

2. INSPIRED PRAGMATISM

Personal Experiences and Reflections About Leadership in the Emerging Wisdom Civilization by Walter Link (Europe)

“Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society — its worldviews, its basic values, its social and political structures, its art, its key institutions — rearranges itself. We are currently living through such a time.”

Peter Drucker

Introduction

This article is part of a book called *Leadership is Global – Co-creating a more Human and Sustainable World*, for which Walter was the lead co-editor and a co-authors together with twenty-one other highly regarded leadership experts from around the world. The purpose of the book was to engage the writers into dialogic process to collectively offer a diverse, multi-cultural perspective on a brought range of leadership challenges and opportunities. The book was co-published with a Japanese foundation and the Global Leadership Network (GLN), which Walter chairs and which Hein is a senior member of. GLN is also conducting a study of thirty of the world’s most innovative leadership development programs, the research findings of which helped to inspire this visionary leadership program. The book and this article were written about four years ago, when US President Bush still spoke for many in the private and public sector when he said that climate change was not a human made phenomena. Now, only a few years later, taking climate change seriously has become the norm, even as the world has not yet gathered the political will to put its money where its mouth is. In rereading the article, I found it interesting to appreciate how for some people it is already partly dated while for others it is still unthinkable, and how overall it is related to our ongoing evolution.

A Global Plan for Action

I vividly remember that clear and crisp morning a short decade ago, when I took the ferry across Istanbul’s Bosphorus, the magnificent waterway where for millennia the great civilizations of the East and West have clashed and enriched each other.

As the sun warmed my face in the fresh breeze and the natural and human-made beauty touched and inspired me, I wondered whether later that day I would be able to make a small contribution to bridging a similarly significant divide: integrating business and economic development with social and environmental sustainability — one of modern civilization’s defining challenges.

I was on my way to speak to the General Assembly at the United Nations Global Summit where the world’s governments met to finalize their first-ever Global Plan of Action for a planet in urgent need of systemic solutions that work for all. The UN’s 1996 Summit in Istanbul was based on the

work of five prior global gatherings, which brought together thousands of public and tens of thousands of private sector representatives from all over the world. They started in 1992 with the Rio Earth Summit, which was followed in yearly intervals by the Human Rights Conference in Vienna, the Population and Development meeting in Cairo, Copenhagen's Social Summit, and Beijing's Women's Conference. The culminating gathering in Istanbul was called Habitat — evoking our shared home.

It was tasked with completing the negotiations for a comprehensive action plan for our increasingly interdependent global village. Even with its many limitations, the Plan was humanity's best effort yet to advance, at least on paper, towards building a more humane and sustainable civilization — together. In that sense the Plan was an historic act of global leadership, and an important step towards a new world order that would be co-created by the many, not imposed by the few.

To inform their deliberations, the Summit's Secretary General had invited me and a few colleagues from the Social Venture Network (SVN)ⁱ, an association of socially and environmentally committed business leaders and social entrepreneurs from across Europe and the U.S., to give a three-hour briefing to the General Assembly about how to reinvent business and economic development in alignment with sustainability — a task the UN has recognized as one of humanity's major opportunities.

Inspired pragmatists

We were what I call “inspired pragmatists” — experienced entrepreneurs and managers who, all over the world, had succeeded in the prevailing socio-economic systems, and yet tried to use our companies as living laboratories to discover and demonstrate that a more humane and sustainable economy is possible. We implemented pragmatic solutions, which were inspired by our hearts' desires for a better world. Understanding that ethical ideals alone had not succeeded in shifting societies, we wanted to prove that social and environmental sustainability, rather than being perceived as a trade-off, could become mutually enhancing with corporate profits and overall economic prosperity.

We didn't claim to have found the Holy Grail of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSR), nor a blueprint for a restorative economy. On the contrary, we were painfully aware and openly addressed the need to become an ever more effective community of learning and action to charter workable paths into the widely unknown territory of sustainable business.

We are still working on it. Even today, nobody can claim to operate a fully sustainable company. Certainly we are still far from implementing sustainable economies. Yet we have made significant progress towards understanding how to align business with the needs of society and nature. If the trends continue, and there are many indications that they are even accelerating, we might surprise ourselves how rapidly this new economic paradigm could unfold, as it already has over the past decades.

A time between paradigms

I concur with Peter Drucker and hundreds of senior leaders in governments and business, civil society and the consciousness movement, with whom I have worked and spoken around the world. We live in a time between paradigms of civilization. It's a time of stark contrasts and accelerated evolution, in which many want to hold onto the familiar, and even return to the past. Yet what is

needed is fundamental change to lead us from our daunting challenges towards co-creating wiser ways of living together in our increasingly interdependent global home.

Modernism created the first-ever semblance of a global civilization. Sparking both conflict and inspiration, it connects diverse cultures within and across all continents. Modern civilization is beneficial in many ways. With all its limitations and challenges, it is an important step in human evolution. In its present iteration, it is, however, unable to solve many problems it inherited from prior civilizations, and creates additional challenges of its own. Overall, it is fundamentally unsustainable, both environmentally and socially.

Besides the many particular levels of suffering that its limitations cause, it ultimately threatens the very survival of humanity and many other species, and holds us back from living our full potential as wise and humane beings. Therefore it is gradually being replaced as life continues to evolve. At this point it is impossible to know whether these paradigmatic shifts will happen fast enough to avoid a fundamental degradation of living systems, both natural and social. But one thing is clear: the more of us that become engaged in working towards sustainability — together — the more likely it is that the really bad scenarios will never manifest. I see many reasons to be optimistic.

Key challenges of our predominant civilization

To be motivated to work for fundamental change, it is important to realize that there are significant problems that need urgent attention. While I want to focus this chapter on opportunities and solutions, not problems — many of which we are only too familiar with — I want to mention at least a few which point to this fundamental challenge that modern civilization presents to both natural and social systems.

