to the shift from traditional leadership to Teamship, where purpose is shared and leadership is distributed.

In my book *6 Leadership Skills to Unleash the Game Changer in You and Your Team*<sup>[1]</sup>, I describe six essential relational skills that I consider non-negotiable for modern leaders. Here they are:

#### 1. Recognize You Don't Have All the Answers

The first act of leadership is vulnerability. Recognizing your limits, admitting mistakes, and asking for help are not signs of weakness but revolutionary acts of courage. They humanize leadership, open the door to authentic connection, and set the tone for psychological safety across the team.

#### 2. Listen Proactively

Leadership begins when we listen — deeply, patiently, and with intention. Proactive listening builds trust, invites diverse perspectives, and forms the foundation of a communicative, inclusive culture. It is an act of presence and a declaration of mutual respect.

#### 3. Provide Safety

Psychological safety is not a luxury — it is a basic need. In times of constant transformation, creating an environment where people feel safe to speak up, show vulnerability, and take risks is essential to innovation and well-being. Safety is the ground zero of high performance.

#### 4. Appreciate

Recognition activates energy. When people feel seen, respected, and valued, their motivation, engagement, and creativity increase exponentially. Appreciation is more than praise — it is an acknowledgment of human worth and contribution.

## 5. Care

Care is the bridge between authority and humanity. To lead is to take responsibility not only for tasks but also for people. Caring means investing in others' well-being, understanding what holds them back, and supporting their growth — in moments of crisis and beyond.

## 6. Encourage

Encouragement is the transmission of courage. It uplifts, energizes, and empowers others to step into their potential. To encourage is to believe in someone before they believe in themselves. And when practiced consistently, encouragement becomes contagious — it moves from "I" to "you" to "we".

Together, these six power skills form the foundation of human-centric leadership. They are the connective tissue of *Teamship* and the gateway to a new paradigm of collective intelligence and shared accountability.

## **From Inner Work to Collective Elevation**

Teamship begins not in group exercises or off-site retreats, but in the inner terrain of each individual. The practice of **inner work** — building self-awareness, emotional literacy, and personal responsibility — is the foundation for every meaningful team transformation.

As I describe in *6 Leadership Skills to Unleash the Game Changer in You and Your Team*, these human and relational skills are not “nice to have.” They are essential capacities that unlock connection, belonging, and impact. Skills like listening proactively, showing care, cultivating psychological safety, and encouraging others are not spontaneous behaviors — they require inner clarity, personal practice, and commitment.

“Leadership is not static but is constantly evolving dynamically. Encouragement, for instance, becomes reciprocal: from ‘I’ to ‘you’ to ‘we’.”

*(Bonacossa, 2022)*

Inner work is what enables us to move from reaction to intention, from defensiveness to openness, from control to co-creation. It prepares individuals to **co-design** and live by a shared **Social Contract** — a foundational agreement that defines how a team interacts, collaborates, and grows.

As Keith Ferrazzi writes in *Never Lead Alone*<sup>[2]</sup>,

*“The key to transformation is not just what leaders do, but how the team behaves as a system. A Social Contract creates the psychological safety and shared commitment that unlock team potential.” (Ferrazzi, 2024)*

When each team member brings their inner alignment into the collective, they can co-create a culture where trust becomes operational, feedback becomes natural, and courage becomes contagious. Through shared agreements and behavioral rituals — such as check-ins, peer celebration, or moments of reflection — the team evolves into a **co-elevating system**.

Teamship is not a technique. It is a human commitment — and it starts with each of us.

To make these behaviors sustainable, however, we need more than individual awareness — we need a cultural shift. And that begins with a new kind of agreement: the **Social Contract**.

### **The Social Contract: A New Foundation for Teamship**

Human-centric leadership cannot thrive in a vacuum. It requires not only personal growth and inner-work capability but also a shared structure that holds the team together and aligns collective behavior. This structure is what the American Team-Coach **Keith Ferrazzi** calls the **Social Contract**: a co-created, evolving agreement that shapes how a team interacts, collaborates, and grows — together.

In his work with over 3,000 teams worldwide, Ferrazzi found that the most effective and innovative teams are not just high-performing — they are *co-elevating*. And this co-elevation is not accidental. It’s built on intentional behaviors, mutual accountability, and a shared commitment to relational excellence. That is the essence of the Social Contract.

Unlike traditional organizational charters or rulebooks, a Social Contract is **not a fixed document**. It is not about roles or responsibilities in a hierarchical sense. Instead, it is a **living agreement** — one that is:

- Co-created by the team
- Visible and transparent
- Regularly revisited and refined
- Grounded in trust, feedback, and emotional safety

### **What Does a Social Contract Include?**

A team’s Social Contract typically addresses the following key areas:

- **How we collaborate:** What behaviors support trust, dialogue, and collective problem-solving?

- **How we treat each other:** What kind of respect, care, and presence do we commit to?
- **What is said and unsaid:** Are we naming the unspoken? Are we creating a space for candor?
- **How we engage in difficult conversations:** Are we avoiding conflict or transforming it?
- **Which tools and rituals we use:** What habits, formats, and language help us stay aligned?

When a team commits to such a contract, something profound happens. It becomes not only a source of operational clarity, but a **container of emotional and psychological safety**. The Social Contract gives permission — and responsibility — to all team members to hold each other accountable, not from a place of control, but from a **place of care**.

### **From Compliance to Commitment**

The power of the Social Contract lies in its **voluntary nature**. People do not comply because they are told to; they commit because they **were part of the process**. This ownership creates a shift from external obligation to internal motivation. It also helps surface and transform the invisible dynamics that often sabotage collaboration — unspoken tensions, unequal participation, fear of failure, or cultural misunderstandings.

*"I like to think of it as a contract among teammates that can be surgically engineered at the team level to hold each other accountable for the application of the agreed-upon practices that help the new contract be adhered to and sustained... It must involve everyone on the team agreeing that there are old notions of our behavior that non longer serve us in the world we live today and must be left behind through the adoption of new proven practices."*<sup>[3]</sup>

### **My Experience with Teams**

In my own work as a leadership and team coach, I've witnessed how a well-crafted Social Contract can be transformative. Teams that start with assumptions evolve into teams that make agreements. Those who were polite become more authentic. Those who remained silent begin to speak with courage.

But this transformation doesn't start at the team level. It starts in the inner reality of the individuals who lead them. The clients I work with — university presidents, directors of academic institutions, senior executives, entrepreneurs — often come to coaching not because they're dissatisfied with their role, but because they struggle with **relational fatigue**. What causes the most suffering is not the workload, but the disconnection: the difficulty of collaboration, the feeling of not being respected, not being heard, not being taken into account.

As Robert Dilts[4] describes, these are **fundamental human needs**: to be seen, to be listened to, to be acknowledged. When these needs are unmet, trust breaks down — even in the most technically competent teams. What’s missing is not strategy or ambition, but **relational fluency**: the capacity to navigate human dynamics with awareness, empathy, and clarity.

Another common challenge I hear from leaders is the **inability to express appreciation** — toward employees, colleagues, or team members. There is a hesitation, sometimes even a fear, of showing gratitude or vulnerability, as if these were incompatible with authority. But in reality, they are **the essence of authority that inspires**.

This is why I believe leadership today must be redefined as a process of **alphabetization in human and relational power** — the skills of listening, care, courage, and appreciation. Without this foundation, it’s impossible to create the kind of deep, collaborative cultures that Teamship requires.

The shift, when it happens, is visible: tension decreases, energy rises, and accountability becomes collective. No longer “I lead, you follow” — but “we rise, together.”

### **From Insight to Action: Three Practices That Bring Teamship to Life**

Theory alone cannot transform a team — it is through intentional practice that culture truly shifts. Teamship is not a mindset we ask people to adopt; it is a culture we co-create through everyday behaviors and rituals. When repeated consistently, even simple actions can have exponential impact.

Here are three field-tested practices[5] — used by high-performing teams across industries — that exemplify the spirit of Teamship and Co-Elevation:

#### **1. Yoda in the Room**

Before a meeting or workshop, assign one team member the role of the “Yoda.” Their responsibility is to observe group dynamics and gently call attention to what is being left unsaid — especially when the team is avoiding tension, difficult truths, or opportunities for deeper dialogue.

The Yoda can ask a simple yet powerful question:  
**“What has not yet been said that needs to be?”**

This creates a space for bravery and alignment. Over time, the presence of a “Yoda” nurtures a culture of constructive honesty, psychological safety, and mutual trust.

#### **2. Intimacy Dinner**

Once a quarter, invite your team to a shared meal — with no agenda, no PowerPoint, and no work talk. The purpose? **To connect as human beings.**

Each person is invited to share a personal story: a defining experience, a challenge they've overcome, or a value that shaped who they are. One of the most powerful questions you can ask is: **“What experience from your past has most shaped who you are today?”**

These dinners deepen empathy, build relational trust, and create emotional glue - the kind that makes teams resilient and creative, especially under pressure.

### **3. Peer Celebration**

End meetings or project milestones with a brief round of peer recognition. But instead of celebrating only outcomes, focus on **behaviors**:

Who showed courage, active listening, creativity, care?

Begin with one minute of silent reflection. Ask each team member to consider:

1. Who am I grateful for?
2. Why am I grateful for this person?
3. How has this person positively impacted me or the team?

Then share out loud. This ritual not only reinforces shared leadership but strengthens the emotional fabric of the team. Peer celebration is a powerful way to normalize appreciation, build connection, and invite continuous engagement.

### **Leadership Self-Check: Where Do You Stand?**

If teamship begins with inner work, then the first step is reflection.

Reflect on these six questions - one for each Power Skill - and three closing reflections.

1. Recognize You Don't Have All the Answers:

Where in my leadership am I pretending to know, instead of being honest about what I don't know yet?

2. Listen Proactively:

When was the last time I truly listened without interrupting or planning my response?

3. Provide Safety:

Do people feel safe around me to speak up, make mistakes, or challenge the status quo?

4. Appreciate:

Who have I failed to acknowledge recently? How can I express authentic appreciation in the coming days?

5. Care:

Do I genuinely know what matters to my team members — their fears, hopes, or dreams?

6. Encourage:

Who in my team needs a confidence boost right now? What could I say or do to transfer courage to them?

And three final questions:

- Which power skill do I most need to strengthen right now?
- What would it look like to lead by co-elevating others every day?
- What kind of leader do I want to be remembered as — and why?

### **Conclusion: Small Practices, Big Shifts**

You don't need grand gestures or sweeping reforms to evolve your team culture.

You need **intention**. You need **courage**. And you need **consistency**.

Practices like these - grounded in trust, vulnerability, and human connection — are how we turn **Teamship** from concept into culture. They are how we move from leadership as a role to leadership as a **shared responsibility**.

We live in an era deeply marked by the rise of generative AI — a technological revolution that is reshaping how we learn, work, and interact. And yet, precisely in this moment of acceleration, the **human factor** becomes more visible, more urgent, and more essential than ever.

I see technology not as a threat, but as a partner — a powerful “sister,” expanding our capacities and access. But no matter how advanced machines become, they cannot replace the **intentional cultivation of human presence**. What each person can develop — with will and awareness — are those **relational power skills** that make true collaboration and human coexistence possible.

That is why I believe that **alphabetization in human and relational power** is no longer optional.

It is a **sine qua non** - a foundational necessity - for working, leading, and evolving together in a hybrid, interconnected, and AI-augmented world.

In the end, **Leadership 5.0** is not just a model. It’s a movement.

And it begins with people - people like you and me - choosing every day to rise together.

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[4] Robert B. Dilts, *Next Generation Entrepreneurs*, Success Modeling Band I, Castle Mount Media, Erlangen 2016, pp. 144-145.

[5] According to Keith Ferrazzi (2024, *Never Lead Alone*), the practices of “Yoda in the Room,” “Intimacy Dinner,” and “Peer Celebration” serve as powerful rituals for fostering team connection, vulnerability, and mutual recognition. These tools — derived from his extensive work with global teams — help transform leadership into shared responsibility, moving teams from assumptions to agreements, and from individual tasks to collective co-elevation pp. 48-49, 65-68, 146-147.



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## **Rajni Vohra: Who Really Creates Organizational Culture: Employees or Leadership?**

*Summary-This article offers a reflective and conceptual perspective grounded in lived organizational and personal experience, rather than in empirical analysis. It examines how culture is not primarily shaped by formal policies, structures, or performance metrics, but by the everyday experiences through which people interpret what is expected, permitted, and valued within a system. The article highlights the emergence of leadership consciousness within broader organizational shifts, particularly in contexts where complexity, uncertainty, and human interdependence exceed the limits of control-based management. It suggests that leadership began to matter more visibly when organizations could no longer rely on hierarchy alone to coordinate work and meaning.*

### **Keywords:**

Organizational culture, leadership consciousness, lived experience, employee engagement, trust and responsibility, management versus leadership, customer care,

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Organizational culture is rarely understood through policies or metrics; it is understood through lived experience:

*“I left the company because of the poor company culture”*

*“The salary is not great, but it’s a good place to work”*

Employees may leave citing poor company culture, or stay despite modest compensation because it is a good place to work. These seemingly simple statements capture the profound influence culture exerts on commitment, wellbeing, and meaning at work.

These narratives are common across industries, generations, and geographies and they point to something deeper than individual satisfaction or dissatisfaction. At the same time, they raise a deceptively simple question: who actually creates culture inside an organization -employees or employers

The answer is not straightforward, but it is revealing. Employees *live* the culture every day, but leadership through its consciousness creates the conditions in which that culture forms.

### **Work, Authority, and Hierarchy in 1980s India**

I grew up in India in the early 1980s, and from a young age I could clearly observe how by and large many organizations functioned particularly in private-sector mills, factories, and family-run enterprises. These environments were generally characterized by rigid hierarchies, narrowly

defined roles, and bureaucratic practices that left limited room for flexibility or discretion. Authority was largely centralized, with decision-making concentrated at senior levels, and questioning seniors was often discouraged, especially in traditional organizational settings. Unsolicited initiative was frequently interpreted as overstepping one's role rather than as a constructive contribution. Treatment of workers and junior employees tended to be shaped more by positional hierarchy than by individual contribution. This period largely preceded the widespread adoption of leadership models as we understand them today

Formal structures were well established, but reflective or participatory organizational consciousness was limited. People operated within organizational systems, but opportunities to experience inclusion, voice, or shared ownership were constrained.

### **The Shift: When Leadership Began to Emerge**

Leadership did not emerge everywhere at once, but where it did, it reflected a broader shift in how complexity, people, and responsibility were understood. For instance, as India entered the phase of economic liberalization in the 1990s, organizational realities began to change. Markets opened, competition intensified, and uncertainty increased. For many organizations, especially those exposed to global clients and faster cycles, traditional control-based management started showing its limits.<sup>1</sup>

This period introduced pressure not only to restructure systems, but also more subtly to expand ways of thinking. While control did not disappear, it was no longer sufficient on its own in every context. As complexity increased, culture began to matter not as a “soft” issue, but as a systemic one shaping how people thought, decided, and related under pressure.

It was under these conditions that leadership began to emerge more visibly, particularly where complexity could not be managed through hierarchy alone. Leadership gradually came to be associated less with position and more with the capacity to:

- hold ambiguity and uncertainty
- enable thinking rather than enforce compliance
- recognize people as contributors, not merely role-holders
- take responsibility for the system as a whole

This shift was neither uniform nor universal. Many organizations adopted the language of leadership while continuing to operate from older mindsets. In several cases, leadership existed in individuals or teams rather than being embedded institutionally.

Yet where awareness did expand however unevenly, leadership began to take root, not as a replacement for management, but as a necessary complement to it.

### **Leadership Before the Language of Leadership**

Long before leadership became a formal discipline, it was enacted through institutional choices.

The Tata Group, founded in India in 1868, offers one such example. Today, it is recognized as one of the oldest and most respected business conglomerates in the Global South, shaped by Indian social realities and sustained by Indian ethical thought.<sup>2</sup>

Decision-making still followed hierarchy, but there was an underlying principle of trust and responsibility. Managers were expected not only to supervise output, but also to act as custodians of people and communities. This created a cultural difference that employees could feel, even if they could not name it.

In consciousness terms, Tata organizations operated beyond pure control:

- authority existed, but was tempered with responsibility
- structure existed, but was softened by care
- discipline existed, but without constant dehumanization

As a result, leadership rather than mere management was able to emerge organically. This allowed leadership rather than mere management to emerge organically. The Tata story shows that leadership does not emerge from tools or titles, but from the level of consciousness shaping decisions. Even within hierarchical systems, leaders can operate from awareness rather than fear.

Based on such illustrations, it can be reasonably argued that leadership emerges when organizations recognize people not as roles to be controlled, but as contributors within a shared human system.

### **Leadership Consciousness Flows Through the System**

Leadership consciousness sets the tone of the entire organization, from the CEO's office to the guard at the gate, and all the way to customer care centres. In my opinion:

- Policies do not carry culture.
- Processes do not carry culture.
- People carry culture, shaped by what leadership normalizes.

Even the most advanced workflow systems cannot compensate for low consciousness. Of course, tools can show task completion, but they cannot capture invisible labor anticipation, coordination, emotional regulation that conscious employees often carry silently. When such leadership consciousness is embedded in culture, it inevitably shapes how an organization engages with the outside world. Values practiced internally tend to surface externally not through slogans, but through conduct. A simple way to observe this leadership consciousness is through everyday customer care interactions. To illustrate this, let me draw on an example from my own lived experience.

## **Customer Care: Leadership Consciousness Made Visible**

As technology has advanced, companies have inserted layers between themselves and customers. Customer care centres have become the frontline handling complaints, confusion, and frustration. These centres do not invent their behavior; they inherit it.

Consider a common situation. A customer orders an apparel item and receives it in the wrong colour. The customer contacts customer care seeking resolution.

In one response pattern, the call is answered after a delay. The executive offers a scripted apology and assures the customer that the issue will be resolved “as soon as possible.” When asked for a specific timeline, no clear commitment is provided. Over subsequent days, repeated follow-ups yield the same response from different representatives. The issue is eventually resolved, but only after a prolonged period marked by uncertainty and frustration. This pattern reflects a system oriented toward avoiding commitment under uncertainty.

In a second pattern, the interaction becomes procedural. The customer is asked why the package was accepted or why it was not checked at delivery. The focus shifts from resolution to policy compliance. Although the problem may be addressed, the experience becomes impersonal and defensive, emphasizing control over care.

In a third pattern, the executive acknowledges the error, offers a clear apology, and provides a concrete plan: a pickup and replacement scheduled for the next day, coordinated at a time convenient for the customer. Contact details are shared, and ownership is clearly established. The issue is resolved swiftly, with minimal escalation.

Across all three scenarios, the problem remains identical. What differs is the leadership orientation embedded in the system -fear, control, or trust. Customer care, in this sense, does not merely deliver service; it enacts the assumptions and priorities shaped by leadership.

Same issue. Three Different Companies. Radically different experiences.

### **The difference is leadership consciousness**

Customer care is not a service function; it is leadership made visible. In organizations where leaders trust employees and empower judgment, customer care feels personal and flexible. Where leadership relies on rigid control and metrics alone, customer interactions often feel scripted and indifferent. The difference is not training.it is leadership orientation.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that culture is not created by intention alone. It is created by repeated leadership behavior that becomes normal.

People don't remember policies. They remember how the system made them feel. In the end, when people say "I left because of the culture", what they are really saying is:

*I could no longer live inside the consciousness of that system. (Period)*

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- Integrating CSR & ESG – Designing impactful programs for sustainability
- Enhancing Communication & Reputation – Building brand trust through strategic narratives
- Mentoring & Thought Leadership – Coaching individuals, startups, and teams.



## Sonja Klopčič: It's Time to Rethink Leadership Titles and Roles

### *It's Time to Rethink Leadership Titles and Roles*

When I think about leadership today, I see it as having a **dual role**. On one level, leadership connects people inside the organization—creating coherence, trust, alignment on values, meaning and purpose, and fostering a sense of belonging among employees. On another level, leadership connects the organization to the wider ecosystem—building bridges, creating partnerships, and generating synergy across boundaries.

The **essence of leadership is the same in both cases**: it is about **weaving connections and orchestrating coherence**. The only difference lies in the space and scale at which this role is played out.

And yet, the way we have understood leadership for decades has been quite different. The traditional model was built on power over, on hierarchy, silos, and control. It was designed to optimize everything for the organization itself. Titles like CEO, CFO, COO, or CIO symbolized authority and reinforced a paradigm in which leaders were expected to have all the answers, to drive performance by command, and to measure success primarily in terms of efficiency and short-term results, frequently on the expense of people and planet.

For many people, these roles were associated more with the corner office, the reserved parking spot, and the generous salary package than with the true essence of leadership. Now ask yourself honestly: how attractive does the title “Chief Executive Officer” or »Chief Sales Officer« really sound today?

Let's be real: these traditional titles often reinforce hierarchy, build walls, and put more focus on power and structure than on substance. But leadership is not only about structure—it is about relationships, collaboration, meaning, self-fulfillment, and creating true value.

**It's time for a new generation of leadership titles and roles—roles that support and inspire, that foster connection, and that open space for co-creating.**

The challenges of our time—climate change, geopolitical tensions, digital disruption, and social fragmentation—require leadership that is not about control but about care, not about power over people but about power with people. We need leaders who can spark energy, foster connection, center purpose, and enable others to thrive.

Instead of titles that define hierarchy, we are beginning to see titles that express responsibility for collective outcomes—titles that convey attraction, energy, ideas, orchestration, and uniting. I support using such titles and, even more, I suggest we replace “Chief” with “Custodian.”

The modern leader is not primarily a commander, but a connector, an integrator, an enabler—a custodian of collective intelligence. And new titles need to show this.