Last year the United Nations released its Millennium Ecological Assessment, in which over a thousand of the world's leading experts concluded that “human activity is putting such strain on the natural functions of Earth that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted.” UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan summarized, “the very basis for life on earth is declining at an alarming rate.”ⁱⁱ In chapter 20, my co-author Hunter Lovins and I elaborate on this issue, as well as some possible solutions.

And, of course, it is not only natural systems which our civilization profoundly challenges; also, each and every one of our social systems is in distress and urgent need of attention. Old paradigm educational institutions neither prepare us for the complexity of life's demands nor help us to fulfill our deepest yearnings. “Mad cow disease” points to the mad and inhumane manner with which we treat other species. Slavery for sexual, domestic, agricultural and industrial exploitation is at record highs, while abusive child labor continues amidst certain advances to abolish it. In the southern hemisphere, tens of millions die each year of preventable hunger and disease, while even in the midst of strong economic growth, half of the world's population barely subsists on less than US\$2 a day. In the USA, 30 million citizens live in “food insecurity,” 40 million don't have health insurance, and millions are homeless — many of them children. Also in Europe social systems are degrading, as are global financial systems, the prior collapse of which helped to bring Hitler to power — debunking the myth that crises mysteriously lead to salvation.

Old paradigm strategies, devoid of human rights and long-term thinking, first empower and arm leaders like Saddam Hussein, then overthrow him at the cost of many lives and hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars — which could be invested to resolve the causes of global conflict — only to create a

second Vietnam in Iraq, which after the internationally unifying response to 9/11, has split the world into increasingly polarized camps. David Gardner, managing director of (Henry) Kissinger Associates in New York — hardly an anti-U.S. or anti-military voice — wrote that it “was clear beforehand that this was a step that would proliferate jihadism, risked turning Iraq into a Lebanon cubed and would destroy western credibility and legitimacy in the Arab and Muslim worlds.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In their 2006 National Intelligence Estimate, 16 U.S. intelligence agencies suggest that old paradigm methods in the global “war on terror” are strengthening terrorism, while others warn that fear and polarization, illegal surveillance and governmentally sanctioned torture diminish civil liberties, democracy and the rule of national and international law — threatening core achievements of modern civilization. Overall, domination as a worldview and violence as a means of interaction is still widespread, not because they are an expression of our fundamental human nature, but because old paradigm civilization reduces us to these kinds of behaviors — as Bill Ury analyses brilliantly in *The Third Side - why we fight and how we can stop*.

Of course, the list of more or less dramatic problems in each societal sector goes on and on, spreading hopelessness and cynicism while creating calluses over our hearts.

I invite you to consider that many of our problems are not anomalies, but that they are born from the inherent ‘logic’ of our predominant paradigm of civilization. In other words, I suggest that they are not bad apples accidentally growing on an otherwise healthy tree. If fully appreciated as such, these dysfunctional system designs, and the suffering they cause, make it obvious that we need to find fundamentally different ways to live with each other and the rest of nature.

This necessitates that we, ourselves, mature into our potential to become more wise and humane beings. Because, as I understand it, what we create in the world is the mirror image of the degree of our inner maturation, and our capacity to translate the resulting wisdom into sustainable actions and institutions. We therefore need both inner and outer development.

It is, of course, much easier to find fault than to create something better. Pointing fingers will not suffice. Humility and sobriety are prerequisites as we talk about something as momentous as evolving civilization. The strength of wisdom doesn’t lie in blanket rejection, but in compassionate as well as honest discernment; and most importantly, in finding out what really works — sustainably — for all living beings. This requires the courage and integrity to face shortcomings and especially to act on opportunities. Because, as experienced leaders note, we succeed by pursuing opportunities, more so than by solving problems.

The fall of apartheid and of the Iron Curtain

It is crucial to recognize that fundamental changes are possible. Fifty years after the horrors of World War II inspired humanity to co-create the ideal and institution of the United Nations, and to adopt its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we are still far from implementing this vision. Yet we have also made great strides. In much of Europe, where intra-continental warfare was a constant for millennia, it is now hard to imagine. In the Americas, which were haunted by civil wars and brutal dictatorships, much has changed as well. In South Africa, apartheid ended — peacefully.

Overall, human rights and sustainability have much more support than at any point in history. A few decades ago, these and many other societal innovations were still very much in their infancy as mass movements. Today they span the globe in many ways and cannot be ignored any longer, even by those who perpetuate abuse. These are important achievements which point to the peaceful

potential of human civilization. If they can arise in some places, they can do it everywhere. Because however varied the richness of our individual and cultural diversity, fundamentally we share a common humanity, and with it a joint potential to develop and implement this paradigm. Collectively, humanity has the material resources and technological potential, the cultural and social frameworks, the psychological and spiritual understanding to address its many challenges much more effectively — and we are gradually doing it.

An Emerging Wisdom Civilization

In fact, throughout all sectors of society, a new civilization is being co-created by countless people and organizations. A dynamic, ever-evolving mosaic integrating traditions and innovations from around the world and throughout time is gradually taking form. It is pragmatic, and at the same time sourced in the depth of human inspiration and aspiration, gradually harmonizing our inner maturation with our actions in the world. While this emerging paradigm is still far from being predominant, the concrete solutions it already offers to some of our most pressing problems point to the fact that a wiser, more humane, and dynamically sustainable civilization is not only possible but already under way.

The media regularly reports about these positive developments, ranging from systemic changes like the ‘greening’ of the economy to individual acts of human creativity and compassion. But mostly it does so as if these were hopeful, yet disconnected islands within the discouraging ocean of bad news. The ‘news’ generally doesn’t portray the broad, systemic, interactive nature of these phenomena. That may not be surprising. It took me more than two decades of active engagement across sectors and continents to both conceptually understand and viscerally get that all these specialized movements of societal and personal transformation are really one and the same emergence of a new civilization.

One of the reasons why it may be difficult to perceive the fundamental unity of this evolutionary process is its decentralized nature. No single person or institution invented or leads it. It has millions of active contributors who, each in their areas of specialization, play a role in its distributed leadership — co-creating its innovations.

This living process constantly evolves, deepening our insights and improving our implementations. It has no predetermined end point, and no dogma, allowing instead ongoing discovery and development. Yet, even as this new civilization evolves in apparently non-linear and at times incomprehensible ways, it appears to have an inherent directionality — the ongoing maturation of our overall consciousness and its translation into values and behaviors, technologies and institutions.

The characteristics of this emerging civilization balance and integrate both ancient and new orientations — towards peace and justice; creative rather than destructive power; the courage to stand up against abuse and domination, and for partnership and compassion; love and forgiveness; fairness and freedom, including that of information, education as well as faith and other non-harmful preferences. It is based on equal rights and responsibilities for the whole, social as well as environmental sustainability, including renewable resources and restorative technologies. It harmonizes individual and multi-cultural diversity with co-creative integration, and facilitates transparency and authenticity, psychological healing and spiritual awakening — all of which are mutually enhancing, like the multi-colored facets of a sparkling diamond.

This list goes on and on — healing the calluses that close our hearts and inspiring our minds to make the possible happen. I summarize these characteristics with the term “*wisdom*,” which I understand to be the realization and implementation of our potential. This pragmatic wisdom benefits from, yet takes us beyond the ages of industry, information and knowledge into sustainable yet dynamic forms of wise living. Therefore I call this ever-evolving global movement the “*emerging wisdom civilization*.”

Inspired pragmatism, not unpragmatic idealism

The emerging wisdom civilization is fundamentally pragmatic. The solutions it brings forth actually work better in the real world, where real people solve real problems and stretch towards realizing their potential. To paraphrase my many conversations with John Naisbitt, author of the *Megatrends* series and the upcoming *Mind Set!* about these current developments: Whatever our political orientation, and whatever our sense of urgency in regard to social and environmental sustainability, these solutions are so attractive that we will want to implement them anyway.

What makes these solutions so attractive and useful is that their pragmatism is increasingly integrated with the depth of our fundamental human inspirations and aspirations. I therefore call it *inspired pragmatism*. Here, pragmatism doesn’t contradict inspiration, but enhances it by challenging and grounding it with concrete implementation.

While inspired pragmatism includes ideals, which can serve as a compass, it should not be confused with unrealistic idealism, which may reflect some yearnings of our hearts, but hasn’t ripened to the point where it can be successfully implemented. Such idealism, even if it is well-intended and worthwhile as a stage on the journey towards inspired pragmatism, often fails to achieve sustainable solutions. Therefore it can reinforce the cynicism that keeps us stuck in a kind of lower-common-denominator, which gives ordinary pragmatism a bad name for the lack of its inspiration. Gradually, we need to work towards, and mature into, the functional wisdom that allows us to satisfy all of our true inner and outer needs and aspirations. That is the potential of inspired pragmatism, which more and more people and organizations are working with and towards.

Evolution, not revolution

Inspired pragmatism makes the organic evolution of the emerging wisdom civilization fundamentally different from abrupt revolutions. These are typically driven by ideological and fundamentalist extremisms, which are based on dogmatic make-believe, and can eventually only be held together by ignorance and force, because they lack the real pragmatism which makes deep inspiration work in the world.

Those who have studied Marxism know that it reached for important humanistic ideals, which tried to remedy the enforced ignorance and otherwise brutal feudalism of its time. Yet, the many failed attempts to implement Marxism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere produced equally brutal dictatorships, which lacked both true inspiration and pragmatism. Religious fundamentalist revolutionaries, too, refer to deeply inspired ideals, but distort them to the point where they contradict their true meaning, and bring earth closer to hell rather than heaven.

While it is easier to recognize the lack of real inspiration and pragmatism in such extreme regimes, ill-inspired and unpragmatic dogmatism comes in many forms. Most of us have a tendency to think that our overall systems and personal positions are as good as things can get. In the battle of economic systems, for example, capitalism was the relative winner over communism — because in

many ways it works better. This, however, doesn't mean that capitalism is without serious challenges. At its present stage of development, it clearly doesn't qualify as deeply inspired pragmatism, and needs to be reformed.

Natural capitalism

In fact, most of our environmentally unsustainable activities are part of the vast system of civilization we call the economy — the way we extract and produce, transport and consume — which, more than ever, dominates our societies. One of the false paradoxes which we find at the core of the unsustainability of this system, is the erroneous but self-fulfilling prophecy that sustainability and economic benefit have to contradict each other, and that sustainability is not the concern of business leaders. This is what I learned 25 years ago in business school from Milton Friedman and other modernist capitalists who, together with their counterparts from the anti-capitalist left, dominated the public discourse — the ones denying the need, and the others the possibility that capitalism could be fundamentally reformed.

While traditional capitalism has for a long time gotten away with diminishing the environment — our natural capital — eventually, environmental as well as social sustainability are not negotiable — we can't survive without them. Therefore, old-paradigm capitalists, who dogmatically stand in the way of bringing capitalism into full alignment with sustainability, are its worst enemies. By underselling the reform potential of market economies, they slow the evolution by which capitalism can realize its full potential to value and enhance all forms of capital — financial and industrial, as well as human and environmental capital.^{iv}

This is why the many economic reform movements of the emerging wisdom civilization which attempt to make capitalism sustainable are of such importance and should be supported by all those who want to evolve and sustain market economies.

Reinventing Business

Sustainability needs long-term perspectives

I was initiated into business as a partner of a now over 130-year-old group of industrial companies in Asia. Originating in Europe, its headquarters is in Thailand. As foreigners doing business abroad, we attempted to behave like respectful guests. Due to our German nationality, the company was expropriated in both the First and Second World Wars by the fortunately victorious Allies. However, our company and our family were organically integrated into Thai society. We had long-standing relationships of mutual trust and respect, and served a useful function in the country's economic development, bridging continents and cultures. Therefore, the Thai government returned our assets after each war, and the overall community helped us to rebuild our business to be even stronger.