What about:

- **The Custodian of Attraction**, creating magnetic appeal for employees and customers.

- **The Custodian of Energy**, nurturing a healthy culture.
- **The Custodian of Ideas**, enabling innovation in action.
- **The Custodian of Orchestration**, creating strategic flow.
- **The Custodian of Unity**, anchoring alignment on shared values, purpose and belonging.

**These are not just playful words. They reflect a deeper shift from titles as symbols of status to titles as commitments to steward what matters most.**

At the heart of this new approach is what I like to call the orchestrator mindset. So, instead of “Officer,” we can use Orchestrator.

Leadership is no longer about being in control—it is about being in service. Just like a conductor of an orchestra, the role is not to play every instrument but to create the conditions in which all instruments can play in harmony, where something greater than the sum of the parts can emerge.

This is also where I would like to add an important perspective: the power of collective intelligence. Beyond individual brilliance, the future belongs to teams that sense, think, feel, and act together. Leadership must nurture collective intelligence and enable co-creation with all forms of intelligence—emotional, rational, spiritual, but also artificial, systemic, and natural intelligence. True leadership recognizes that intelligence is not one-dimensional. It is plural. And the leader’s role is to be a custodian of this ecosystem, creating conditions where every kind of intelligence can contribute to shared value and regenerative progress.

In the community of AEIOU leaders we recently carried out an online experiment—a systemic constellation of intelligences—where we observed that natural intelligence is included everywhere and is calling us to return to simplicity, while spiritual intelligence is asking us to serve as guardian and mentor for humanity.

Leadership needs to be aware of this and able to co-create with all intelligences.

In complexity, no single leader can possibly have all the answers. Resilient organizations are those where leadership is distributed, adaptive, and regenerative. Leaders who empower others, integrate diverse perspectives, and connect people across silos and ecosystems are the ones who will enable their organizations not only to survive but to thrive.

So, what defines leadership in today’s fast-changing and complex world? I believe it is this capacity to shift from control to care, from hierarchy to connection, from status to custodianship. Leadership is not about commanding followers, but about enabling co-creators.

Let us rethink leadership not as a position of power, but as a practice of custodianship—for our organizations, for our societies, and for our shared future. Let us promote leaders who lead from love, with an eco-systemic view, with purpose and responsibility to create value for all stakeholders. **Because the real question is not who leads, but what we can create together when leadership is shared and we all respond as custodians.**

Non-negotiable quality of a leader today is the ability to *orchestrate collective intelligence*. Leaders need to create the conditions where diverse perspectives, human creativity, and even all

forms of intelligence (AI, systemic, natural) can work together. This requires humility, deep listening, and the courage to shift from control to care.

In short: leaders who cling to authority will struggle; leaders who cultivate connection and custodianship will thrive.



### **Sonja Klopčič, Msc**

**Sonja Klopčič** is a Slovenian leadership innovator, author, coach, and mentor, and the developer of the **AEIOU Leadership** model. She serves as CEO of AEIOU Universe - Custodian of Energy Orchestration, and a Country Chair for **G100 Leadership & Entrepreneurial Education**. Her work focuses on conscious, values-based, and human-centred leadership for a rapidly changing world.



# **Nathaniel Whitestone: Integral Leadership: Embodying the Full Spectrum of Human Development**

## **Introduction**

Integral Leadership isn't about transcending the first-tier worldviews; it's about integrating them. Each of the six first-tier worldviews — survival, kinship, power, order, achievement, and pluralism — is valid, useful, and necessary at different times.

Whatever our knee-jerk preferences for one or another of these worldviews, true leadership demands that we develop the capacity to operate from all of them. Leadership at its heart is the art of wielding influence in group settings — especially in those moments when things get hard, when tensions rise, and when people look around for someone who can help move the group forward.

This article is a reflection on my own journey into Integral Leadership: not just grasping the theory, but learning — often painfully — how to embody it in action.

## **My Journey with Worldviews**

I grew up Quaker. From early on, I was immersed in a postmodern worldview — a culture of consensus, of honoring every voice, of believing in the sacredness of each person's experience. I learned the language of postmodernism young, but like every child, I also went through other developmental phases.

As a child, I idolized power figures, entered into periods of fundamentalism, and held tightly to the basic beliefs of my people. As an adult, I worked hard to embody the ideals of pluralism — the postmodern green value set -- and at the same time, to succeed as an entrepreneur -- modernist values from the other side of my family.

But as I moved from a purely intellectual appreciation of Integral Theory into a more grounded, whole-person integration of second-tier awareness (supported by my mentors Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, whose work I recommend to any aspiring integral leaders), I realized something important: second-tier thinking isn't about knowing the model. It's about practicing the flexibility to operate from the strengths of all six worldviews.

## **The Misunderstanding About Second Tier**

There's an idea floating around that if you understand eight stages of development, if you can name them in order, you've somehow made the leap to being a second-tier being. In my experience, that's not true.

Acquiring fluency with the first six worldviews — being able to inhabit them, apply them appropriately, and not allow one to sabotage the others — is challenging, subtle, and ongoing work. And it doesn't happen in the linear way suggested by a simplistic interpretation of stage models.

We often intuitively feel the tensions between worldviews:

- The pleasure impulse of survival (Beige) conflicts with the moral purity impulse of traditionalism (Blue).
- The kinship and stability of tribalism (Purple) can clash with the individual excellence and ambition of achievement (Orange).
- The red energy of raw power can conflict with the green values of love and inclusivity.

Actually embodying all of these principles is incredibly difficult — especially when stress levels rise, cognitive load increases, and we find ourselves reverting to our default strategies.

### **Influences That Shaped My Leadership**

Throughout my life, several teachings have deeply shaped my leadership style:

- Robert Greenleaf's **Servant Leadership**, with its focus on stewardship and serving others.
- Peter Senge's **Organizational Learning** model, emphasizing systems thinking and collective growth.
- Early lessons from Max De Pree's **Leadership is an Art**, a book given to me by my father.

I also draw heavily from my Aikido practice: the idea that although we are training to align with loving energy and mutual support, we must still remain alert — ready for the possibility that someone may, by accident or design, punch us in the face.

### **Integral Leadership Across Levels of Learning**

To deepen our understanding of Integral Leadership, it's helpful to bring in Gregory Bateson's ideas about levels of learning:

- **Learning 0:** Stimulus-response behavior (like a thermostat).
- **Learning 1:** Learning new behaviors within a fixed context.
- **Learning 2:** Learning to change contexts themselves.
- **Learning 3:** Changing our self-in-world story — our identity and meta-context.

Sociocracy offers a similar model, distinguishing between:

- **Linear process:** Direct work delivering value.
- **Circular process:** Learning and improvement around that work.
- **Fractal process** (my addition): Deep intention-setting and identity transformation across the organization.

In this framing:

- Learning 0 and 1 largely map to **linear process**.
- Learning 2 maps to **circular process**.
- Learning 3 maps to **fractal process** — transformational, identity-shifting learning that transcends any one team or circle, including the relationships of me, us, and environment.

### **Practical Application: Resolving Conflict and Growing Power**

The tensions that arise in collaborative work offer some of the best training grounds for Integral Leadership.

For example, my colleague Lev and I both share a passionate, heartfelt vision and have decades of experience in collaborative leadership. People come to both of us for advice about working well in groups. And yet — even between us — there are moments where we find ourselves stepping on each other’s toes.

Over and over again, I see how the feeling of *you’re stepping on my toes* escalates into conflict. We fall back into win-lose thinking — a primal, biological pattern rooted in our evolution as social animals. We see power as a limited resource: if you have more, I must have less.

But Integral Leadership invites us to a different vision: seeing power as something that can *grow* through interaction. Lev and I have learned to talk through misunderstandings, to name our pain, to reaffirm our collaborative intention, and to reweave trust when it frays. Healthy power emerges not from dominance, but from shared stewardship.

I saw the same dynamic recently facilitating an online community meeting for a cohousing project. They faced a late-emerging risk that could have sunk the project. Tempers flared. Some members wanted to enforce agreements; others wanted to hear new information. Stress activated fight-or-flight responses.

I supported the group in clarifying:

- What are the agreements?
- What are the options?
- What are the risks and benefits?

Then we dropped deeper: exploring feelings, surfacing fears and hopes, and noticing the emotional patterns emerging. After working through this emotional clearing, they could return to problem-solving with greater creativity and mutual respect — eventually reaching a viable proposal.

This cycle — moving from facts to feelings, then back to collective intelligence — is core to enabling groups to tap into their shared wisdom, even under pressure.

### **Leadership Responsibilities at Each Level**

Integral Leadership requires operating skillfully across all three domains:

- **Linear process:** Guiding or inspiring immediate actions in the domain of the working group; made easier by having integrated the perspectives or worldview shared by most team members.
- **Circular process:** Facilitating reflection, learning, and adaptation (e.g., Kaizen, retrospectives).
- **Fractal process:** Supporting the deep work of identity formation, collective purpose, and transformational change (e.g. the transcontextual learning developed through Nora Bateson’s Warm Data Labs).

At each level, the leader’s role shifts — but always anchors in a commitment to steward both the well-being and the evolution of the group.

### **Conclusion**

Integral Leadership demands two kinds of integration:

Integration across the six first-tier worldviews -- embodying a full set of skills for human being.

Integration across levels of learning and organizational process -- showing up in service to get things done together, to reflect, and to transform.

It’s not enough to know the maps. Leadership means embodying the flexibility to act with love, wisdom, and power — to shift perspectives, contexts, and even identities when needed.

I know from my own experience how hard this is, and how easy it is to fail. But learning, and integral leadership, do not require us to be perfect. All we need to do is help each other up when we fall, and begin again to move forward together.

Leaders who can hold these tensions with grace — who can navigate both the primal and the transcendent dimensions of human collaboration — are the ones capable of stewarding real, regenerative change.



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## **Martina Puc: Leadership for Co-Transformation**

### **ABSTRACT**

Through transformation an organization changes on so many levels and to an extent, where people could find themselves in an environment they just do not recognize anymore and could even not fit anymore. They can become alienated from an organization without taking their transformation into consideration in Transformation Management. Such omission could lead to many unwanted scenarios, like passive resistance or even an active hindering against change. To overcome this misalignment Transformation Management should take into account the necessity for people transformation, leaders included and leading with example and active support.

True personal transformation is emboldened with continuous development of traditional competences, like knowledge, skills and attitudes; however, it is more distinct with an expansion of awareness. An inclusion of level of awareness in a competence model would support the transition and even a further development of an organization.

A collective experience of personal transformations could be an additional glue in the new organizational culture, a necessary part of it for the organization and its people to stay resilient. However, to cultivate their progressive involvement in the whole process there is a need for active leadership support on all levels of organization for personal transformations, while leaders transform themselves.

Co-transformation is a complex process of mutual support of transformation among leaders, people and an organization within Transformation Management.

**Keywords:** Transformation Management, Levels of Awareness, Co- transformation, Leadership, Competence Model

### **FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATION OF ORGANIZATIONS ATTENTION SHOULD BE ON PEOPLE TRANSFORMATION**

In the world of metarupture (disruptions stacked on top of one another, each feeding and accelerating the next, coined by futurist Roger Spitz, futurist and chair of the Disruptive Futures Institute as stated by Zhexembayeva, N. (December 2025)) transformations of organizations and transformations of people are parts of our daily life. However, when they are misaligned with each other's transformations, they go apart in some way or another. To manage that risk it is necessary to include leadership supporting them adequately.

## **IN TRANSFORMATION MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP COMPETENCES SHOULD INCLUDE TRANSFORMATION THEORY BASICS**

Burnes, B., Todnem By, R. (2011) noted the essential role of leadership is to encourage change. With an acceleration of change in various dimensions, like frequency, size and profoundness, we move from Change Management to Transformation Management with even more important role of leadership. However, leadership for organizational Transformation has to be distinguished from Transformational Leadership. Transformational Leadership (Avolio B. J. et al. (1991)) is addressing development of followers. Yet, with a critical role of leaders in a transformational process, it is important to take into consideration their own transformational development too.

For a supporting role of leadership in the transformation of people while leaders transform themselves a leadership development program at the preparation stage of Transformation Management should include competences from Transformation Theory with a clear distinction from Transformational Leadership. Kokkos, A. (2022) in a summary of Mezirow's Transformation Theory outlined the following:

- We perceive reality, including ourselves, on the basis of values, perceptions, beliefs and interpretative rules which we have internalized during our socialization process, underneath influenced by our environment.
- The objects of transformation are meaning perspectives and meaning schemes.
- Meaning schemes are more easily transformed than meaning perspectives.
- The ultimate goal of Transformative Learning is to review problematic meaning perspectives; however action should ideally occur as the amalgamated awareness of the reasons creating a problematic situation, as well as of the consequences which can be brought about by a change of circumstances.
- A crucial means to the achievement of the transformative process of learning is critical reflection, which includes the principles and standards according to which a transformative learning group interacts.
- The transformative process goes through certain phases.
- Opinions shouldn't be imposed on learners; they should be just exposed to critical questions and conditions for reflective discourse.

## **TRANSFORMATION IS LEADING US THROUGH ADULT DEVELOPMENT**

Within the field of transformational educational theory Kokkos, A. (2022) is listing among other approaches development order of consciousness from psychodevelopment view. Research on consciousness comes from different disciplines in science and spiritual work. Therefore, it is not surprising the researchers to speak about a spectrum of human consciousness, which includes instinct, ego and spirit; pre-personal, personal and transpersonal; subconscious, self-conscious and super-conscious (Sarkar, B. (2012)). Their work is becoming more important with world's

attention to sustainable business. According to understanding of a concept of superior leadership complex balancing of addressing people, planet and profit is needed (Hayden, G., Jager, K. D. (2010)). Awareness as a part of consciousness is otherwise at the core of research of adult development. Developmental stage theories of adulthood apply to sequential growth in complexity of reasoning. Kegan, R. (1982) in his model of adult psychological development outlines the following five stages:

- The Impulsive Mind Stage (Egocentric), where individuals are predominantly concerned with their own needs and desires. They have limited empathy and struggle with impulse control.
- The Imperial Mind Stage (Ethnocentric), where individuals identify strongly with their social groups, such as family, tribe, or nation. They conform to group norms and often view outsiders with skepticism or wariness.
- The Socialized Mind Stage (World-Centric), where individuals develop a larger capacity for empathy and begin to question societal norms. They seek fairness and justice on a broader scale and are open to more diverse perspectives.
- The Self-Authoring Mind Stage (Inner-Centric), where individuals develop a strong sense of self and personal values. They can hold their own beliefs and attitudes while respecting others' viewpoints. They are goal-oriented and can adapt to various roles.
- The Self-Transforming Mind Stage (Integral or Global-Centric), where individuals have a more holistic worldview. They are comfortable with ambiguity, paradox, and multiple perspectives. They seek interconnectedness and are committed to personal and societal growth.

## **EXTENSION OF A COMPETENCE MODEL WITH LEVELS OF AWARENESS**

Developmental stages of individuals reflect on their relationship with an organization they work in. Individuals are most fulfilled and engaged when they work in an organization whose evolutionary development is in line with their own awareness. Within Transformation Management it is therefore important:

- to assess what level of awareness in various dimensions according to Kegan, R. (1982) would support the aimed features of the organization (optimal level) with design of an appropriate holistic Competency Model;
- to reinforce leaders and people transformation to optimal level of their awareness as parts of their competency development processes within a project of Transformation Management;
- to back up holistic competency development of leaders and people with addressing leadership competencies for mutual support throughout their personal transformation;
- to address the line of privacy.

Barbuto and Millard's statement "As leaders transition to more complex thinking, self-reflection, and increased capacities of dealing with the world, they experience concurrent progression in both constructive development and wisdom development." (2012)) is a suggestive statement within a context of Transformation Management, where with a transformation of an organization we could almost expect some raise of awareness in leadership with an extended wisdom. Therefore, it is important to address leadership development with an appropriate more holistic Competence Model throughout the process of transition to a transformed organization.

According to Chouhan V. S. and Srivastava S. (2014, p. 16) many definitions of the term competency have risen over the past decades, the definition that is most preferred is as follows: *„Competencies include the collection of success factors necessary for achieving important results in a specific job or work role in a particular organization. Success factors are combinations of knowledge, skills, and abilities (more historically called —KSA's) that are described in terms of specific behaviors, and are demonstrated by superior performers in those jobs or work roles. “* Reviewing historic development of definitions they choose for their own work the following definition: *„A competency is the capability of applying or using knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal characteristics to successfully perform critical work, tasks, specific functions, or operate in a given role or position. Competencies are thus underlying characteristics of people that indicate ways of behaving or thinking, which generalizes across a wide range of situations and endure for long periods of time.“* They are explaining a competency model as an organization of individual competencies to enable people in an organization or profession to understand, discuss, and apply the competencies to workforce performance.

Framework for Competency Modelling Paradigms/Approaches according to Megahed, N. (2018) is classified into five major research paradigms, namely behavioral, business, functional, educational and situational models. While speaking about leadership development it is important to notice the educational point of view. There Megahed, N. (2018) is observing both International Board of Standards for Training and Performance Instruction and National Center for Education Statistics of the US Department of Education, and suggests that a competency includes both means and an end, meaning it comprises of knowledge, skills, or abilities, and the end refers to an effective performance of the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment. Reasoning about means and an end is leading to process thinking on competences, applicable models and approaches as distinct from functional concept of an organization. Different organizational structure is supported with a different Competence Model.

On the quest to synthesize and integrate models or structures of competence with an overview of relevant application domains, sub-constructs, and operationalization possibilities Mikhridinova, N., Wolff, C. and Van Petegem (2024) developed characteristics and features placing these competence models in respect to application and operationalization scenarios. They presented taxonomy with an overview summarizing models' development methods, operationalization, and purposes in a specific application domain, while overcoming a conceptual ambiguity of

competence concepts. Under the label of Denotation of underlying dimensions, in which constructs of competences can be expressed, they describe possible sub-constructs of a competence by its input-based (competency, knowledge, skill, ability, attitude, trait, motive, value, self-image, experience) and output-based (action, activity, behavior, performance, context) characteristics, or a competence itself may become an input for a to-be-acquired, output competence. An introduction of levels of awareness as an input characteristic would add value to Competence Model concept role in Transformation Management.

Relationships between individual levels of awareness and organizational type can be observed through the following parameters of the relationship between an individual (an employee and a leader) and an organization:

- o perceived and expected type of a psychological contract,
- o perceived and used Competence Models,
- o perceived and used motivation sources and
- o perceived and aimed focus of action;

all of them integrated in an existing organizational culture.

## **CO-TRANSFORMATION**

When change within any of these parameters is structurally, regularly and systematically reflected within internal formal groups, formed within a new organizational structure, there is a substantial support for personal transformations. Active roles of leaders in these reflections are supported by organizations:

- o with the adequate definition of group roles in the new structure,
- o with an adequate Competency Model including levels of awareness in addition to knowledge, skills and attitudes and
- o with an inclusion of the adequate leadership development for an active role in planned reflections through stages of transformation and change.

With such support from an organization involved leaders can support each other and other employees in their transformation, and with that the transformation of organization.

Co-transformation is an essential part of leadership for successful Transformation Management, expressing continuously evolving crystal forming behavior of human connections within fluid organizational structure.

Co-transformation is building up ability of leaders, people and organizations to gear among different dimensions of reality as smooth as possible and is a crucial part of a transformational readiness.

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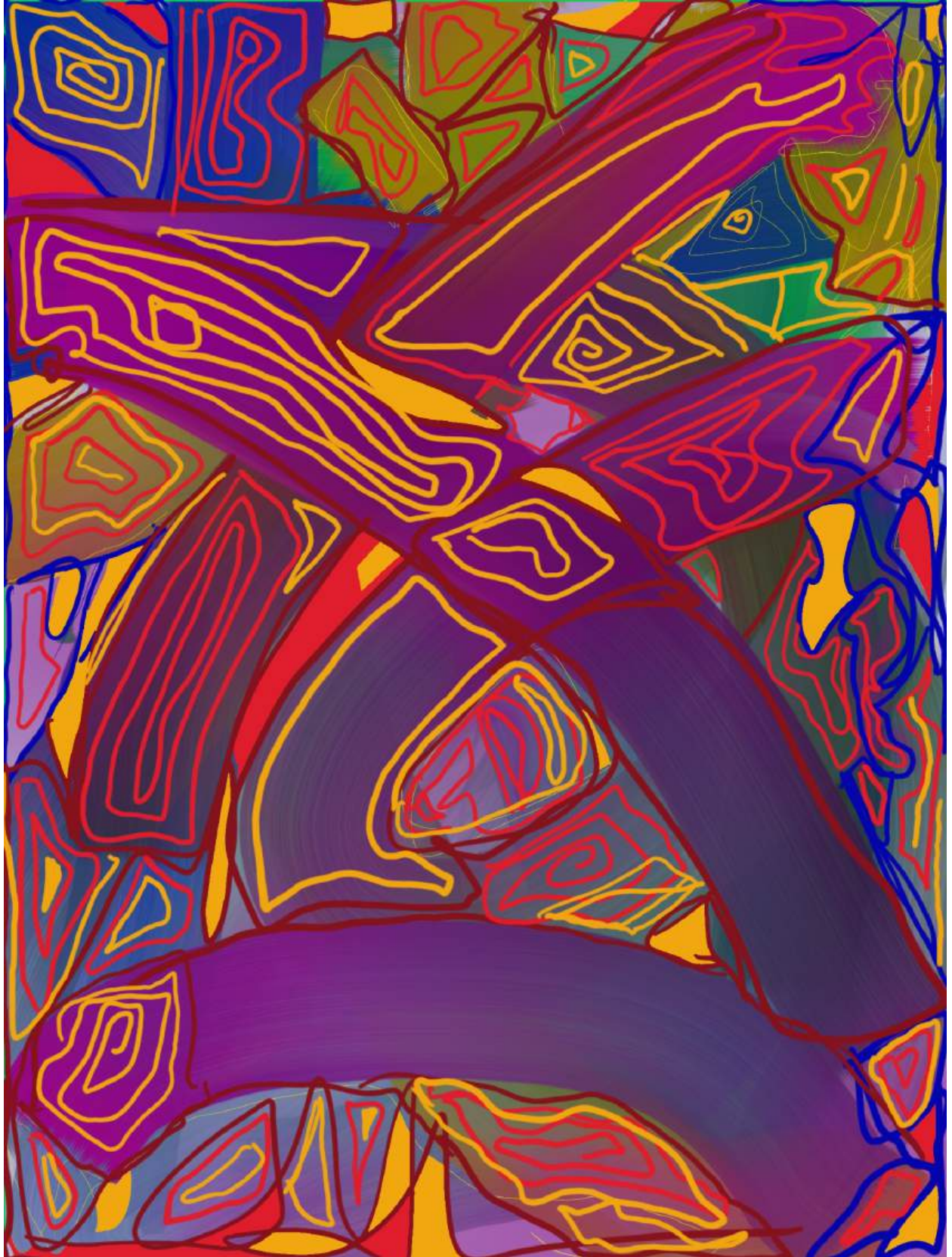
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She is focusing on transformational projects of organizations offering cognitive services. Her competences arise from experiences in Health Industry, Educational institutions, IT and finance organizations and are built with continuous education in fields of leadership, strategy, organizational structure and psychology.