These events helped me to realize the co-creative potential of business and society, especially as commerce becomes increasingly global — often losing contact with the sense of community and the very personal accountability that comes with it. As Peter Drucker wrote in the Economist: "In the next society, the biggest challenge for the large company — especially for the multinational — may be its social legitimacy."^v The support our family and company received speaks to this legitimacy, and underlines the value of a long-term perspective in business, and in the emerging wisdom civilization.

This perspective was echoed by the chairman of CalPERS, with over 200 billion dollars in assets, the largest pension fund in the U.S., and one of the world's biggest and most influential investors. Speaking at a conference which I co-organized to inspire pragmatic cooperation between sustainability experts and institutional investors — two constituencies which play a pivotal role in reorienting the economy — he emphasized that in the long term, financially successful business will logically depend on social and environmental sustainability — an obvious fact that nevertheless has been systemically ignored.

Leading sustainable corporations everywhere

In chapter 20, entitled “*Leading Sustainable Corporations Everywhere: From Oxymoron to Reality*,” Hunter Lovins and I offer a detailed assessment of powerful societal and market trends towards sustainable yet profitable business, which are rapidly developing around the world. This new business paradigm is still far from its full potential, but since Istanbul, it has made significant strides. It moved corporate social and environmental responsibility from a ‘nice idea’ (one of the more friendly early-day comments heard as we worked to create the Social Venture Network and other such organizations throughout Western and Eastern Europe) into the mainstream of the economic and corporate agenda in the northern hemisphere.

Corporate responsibility is also rapidly expanding in the global South. For example, in the Americas, starting out as a small group of international business leaders, we united and co-created twenty sustainability-oriented business organizations between Argentina, Brazil and Chile in the South to Mexico, the U.S. and Canada in the North under the umbrella of *Empresa*.^{vi} Starting in 1996, *Empresa* now connects thousands of companies with tens of millions of employees, and hundreds of billions of dollars in revenues. In country after country, its members, in cooperation with governments and civil society organizations, have become an important force for sustainability-oriented business practices and governmental action, supporting multi-sector partnerships and strengthening democracy.

Together, these companies, and those united in other such networks representing all sizes and sectors of the economy, are a sufficiently large and diverse sample to prove that a different economy is indeed possible. Even in view of their limitations, they demonstrate that moving towards social and environmental sustainability on the one hand, and corporate success and economic development on the other, have become mutually enhancing, rather than being mutually exclusive goals. As such, they refute a core tenet of the old economic paradigm, which presumes that sustainability cannot be good for profits — a core belief which systemically oriented the economy to choosing personal and corporate wealth over the common good.

Resolving such false paradoxes in a mutually enhancing manner is characteristic of the emerging wisdom civilization, and essential to its practical implementation. It takes us beyond ideological discussions to pragmatic and inspired solutions.

Corporate responsibility and the UN's Global Compact

At the time of the Istanbul Summit, this new paradigm of business was still in its infancy as a mass movement to reform global economies. Even though it had been already presented four years earlier at Rio's Earth Summit, it had not penetrated the overall considerations of UN delegates. We therefore knew that we were charting relatively new and potentially challenging territory. But because we offered concrete models, fitting within a coherent worldview and backed up by a critical mass of

corporate examples and other data, we could go beyond problems to demonstrating concrete alternatives. Beyond the known challenges, we pointed to attractive opportunities which were already working in the real world. After short presentations, we had a wide-ranging discussion about these new business models and sustainable technologies, green accounting and socially responsible investing, fair trade and micro-lending, which are mutually enhancing in moving towards a sustainable economy.

Gradually, the attitudes of delegates began to shift from surprise and disbelief, even cynicism, to constructive engagement. In later meetings, a number of the delegates told me that the reforms we described allowed them to envision how their economies could benefit from market efficiencies, without being dominated by companies, especially multinational ones.

In fact, this approach, they remarked, returns business to its appropriate station as a servant of society, rather than its master. As such, these representatives recognized that this approach has not only the potential to address the urgent needs for ecological and social sustainability. It also offers a resolution of the 20th century struggle between economic socialism and capitalism, which had split the UN and many of its members since its outset.

Subsequently, delegates invited us to help formulate specific language for the UN's Global Plan of Action. Besides making more general statements about business practices, I found it especially important that the Plan ended up calling for the development of specific standards for corporate social responsibility, to distinguish genuine efforts from the 'green-washing' of outdated business behavior. Because consumer demand for 'responsible business' is sharply increasing, more and more companies want to claim that they qualify. Only with measurable standards can we be sure that this is actually the case.

Over the past decade, Empresa members and other corporate responsibility networks and companies from around the world have cooperated with the UN to develop its Global Compact, which has the goal to move the world towards sustainable development. If properly implemented in fully equitable multi-sector partnerships, the Compact and other such initiatives have the potential to become one of the United Nations' key innovations in global governance.

Cross-sector partnerships, which integrate governmental leadership with that of the two other powerful political forces of modern societies — business and civil society — to address our challenges *with* rather than *against* each other, are an especially significant development of the emerging wisdom civilization.

Reinventing Governance

The rising power of business and civil society

Of the one hundred largest economic entities on the planet, over fifty are now corporations, not countries. This trend is accelerating. Many agree that the impact of companies on local and global governance is even larger than these numbers indicate. It was this general analysis, combined with my personal experience, that led me to focus my work partly on helping to design and implement a new vision for business to reorient its great power towards sustainability and the like.

It also brought me to train so-called social entrepreneurs — inspired pragmatists who combine the entrepreneurial impetus that makes business so effective, with the desire to create a better world — as well as to co-found and strengthen civil society organizations and networks, because they are a crucial balance and inspiration to both corporations and governments. Unless it is suppressed by

anti-democratic strategies, civil society will play an ever-increasing role in societal leadership, especially as its organizations and networks integrate social entrepreneurship and greater effectiveness into their operational models.