As a co-chair of Ecocivilisation Slovenia movement she co-creates morphogenetic connections of empowered individuals aligned with five pillars of Beings, Consciousness, Society, Relationships, and Space.

## **Chapter 4. Systemic & Complexity-Aware Leadership**

*Leadership operating in complexity, institutions, science, and governance.*



## Leadership is More Than Style: Engineered Leadership for the 21st Century[1]

*'Leadership is not a role. It's a system of relationships geared to turn complexity into collective wisdom.'*

Dr. V M. Saintot, 2025

### Abstract

**Leadership is not a style.** It is society's capacity to meet complex, often existential challenges from institutional breakdowns to global crises. Yet today's leadership discourse is diluted by trends, buzzwords, and 'change-washing'. We call for a deeper intervention. What if leadership was reimagined not as personality or preference, but as a system guided by principles borrowing from physics and engineering? We propose a journey into *Engineered Leadership*: where inner engineering converges with emergence, circular design, and grounded action. Not a new framework or recipe, but an evolving process inviting co-engineers to catalyze paradigm shifts, foster regenerative change, and align with life-centric systems.

### Introduction

In three broad and highly imperfect strokes, we can observe that i) after the Second World War, the world stimulated the emergence of transactional leadership to stabilize and rebuild; ii) later, when economies matured in the 80s-90s, transformational leadership offered new vistas, calling leaders to inspire and innovate; iii) entering the 21st century, we now confront crises of mental health, systemic inequity, ecological collapse, and digital complexity, stimulating the emergence of mindful leadership.

Leadership fundamentally orchestrates 'elementary particles' in the form of attention, intention, and trust across systems. Systems today are fractured. We are on the move from attention economy to intention economy. Today's deep challenges span digital landscapes, international flows of goods, services, and capital, complex informational and emotional overload. We live in a time where artificial intelligence shapes our cognition and perceptions; where post-truth media polarizes our conversations; and a time when climate disruption destabilizes our habitats.

Bruno Latour reminded us that our grand narratives of progress were often blind to the messy entanglements of nature, technology and society to explain his famous statement 'We have never been modern' (1991).

Today's leaders need to recognize that complex relationships across teams, departments, partners, and wider ecosystems are not external challenges to be managed from the outside. They

are core elements of how organizations function. Effective leadership means working *with* and *within* these relationships, treating them as essential building blocks of strategy, culture, and performance.

### **Why Style Is Not Enough**

The emphasis on leadership styles as we often list them: charismatic, servant, situational, emotional, participatory, and so on, risks trivializing what is needed to really address the challenges of our times. We are not facing a styling problem but a complex and volatile systems design challenge.

In the first quarter of the 21st century, leaders cannot simply influence others; consciously and/or unconsciously, they are called to rewire cultures, build socio-technical bridges, and nurture regenerative ecosystems of meaning, trust, and practices in the best-case scenarios.

We face challenges that cannot be solved by soft skills alone. To superficially illustrate this perspective, we reflect on five undeniably pressing challenges:

- i) *Misinformation has multiplied:* leaders must navigate algorithmic bias, disinformation, and cyber insecurity, which demand technical understanding and ethical reasoning.
- ii) *Mental health needs real attention:* burnout, anxiety, and isolation are on the rise in private and professional spaces alike. Leaders are expected to be emotional caretakers yet often lack tools for scalable mental well-being.
- iii) *News about environmental collapse is ever more central:* climate change is not an external threat but an embedded reality. Leaders cannot limit themselves to short-term human planning and need to confront systemic feedback loops that require a lot of energy to compile and orchestrate.
- iv) *Polarization and identity conflicts are growing:* leadership in divided societies requires the ability to hold opposing perspectives and co-create shared realities without stimulating antagonism. Current political correctness may at time give leaders the sentiment they are not free to speak their minds for fear of being perceived wrongly by their teams. This in turn leads to blur even more reality and prevent the design of systems relevant interventions.
- v) *Trust is in decline:* governments and public and private organizations are facing a crisis of legitimacy. Leaders must rebuild trust through transparent and participative processes where consultation are not fake but truly open ended with a space for people to not only be heard but become stakeholders not just be vague stakeholders.

### **Soft Skills Are Necessary Yet Not Sufficient**

Soft skills such as empathy, active listening, emotional intelligence and conflict mediation are fundamental to leadership. However, in 21st-century systems, they are no longer enough.

Firstly, soft skills cannot redesign systems. Although they can help people feel heard and ease interpersonal dynamics, they cannot reconfigure workflows, rebuild trust architectures or restructure socio-technical systems that rely on formal mechanisms, shared standards and institutional governance.

Secondly, soft skills are difficult to scale up. While a leader may be able to resolve tensions within a team, these abilities often fail to generalize across distributed, cross-functional ecosystems with diverse agendas and cultural norms.

Thirdly, soft skills are often intuitive and context dependent. Their effectiveness depends on tacit knowledge, unspoken social cues and interpersonal history, which makes them unreliable as a repeatable method.

Lastly, soft skills lack systemic diagnostics. They offer little help in identifying structural bottlenecks or addressing power imbalances that perpetuate dysfunction throughout the organization.

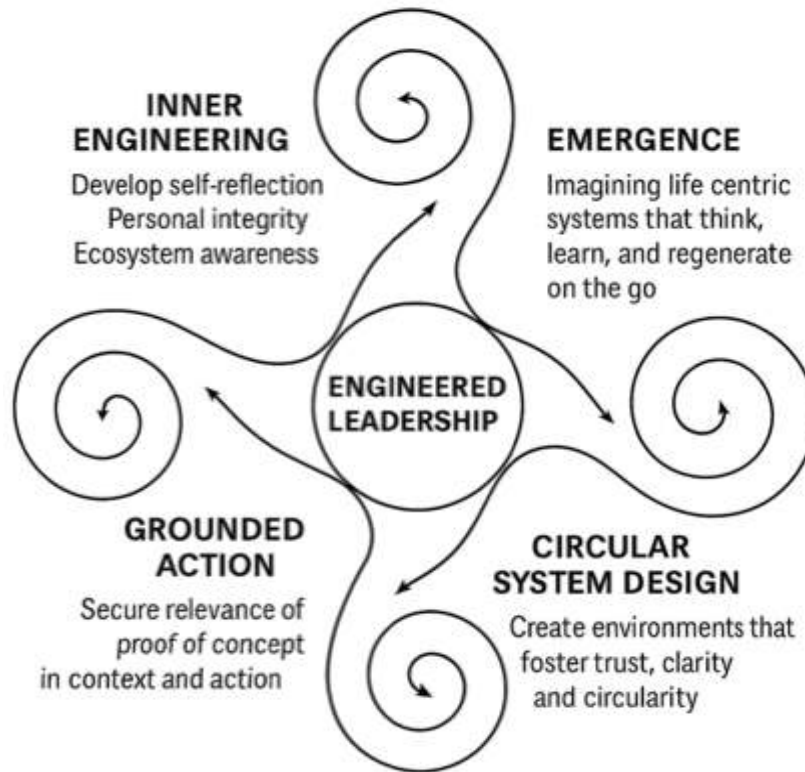
Rather than discarding soft skills, engineered leadership builds on them by applying systems literacy, design capabilities, and technical sensemaking to amplify their impact across the whole.

### **Engineered Leadership Framework**

In times of accelerating disruption, organizations often resort to the language of transformation using terminology such as resilience, agility and systems thinking without meaningfully altering their inner logic and deep intention. This phenomenon, often referred to as 'change-washing', creates the appearance of evolution while maintaining the status quo.

Engineered leadership provides an alternative approach in the form of a mindset which prevents and at times reveals superficial changes. By focusing on system diagnostics, energy dynamics, stakeholder co-design and inner development, engineered leadership can reveal cosmetic changes and hold organizations accountable for deeper structural transformation. Engineered leadership is not merely about influence or authority it is about orchestrating systemic vitality across inner and outer domains.

We have created a framework composed of four mutually reinforcing dimensions as presented in Figure 1 and entitled *Engineered Leadership Quadriskell*.



**Figure 1** *Engineered Leadership Quadriskell*

Each spiral represents a source of leadership energy: personal, directional, systemic, and practical that together form a dynamic whole.

- i) *Inner Engineering*: with this perspective, leaders and teams are invited to develop self-reflection, personal integrity and ecosystem awareness. Leadership begins within. Inner Engineering is the practice of cultivating self-awareness, emotional agility, and ethical grounding. It is about aligning one’s values, presence, and perception to act from clarity rather than reactivity. Leaders must build inner capacity to hold ambiguity, stay rooted under pressure, and see the bigger picture. Without a strong inner core, even the most advanced strategies lose coherence. Inner Engineering connects us to our core energy and discernment.
- ii) *Emergence*: with emergence, we touch on life-centric systems that think, learn, and regenerate on the go. Leadership in complex systems is not about control, it is about enabling emergence. This dimension involves cultivating collective intelligence, designing for uncertainty, and imagining regenerative futures. Leaders who practice emergence create the conditions for learning, adaptation, and innovation to happen across boundaries. Leaders and teams do not mean to predict the future but to host the processes that allow new possibilities to unfold wisely. Here, energy is focused with intention and attention.

- iii) *Circular System Design*: like in physics, energy does not get lost but directed or redirected. Our vision of circular systems is to create environments that foster trust, clarity, and circularity to achieve a more effective and efficient management of natural and non-natural resources. Sustainable leadership is systemic leadership. Circular System Design is about shaping cultures and processes that recycle trust, information, and value rather than depleting them. It requires seeing the organization as an ecosystem with dynamic feedback loops, co-creative participation, and mutual care embedded into its design. Leaders move from linear extraction to circular regeneration, ensuring that no energy is lost, and every interaction contributes to long-term vitality and life-centricity.
- iv) *Grounded Action*: good intentions and bold visions must be grounded in situated action. Grounded Action is the discipline of translating ideas into context-specific, evidence-based interventions. It requires working with the constraints and affordances of the real world: piloting, testing, learning, and iterating as much and often as needed. Leaders who stay grounded ensure that strategy is not abstract but alive, adaptive, and meaningful. They build credibility by showing that change is not only imagined, but enacted.

The *Engineered Leadership Quadriskell* is not a prescriptive approach for transformation projects nor a list of tips and tricks. Unlike traditional leadership models that may offer linear steps or fixed styles, the quadriskell reflects an emergent logic. It is more a compass than a roadmap.

Leaders and teams working with this mindset are not applying a predefined recipe, they are sensing, designing, adapting, and co-evolving in real time the path and the goals. Each context demands its own translation of the four dimensions of the quadriskell. The process reveals itself on the go and is not executed from a script.

Engineered Leadership invites practitioners to be architects of participation, stewards of energy, and designers of relevance and not merely followers of frameworks.

### **The Physics of Engineered Leadership**

To allow ourselves to evolve our way of being present to the world, we need to revisit leadership with the lens of a few concepts borrowed from physics. May those truly knowledgeable with engineering and physics invest some units of tolerance for the possibly clumsy analogies. The goal is to stimulate imagination and shake certainties to allow the new to emerge.

Taking inspiration and metaphorically borrowing from physics, the Engineered Leadership Quadriskell can be viewed as a way to mobilize our various energies (core, directed, regenerative, applied) borrowing from physics principles (vibration, resonance, flow and coherence) as proposed in Table 1.

QUADRISKELL	FOCUS	ENERGY TYPE	PHYSICS PRINCIPLE
Inner Engineering	Reflection, presence, inner alignment	Core energy	Vibration
Emergence	Intention, imagination, life-centric design	Directed energy	Resonance
Circular Design	Systems thinking, no waste, trust loops	Regenerative energy	Flow
Grounded action	Prototyping, context-based execution	Applied energy	Coherence

**Table 1**      *Physics of Engineered leadership*

Below are six underlying mechanics of this engineered approach to leadership, offering frameworks, metaphors, and tools that move us beyond intuition and charisma.

### ***Systems Mapping and Network Thinking***

Leadership is not a top-down process of influence. It is a dynamic network of interrelated actors, forces, and flows. In engineered leadership, leaders and teams become systems thinkers capable of seeing the whole, not just the parts.

Understanding feedback loops, delays, interdependencies, and leverage points is essential. Tools like causal loop diagrams, systems archetypes, stock and flow diagrams, and network visualizations help make the invisible architecture of influence visible. These tools allow shapeholders to identify points of intervention that can create ripple effects across an entire system. Engineered leadership sees complexity not as a threat, but as a field of potentials.

### ***Thermodynamics of Leadership***

Leadership can be viewed as a thermodynamic system, one that must manage energy flows, entropy, and renewal cycles. Just as machines and ecosystems need energy input to maintain function, so too do human systems.

When leaders fail to renew their own energy or that of their teams, burnout and disintegration follow. The antidote is designing cultures with built-in rhythms of recovery. Think of Agile sprints followed by deliberate rest periods, mindfulness-at-work practices, or meta-reflection retreats. Entropy must be countered with regenerative leadership practices that sustain vitality and performance over the long term. Sustainable leadership is energetic, renewed, rhythmic, and resilient.

### ***Homeostasis and Adaptability***

Healthy systems maintain homeostasis, a dynamic balance that allows for adaptability in changing environments. In organizations, this means balancing stability with the ability to evolve.

Engineered leadership promotes the capacity to distinguish between technical problems (which have clear solutions) and adaptive challenges (which require learning, experimentation, cultural change and co-engineering). Tools like adaptive leadership frameworks, learning organizations, and feedback-rich cultures support this balance. Lifelong learning becomes not just a personal goal but a system-wide norm. Leadership is the art of maintaining coherence while dancing with change in an uncertain and volatile world.

***Cognitive Diversity and Sensemaking***

In a world of increasing ambiguity, no single perspective is enough. Engineered leadership embraces cognitive diversity, bringing together multiple ways of knowing to generate deeper insights.

Leaders need to understand the nature of the challenge they face, whether it is simple, complicated, complex, or chaotic and need to tailor their responses accordingly. Visual and visible thinking, inclusive foresight, and narrative methods become tools for collective sensemaking, enabling teams to navigate uncertainty together. Diversity of thoughts is not a box to check but a strategic advantage to make use of. The most powerful teams are not echo chambers but ecosystems of minds, hearts and hands.

***Ethical Co-Design***

The age of command-and-control leadership is over. In its place comes co-creation, co-engineering, engaging stakeholders not as recipients of change, but as co-authors of shared futures.

Engineered leadership draws on design thinking, participatory design, and collaborative foresight. Methods like open space technology, design sprints, and stakeholder canvases allow leaders and teams to democratize innovation, increasing both the quality and legitimacy of decisions. This shift from *'doing to'* towards *'doing with'* is both an ethical and a strategic necessity. The future is not something we lead people into; it is something we co-design and engineer together.

We could reimagine leadership so that we are in the right relationship with each other, with technology and with the one planet we know is habitable and lovable. We could design organizations not as machines but as living systems as displayed in Table 2.

DIMENSION	MACHINE VIEW	LIVING SYSTEM VIEW
Structure	Fixed hierarchy, predefined roles	Fluid networks, evolving relationships
Control	Centralized, top-down	Distributed, responsive

<b>Purpose</b>	Efficiency, output, predictability	Growth, resilience, adaptation
<b>Change Process</b>	Linear, planned, controlled	Emergent, iterative, self-organizing
<b>Employees</b>	Replaceable parts, role players	Contributors with agency, meaning-makers
<b>Knowledge Flow</b>	Siloed, managed through reporting	Dynamic, peer-to-peer learning
<b>Leadership Role</b>	Command and correct	Sense, nurture, enable
<b>Feedback</b>	Reactive: fix deviations	Generative: amplify learning and evolution
<b>Energy Metaphor</b>	Input-output; energy is used up	Circulating; energy is renewed
<b>Innovation</b>	Driven by R&D departments	Emerges from edge interactions
<b>System Health</b>	Measured by productivity and control	Measured by trust, adaptability, vitality
<b>Vision of Success</b>	Optimal performance under constraint	Thriving ecosystem aligned with purpose

**Table 2** *Organizations As Living Systems*

Viewing organizations as living systems instead of machines fundamentally changes how we understand structure, leadership, change, and value creation.

### **Toward a New Ethos of Leadership**

Engineered leadership does not reject soft skills; rather, it expands on them in a contextually appropriate way, with a sense of integrity and accountability. It is a discipline that combines the precision of complex systems thinking with profound human insight. In this new ethos, leaders are not heroes, but rather stewards of complexity, facilitators of emergence and co-creators of systemic circularity.

To design engineered solution, it takes to verify the working hypothesis, facts, data, information and knowledge and even wisdom in presence. It requires a proper matching of the methods with the root caused diagnosed so what is created leads to a holistic desirable outcome.

Table 3 summarizes the essential questions that may guide people, teams, organizations and entire societies into the tenants of the problem under review.

<b>PERSPECTIVES</b>	<b>INQUIRY (Individually, collectively, within and across systems)</b>
<b>System Diagnostics</b>	What are the system’s hidden structures, loops, and leverage points?

<b>Stakeholder Participation</b>	Who is shaping the solution, and who is left out?
<b>Energy and Renewal</b>	How is energy managed across people and processes? What renewal practices exist?
<b>Inner Development</b>	To which extend are leaders and teams cultivating the capacities needed to carry the change?
<b>Tool Fit-for-Purpose</b>	How do you assess the efficiency of the tools used in terms of illusion of progress or real problem solving?
<b>Feedback and Adaptation</b>	How formalized is the process for learning and iterating building on ongoing feedback loops?
<b>Ethical Implications</b>	How are power, equity, and unintended consequences transparently effectively addressed?

**Table 3**      ***Questions To Ask To Move Towards Engineered Leadership***

To lead in the age of artificial intelligence, planetary challenges, and social fragmentation, we must learn not just to inspire but to design, map, sense, adapt, renew, co-create and co-engineer. What if leadership was not a role but a relational system with a more collective and personal dimension? What if leaders didn't aim to be the smartest or the most inspiring, but the most attuned? A new form of leadership would:

*Turn complexity into collective intelligence.  
Convert attention into alignment.  
Transform power from dominance to emergence.*

Such leadership would nurture eCosystems, not eGos. It would aim to heal disconnections, not just optimize performance. And it would do so by engineering trustable processes rather than depending on heroic individuals.

## **Conclusion**

Our vision is not a mere semantic compilation of abstract terms. It is the articulation of a new vocabulary and mindsets, ones that invite us to evolve the deep mechanics of leadership itself. By moving beyond cosmetic changes, we avoid the endless cycles of 'change-washing' that exhaust systems without transforming them. The Engineered Leadership Quadriskell fills a critical gap. It does not offer a static model, but a living methodology designed to engineer our collective capacity to respond, adapt, and regenerate. In doing so, it becomes a compass toward a future not merely endured, but consciously shaped and worth looking forward to.

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[1] My gratitude goes to Julie Vittecoq, Tony O'Grady, Suzanne Dvořák, Filip Lulić and Erik Månsson for their time and dedication. Their concrete feedback brought the article to another level of maturity. NB: some of the tables have been augmented using chat GPT 4o. All errors remain mine.



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## **Thomas Egli & Mrs Chloé Larose: Participatory Science as a Path to Leadership, Peace, and Development**

**Abstract** Participatory research is increasingly recognized as a transformative approach to knowledge production, promoting inclusion, equity, and social impact. This article explores how intentional leadership is essential for enabling participatory research processes, and conversely, how participatory research cultivates new forms of collaborative, community rooted leadership. Drawing on practical examples and theoretical insights, the article demonstrates how participatory science contributes not only to academic rigor but also to sustainable development and peacebuilding. The paper argues for a reframing of science as a co-constructed social process, and leadership as a facilitative, ethical, and contextual practice.

**Keywords:** Participatory Research, Leadership, Inclusion, Peacebuilding, Development

### **Introduction: Science, Society, and the Need for Transformation**

The 21st century confronts us with interconnected crises - ecological, social, political, and epistemological. These challenges call for a rethinking of how science is practiced and for whom. Traditional models of research, often centralized and hierarchical, are increasingly inadequate in addressing complex societal problems that require diverse perspectives and co produced solutions. Participatory research emerges as a response to this need, promoting the democratization of knowledge and the redistribution of epistemic authority.