While politics and business have been widely discussed, civil society is still a less appreciated and more dynamically evolving phenomenon, which is why I want to focus here on this newest member of the societal leadership triad.

Civil society, or the citizen sector, is organized in a vast array of so-called NGOs (non-governmental organizations), also called non-profit or social benefit organizations. They, and their mostly informal networks, have exponentially grown in both numbers and influence over the past few decades.

Twenty years ago, Indonesia had only one independent environmental organization. Today it has more than 2,000. In Bangladesh, the predominance of the country's development work is now being handled by 20,000 NGOs, most of which have been established in the past 25 years. In the five years following the fall of the Iron Curtain, over 100,000 such entities were founded in the formerly communist countries of Central Europe. India has over one million citizen organizations, as does Brazil. The U.S. has over two million, 70% of which are less than 30 years old.^{vii}

A John Hopkins University study of eight western countries found that in the five years prior to the Istanbul Summit, employment in this sector grew two and a half times faster than that of the overall economy. In addition to this growth of measurable employment comes the countless volunteer efforts, which, if evaluated in monetary terms, make civil society one of, if not the, largest sectors of the economy. Without it, societies simply couldn't function.

Who represents the people?

Politically, this growth in NGO numbers and influence is especially apparent in democratic nations, and stands in contrast to the often-anemic participation in democratic elections. More and more voters do not feel adequately represented by their so-called representatives. Presently, "more than two-thirds of Americans strongly disapprove of Congress' performance in the past two years, while fewer than a quarter approve."^{viii} Whether I ask conservatives in the U.S. or social democrats in Europe, civil society leaders in Latin America or business leaders in Asia, the frustration with our current political leadership is near universal.

As we continue our inquiry into how to implement the ideals of democracy, these developments prompt the question about the most effective means of democratic representation, and point to the significant reform needs in the governmental sector. The old paradigm ways to organize our political systems and processes are clearly limited in their capacity to generate the kind of inspired yet pragmatic leaders we really want and need.

Meanwhile, civil society has created an important counterbalance to old paradigm companies and elected officials whose financial dependence on business and other traditional special interest groups influences their ability to represent the common good. As the Financial Times reports: "Since 1994, the number of lobbyists in Washington has more than tripled to almost 40,000 as the opportunities to influence Congress have grown."^{ix} On the other hand, we also have to consider the grounds of civil society's democratic legitimacy.

Market democracy

The power of these citizen organizations and their worldwide networks doesn't lie in their financial resources, or, for that matter, in any hierarchical authority. Their influence comes from evolving and representing the values of millions of citizens who, as consumers, are often more successful in impacting the direction of companies and society than as voters.

Without the multiple impacts of NGOs on consumers and other market participants, the movement towards corporate responsibility, which brings business closer to the common good, would not have come so far, so fast. In the absence of sufficient governmental interventions, companies are mostly being reoriented towards sustainability by changing market conditions, which civil society interventions help to shape by educating and motivating consumers, who in turn exercise their purchasing power. In other words, in the absence of fully representative governments, the arbitrage of societal values is transferred to the marketplace — creating hybrid “market democracies.” While this helps us to advance on important issues, it can't by itself replace a fully democratic process, which also needs to include the governmental sector.

Corporate giants such as Nike, one of the world's leading consumer brands, and Citi Bank, the world's largest financial institution, have been pressured alongside many other corporations into sustainability reforms by NGOs and shifting consumer demands. The financial strength of these NGOs is negligible when compared to the monetary means of these companies — which have repeatedly tried to counterattack, often with the help of their allies in government — mostly without success.

Brent Spar and Seattle — a new balance of power

Governments and global governance institutions are also not immune to such civil sector pressures. One of the most memorable examples was the shutdown of the World Trade Organization's Seattle Conference in 1999 by a broad coalition of environmental and human rights activists, unions members and religious protestors. In another example, in 1995 Royal Dutch Shell received permission from the British government to sink Brent Spar, an old oil-drilling platform filled with massive amounts of toxic waste.

Greenpeace and other non-profits alerted the media, mobilized the public, and forced politicians to take a stance against the environmental impact on Europe's North Sea. The outcry was so massive that a broad coalition emerged, including mainstream families, corporate leaders, and Helmut Kohl, the conservative Chancellor of Germany. Within a short timeframe, the pressure on Shell grew to a point where the corporate giant had to agree to tow the platform to shore instead of sinking it, and it decided to replace top managers and promise wide-ranging reforms in its overall corporate strategy.

In the subsequent national election, the Conservative British government was defeated in a landslide, partly blamed on its stance of wanting to sink the platform despite the public uproar, even as Shell had already given in. These dramatic events point to the importance of creating cross-sector consultations and institutions that can bridge these divides and address such issues before they turn acrimonious, or even violent.

Those who are genuinely interested in social and environmental sustainability, but object to more aggressive activist methods, should ask themselves how else civil society organizations could succeed in systems that haven't yet given them equal space at the negotiation table? We are also well served to remember that most human progress has been won against the objections of one establishment or

another that was so attached to its old worldview and its own interests that it didn't represent the common good. We therefore need to create conditions under which all of us together can bring about the wise shifts we so urgently need.

On the other hand, civil society activists have to wonder whether their combative methods reflect only temporary tactical necessity, or also society's overall addiction to conflict, which haunts the old paradigm of civilization.

The potential for cross-sector co-creation

While the empowerment of citizens to stand up against social and environmental degradation is an important step in the direction of a more democratic balance of power in our present system of governance, some of the most creative work in redesigning our societies is done when members of the different societal sectors actually cooperate.

The co-creative potential of such cross-sector cooperation became apparent when Human Rights Watch (HRW) played a crucial role in helping to draft and negotiate the agreements for the International Criminal Court, creating a globally effective legal institution and individual accountability to prevent the world's most horrible crimes against humanity. Members of governmental negotiation teams told me that due to its inspired integrity, its pragmatic professionalism and subsequent clout with the press and politicians, Human Rights Watch, an NGO with an annual budget in the neighborhood of US\$10 million, was considered as influential as delegations from major countries.