This article explores the dynamic interplay between leadership and participatory research. It begins by outlining how participatory research depends on a particular form of leadership - not one based on control or charisma, but on posture, ethics, and facilitation. It then examines how participatory research itself generates leadership, particularly among historically marginalized individuals and communities. The conclusion reflects on how these dual dynamics contribute to peacebuilding and inclusive development.

## **1. How Leadership Can Strengthen Participatory Research**

### **1.1 Leadership as Posture, Not Position**

Participatory research does not happen spontaneously. It requires leadership that intentionally creates space for dialogue, inclusion, and shared meaning. In this context, leadership is not about authority or visibility, but about posture. It involves creating the conditions for people to feel safe, respected, and empowered to contribute to the co-production of knowledge.

### **1.2 Building Trust and Inclusion**

A participatory research leader listens deeply and acknowledges diverse forms of knowledge - including lived experience, traditional knowledge, and local observations. Trust is established when all participants feel their contributions are valued, regardless of their academic or institutional background.

### **1.3 Ethical and Transparent Frameworks**

Effective leadership sets a clear ethical framework, especially when sensitive topics or vulnerable populations are involved. This includes defining roles, responsibilities, and shared values from the outset. Transparency is essential in ensuring equity in decision-making and data ownership.

### **1.4 Facilitating Horizontal Dynamics**

Participatory research leaders facilitate horizontal dynamics between researchers, participants, and community members. This does not mean removing structure, but rather enabling shared ownership of the research process. Leadership in this context is often invisible - more about enabling than directing.

### **1.5 Integrating Scientific Rigor and Lived Experience**

Strong leadership ensures that both scientific standards and experiential knowledge are integrated. No form of knowledge is disqualified; instead, diverse contributions are treated as complementary and essential for producing actionable, contextually relevant findings.

## **2. How Participatory Research Builds Leadership**

### **2.1 From Beneficiaries to Co-Creators**

Participatory research does not only require leadership; it creates it. When participants contribute meaningfully to knowledge production, they develop skills, confidence, and agency. They move from being "informants" to becoming co-creators of both knowledge and solutions.

### **2.2 Developing Autonomy and Ownership**

Engaging in all stages of the research process - from design to dissemination - fosters autonomy, responsibility, and ownership among participants. This is especially transformative in contexts where people are used to being excluded from decision-making.

### **2.3 Legitimacy Rooted in Action**

New leaders often emerge from participatory research processes. Their legitimacy is not granted by title or status, but earned through action and commitment. In many cases, these individuals become trusted figures in their communities.

### **2.4 A School of Leadership in Marginalized Contexts**

In historically marginalized territories, participatory research becomes a school of leadership.

People who were once silent begin facilitating workshops; youth take on mentoring roles; local actors initiate collective actions. This shift is not merely symbolic but structural, redistributing power both within and beyond the scientific process.

## **2.5 Collaborative and Contextual Leadership**

The leadership that emerges from participatory research is collaborative, situated, and grounded in real-world experience. It is often modest in form but impactful in outcome. These qualities are precisely what is needed in addressing complex, adaptive challenges.

## **3. Participatory Leaders and a New Kind of Leadership**

Participatory research is not only a process of co-creating knowledge—it is also a generator of a distinct kind of leadership, one that breaks away from conventional, hierarchical, and technocratic models. These participatory leaders often emerge organically from within communities or collaborative teams, shaped by the values and practices they help enact.

### **3.1 Characteristics of Participatory Leaders**

Participatory leaders are facilitators more than directors. They lead by listening, empowering, and connecting. They operate with humility, aware that knowledge is distributed and that impact arises from collective rather than individual brilliance. These leaders embrace complexity and uncertainty, and they cultivate trust over time.

### **3.2 Leadership Through Practice, Not Position**

Rather than being appointed, participatory leaders gain legitimacy through practice. Their leadership is enacted through consistent engagement, ethical responsibility, and the ability to catalyze collective learning and action. Their credibility stems from their contributions and relationships, not from formal roles.

### **3.3 Navigating Between Worlds**

One of the key competencies of participatory leaders is their ability to navigate across different worlds: between science and society, between academia and grassroots, between policy and practice. They act as boundary-spanners, translators, and system thinkers who help weave coherence across fragmented domains.

### **3.4 Ecosystemic Inspiration**

Participatory leadership is often inspired by the dynamics of living systems: diversity, feedback, adaptability, decentralization, and resilience. These principles support governance approaches that are both responsive and regenerative. Participatory leaders foster these dynamics, encouraging polycentric collaboration and mutual learning.

### **3.5 Toward Regenerative Leadership**

This new kind of leadership does not aim to dominate but to regenerate. It contributes to the transition toward more just, sustainable, and life-affirming systems. It is a form of leadership particularly attuned to the Anthropocene’s challenges—able to hold complexity, honor multiple ways of knowing, and mobilize communities for transformative change.

#### **4. Toward Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development through Participatory Science**

Participatory science does not merely enrich academic knowledge; it strengthens the social fabric. By promoting inclusive leadership and valuing diverse knowledge systems, it contributes to both sustainable development and peace.

##### **4.1 Bridging Divides through Co-Production**

Participatory research brings together stakeholders across social, cultural, and epistemic divides. It builds bridges between communities and institutions, between experts and laypeople, and between theory and practice.

##### **4.2 Enhancing Social Cohesion and Dialogue**

In contexts of conflict or marginalization, participatory research offers a framework for constructive dialogue. It provides neutral ground where historical grievances can be acknowledged, and collective futures imagined.

##### **4.3 Development Grounded in Local Realities**

Unlike top-down development models, participatory research ensures that local knowledge and priorities guide action. This results in more effective, equitable, and context-sensitive development interventions.

##### **4.4 Science as a Common Good**

Reframing science as a common good rather than a privileged domain reshapes our understanding of who can produce knowledge and to what ends. This transformation has implications for education, governance, and public policy.

##### **4.5 Shared Knowledge, Shared Power**

Ultimately, participatory science distributes power through the distribution of knowledge. Shared knowledge leads to shared power, and shared power creates conditions for durable peace.

#### **Conclusion**

Participatory research and leadership are mutually reinforcing processes. Intentional, ethical leadership is crucial for creating inclusive and effective participatory research. At the same

time, participatory research cultivates new forms of grounded, collaborative leadership that extends beyond the research context into communities and institutions.

In an age marked by polarization and inequality, participatory science offers a model of practice that is inclusive, ethical, and empowering. It represents not only a new way of doing science, but a new way of doing society.

To support peace and development in the 21st century, we must embrace leadership that enables participation and participation that builds leadership.

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#### PHOTO

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## Marilyn Hamilton: Leadership Challenged: City Leadership Journeys to Wholeness and Compassion

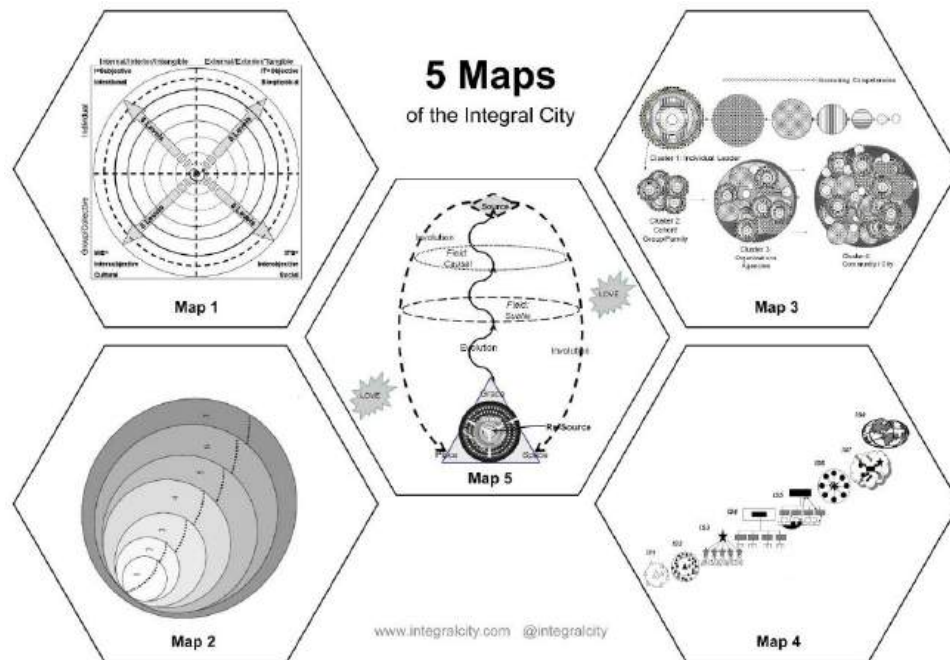
Long ago, when researching leadership in cities, I adopted the definition of Leadership from Joe Jaworski (ref), as “a journey to wholeness”. In a parallel fashion I then defined “community as a journey to wholeness for a group of people” (ref).

The value of these definitions is that they allow the Self and Others to accept ourselves exactly as we are – that we are all on a path to wholeness at every stage of our lives.

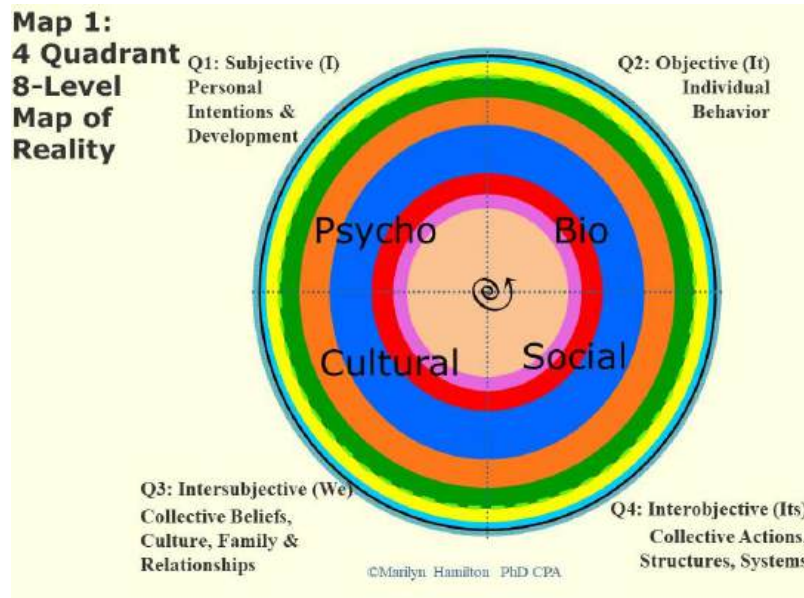
Today, many leaders are challenged on their journeys to wholeness because they live in life conditions that thwart their transformation to become fully conscious Gaian Beings.

Graves and Beck (ref) suggested that a leader’s readiness for learning can be characterized as Open, Arrested or Closed. I consider these qualities represent states of possibility or potential for individuals who are in informal or formal positions of leadership – all on their roads to wholeness.

Within the context of Integral City (and by extension Living Cities Earth or Ecocivilisation) a leader’s journey to wholeness can be mapped out on the 5 Maps of Integral City.



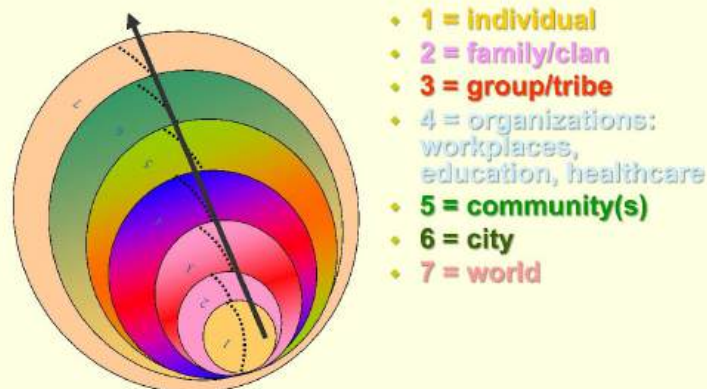
In Map 1 the Leader’s progress is mapped within the Integral Quadrants of Bio-Psycho-Cultural-Social realities. These quadrants extend from the spiritual impulse at the centre of the map across the levels of developmental complexity we could name (and colour in Spiral Dynamics integral terms) as Pre-Modern (Blue) , Modern (Orange), Post-Modern (Orange) and Integral (Yellow).



In terms of Map 1 a leader could be challenged to be Open, Arrested or Closed in any or all of the quadrants and/or at any of the levels of development.

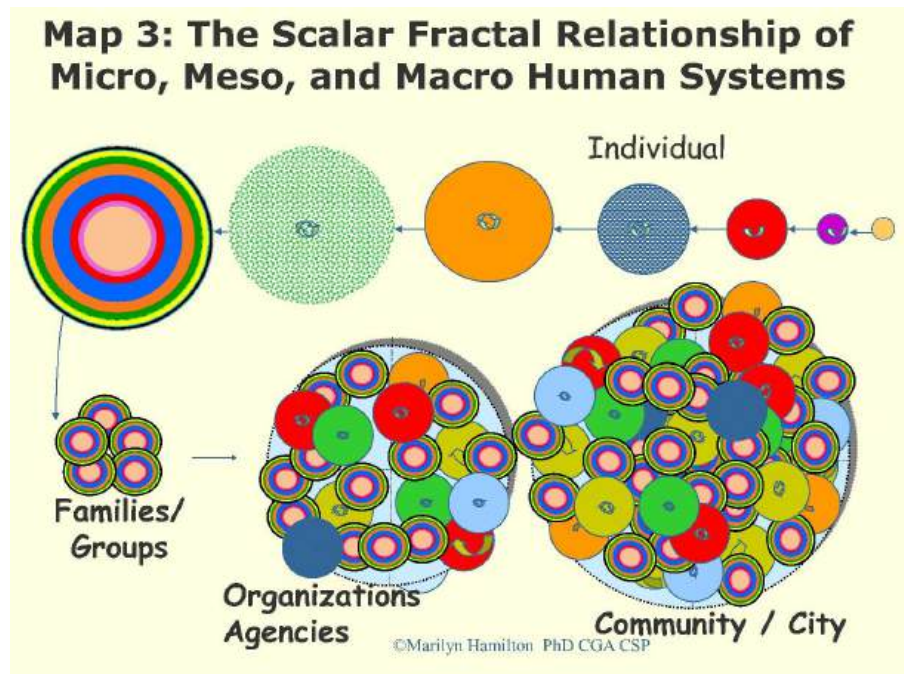
In Map 2 the Leader can be situated in any or all of the holarchies of collective engagement: family hearth, clan or neighbourhood cluster, workplace team, community/city function (city hall, education, healthcare, justice, emergency response), regional environment, national association, or international alliance. In these holarchic situations, leadership practice will be influenced by the challenges the leader brings with them as Map 1 reflects how their lives express in bio-psycho-cultural-social realities each and all at various developmental levels.

## Map 2: The Nested Holarchy of City Systems



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Map 3 illustrates how individuals, teams, groups and communities exist as fractal combinations of Maps 1 and 2 – showing how leadership is Open, Arrested or Closed from the Micro-individual, to the Meso-collective to the Macro – whole city scale. Here we can see how leadership may be supported by their proximity to other leaders and teams of similar or greater developmental capacity or alternatively challenged by others of different and/or less complex capacities. When viewed through the lenses of Map 3, leaders may recognize the tensions of balancing between different life conditions of Open (say their personal experiences) -Arrested (say their team activities – or Closed (say their national political affiliation).

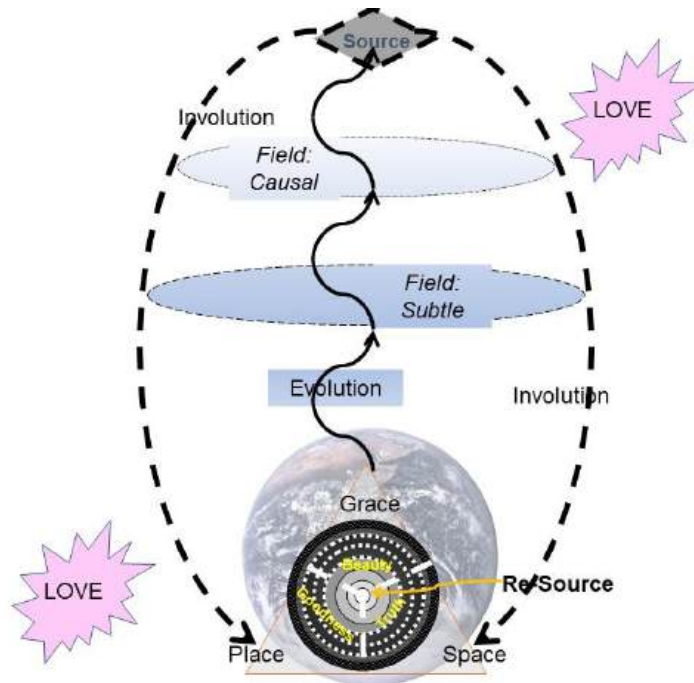


Another way of looking at the dynamics of leadership challenges is to consider the leader’s relationship to the unfolding patterns of organizational development – set out in Map 4 – each of which demands different leadership behaviours. Consider how differently a leader must act in order to be effective in all the organizational forms that co-exist in our current cities; for example as a Parent at home; as a Clan “Shaman” within a cultural tribe; as a Sport Coach in competitive sports; as a functional Bureaucrat at the office; as an entrepreneurial Competitor in the marketplace; as an inclusive Care Giver in social services; as a Systemic Catalyst in a regional ecosystem; or as a planetary Pioneer in a global bio-psycho-cultural-social evosystem.



back to Source. Thus the leader's journeys to wholeness leads to and transforms them through what amounts to Circles of Compassion.

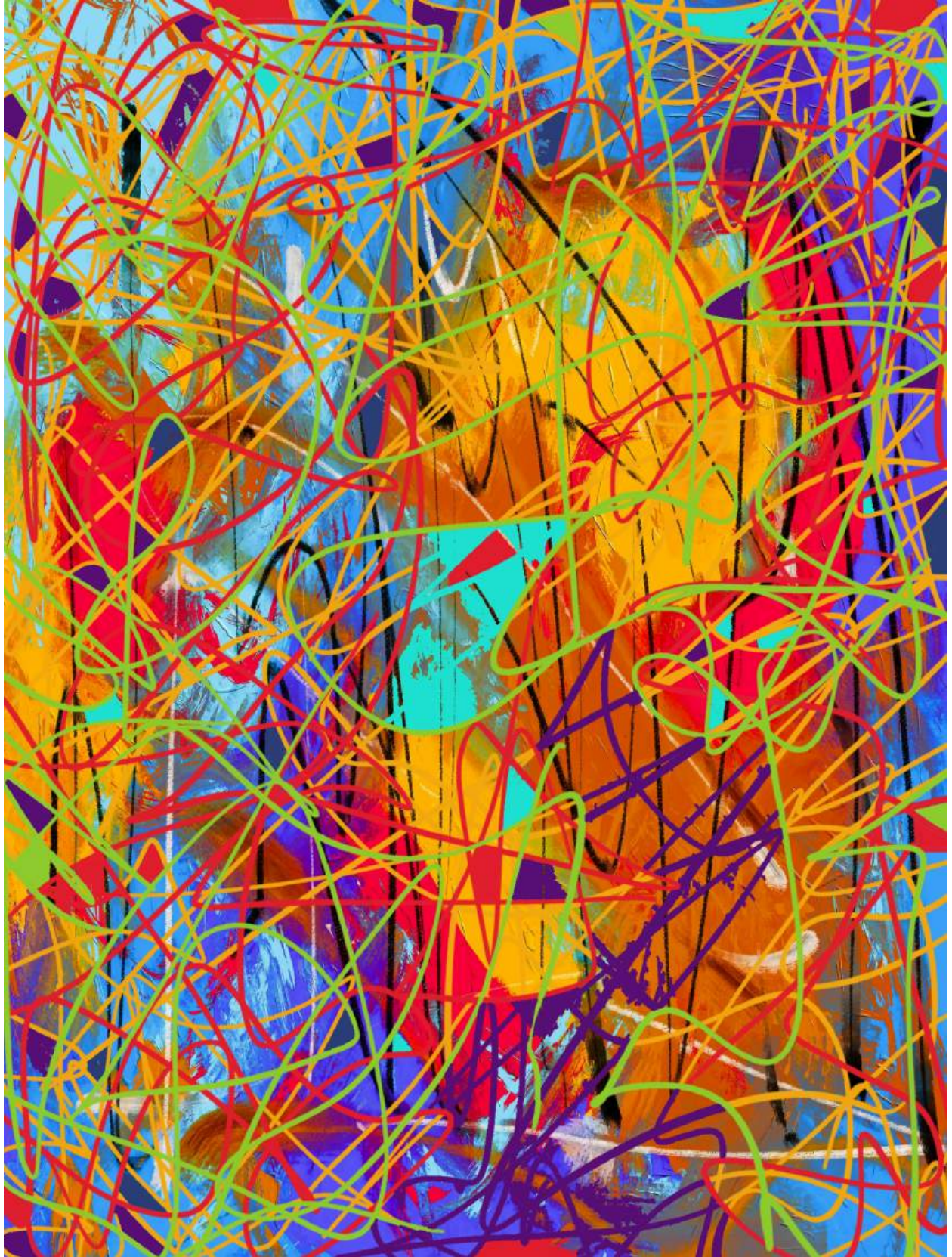
### Map 5: Integral City Map of Spirituality



Finally as we consider the many vectors that challenge leadership in our world of 2025 and beyond, we can take courage from Gaia's Code of Care. Leaders who practice Gaia's Code of Care are in effect catalysing Compassion as a leadership practice. And as leaders who are challenged return always to Gaia's Code of Care, they expand Circles of Care and Compassion. In doing so they are opening themselves and all the lives they touch, to experience Gaia's evolutionary care for all her beings. Thus the challenges of leadership become the portals to ever-expanding capacities and potentials for leaders to care and grow and become ever more whole.