Another such co-creative example is the New Voice of Business, a business network in California we recently co-founded. Within a few months, it was able to co-create a broad coalition of NGOs and business organizations, California Democrats and Republicans, who then facilitated the adoption of a US\$3.2 billion solar energy program. Another such coalition supports the passage of a law that moves California towards implementing the Kyoto protocol, and yet another law, soon to come up in a public referendum, would redistribute each year an estimated US\$400 million in oil revenues towards building a renewable energy infrastructure. Only because we were working together across sectors were we able to achieve this.

The challenge and opportunity of difference

If cross-sector cooperation is to be a new paradigm of governance, how can we address both the challenge and opportunity of our differences? How can we meet on the ground of our shared humanity, while respecting and benefiting from the richness of our diversity? Several chapters in this book address this question. They also point to the fact that working together is easier said than done.

When people speak of cultural differences, they mostly comment on the differences between individuals or groups from diverse ethnicities, geographical regions or religious beliefs. However, in my experience, the cultural divide between business leaders of different nationalities can be easier to bridge than between a traditional businessperson and a civil society activist from the same town.

The differences of opinion and interests are often reinforced by the discrepancies in behavior, language, attire, and most importantly by misunderstandings and disrespect. For many of us, it is easier to embrace diversity conceptually than to accept and cherish that other people can be really different, and challengingly so.

Therefore, one of the most important tasks of our time is to develop and apply cross-sector and cross-culture leadership approaches that facilitate mutual understanding and genuine cooperation as a

basis for inspired and pragmatic co-creation. This bridging of sectors and other forms of difference is part of what I call the “horizontal integration” within the emerging wisdom civilization.

Horizontal integration among civic movements

Horizontal integration is also needed among the many movements which make up civil society. They include the movements for human rights and justice, social and environmental sustainability, as well as diverse aspects of science, healthcare and education, to name but a few. As the civic sector grows in size and complexity, it also becomes increasingly specialized. Specialization and decentralization are important for many reasons. But we must also remember the forest for the trees.

Too often we ignore or even disrespect and diminish each other’s work. If we don’t realize that we are all in this together (even if we use different methods), and learn to support each other accordingly, we unnecessarily slow our overall progress. When we recognize that we are indeed one interdependent movement to reinvent our overall civilization, we will unleash cross-movement creativity and co-create integral solutions, which are relevant to, and representative of, the whole system.

The degree of our horizontal integration and cooperation will also determine our political leverage. Too often, individual citizens and civic organizations perceive themselves as small and weak in their struggle against large political institutions and corporations. However, if the civic reform movements unite, including also their allies in business and government, they represent hundreds of millions of people around the world advancing together towards the tipping points of sustainability and other shared goals.

Reinventing Medicine

Integrative medicine

Next to the transformation of the economy and governance, another core sector of society which is rapidly evolving is healthcare. The new paradigm that is emerging is often called “integrative medicine,” or in its fully holistic version “integral medicine.” Here, another aspect of the horizontal integration within the emerging wisdom civilization becomes particularly evident: combining the best evolutionary outcomes of the globe’s cultural diversity to strengthen health and heal illness, while promoting overall sustainability.

Ideally, integrative medicine attempts to combine the best of contemporary western medicine with the most effective indigenous, traditional and alternative treatment modalities that have been developed around the world for thousands of years. Its pragmatic goal is to find for each patient the most appropriate combination of available and affordable methods — in other words what works best under given circumstances.

Truly integral medicine does so in dialogue and joint decision-making with the informed and empowered patient — translating democracy and distributed leadership into healthcare. This is a big step away from the old models, in which more or less ignorant and disempowered patients are being treated by the healer who knows it all — a significant change not only for western medicine, but also for many traditional healing approaches. Considering all elements of the healing system, integrative medicine also cares for the well-being of the healer and society at large. It tries to mitigate the ever-increasing costs of healthcare, and the pollution created especially by western medicine. In other

words, integral medicine seeks not only the cure of an isolated set of symptoms, but addresses the depths and breadth of causalities and interdependencies.

We are more than material entities

Unlike the often exclusively materialist worldview of modernist western healthcare, integrative medicine realizes that we are much more than material entities — that consciousness is a significant part of our being human and healthy. It recognizes the fundamental importance of the often-excluded psychological, energetic and spiritual aspects of our lives, both in terms of healing and living. In other words, it considers the whole person — body and mind, heart and soul, as an integral unity, which in turn is interdependent with their community, and ultimately all of life. Taken to its full potential, this integral perspective will radically alter humanity's worldview — transforming our understanding about what we are as human beings — with impacts reaching far beyond medicine into every aspect of societal and individual life. Therefore, integrative medicine, leading to integral healing, is one of the most potent drivers of the emerging wisdom civilization.

Culturally diverse yet integrated treatments work better

Concretely, integrative medicine might treat severe forms of cancer with an interactive combination of radiology and surgery, energy medicine and herbal remedies, dietary and lifestyle changes, psychotherapy, meditation and prayer — chosen to mutually reinforce each other's healing properties and mitigate side-effects.

Before symptoms occur, integrative medicine attempts to strengthen health and prevent illness, preempting the outbreak of many diseases, or treating them at an early stage with less invasive and costly methods than radiology or surgery — medical equivalents to armed conflict — which always creates 'collateral damage.' Thus, similar to preventative diplomacy and international cooperation, integrative medicine attempts to intervene long before a crisis calls for extreme measures — an approach that is both wiser and cheaper.

This is why more and more insurance companies, especially in northern Europe, are gradually paying for these kinds of prevention and treatment approaches, a trend that is likely to accelerate once integrative medicine has reached critical mass. Considering the huge financial burden that societies, companies and families are carrying in the present healthcare systems, prevention is clearly an important part of the answer — for the patient and society.