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## **Mar Introini: On the Search of a 5.0 Leadership: Five Drivers for Civilisational Change**

*Education, Innovation, Civi society, AI + Tech, and Art*



### **Abstract**

The speed advances on technology, and AI are pushing towards a global leadership based on a centralized agenda from stakeholder's private interests, and war development, instead of a 5.0 Leadership that invites to evolve within ethics, morality, and high standards on human rights. The state of chaos, especially in relation to security suggests

that there is a political agenda that is using AI as a goal to lead beyond any kind of accountable system. The fact that the new values are not aligned with the development of critical thinking or more independence and freedom from citizens, confirms this idea. A technological change, needed, however in the wrong direction. The simple idea that robots will replace humans, or that we are increasing the possibilities of a nuclear war, are some of the elements that reassures the existence of a global agenda against unity.

Drivers to change like better Education, stronger civil society, democracy, ethical AI or traditional art, are not convenient to a goal of a powerful leadership, centered and focused on domination and authority. In fact, more freedom and influence in the decision-making process from the citizens, represents a threat to those that aim to centralize power. Is it so, that technology may become an ally to progress as well as a threat in democratic terms. Cancel creativity, ethics or creation of "new values" around humanoids robots instead of humans, irreversible evolves towards an agenda centralized only in a small group of powerful actors instead of an open process of transformative integration.

Leadership as a matter of power, and not a tool to impact directly into higher values around creativity and self-determination from Nations and individuals. Is the combination of Education, Innovation, Civil society, Ai+ Tech and art that make it possible. A true driver to change mentalities towards independent thinking and appreciation of each other's differences, instead of following an obscure agenda for whom replacement of humans by robots and high technology

are a goal in itself. A toxic change that supposes a centralized leadership by nullifying individuals' creativity, spirituality and culture.

A global system is meant to join around common goals, culture does not suppose a threat, yet a positive pillar that leads to greater tolerance and integration. Having as a result a more complete system that makes of diversity an asset for an ecosystem based on balancing power, therefore, preventing polarization. However, under the new values, globalization is at the service of a centralized group that in the end, is furthering more confrontation. The wrong way to lead transformation, although convenient to an agenda that aims to cancel critical thinking and high values to pursue the toxic ambition of a super technological power beyond ethics' standards.

## **Keywords**

HighValues, ethics, creativity, culture, civilsociety

## **On the search of a 5.0 Leadership, through 5 revolutionary drivers to change Education, Innovation, Civi society, AI + Tech, and Art**

Modernity or traditions, culture or global culture, ideologies or new philosophies, religion or AI mandate, central or global authorities?

Some of the big questions that are leading civil societies into becoming mere observers and not agents of change, following pre-establishing codes of living that cancel democracy in all its terms. Is with no doubt, the emerge of a 5.0 Leadership, although from a panopticon view that centralize power, searching to replace humans by robots in an unprecedented move to transform the global society into a tool of manipulation and autocracy. Under this agenda a 5.0 leadership is a matter of a few stakeholders with a focused interest on enrichment and domination a not a way to boost better conditions to make of education, innovation, AI + tech and art the true actors for an improved society version on values and knowledge.

Sometimes we forget that those stakeholders that are driven the civil society into AI living standards are the same that are pushing into a permanent state of war, furthering polarization to develop their own goals of centralizing power.

The more the confrontation, the weaker the societies are to developing their models of living according to culture, tradition or even religion.

As a difference from the past, leadership is about transforming political agendas into a results-driven action without relying on personal charisma, yet is precisely a matter of soft power, finding strategists, not visionaries, action-makers, not debate-makers, results-driven politics, not show business politics. In the end, achieving a higher goal on stability and balance, not necessary on prominence and Media exposure. Like an ecosystem, the combination of skills, purpose, and ethics in a specific environment, works as a unit, the lack of one of these elements threatens to collapse the goal of leading positive changes aligned with citizens' agenda, and high values. Leading towards peace, security, healthy environments, well-being and wealth, are some of the main goals in all levels of leadership. However, the scope of performance for each leader

especially those that are out from the political or business sector, is limited to their level of power in society. Consequently, educators, religious leaders, intellectual actors, pacifists, etc. are not leading, simply accompanied an agenda of societal self-destruction in ethics and morality, therefore breaking the fragile thread of common interest and balance.

On recent declarations Bill Gates predicts that only three jobs will survive: coder, energy experts and biologists<sup>2</sup>, which raises many questions about the how and who is leading this cumbersome process towards an AI domination. Under this framework, a 5.0 Leadership is transformed into a complete paralysis from creativity, empathy, connections, or even human contact. Instead, chats GPT, doctors, phycologists, educators, artists, among others, would eventually be replaced by robots.

The question is: who decided that this is the best way to evolve, and why a new leadership must be based on a full cancellation from human essence?

We become aware of the threat that supposes to the very human existence, and the precious gift of their soul, spirit and heart, just by exploring some examples: AI-DA is the first humanoid robot<sup>3</sup> that uses cameras in her eyes, robotic arms and AI algorithms that allows to become a painter. In their website it describes AI-Da's work as art, *"because it reflects the enormous integration of technology in today's society"*. A quite poor explanation of why we need to transform art and start a shocking competition human against technology. I do believe that challenging creativity by this concept is the anteroom to destroy human's heart and soul, two essential parts to become an artist.

The Sixtin Chapel in the Vatican, Rome, masterpiece from Michelangelo, is one of many examples for whom humans are irreplaceable. The majestic work combines passion and spirituality, religion and art, soul and mind to create a unique space to inspire, to vibrate in different dimensions, still mysterious, that are still there reminding us of its eternal enigma. As a difference to a robot, the feelings are not programmed, the evolution is not registered, and the algorithms that lead the path are only made by creativity, passion, and faith. All elements that make us different from machines and must be explored deeply without distractions and the temptation of an "easy life". The capacity to evolve can only be developed by those able to find moral standards and take the challenge to rise above themselves. The other way round, the stagnation on values, drives into ignorant and "frozen" societies that allows a perverse and obscure leadership.

Is time to lead intellectually to make a change, to rescue an agonizing society that is being manipulating to create global standards on "new values" that cancels a high level of consciousness and awareness of the true power to transform themselves and the environment around them.

Another paradigmatic example of those values that are trying to impose us, to erase traditional human relations is the case of Alicia Framis, the first woman that marry an hologram<sup>4</sup>. Framis is the creator of AILex, a hologram based on the profiles of their past relationships. According to her, one of the main reasons to develop their project was as a therapeutic tool for those who

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/bill-gates-predicts-only-three-jobs-will-survive-the-ai-takeover-here-is-why/articleshow/119533999.cms>

<sup>3</sup> <sup>2</sup> <https://www.ai-darobot.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <sup>3</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/01/03/meet-spanish-artist-alicia-framis-the-first-woman-to-marry-a-hologram>

suffered trauma or abuse, as well as to fight loneliness. Moving further in this concept she explains: *“A new generation of love is emerging, whether we like or not, in which humans will marry and maintain relationships with holograms, avatars, robots, and so on. Just as we practice new languages with Duolingo, we will practice relationships with these entities.”* What seems to be an extravagant, mental unhealthy experiment in physiological terms, we may explore the true agenda behind: the replacing of humans and their feelings. This type of project further the idea that instead of tackling loneliness, or overcoming the incapacity to relate to other humans, and search for solutions that fix mental problems, instead, they leave mental barriers without a way out and certainly without balance. Is also good to mention that in the past -1996- Alicia Framis has participated in an experiment for whom she lived for some time with a mannequin. Confirming that is a project that comes from a long time ago and does not appear with AI.

In the end, is about a harmonious relationship mental health and technology that may help on a self-recovery process and not preventing humans to overcome their mental or psychological barriers. By acknowledging these types of relationships, we are being in complicity with an agenda of control and manipulation on mental stagnation that goes against high values based on human dignity and mental health. Evolving towards new trends of technological assistance is completely different to furthering unhealthy models of erasing human relations. Technology development is meant to be a tool, not an actor, a means not an end.

Like in a war, the weapons are values, and the strategies are based on their soldiers not the armament. Awakening to a society that puts empathy and creativity at the front line, Instead, we are on the edge of a collapse on values to the point that a robot-centered action is the one that pretend to lead the path. Is the automatization of tasks the only driver to change technologically, however, is it only now, that we realize that an agenda on erasing humans as inspiring and creative agents is the true goal. A true ideology that is using a biased and distorted version of globalization for their purposes. Instead of distributing power among the different Nations and individuals, they are establishing a sort kind of “panoptic surveillance” - an idea taken from Michel Foucault- centralized in stakeholders that do not make of ethics and morals a priority.

If there is a panoptic surveillance that must be implemented is the one that further an ecosystem in high values standards: education, making of critical thinking a true axis. Initiatives on innovation that do not focus on technological power, yet they use it as a powerful tool that develops creativity towards practical solutions to the current pressing issues. Having as an ally AI+tech as a tool to help humans on their daily lives, not a threat that replaces humans and cancels their possibilities to challenge themselves to become better and stronger. Recovering the place that the civil society deserves: a democratic role of dynamic influencers and actors in the different decision-making processes. Finding balance through Art as the best resource, for human expression on inspiration and creativity to finally construct beauty and harmony.

Mainstreaming leadership towards a global change, within the civil society to take control over all the sectors, having a human-centered perspective and not a robot-centered one. Making of humans moral and ethical greater, without contradictions with a highly technological society, although controlling deeply their use, purpose and goals. Educating for leading and leading within educated individuals, innovating within moral and ethical purposes, giving a central role for the civil society, within an accountable and transparent AI+tech, making of art the tool for

transforming societies into expressions of beauty from the highest values on creativity, spirituality and philosophy. Leading 5 drivers to change, by natural Intelligence, technologically assisted, and intellectually developed. Ethical and moral way to evolve resiliently. Let's be bold, let's be human.

**Mar. Introini**  
**Founder & Political Analyst [thesustainabilityreader.com](http://thesustainabilityreader.com)**

*Mar Introini*  
*Madrid, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2025*

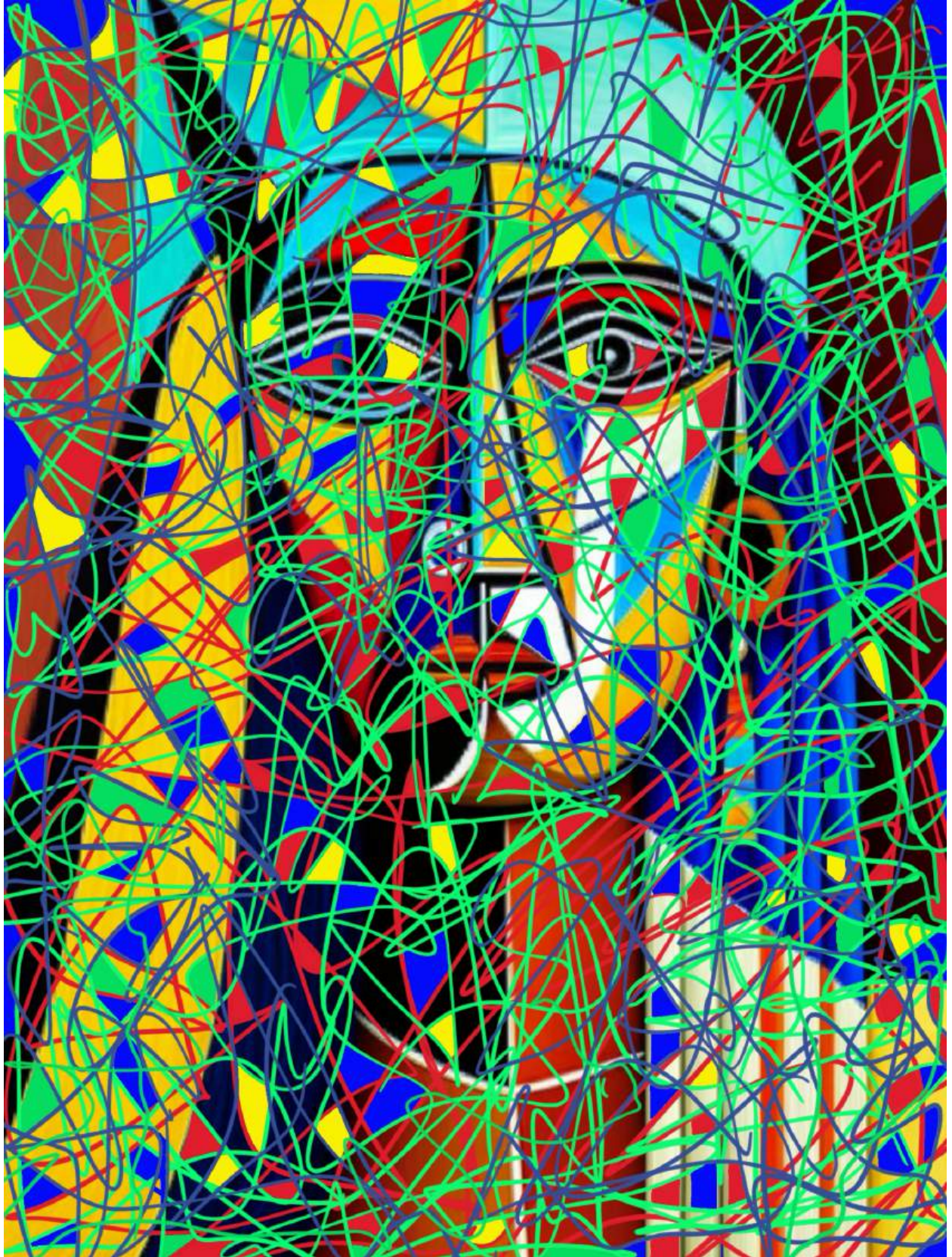


**Mar. Introini** is a Writer, Speaker, Facilitator, International Speaker, Goodwill Ambassador WEF, Doctor Honoris Causa, Political Analyst and Founder of the Blog [thesustainabilityreader.com](http://thesustainabilityreader.com) that focuses on reshaping the global system mainly through a new political approach taking citizen engagement as one of the main drivers to change, along with a Zero leadership concept, reforms from global and regional institutions - particularly on the European Union- and the implementation of the Global Goals. With a legal background as a Public Attorney, and Legal Advisor, Mar holds a vast experience living in different cities, and cultures, Mar has developed a strong sense of multiculturalism based on the need to make of integration, and new legal approaches a turning point for future societies. Holistic approaches that transform culture and religious diversity into a common goal. Joining expertise, and goodwill through advocacy, and networking are the leading principles for her work. Learning how to become a changemaker individually, and in society from a very special focus on innovative strategic thinking, and bold partnerships.

The fact that Mar has been appointed as Global Chair G100 Global Networking, a group of 100 women -from all background and culture- reinforces and complements her commitment towards change from individual action. The group aims to empower individual and societies, through connections in a virtual and innovative platform all over the world by opening spaces for dialogue and exchange.

## **Chapter 5. Ecocivilisation & Planetary Leadership (Leadership as stewardship of life)**

*This is the **largest-scale perspective**, aligned with Ecocivilisation thinking.*



## Thomas Bruhn: How Can Leadership Be a Meaningful Element of a Healthy Ecocivilisation?

### Abstract

Leadership can refer to different aspects that I find crucial to distinguish. On the one hand, the term leadership can refer to a structural role in organizations or groups. On the other hand, it can refer to a personal quality of individuals. From the perspective of an emerging ecocivilization, both understandings of leadership are currently experiencing various challenges such as overwhelm with complexity and leadership dilemmas. The aliveness-oriented vision of an ecocivilization is not consistent with leadership ideas that are oriented towards notions of goals and success as they are set by non-ecological organizations. Additionally, I argue that the notion of an emerging ecocivilization challenges the entire understanding of leadership as it has been discussed in the recent past, and I emphasize the importance of a healthy “culture of dying” as an integral part of an aliveness-centered ecocivilization.

**Keywords:** Aliveness, leadership dilemmas, consciousness, dying

Today’s world is full of highly praised leadership approaches, personality assessments and trainings for leaders. They promise competencies for more effective problem solving and success in organizations or activities of various kinds. What I often find missing, is an honest reflection on what kind of leadership suits (or does not suit) which context and for which kind of purpose. Most leadership approaches I am familiar with have been developed within and in response to a world that does not thrive on the principles of an ecological civilization. Rather, discussions on leadership focus on how to equip humans and structures to better manage or cope with the challenges of human interaction in the presently existing structures. That means that many leadership approaches still start from premises and assumption (e.g. about the purpose or success of leadership) that are not consistent with the fundamental notions of an ecological civilization (Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

As the civilizational model of modernity is increasingly overwhelmed with the complexity of the current social and ecological challenges, and those who are trying to serve as leaders within those structures are in a terrible situation: Regardless of how well-meaning or good-hearted they may be, they are unable to “fix” or “heal” the unhealthy and overwhelmed systemic structures they are operating within. And yet, they are employed as leaders, faced with the expectation that they guide their respective area of responsibility towards continuing the functioning of these very structures (Keil & Zangrillo, 2024). One result is that leaders in all sorts of contexts feel immensely overwhelmed and torn in typical leadership dilemmas, trying to “manage the unmanageable” until they either collapse or move further to another context.

One keyword that keeps being mentioned these days is the role of *consciousness* or mindsets for leadership. For various reasons I personally sympathize with the interest in these aspects, simply because it draws attention to the fact that consciousness is an integral element to leadership as

opposed to understanding leadership primarily as an accumulation of skills, tools and practices. At the same time, I worry that consciousness and mindsets may be seen primarily as tools of further self-optimization to become more effective and more efficient leaders in the existing structures of our civilization. Focusing on *consciousness* does per se not express anything about the purpose around which leadership is oriented. As long as one is following a goal-oriented understanding of leadership, any approach, consciousness etc. will likely be instrumentalized as a means toward achieving the respective goals, regardless whether they are in accordance with any aliveness-centered purpose or not (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014; Aşkun, 2025; Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

Taking the perspective of an ecological civilization, I would like to propose a quite different approach towards leadership and the notions behind it. The central orienting principle of an ecological civilization is the thriving and flourishing of (human and non-human) life (Cobb Jr, 2021; Korten, 2017, 2018; Lent, 2021). Leadership, then, generally describes the ability (or structures, roles or people) to enable dynamics that foster the flourishing aliveness of a (sub-)system (Kuenkel, 2022; Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Schein, 2017).

Aliveness is an intrinsic potential in certain complex systems that can either be oppressed or fostered, but it cannot be made or managed (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Kuenkel, 2019, 2022). Leadership in the context of an ecological civilization is therefore not a practice towards any kind of achievable goal. Its focus shifts away from channeling resources for the successful achievement of preconceived goals towards continuously sensing and nourishing the aliveness of and within the respective system. In my view, leaders are thus people who are a) in touch with and continuously further unfolding their own aliveness and simultaneously b) sources and catalysts for the aliveness in the relationships they are embedded in.

In our current civilizational situation this may create additional dilemmas for people in leadership position: 1) When leaders catalyze the aliveness in themselves and their relational field, they are likely to experience conflicts with the objectives they are tasked with. 2) When leaders care about the thriving of the people they work with, it is highly likely (and desirable?) that these people develop their own notions of objectives and orientation for their thriving. Leadership might therefore mean leading people *toward leaving the leader*. In this way, the decision to orient one's leadership around the notion of an ecocivilization will challenge leaders in "non-ecological" contexts and present them with tensions that need to be navigated carefully.

On the other hand, the notion and vision of an ecocivilization invites us to look differently at the term leadership. While I would say that leadership certainly exists as a quality (of people and processes) also in the context of an ecocivilization, I would simultaneously argue that the idea of an ecocivilization very much challenges the notion of leadership in the first place. Oriented towards the aliveness in oneself and one's surrounding, people who eventually provide leadership in their context will likely not aspire "to be leaders" or identify themselves as such. As their concern is on the aliveness in themselves in their environment, they care about thriving as a purpose and end *in itself*. The more authentically they grow and sink into this aliveness, they

may become sources and catalysts of aliveness and thus “provide leadership” to the flourishing of their system. Still, leadership is probably neither an objective of these people nor part of their sense of identity. It is rather a secondary quality that emerges as these people continue to move on their path of cultivating aliveness in themselves and their relationships.

With all that said, I would like to highlight at least one very specific aspect of leadership because I find it so remarkably neglected: Leadership in the context of an ecological civilization includes guiding through processes of decay, farewell and dying. I find this aspect so crucial because ideas of “flourishing” or “thriving” are often communicated as if they were about an ever-increasing intensity and dynamic. In my view, such notions are ignoring the cyclic nature of aliveness. Leadership in service of aliveness necessarily needs to include giving space for processes of dying, mourning, grieving and loss. Leadership that always want to see everything thrive would oppress the intrinsic nature of aliveness to also go through phases of decay and renewal. In human systems this becomes a particular challenge as cycles happen simultaneously but not in correlation with each other; while some relationships may thrive, others might be in the phase of decay or renewal. For the overall aliveness of a system (organization), such phenomena of decay or renewal are not “a problem”. On the contrary. My personal experience teaches me very clearly that in systems, where death and farewell is not experienced with dignity but avoided or ignored, also the living elements can become strangely static and paralyzed. I actually see it as one of the crucial weaknesses of currently dominant organization structures, that they do not allow enough adequate space and rituals for gradual decay, resting and farewell.