It also has many fringe benefits, such as necessitating better education and empowerment in regard to sustainable lifestyles, ranging from healthy nutrition and stress reduction, to the overall maturation of our consciousness and its translation into living wholesome lives. This, in turn, will positively impact other challenges in our interdependent systems of society.

A rapidly evolving trend

Over the past decades, this new paradigm of medicine, vigorously embraced by patients who recognize its increased healing capabilities, has been expanding even more rapidly than corporate responsibility and sustainability. This may well be because we are rarely more interested in the inspired pragmatism of what really works than when our own bodies, and that of our loved ones, are at stake.

While fully integrated medicine is still a rarely reached ideal, a report by the American Medical Association found that 40% of U.S. Americans are using some kind treatment methodologies pointing in that direction, while over 80% of U.S. households purchase some form of dietary

supplements, vitamins, minerals and herbal remedies, based on alternative and traditional healing methods to augment health and prevent illness. There are now more fitness studies in the U.S. than McDonald's restaurants, and after smoking, alcoholism and other drug use, obesity has been recognized as a national problem.^x

On other continents, these numbers are similar enough to indicate a global trend. In fact, in countries like India and Germany, medical integration is further advanced. Therefore, integrative healthcare, driven much like sustainable business — by the increasingly educated consumer — will gradually replace mono-medicine of all origins — demonstrating on a very practical level that cultural diversity can be an important key to unlock our individual and global challenges.

Attachment to the status quo

Yet in the U.S. and other countries, the medical establishment, like the establishments of all institutions, is much slower in accepting this trend. Not surprisingly, it protects the status quo. Based on reasons ranging from the lack of costly scientific research to cultural prejudice, integrative medicine was, until recently, eyed with suspicion. Only little more than a decade ago, it was still considered to be a potentially dangerous or useless fringe movement, and its practice could threaten mainstream medical careers in the U.S. and elsewhere.

When Dr. Woodson Merrill, like so many integrative medical doctors, an inspired pragmatist, started to add Chinese and Tibetan healing to his allopathic internal medicine practice in New York, he was willing to take the risk he shares with all pioneers. Today, he treats patients and instructs colleagues as the founding director of the prestigious Beth Israel Continuum hospital group's integrative medicine treatment center. Now, most Ivy League universities and major hospitals in the U.S. have begun to engage to some degree in integrative medicine, and 60% of all U.S. medical schools offer courses that at least point towards this kind of integration.^{xi}

Global impacts on local cultures

The shift of such respected U.S. medical institutions has global implications. In the past, for many in the modernist medical establishments of the global South, progress meant leaving behind local healing traditions to focus on western medicine. This improved only certain health conditions, and generally increased healthcare costs, often beyond the reach of the many poor. This 'either-or' approach prevented cross-pollination and the development of integral approaches, which could benefit from the local healing modalities that tended to be more economical, and also effective in many ways. Additionally, by disempowering traditional healers, this shift to western medicine tended to diminish respect in the country's overall cultural heritage. Integrative medicine has the potential to reverse this unfortunate development by combining available and affordable western methods with traditional healing modalities.

I gathered first-hand experience with this phenomenon when, on the basis of my work on the integrative medicine curriculum at Einstein Medical School in New York, I was able to help with the introduction of integrative medicine into the medical establishment in Latin America.

For example, together with my colleagues at the Global Academy, we were invited to assist in the programming of two events: the 50-year jubilee of Panama's largest medical school, and a conference for the ministers of health from the Latin countries in The Americas and Europe. In both instances, the fact that integrative medicine had received the benediction of the medical establishment in the northern hemisphere created much interest and acceptance. While this points to the unsustainable

imbalance in our relationships, both between and within cultures, this is one of the pragmatic trailheads, which, if approached wisely, can deepen mutual respect and integration.

Cancer and AIDS – evolutionizing Western healthcare

Of the most threatening diseases in the West, cancer was probably the strongest cause for the experimentation with, and the acceptance of, integrative medicine. Personally, I was introduced to integrative medicine with the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis in North America and Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which also advanced medical bridge-building significantly. At that time, western medicine was mostly helpless to prevent significant suffering and relatively rapid death. That, of course, has changed now, pointing to the ingenuity of western medical research, as well as to the perverse malfunction of our global economic healthcare system, which systemically withholds healing available for those in the global North from others in the global South, where large parts of populations and societies are being decimated by AIDS — one of the most painful manifestations of our ‘civilization’ that a truly integral medicine will have to overcome.

At its onset in the northern hemisphere, HIV-induced illness hit predominantly younger people, some of whom were open to experiment. Because of the fact that western medicine had little to offer, they broke through the stereotypes of ‘mono-medicine’ and ‘knowing doctor—ignorant patient.’ These pioneers explored whatever might work, increasingly integrating the advice of medical doctors and other healers in a process that empowered them to become joint decision-makers with their healthcare providers. Soon, thousands of patients and community members in Europe and North America were discovering the benefits of an emerging integrative medicine.

In that process, it became clear that there was more to heal than the physical dimension of the body and society. People in the prime of their lives were suddenly forced to face their own death, and that of many loved ones. It wasn’t uncommon to bury a good friend and several acquaintances each month. Additionally, those infected suffered from widespread social ostracism — in some cases losing their homes and their jobs and being maligned as sinful and worse. Even healthcare personnel were often afraid to touch patients, who needed physical and personal contact as much as medical treatment.

Discovering our shared humanity by integrating inner work

The confluence of these circumstances led to intense emotions, in particular among those just learning that they and their loved ones had been infected, realizing that in all likelihood they were soon to become ill and die — generally with much pain.

Unprepared by our western healthcare and education systems, which teach us more about chemical tables than about how to deal with feelings, patients and their communities suddenly had to manage intense despair and fear, anger and hopelessness, guilt and loneliness. Some also developed a deep hunger to open into their spirituality, and the mystery of life and death.