Organizations that are inspired by the notion of an ecocivilization need to carefully integrate a culture of decay, rest and farewell (death). These may not happen in synchronicity for entire organizations. While some people and groups are thriving (accelerating), others may be in a phase of decay (slowing down) or renewal (resting). Each phase deserves specific rituals and guidance in rhythms that are distinct from the rhythms of other phases. One of the biggest challenges for leadership in an emerging ecological civilization seem to me this navigating of simultaneous phases of flourishing and decay, birth and death. An ecological civilization embodies space for the simultaneity of all these different phases and rhythms in lively relationships with each other.

With these brief reflections, I have shared my perspective at “leadership challenged” from the perspective of an ecocivilization. As our civilizational mode is experiencing several social and ecological crises, leaders in established organizations and structures are faced with various significant challenges that often cannot be “resolved”. With the emergence of visions for an ecological civilization, present notions of leadership are challenged, and new understandings of leadership emerge. In some sense, I have argued that the notion of an ecocivilization may even challenge the very notion of leadership as a quality that can be pursued or trained. Maybe the explicit attribution of “leadership” is just an echo of a civilizational paradigm that human organizations may barely remember in a few hundred years.

And yet, for the time being, we are blessed enough to witness humans and processes to which we attribute “leadership” in the emergence of an ecological civilization. To them it might come as a surprise, and they may not attribute this to themselves because they may say that the actual “leadership” lies in the intrinsic miracle of life itself.

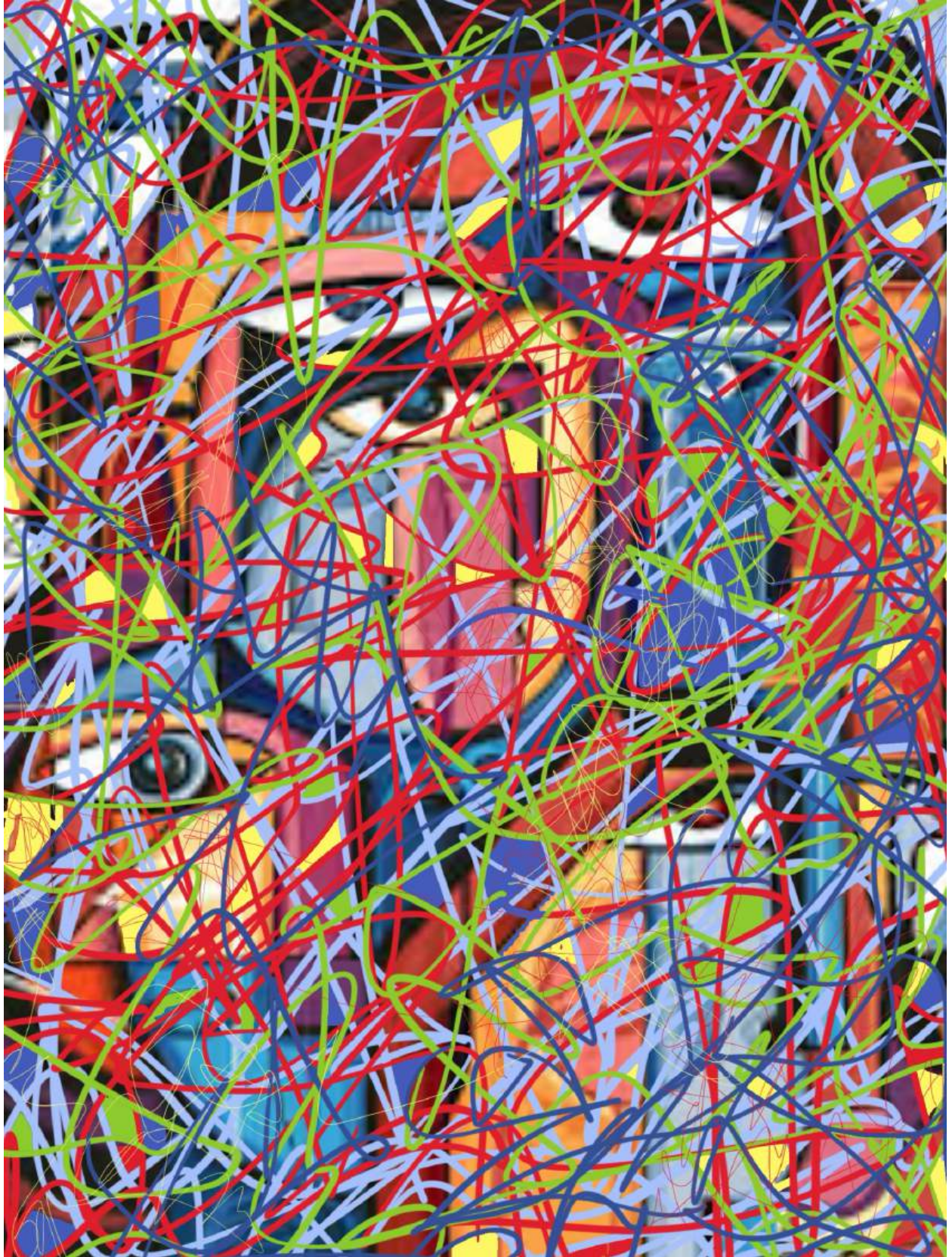
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**Dr Thomas Bruhn** is a physicist leading the research group "transformative spaces and mindsets" at the Research Institute for Sustainability in Potsdam. His research focuses on the design of communication processes for transdisciplinary groups of decision-makers, e.g. at the UNFCCC climate conferences. He is an expert for collective learning and co-creativity and is particularly interested in the role of mindsets like compassion and mindfulness. He is trained in various facilitation approaches and psycho-dynamic leadership. Before joining RIFS, Thomas did research on self-organizing semiconductor nanomaterials. He serves in the board of directors to the German Association to the Club of Rome.



## Lev Gordon: New Leadership for a Living Planet

### ABSTRACT

This article outlines the vision of Living Cities Earth, a global integral initiative aiming to empower 1 million leaders to co-create 10 000 Living Cities worldwide. Drawing on the Leadership Challenged dialogues, it argues that today's intertwined crises — ecological, social, and psychological — require a fundamental shift from hierarchical, extractive leadership toward regenerative, relational, and consciousness-based model. Leaders are framed not as controllers but as facilitators who cultivate trust, inner awareness, collective intelligence and action. By highlighting the role of communities, inner development, and systems thinking, the article presents a new leadership paradigm in which cities become living ecosystems centered on human well-being, creativity, and care for the planet. Through programs such as Future Leaders, City Leaders, and the Global Mayors Academy, Living Cities Earth seeks to scale this new leadership paradigm as the foundation for a planet of living cities.

### **Our Mission: inspire and empower 1 million leaders in 10.000 cities**

*“Love is all you need... Love is all you need... Love is all you need... Love is all you need..!”*

-- Beatles

When the co-founders of Living Cities Earth global integral initiative met in Amsterdam in June 2022, we quickly realized our vision: 10.000 living cities on 1 living planet.

Well, you could ask - but what is a Living City?

In our understanding, it is a place where all life thrives, a city that is a living ecosystem, healthy, evolving and serving the larger whole. Focusing on humans, it is a place where people:

- live happy healthy lives in harmony with themselves, each other, and nature,
- feel fully alive, manifest their creative potential and human well together,
- realize the power of love and practice love and care in action.

Not a bad vision, so, how do we get there?



It took us a few months to realize the simple truth: neither 15, nor 150 co-founders could transform life in 10,000 cities - and so it is the leaders of positive change already living in those cities who could help them evolve - and, thus, our mission is to integrally support them on this journey.

How could we do it?

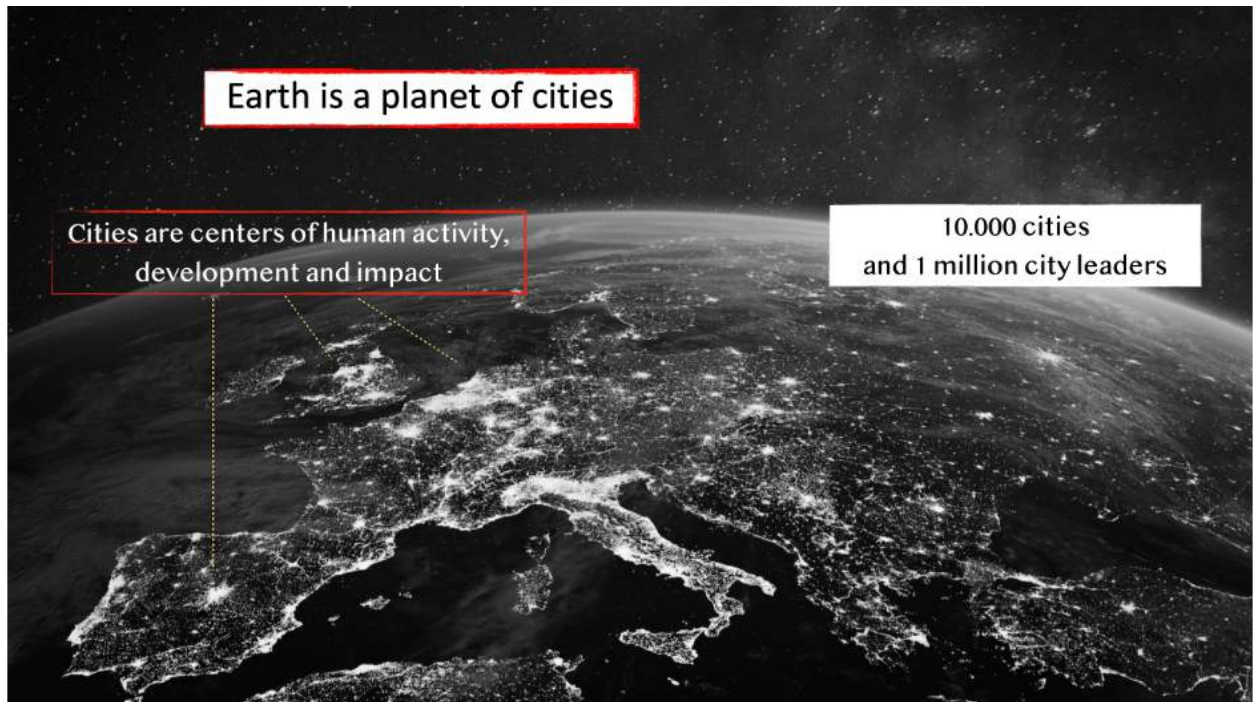
We examined outstanding stories of city transformation and in each case we noticed three elements that came into play: inspiring visions, human connection and empowerment.

This informed our thinking as we formulated **our mission: to inspire, interconnect and empower 1 million leaders of positive change in 10,000 cities.**

We then developed a strategy of how we actually support those leaders, how we inspire and empower them and how we educate young citizens who will become the future leaders shaping the future of humanity and planet Earth.

In order to develop programs for these leaders - including Future Leaders program for teens worldwide and Global Mayors Academy for city leaders around the planet — we had to understand what kind of leadership we see fit for the constantly changing world and for the society that is moving fast into the unknown future.

Old leadership paradigms do not seem to work anymore, so how do we see this new leadership in the ever-changing world?



## New Leadership for The New World

*“10.000 living cities, 1 living planet”*

-- Living Cities Earth vision

As we all know, the world is no longer stable, predictable, or linear. We are living inside what scholars describe as a **VUCA-BANI reality** — “volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous” as well as “brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible”. In such a world, the old model of leadership — hierarchical, controlling, ego-centered — is not only ineffective. It is dangerous.

The crises we face today — climate, polarization, mental health, inequality, and the erosion of trust — are not technical problems. They are **crises of consciousness, culture, and relationship**. They require not more power, but a **new quality of power**. Not more command and control, but more coherence and connection.

This is why at Living Cities Earth we speak about **Living Cities** — cities where people live happy, healthy lives in harmony with themselves, each other, and nature. Where people human well together for aliveness with love. Cities where the economy serves life, where culture nurtures meaning, and where governance emerges from collective intelligence rather than fear.

Clearly, to create such cities, we need a new kind of leadership.

## From Command to Co-Creation

*“You change things not by fighting the existing reality, but by building a new model that makes the old model obsolete.”*

-- Buckminster Fuller

We explored this shift deeply in the Leadership Challenged dialogues organized by Ecocivilisation and co-created with many co-founders from Living Cities Earth. Voices from different cultures, generations, and professional backgrounds converged on a single insight:

**The future will not be built by leaders who dominate — but by leaders who empower.**

Modern leaders are not commanders of systems - they are **hosts of possibility**. They create spaces where people feel safe to speak truth, diverse perspectives can meet, and collective intelligence can emerge.

As discussed during one of the panels, “Leadership today is not about being right — it is about creating nurturing relationships”.

This is a profound shift. It means leadership moves from ego to ecosystem, from hierarchy to networks, from control to co-creation.

## The Inner Dimension of Leadership

We also pointed to something equally essential: “There is no outer change without inner change”. A Living City begins inside human beings. And leaders of the new era must develop:

- emotional maturity,
- self-awareness,
- capacity to listen deeply,
- and courage to face uncertainty without panic.

In a VUCA-BANI world, people don’t need heroes. They need **caring aware humans**.

A leader who is disconnected from their own fears, wounds, and values will unconsciously project those onto the city, the organization, the system. That is how institutions become rigid, violent, or corrupt.

Inner development is not a luxury. It is a **foundation**.

## Communities as the Living Cells of the City

Every Living City is made of multiple **living communities** — neighborhoods, schools, cooperatives, cultural circles, startups, gardens, creative hubs. These are not peripheral. They ensure the healthy metabolism of the city.

As our speakers emphasized, resilient cities are built not by mega-projects, but by **strong local relationships**. Trust, reciprocity, mutual aid — these are what allow cities to absorb shocks and regenerate after crises.

The new leader therefore becomes:

- a weaver of relationships,
- a bridge between sectors,
- a catalyst for community energy.

Leadership shifts from managing people to inspiring, empowering and liberating their potential.

## From Extraction to Regeneration

Old leadership was designed for an extractive economy:

- take resources,
- take labor,
- take attention,
- maximize profit.

But Living Cities require a **regenerative logic**:

- restore ecosystems,
- nourish human potential,
- reinvest in local culture,
- create shared value.

The most innovative cities today are not those that grow faster, but those that learn faster. Learning organizations. Learning communities. Learning cities. Learning leaders. That forms the DNA of a living system.

## The New Leader

*“10.000 living cities, 1 living planet”*

-- Living Cities Earth vision

So, who could be the leader in a Living City? Not a ruler. Not a technocrat. Not a celebrity.

The new leader is:

- a listener,
- a systems thinker,
- a community builder,
- a steward of the future.

New leaders hold a long-term vision — not just for the next election, but for next generations. They understand that the real wealth of a city is not GDP, but **well-being, belonging, creativity, and trust**. They know that when people feel seen, heard, and empowered, then their creative energy flows, connections are created and **cities become alive**.

### **A Planet of Living Cities**

Living Cities Earth exists to support the emergence of **10,000 Living Cities** around the world — each rooted in its culture, ecology, and people, yet connected through a shared ethos of care, collaboration, and consciousness.

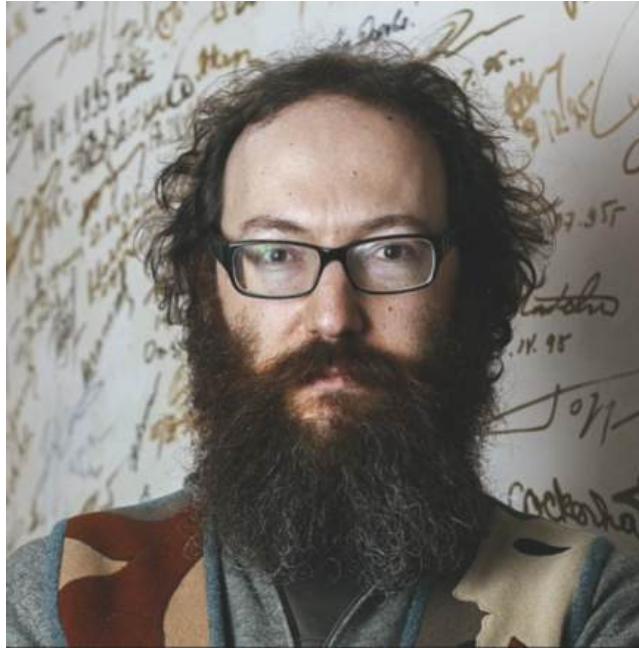
The Leadership Challenged series reminded us of something powerful: We are not waiting for the future. We are **becoming** it. And the cities we create will reflect what kind of leaders we choose to be and help others to become.

It is heart-warming to notice that only after a year since we launched the Future Leaders program - together with Ecocivilisation and other partners - it has attracted 6786 participants from 492 cities and 19 countries. What they learn is exactly the new leadership - both its outer and inner dimensions, life skills and meta skills. They also learn how to love oneself, to be able to truly love others, so together they could love and care for our communities, cities and our planet.

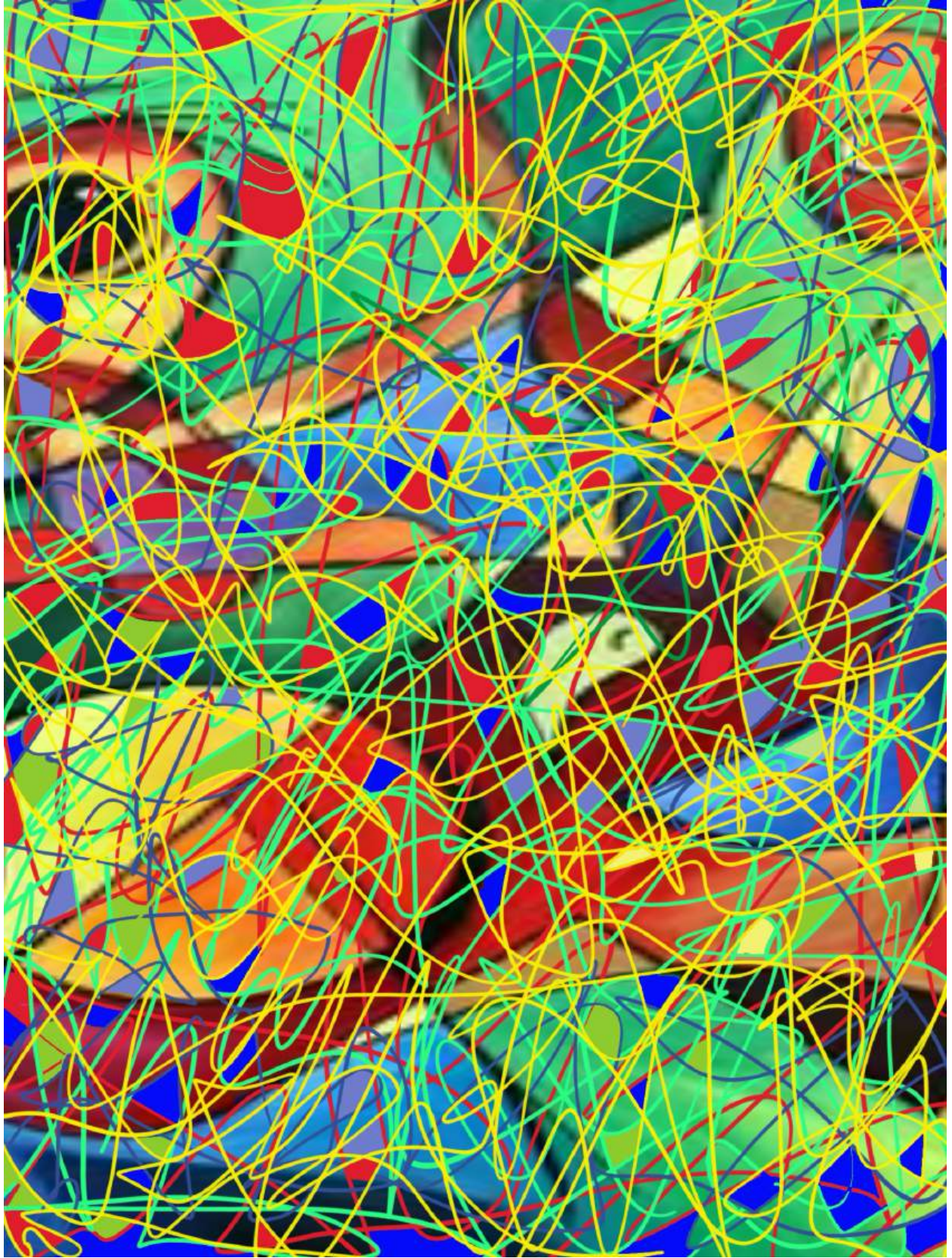
We have a long way to go to reach 1 million leaders in 10.000 cities, but the foundation is there and we are on our way. The City Leadership Program and Global Mayors Academy have also opened enrollment and will attract thousands of city leaders in 2026.

Hopefully, over the next 10 years our programs and projects will inspire and empower new generations of leaders to co-create 10.000 living and thriving cities on planet Earth.

In conclusion, we would like to extend our gratitude to Ecocivilisation team for the opportunity to meet and reflect on these important subjects - and let's work together in love and kindness on the evolution of humanity and flourishing of all life on our beautiful planet.



**Lev Gordon**, co-founder of Living Cities Earth, Future Leaders Program and Global Mayors Academy, Lev is a life-long student of human condition, leadership and integral development for individuals, organizations and cities. With prior experience of leading global business projects in 35 countries, Lev spent last 17 years in integral human, leadership and city development. A graduate of executive education programs in the world's top universities, including Harvard, Columbia, Yale and London Business School and a member of the Harvard Club, Lev knows life as a big dream and learns to be in sync with its flow.



## Ursula Oberhollenzer: Leadership for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future

### Abstract:

This paper synthesizes leadership insights from the 2025 G100 Vienna Conference on *Women for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future*. It demonstrates that **gender-balanced leadership** is a critical driver of sustainable governance, economic resilience, and durable peace. Drawing on empirical evidence from policy, finance, industry, and peacebuilding, the paper introduces the **Vienna Model of Cooperative Leadership**, which integrates ethical governance, inclusive decision-making, and long-term system stewardship. It argues that institutionalizing gender equality within leadership structures is a strategic necessity for achieving the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and long-term global stability.

**Key words:** gender balanced leadership, sustainable governance, economic resiliende, durable peace, international cooperation

The Conference on „The Role of Women for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future“ on September 12th, 2025 in Vienna was organised by the International CSR Dialogue Forum ([www.csr-dialogforum.com](http://www.csr-dialogforum.com)) in cooperation with G100 (a global network of women leaders with the target to implement SDG 5 by the end of the decade, [www.g100.in](http://www.g100.in)) and UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, [www.unido.com](http://www.unido.com)) at the VIC in Vienna. It was a multi-stakeholder meeting with participants from more than 20 countries worldwide to discuss how women can and/or could contribute to a sustainable and peaceful future. The outcome was documented in a White Paper (for [download](#) from the webpage of CSR Dialogue Forum) from which we cite some highlights for this article with regards to leadership.

### 1. Leadership Paradigm Shift: From Authority to Systemic Stewardship

The White Paper proposes a clear thesis: **sustainability, peace, and gender equality are inseparable leadership challenges**. Leadership is no longer framed as hierarchical authority or short-term performance optimization, but as **systemic stewardship**—the capacity to align economic, social, and environmental systems over time. Conference participants agreed on the idea that **women’s leadership is not additive but transformational**. Gender-balanced leadership changes the way organisations define success, measure value, and respond to complexity.

### 2. Ethical and Inclusive Leadership as a Performance Multiplier

Across public, corporate, and multilateral contexts, the White Paper presents strong empirical evidence that **gender-diverse leadership improves institutional performance**:

- Organizations with gender-balanced leadership consistently outperform peers on ESG metrics, regulatory compliance, and innovation indices.

- OECD and UNIDO data cited at the conference show that firms with women in senior leadership roles achieve higher resource efficiency, stronger governance outcomes, and faster ESG improvement trajectories.
- Ethical leadership—characterized by transparency, accountability, and long-term orientation—emerges as a defining trait of women-led or gender-balanced institutions.

Leadership is thus presented as both a **moral responsibility and a strategic asset**. Ethical decision-making is no longer treated as a soft value but as a core governance capability that enforces resilience in the current VUCA world.

### 3. Governance Leadership: Embedding Gender Equality into Decision Systems

A central leadership theme of the White Paper is the transition from **voluntary commitment to institutionalized accountability**. The conference emphasized that progress is stopped when leadership relies on symbolic representation rather than structural reform.

Key governance leadership recommendations include:

- Embedding gender KPIs into ESG reporting, public procurement frameworks, and national sustainability strategies.
- Treating gender balance as a governance indicator, not a diversity initiative.
- Aligning CSR frameworks with international standards (OECD Guidelines, ISO 26000, EU Green Deal) to ensure leadership accountability across jurisdictions.

Leaders are called upon to move beyond advocacy and assume responsibility for **system design**—creating rules, incentives, and reporting structures that make inclusion a success factor.

Additionally, the BSDC study *Better Leadership, Better World[1]* from 2018 identified six competencies that are key to a successful implementation of the 17 SDGs: long-term thinking, innovation, collaboration, transparency, environmental management and social inclusiveness. As per this study, existing research shows that these competencies are obvious in gender-balanced teams that include women in leadership roles.

### 4. Leadership in Industrial and Circular Transformation

The White Paper positions women as **strategic leaders of the green and circular economy**, not merely participants. In sectors covered by the panelists, women-led teams demonstrated shorter development cycles, lower emissions across supply chains as well as higher material recovery and reuse rates. Circular economy leadership is additionally framed as a **peace-building mechanism**. By reducing resource scarcity—one of the root causes of conflict—circular systems contribute to social stability.

A distinctive leadership insight from this section is the emphasis on **cultural leadership**:

- Technical innovation must be matched by narrative and behavioral change.
- Leaders must translate complex sustainability concepts into shared social meaning.
- Storytelling, education, and inclusive design are recognized as leadership tools.

## 5. Financial Leadership: Capital Allocation as a Leadership Act

Finance is portrayed as one of the most powerful—and underutilized—levers in leadership. The White Paper argues that **capital allocation decisions reflect leadership values** and directly shape societal outcomes.

Core leadership messages include:

- Gender Lens Investing (GLI) should be treated as a structural policy instrument, not a niche practice.
- Financial institutions and central banks have a leadership responsibility to abandon “gender-neutral” assumptions that perpetuate inequality.
- Inclusive finance strengthens economic resilience, accelerates recovery from shocks, and contributes to long-term peace.

Evidence presented at the conference shows that economies with higher gender equality in finance and labor participation demonstrate **greater adaptability to crises**, including digital and green transitions.

## 6. Peace Leadership: From Representation to Effectiveness

One of the White Paper’s most decisive leadership arguments concerns **peace and security governance**. The data are unequivocal:

- Peace agreements involving women last significantly longer.
- Yet women remain severely underrepresented in peace negotiations and mediation processes.

The document reframes peace leadership away from symbolic inclusion toward **effectiveness and durability**. Women’s leadership in peacebuilding is presented as a strategic necessity, a governance competence as well as a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy.

## 7. Media, Education, and Narrative Leadership

An often-overlooked dimension of leadership addressed in the White Paper is **narrative power**. Leaders shape not only policy, but perception.

Key points include:

- Media representation influences public trust, conflict dynamics, and social norms.
- Training journalists and communicators is a form of peace leadership.
- Universities, corporate academies, and professional training institutions are critical incubators of future leadership culture.

Leadership is thus understood as **norm-setting**—deciding whose voices are heard, which stories are legitimized, and what behaviors are rewarded.

## 8. The Vienna Consensus: Leadership as a Living Framework

The White Paper concludes with the articulation of the **Vienna Consensus**, a leadership framework grounded in three principles:

1. **Interdependence** – Sustainability, peace, and equality are mutually reinforcing systems.
2. **Institutional Courage** – Leadership requires reforming rules, not just rhetoric.
3. **Continuity over Competition** – Long-term stability outweighs short-term gains.

Leadership is reframed as **service to future systems**, not control over present actors. The Vienna Consensus positions women not only as beneficiaries of peace and sustainability, but as their **primary architects**.

Summarising, we have identified three key points during the conference:

- Leadership quality can be a measurable determinant of sustainability and peace.
- Gender-balanced leadership improves governance, resilience, and innovation.
- Ethical leadership is a performance driver, not a constraint.

We are very much looking forward to deepening these insights and adding new dimensions at the next G100 Conference Vienna in 2026!

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[1] See *Better Leadership, Better World. Women leading for the Global Goals*.

### **Citations:**

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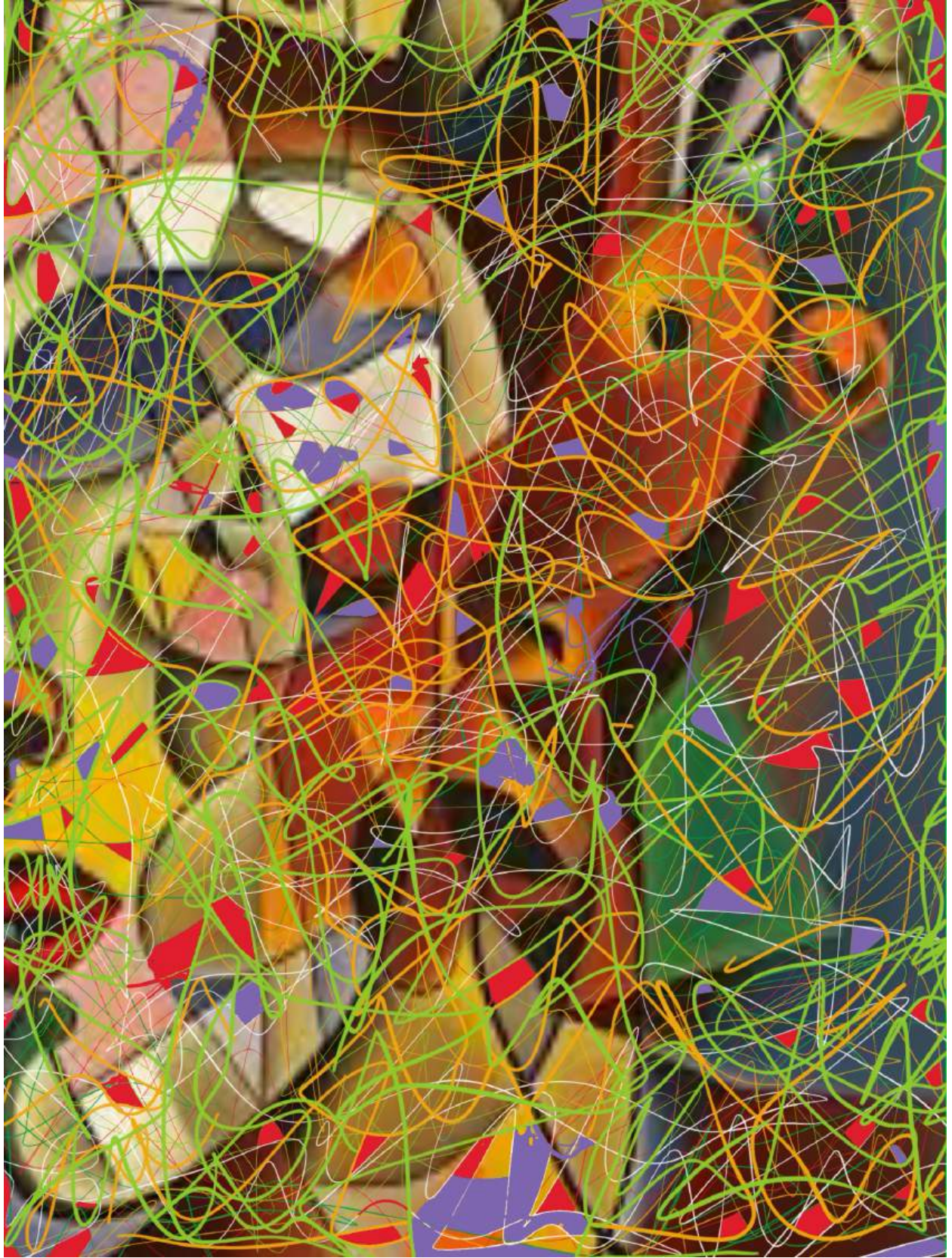
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## Marina Demchenko: Ecosystemic Leadership: Tending the Garden of Collective Thrivability

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."*  
— Marcel Proust

### 1. The Fundamental Misconception: The Illusion of Separation

The contemporary civilisation and with it, dominant models of leadership, rests on a fundamental misconception that we are separate, autonomous individuals navigating a mechanistic, indifferent or even adversarial world. This metaphysical assumption underpins extractive economics, competitive institutions, and heroic leadership myths.

At the same time Indigenous cosmologies across the globe consistently affirm that the world is a living, relational web of interdependence. In many Indigenous American traditions, the Earth is regarded as a sentient being: Mother Earth with all life forms considered relatives. For example, in Lakota spirituality, the phrase *Mitákuye Oyás'iy* - "all my relations" - encapsulates a worldview in which humans, animals, plants, rivers, and ancestors are part of a sacred kinship network, each contributing to the balance of the whole (Cajete, 2000). As Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) explains, "An Indigenous ontology sees the world as a set of relationships... All things are related and must be understood in terms of their relationships." Similarly, the Southern African philosophy of Ubuntu expresses a communal, intersubjective reality: "I am because we are." As Desmond Tutu (1999) notes, "Ubuntu speaks of the very essence of being human. You can't exist as a human being in isolation." Both *Mitákuye Oyás'iy* and Ubuntu articulate not just ethical principles, but ontologies—visions of life grounded in mutual dependence, sacred reciprocity, and systemic belonging.

This illusion of separateness has also been critiqued by some contemporary scholars across leadership and systems thinking disciplines. C. Otto Scharmer argues that one of the core myths of modern leadership is that it is an individual pursuit, disconnected from systemic intelligence. In his words: "Leadership is a distributed or collective capacity in a system, not just something that individuals do. Leadership is about the capacity of the whole system to sense and actualize the future that wants to emerge" (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p. 24). Similarly, Jon Stokes and Sue Dopson (2020) emphasize that in times of radical uncertainty, leadership rooted in ego-centric, charismatic authority is no longer sufficient. Instead, what is required is a shift from "ego to eco"—from individual dominance to collective awareness and co-creation. They argue that "in times of radical uncertainty, we need inspirational rather than charismatic leaders," highlighting the need for system-level responsiveness over performative heroism.

General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968), Koestler's holarchical view of reality (1967), and Wilber's post-conventional philosophy (2000) all converge in asserting a fundamental truth: nothing exists in isolation. Donna Haraway (2016) reframes life itself as *sympoiesis*: a process of

"making-with." In this view, no being is self-made. All are co-created in mutual entanglement. To lead, then, is to participate in co-flourishing, not to dominate.

This shift mirrors Martin Heidegger's spiritual insight: "The human being is not the lord of beings, but the shepherd of Being." (Heidegger, 1947/1977, p. 245). The work of leadership is not mastery over others, but attunement to the unfolding of Being itself.

Together, systems science, Indigenous wisdom, deep ecology, and post-conventional philosophy articulate an alternative ontology: *we are open living systems* - nested, relational, and in continuous co-evolution with the Whole. In this context, leadership cannot remain a function of control or charisma. It must become a function of relational stewardship.

## **2. Every Human System Is an Evolving Ecosystem**

Every human system, whether an organisation, community, city, region, or network, is not an isolated structure, but is an evolving ecosystem nested within broader ecological and cultural contexts. These ecosystems are shaped by continuous feedback (both ecological and social), emergent meaning-making processes, and a shared sense of purpose that guides collective evolution.

In the language of ecology and systems thinking, they may be understood as biocenoses—dynamic constellations of human and more-than-human agents co-regulating their existence through reciprocal interaction. Originally coined by German zoologist Karl Möbius in 1877, the term biocenosis refers to a community of different species living together in a shared habitat, functioning as a unit (see Berkes & Folke, 1998; Glaser et al., 2008).

When applied to social ecosystems, it underscores the interdependence and co-regulation among all forms of life. This view aligns with the theory of social-ecological systems (SES), which conceptualises the social and ecological as an integrated whole rather than separate domains. As Berkes and Folke (1998) explain, SES are “linked systems of people and nature” where the boundary between society and ecosystem is artificial, and resilience emerges from their interdependence.

Similarly, Machlis, Force, and Burch (1997) propose the “human ecosystem” as a foundational concept for understanding the nested, co-evolving relationships between human communities and their environmental context. In this framing, *any effort to lead or transform a social system must be rooted in an awareness of its entangled ecological, cultural, and spiritual realities.*

We propose that instead of viewing human systems through mechanistic metaphors (the "political machine", the "administrative apparatus", the "social lift", the "financial leverage"), we must embrace their nature as animated organisms, where explicit structures are inseparable from implicit culture, history, and soul. In this framing, individuals are not cogs or consumers but active participants in the garden of life (Demchenko et al., 2024).

Ecosystemic Leadership begins with the leader's capacity to perceive and nurture the vitality of the system, not as an external controller, but rather in the manner of a gardener who tends to the living dynamics from within. This 'living systems' view of leadership resonates with Heidegger's concept of "dwelling," which he describes as an attentive and caring way of being in the world. In his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," Heidegger uses the metaphor of building and cultivating to illustrate how humans inhabit and care for their environment, suggesting that genuine dwelling involves an ongoing, nurturing relationship with the world (Heidegger, 1971).

Thus, social ecosystems thrive not through control, but through relational coherence, spiritual presence, and systemic regeneration. The leader's role is to create conditions for mutual flourishing: where the parts serve the Whole, and the Whole nourishes the parts, again and again.

### **3. From Machines to Gardens: Rethinking Leadership Paradigms**

To fully appreciate the uniqueness of Ecosystemic Leadership, we must position it within the broader developmental arc of leadership paradigms. Each paradigm arises from a distinct worldview, a "cosmology in action" (Wilber, 2000), that shapes how leaders understand themselves, others, and the systems they inhabit.

Leadership development is not linear, but evolutionary: it grows through nested transformations of identity, perspective, and ethical reasoning. Here, we map five major leadership paradigms: *Command-and-Control*, *Transformational*, *Servant*, *Complexity/ Adaptive*, and *Ecosystemic Leadership*, which correspond with recognized adult development models.

William Torbert's Leadership Development framework (1995), Susanne Cook-Greuter's Ego Development Theory, and Robert Kegan's Orders of Consciousness (1994) together illuminate the developmental interior of leadership practices. Each paradigm reflects a distinct relationship to power, truth, complexity, and the self-world boundary, undergirded by corresponding ethical philosophies.

#### **Command-and-Control Leadership**

The Command-and-Control style of leadership emerges from the earliest stages of adult development and remains a dominant mode in many traditional institutions. Psychologically and behaviourally, it is rooted in the *Opportunist*, *Diplomat*, and *Expert* action logics described by William Torbert (Torbert et al., 2004), and in the *Impulsive*, *Self-Protective*, *Conformist*, and *Expert* stages in Susanne Cook-Greuter's developmental model (Cook-Greuter, 2005). From the perspective of Robert Kegan's theory, these stages align with second-order consciousness (Instrumental mind) and the early phase of third-order consciousness (Socialized mind), where the self is still shaped by concrete needs, roles, and externally defined norms (Kegan, 1982).

Each of these early stages brings a distinct dynamic into the command-and-control paradigm. The Opportunist, functioning from an egocentric worldview, seeks to dominate and manipulate

the environment for personal gain, often through deception, coercion, or brute force. The Diplomat avoids conflict and maintains safety by adhering strictly to social roles, traditions, and expectations, equating harmony with survival. The Expert, which anchors this style in modern bureaucracies, operates from a worldview that equates truth with objectivity, logic, and technical mastery. While cognitively more complex, the Expert remains constrained by a belief in absolute procedures, valuing correctness and precision over adaptability or reflective insight.

Leadership at this stage is externally defined. It relies on hierarchical control, formal authority, and rule-based enforcement to maintain stability. Power flows vertically—through commands, systems of compliance, and often surveillance. Leaders here act as guardians of order, enforcing protocols and evaluating performance through measurable outputs. As such, they frequently depend on institutional validation rather than self-reflective judgment or ethical autonomy.

The ethical reasoning of command-and-control leaders corresponds with what Lawrence Kohlberg identified as the conventional stage of moral development, in which right action is determined by adherence to rules, social expectations, or instrumental outcomes (Kohlberg, 1981). Morality is externalized and norm-driven, not yet informed by inner ethical reasoning or critical evaluation of the system itself. As the leadership logic at this stage declares: “*Obey the system, follow the rules, or assert dominance to survive.*”

The epistemological boundary of this leadership style is shaped by a *positivist or instrumentalist logic*, where knowledge is validated through objectivity, consistency, and utility. Truth is what works within the system, or what aligns with consensus and institutional norms. Leaders at this stage lack the reflective capacity to critique the system from within or to author their own guiding principles.

Despite these limitations, Command-and-Control leadership continues to be the prevailing norm in many bureaucratic, industrial, and militarized organizations. Its appeal lies in its ability to ensure order, predictability, and efficiency. However, it is fundamentally ill-equipped to navigate complexity, ambiguity, or human developmental potential beyond control and compliance.

*To transcend this stage a leader could:*

- Engage in self-reflection beyond roles and rules,
- Seek diverse perspectives and feedback,
- Develop capacity for critical thinking and self-authored values.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational Leadership corresponds to the *Achiever* action logic in William Torbert’s developmental model (Torbert et al., 2004) and the *Conscientious* or early *Achiever* stage in Susanne Cook-Greuter’s ego development framework (Cook-Greuter, 2005). It aligns with Robert Kegan’s fourth order of consciousness—the *self-authoring mind*—where individuals

generate meaning, purpose, and values from within rather than conforming to external systems or norms (Kegan, 1994).

This stage marks a critical developmental leap from conformity to autonomy. Leaders become self-directed, strategic, and goal-oriented, capable of crafting a personal and organizational vision and pursuing it with discipline and accountability. They operate with internalized standards and feedback loops, continuously learning and optimizing systems for performance and impact. Their focus shifts from rule-following to principled leadership grounded in rationality, fairness, and outcome-oriented collaboration.

Transformational Leaders work within existing systems but possess the reflective capacity to improve and align them with broader goals. They inspire others through vision, manage through structures that foster accountability and engagement, and drive collective performance. Their ethics move beyond social conventions toward self-authored principles informed by rational universality and empathy. This stage resonates with John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness, where ethical reasoning is shaped by impartiality and the "veil of ignorance" (Rawls, 1971).

Cognitively, leaders at this stage begin to demonstrate early forms of dialectical reasoning. Drawing on Hegelian logic, they can integrate multiple perspectives into a coherent strategic synthesis, navigating contradictions not as threats but as developmental opportunities (Hegel, 1807/1977). They build high-performing teams, align stakeholder interests, and foster collaborative innovation.

However, Transformational Leadership remains bounded by the paradigm of rational success. It privileges measurable outcomes, strategic planning, and performance-based legitimacy. Complexity is engaged through systems thinking, but not yet fully inhabited from a trans-systemic, developmental, or ecosystemic perspective. The underlying leadership logic is: *"Deliver results through internally authored vision, strategic alignment, and shared achievement."*

*To transcend this stage a leader could:*

- Deepen reflective practice and systemic awareness,
- Embrace complexity and ambiguity,
- Cultivate empathy and dialogical engagement.

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant Leadership emerges at the *Strategist* action logic in Torbert's developmental framework (Torbert et al., 2004) and the *Autonomous* stage in Cook-Greuter's ego development theory (Cook-Greuter, 2005). It corresponds to the late fourth to early fifth order of consciousness in Robert Kegan's model, where individuals begin to perceive and transform the limitations of their own meaning-making systems (Kegan, 1994). This marks a decisive shift from conventional success metrics to post-conventional, values-based awareness.

At this stage, leadership becomes internally anchored. The Servant Leader is guided not by external validation or performance indicators, but by a deep coherence between inner conviction and outer action. Moral autonomy replaces rule-following; systemic thinking replaces linear causality. Leaders begin to perceive time, identity, and value creation through multiple horizons—personal, cultural, ecological, and intergenerational.

Servant Leaders act from an ethical imperative rooted in authenticity, relational intelligence, and service to the whole. Their commitment to empowerment is not instrumental, but ontological—they lead from within systems rather than from above them. Leadership becomes less about directing others and more about cultivating the conditions for others to thrive. They design for emergence, navigate across boundaries, and align diverse perspectives into coherent, value-driven systems.

Ethically, this stage moves toward what Jürgen Habermas calls *communicative rationality*—a space where moral reasoning is shaped through dialogue, mutual understanding, and the integrity of shared meaning (Habermas, 1984). These leaders are capable of dialectical integration: holding paradoxes, reconciling polarities, and embedding individual uniqueness within systemic justice. Their development reflects a synthesis of Hegelian dialectics, existential responsibility, and deep intersubjective presence.

Servant Leadership signals a shift from ego- and group-centric to whole-system stewardship. It transcends managerialism and conventional transformation by rooting leadership in service, not as strategy, but as identity. The guiding imperative becomes: “*Empower others through value-aligned action, systemic integration, and authentic presence.*”

*To transcend this stage a leader could:*

- Embrace paradox and hold multiple perspectives,
- Practice deep listening and generative dialogue,
- Foster environments for collective emergence.

### **Complexity / Adaptive Leadership**

Complexity or Adaptive Leadership emerges at the *Magician* or *Alchemist* action logic in Torbert’s developmental typology (Torbert et al., 2004) and the *Construct-Aware* stage in Cook-Greuter’s framework (Cook-Greuter, 2005). It aligns with Kegan’s fifth order of consciousness, where individuals perceive all meaning-making structures, including their own identity, as constructed, fluid, and open to transformation (Kegan, 1994).

At this stage, leaders no longer seek mastery over systems but seek participation within their living dynamics. They engage complexity not by imposing order, but by cultivating conditions for emergence. Identity becomes provisional and contextual; reality is seen as intersubjective, symbolic, and permeated by paradox.

Complexity Leaders operate at the edges of systems, sense-making, and language. They work with ambiguity, polarity, and shadow as raw materials for transformation. Ethics arise not from rules or fixed principles, but from *situational discernment*, what Gandhi called *satyagraha*, or truth-force, and what Gregory Bateson identified as “mind in nature” (Bateson, 1972). Their attunement includes both Jungian individuation and systemic resonance.

Rather than directing change, these leaders midwife it. They use symbolic reframing, dialogic inquiry, and deep listening to evoke coherence from chaos. Their action is often non-linear, timed, and catalytic, what Torbert calls “timely action.” They disrupt ossified patterns to invite the system’s deeper intelligence to emerge.

This leadership is simultaneously inward and systemic. It integrates multiple temporalities, moral perspectives, and ontological layers. The imperative becomes: “*Transform the system from within, by honouring emergence, paradox, and symbolic depth.*”

*To transcend this stage a leader could:*

- Cultivate inner stillness and symbolic awareness,
- Let go of fixed identity and control,
- Engage with the unknown as a source of creativity.

### **Ecosystemic Leadership**

Ecosystemic Leadership corresponds with the *Ironist* action logic in Torbert’s framework (Torbert et al., 2004) and the *Unitive* stage in Cook-Greuter’s developmental model (Cook-Greuter, 2005). It resonates with a trans-personal consciousness that transcends even Kegan’s fifth order, entering a non-dual awareness in which self, other, and system dissolve into a field of sacred interbeing.

At this stage, the **leader is no longer the agent of change but a steward of emergence**. Identity is transparent, provisional, and permeable. Leadership arises not from will or intention, but from deep attunement to the unfolding of the Whole life itself as sacred process. Action emerges through silence, presence, and inner stillness.

Ecosystemic Leaders practice what might be called *leadership-as-listening*. Their authority comes from their capacity to serve, sense, and synthesize. Drawing from mystical traditions, indigenous worldviews, and process-oriented philosophies (e.g., Whitehead, Laszlo), they engage paradox not as a challenge but as a sacred pattern of wholeness.

Their ethical ground is transpersonal and time-transcendent— non-anthropocentric, planetary justice, caring for all beings, visible and invisible, across generations. They lead through coherence rather than control, often bypassing formal structures in favour of relational, regenerative influence. Their presence nourishes the subtle, the invisible, the emergent.

Their imperative is radically simple: *“Tend the living system as a sacred garden—nourish its unfolding with reverence and care.”*

*To transcend this stage a leader could:*

- Deepen contemplative and integrative practices,
- Surrender personal will to serve the whole,
- Embody humility, presence, and sacred regard for life.

Thus, leadership development is a journey from external control to internal coherence, from individual achievement to systemic stewardship, and ultimately to serving life itself. Progression through these stages is supported by practices that foster self-awareness, systemic integration, dialogical capacity, and an ever-deepening sense of service and presence.

#### **4. Final Chapter: Becoming an Ecosystemic Leader**

Leadership, then, is no longer about commanding the machine, but about tending the garden. The modern mythology of control collapses under the weight of systemic complexity, giving way to a deeper responsibility: to steward the conditions for life to thrive. In living systems, intelligence is distributed rather than centralized, resilience stems from diversity and relational responsiveness, and sustainability is maintained not through rigidity or extraction, but via recursive feedback, adaptability, and regenerative capacity - principles rooted in Bertalanffy's (1968) foundational systems theory and further elaborated by contemporary theorists who emphasize the self-organizing, emergent nature of complex systems (Gorban, Grechuk, & Tyukin, 2020; Mitchell, 2007; NASA, 2002). These dynamics are not problems to be solved, but evolutionary features to be nurtured. Leadership in this context is not about control, it is about sensing and supporting life-sustaining patterns.

Thus, in a healthy ecosystem, resilience arises from relational dynamics, not rigidity. Homeostasis is not a static state but a capacity for ongoing adaptation. Any social system, be it an organization, community, or bioregion, can only remain viable if it learns to regenerate from within, compost what no longer serves, and design for succession. The ecosystemic leader does not dictate outcomes; they observe before acting, care for the edges, and recognize that transformation takes root in the margins.

This leader acts as a gardener: observing before intervening, cultivating soil and relationships, and pruning not for control but for emergence. Like a permaculturist, they nurture unseen forces, design for resilience, and respond with care to the ecosystem's shifting needs. Leadership becomes life stewardship, not optimization.

Such leadership nurtures the wholeness of ecosystems, both structural and cultural. Structurally, the health of living systems depends on open boundaries that allow permeability without collapse; feedback loops that sense, interpret, and recalibrate; and coherence that embraces complexity without enforcing uniformity. Ecosystemic leaders tend to these dynamics by

maintaining decentralized responses, cultivating adaptive immunity (analogous to cultural antibodies), and holding space for contradiction. They recognize that crisis is not failure, it is a signal for realignment. Their task is not to fix the system, but to sustain its capacity to self-heal.

As Bayo Akomolafe (2021) reminds us, “systems are speculative.” They are “emergent phenomena, not artifacts of pure intentionality or design.” They take shape through “encounters, constraints, and the entanglement of forces beyond human will.” Capitalism, for example, was not engineered in a boardroom but emerged from “the frictions of history, from material conditions, from desire as a weathering pattern... from the whims of markets, from the movement of bodies and commodities across seas.” If we seek a clearly defined, prefigured “alternative” to such systems, we may already be reproducing their logic—imagining them as static, controllable objects. Instead, Akomolafe invites us to notice the “leaks, cracks, and dissonances within systemicity”, what he calls “weird fidelities,” minor and fugitive openings that escape systemic capture. The question thus moves from *What is the alternative?* to *Where is the system already leaking?* The ecosystemic leader learns to sense these paraontological openings, attune to what is already emerging, and protect the fragile signals of the not-yet-known.

If structural resilience is the body of a living system, then cultural coherence is its soul. Alongside maintaining adaptive structures, the ecosystemic leader also holds the cultural and spiritual wholeness of the system. Culture is not peripheral, it is the deep grammar of belonging, the invisible architecture by which we make sense of meaning, value, and possibility together. Spirituality, in this context, is not about belief or dogma, but about connectedness: a profound alignment between inner and outer, self and whole. It is the felt sense of being in right relation.

The leader, then, becomes a spiritual integrator—not in a religious sense, but as a steward of coherence through meaning, care, and alignment. This is the transpersonal axis of leadership, rooted in relational presence rather than ideological conviction. At the heart of the ecosystem lies a spiritual center that holds together the diversity of parts through **seven axes of connectivity** - an extended model introduced by Alexander Laszlo (2020), and resonant with both indigenous cosmologies and post-conventional developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 2005; Kegan, 1994; Wilber, 2000):

1. Inner Self – cultivating virtue, moral clarity, and presence
2. Higher Self – living with purposeful integrity beyond ego
3. Others – practicing empathy, ethical care, and mutual recognition
4. Non-Human Beings – honoring sympoietic kinship with all life
5. Nature and Place – attuning to the spirit and soul of place
6. Time – anchoring in ancestral wisdom and responsibility to future generations
7. Kosmos – acting with humility before the mystery of Being

These axes offer more than a moral compass, they form an ontological map of coherence for leadership rooted in wholeness. They align with Cook-Greuter’s descriptions of ego-transcendent

stages, Kegan's fifth-order consciousness, and Wilber's integral models of human development. Together, they support a form of leadership capable of weaving structural vitality with cultural depth - a leadership not of control, but of communion.

In this light, the ecosystemic leader is not a hero, but a host; not a fixer, but a midwife of emergence. They do not impose solutions but hold space for transformative questions. Their leadership is grounded in humility: the courage to listen before acting, to ask before speaking, and to appreciate before judging. Their strength lies not in control, but in care. They foster trust by giving agency, encourage responsibility by cultivating a deep sense of belonging, and model solidarity through consistent, ethical, and caring presence. This is not leadership of charisma or command, it is leadership as presence, resonance, and quiet coherence.

They operate with a posture of benevolence and curiosity, always oriented to "not-knowing" as a source of wisdom. Their praxis includes holding complexity without rushing to resolve it, learning tough lessons without collapsing into defeat, and transforming grief into generosity. As Adam Sher (2022) writes, "*A tree that falls doesn't fail. It gives life to the soil.*" These leaders compost the old to nourish the new. Loss becomes nutrients. Breakdown becomes insight. Their role is not to preserve rigid forms, but to accompany transformation with compassion and care.

This is a post-heroic leadership that echoes what Lao Tzu intuited millennia ago: "*A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, they will say: we did it ourselves*" (Laozi, 1988). The ecosystemic leader disappears into the system: not out of passivity, but out of generativity. They recognize that no one of us is as smart as all of us, and so they create the conditions for collective intelligence to flourish. Their leadership makes room for others to grow, to lead, to take root and co-create. Each voice, each root, each stream contributes to the vitality of the whole.

This ethos animates the win-win-win logic of benevolent capitalism (Bowman, Douglas, & Bowman, 2022), where the well-being of the self, the other, and the system are interwoven. The ecosystemic leader does not act out of altruism, but from enlightened interdependence. They foster opportunities for every part of the system to thrive, nourish learning rooted in ethical inquiry, and cultivate a culture of generosity, mutual care, and integrity with the living field. They serve not outcomes, but emergence; not ego, but the Whole.

Ecosystemic leadership is not a methodology, it is a way of being in service to Life. It reorients leadership from mastery to mystery, from separation to communion, from control to care. It invites us to remember that we are not outside the system, not observers or engineers, ***we are the ecosystem***. To lead is to become porous, attuned, and humble. To lead is to trust that the system knows how to become more of itself: if only we can listen, tend, and hold.

This form of leadership begins in listening and ends in emergence. It is grief transmuted into generosity, failure composted into wisdom, and love in action—not for the self, but for the

Whole. It reconnects us to the sacredness of life, re-roots us in place, ancestry, and purpose, and prepares us to steward the long arc of time. It reminds us, as Rumi once said, “*You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.*” Ecosystemic leadership is how we remember this - together.

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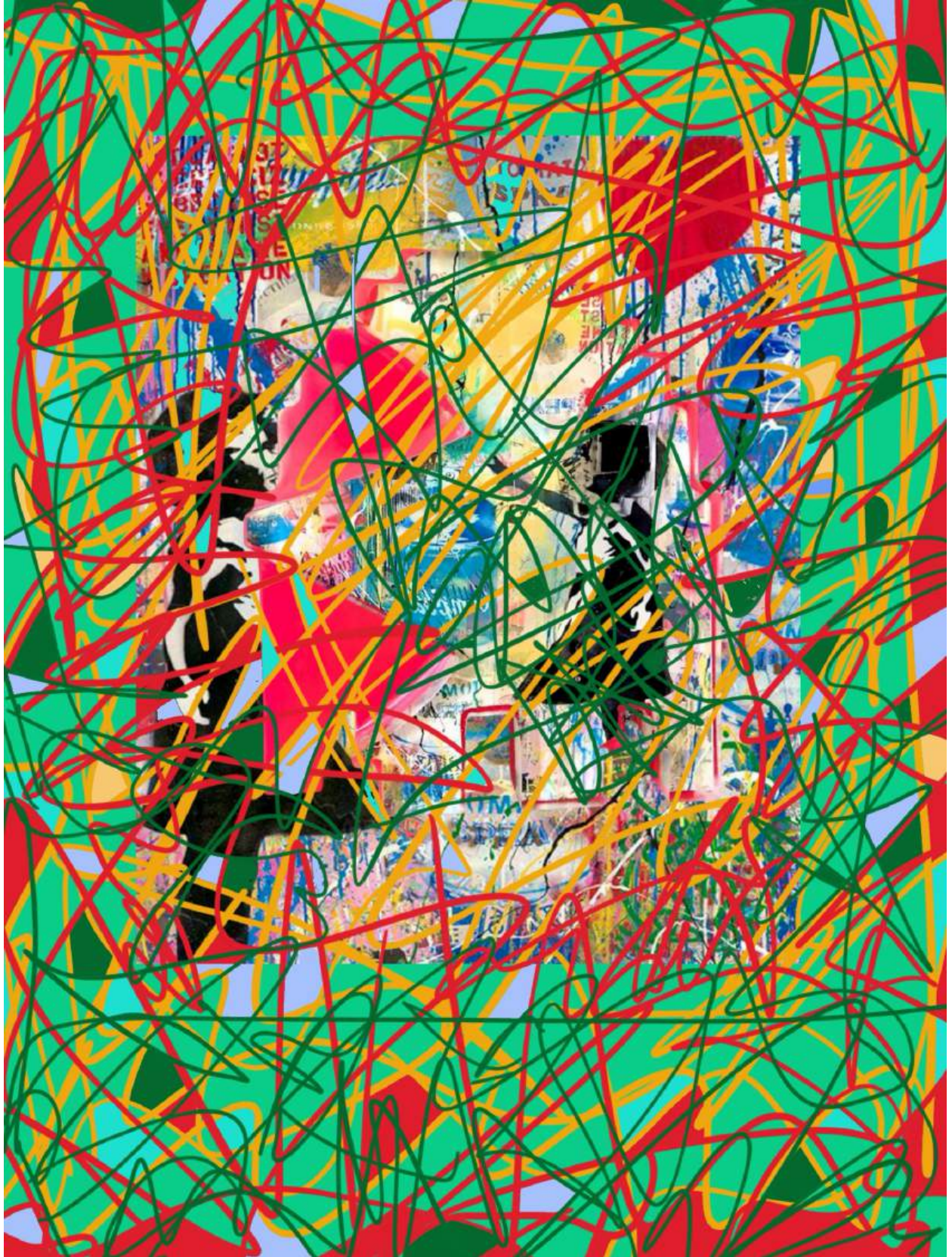
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## Conclusion

### **“From Leadership Challenged, to Leadership Re-Rooted in Natural Ecosystems”**

This book begins from the recognition that what we call a leadership crisis is not primarily about the failure of individuals, but about the limits of a civilisational paradigm built on certainty, control, extraction, and separation. The erosion of legitimacy across institutions, economies, and governance systems signals not the absence of leadership, but the exhaustion of the assumptions that once defined it.

Across these chapters, leadership is gradually reframed. First questioned, then deepened, then redistributed, and finally reintegrated into living systems, re-rooted back into natural ecosystems. Or as Ravi Chaudhry’s Peopleism suggests, leadership becomes inseparable from wisdom, dignity, and care for people and planet.

While floating on the waves of the book I hope you sensed the emergence of a clear pattern. A pattern suggesting that the future is not predetermined by technology, markets, or political power. It is shaped by whether humanity chooses participation in life-affirming evolution or not, so called antidystopianism as presented by Alexander Laszlo.

Leadership can no longer be understood as authority, position, or performance. The pressures of disruption, ecological limits, technological acceleration, and social fragmentation reveal that leadership rooted only in power, expertise, or optimization cannot sustain healthy human or planetary futures. The challenge is therefore the our capacity to open up our conscious self for an evolutionary, relational, and civilisational emergence at once. Or put it in the language of Ian McGilchrist, for humanity to thrive left and right part of our brain need to collaborate and co-create to deliver a sustainable and resilient future and as we have learnt through various discussions open for the energies of our entire body, especially our heart, sensing intuitive insides emerging from the field of collective coherence.

One of the strongest threads running through the book is the recognition that inner development is foundational. We have explored this topic deeply in the “Year of Mental Wealth” well captured in the book “Mental Health”. It is clear, when leadership becomes too performance or identity-driven, it produces burnout, disconnection, and created cultures of fear or compliance without a judgement. When grounded in awareness, presence, intuition, and collective intanglement, leadership becomes balanced and dynamically prosperous rather than controlling. In this sense, leadership shifts from something one “does” to something one “embodies”.

From this inner shift various authors helped us to see how we can start sensing a truly transformative relational shift, bringing individual needs in a balance with the needs of the collective.

In other words, leadership increasingly appears not as an individual function but as a collective capacity emerging through relationships, trust, participation, inclusion, and shared meaning. It

moves from authority to stewardship and custodian role, holding space for the emerging processes towards the evolutionary coherence.

Teams, communities, and organizations begin to function less through hierarchy and more through social contracts, culture formation, and co-responsibility. Leadership becomes distributed across systems of collaboration rather than concentrated in roles or titles.

In this transition, culture is revealed as a living phenomenon shaped by everyday decisions, awareness levels, and mutual accountability. Transformation becomes co-transformation, where individuals and systems evolve together.

As the perspective widens further, leadership becomes inseparable from systems design and participatory processes. Cities, institutions, and knowledge systems can function as living environments that enable compassion, collective intelligence, and peace. Leadership becomes embedded in structures that allow learning, inclusion, and responsibility to flow across society.

At this level, leadership is less visible but more consequential. It operates through enabling conditions rather than directives, through architecture rather than authority.

Beyond human systems, the book points toward a deeper transition: the movement from managing systems to belonging to living systems. Leadership becomes stewardship of aliveness, including the acceptance of decay, uncertainty, and non-optimization as natural aspects of life. The question is no longer how to lead systems more efficiently, but how to participate responsibly within Earth's evolving processes. This is well aligned with the Ecocivilisation's call for remembering and re-aligning with the fundamental laws of nature, acknowledging again that we are its inseparable part.

Further, the economic, technological, and governance models are reconsidered through this lens, as well, suggesting that extractive logic is challenged by care-centered alternatives. We are collectively invited to imagine a world where technological futures are balanced by ethical responsibility, education, and civil society. Where civic movements, when trust in institutions collapses, demonstrate how legitimacy and social codes can emerge without centralized leadership. In this evolution of our world where the Earth's authentic system is intertwined with human-based communities and expanded with the so called virtual world, intuition is awakened as an integral part of our decision-making, or as Manica Čelofiga reminds us in her contribution, intuition becomes our legitimate faculty.

Across these perspectives, leadership is increasingly understood as coherence-holding within complexity. The ability to maintain alignment between people, systems, and life conditions within dynamic fields of emergence and constant transformation.

This shift is neither abstract nor utopian. It is already visible in communities, organizations, cities, and social movements experimenting with new forms of participation, stewardship, and shared responsibility.

And what one can imagine at the end of this exploration, is a paradox: the more leadership evolves, the less it resembles leadership as traditionally understood.

It becomes:

- presence instead of control,
- stewardship instead of ownership,
- participation instead of authority,
- care instead of extraction,
- collective intelligence instead of individual direction,
- planetary belonging instead of human centric experience.

In this sense, leadership is not disappearing, it is returning to its ecological context.

The challenge ahead is not to invent better leaders, but to cultivate the conditions in which leadership can emerge naturally from aware individuals, healthy relationships, and living systems.

We are invited to get comfortable with dynamic field of emergence where the end of certainty does not mark the end of our existence and leadership. It marks the end of static structures unable to respond to the nature of life itself, and in that sense it marks the end of the old leadership style based on separation from life.

What follows is the possibility of leadership as a shared human capacity, grounded in responsibility, guided by awareness, and aligned with the flourishing of a living planet. Perhaps this shift also means the beginning of leadership as participation in life's unfolding cosmic intelligence. This is yet another view beyond the known where the dreams of Ecocivilisation Movement unfold.

The Ecocivilisation Team