It was in this social climate that I was invited to introduce into the HIV/AIDS community the kind of integral psychological and spiritual work which my partner and I were offering to leadership practitioners and the general population throughout Western and Eastern Europe. Facilitated by the “Deutsche AIDS Hilfe” (lit. German AIDS Help) centers, an effective partnership initiative between the government and community-based organizations, we began to offer experiential training programs which addressed these inner challenges and yearnings.

Unlike the then-common formula by which ‘helpers’ — medical personnel and social workers — did self-help groups separately from ‘sufferers,’ who in turn were often split up into categories such as homosexuals, junkies, prostitutes, hemophiliacs, friends and family, we insisted on working with everybody at once in an integrated manner. The results of this simple, if challenging, choice were surprising to both many participants and the old paradigm treatment establishment.

Held within the safe container of integral inner work, it generally took very little time until apparently divisive differences between participants melted into their shared humanity. Given the right support, they became what we all are — human beings who at times are afraid or lonely, angry or sad, loving or hopeful. It is true that on the surface, much can divide us, but as we go deeper, we find that there is much more that unites us — an awareness supported by the intensity of such situations that could help us with all aspects of societal and private life.

In such environments, traditional roles and functions also evolve. Suddenly, the straight medical doctor whose stressful career was based on “knowing it all,” but had estranged him from both his teenage daughter and his own feelings, lay crying in the arms of a gay AIDS patient, who, through the challenges of his own suffering, had learned to digest his feelings and had opened into the ability to have real relationships. This physically sick man at the edge of death became the healer who counseled the professional caregiver on how to start afresh with the daughter he loved, and the inner child he had lost contact with. Together, they discovered that we can heal in living and dying, and that facing death can be a powerful ally in becoming truly alive.

Needless to say, this experience also changed this doctor’s way of working with his patients, as the AIDS crisis in the West in general helped to evolutionize treatments and relationships along the path towards integral medicine, underlining the fundamental humanity of patients and healers alike. These openings in the field of medicine helped, in turn, to reinforce similar developments in other parts of society, including in certain educational institutions where students and teachers have begun to meet beyond their roles, as human beings jointly engaged in the fascinating quest for learning.

Healing into life and death

In some cases, these spiritual practitioners with AIDS, whose suffering from physical pain and social ostracism had been horrendous, expressed gratitude for a predicament that had forced them through the dark night of human pain to awaken into their spiritual depth.

This didn’t reduce their activism against social discrimination, and for faster medical research — civil society was also strengthened by this crisis. But it taught those who deeply engaged in inner exploration how to mature into the opportunities of the human spirit, which, in its depth, is widely neglected in much of our modernist paradigm. This engagement with all aspects of their experience did not only contribute to the individuals’ spiritual healing, but in many instances also to that of their overall community, which became a window into our collective potential of mutual love and support as a society — not unlike the joint humanity that briefly took hold of New York City after 9/11. Clearly we can do better than life-as-usual.

Many of our friends and work partners from other aspects of our lives thought that my partner and I were crazy to immerse ourselves in what they saw as a nightmare of human suffering. But for both her and me, becoming part of this community was a blessing in many ways. We tend to believe that our lives will be happier if we avoid pain — our own and that of others. This, too, is a fundamental misunderstanding at the core of modern civilization, which perpetuates the suffering we

try to avoid, and consequently keeps us from evolving into our full potential of heart and spirit as individuals and societies. When we close off from anything, we close off everything. As we open into pain, we also open into love and life.

Reinventing Leadership

The beauty of life and the banality of evil

Being with all of life, just as it is, has the potential to cut through this misunderstanding and the superficiality it engenders. When we face it all, it becomes easier to drop our masks and get real. Then our essential nature responds and reveals the underlying beauty of life. Eventually, all people who open up begin to embody that beauty, and all the other essential qualities of the Presence we really are. We can't help it. It is our fundamental nature, even if it can and does become so deeply hidden and profoundly distorted that we are able to commit more or less conscious acts of inhumanity, including the dull carelessness of business and life-as-usual, which in today's societies can be even more threatening than obvious forms of violence.

Hannah Arendt's term, the 'banality of evil,' with which she described the heartless efficiency of the Holocaust's bureaucrats, is still relevant today, when just 'normal' living is taking society further down the path of social and environmental unsustainability. What we need, then, to move towards sustainability are shifts in our consciousness to the point where it becomes impossible for us to commit the many 'crimes' of negligence and ignorance, let alone those of intention. As Einstein said, no problem can be solved from the level of consciousness that created it, which also means that if we stay in the same level of consciousness we will perpetuate our challenges.

Einstein and the vertical integration of wise leadership

Changing our consciousness, as Einstein suggests, to become real leaders for sustainability and peace is, of course, easier said than done. Integrative learning at all levels of our educational systems is gradually making inroads in that direction. And at any time in our lives, we can draw on a rich diversity of consciousness-changing inner work practices, ranging from indigenous wisdom traditions, eastern and western spirituality and philosophy, to the arts, neuroscience and diverse psychological approaches. While they are not the only avenue to the transformation of consciousness and action, they have been proven to work for countless millions throughout all times and cultures.

While the practice of those forms of consciousness work is dynamically expanding in many parts of the world, modernity views these inner work approaches often as strange and irrational, even dangerous, and, at best, meant for others who have "problems." For many, especially in Europe, they evoke Marx's critique that religion (which is often thrown in with all else) is "opium for the people," leading to political apathy — and worse, to irrational frenzy a la Third Reich or suicide in sects. Extremists who call themselves Christian, Muslim or Hindu certainly don't help with this perception, even if they have nothing in common with real inner work, which helps us to see and work through both apathy and fanaticism.

In the same way as apparent paradoxes are healed in sustainable business and integral medicine, real inner work practices can be tremendously helpful for all aspects of our lives. In fact, the genuine methods are great examples of inspired pragmatism. On the one hand they are sourced from the depth of human inspiration and aspiration. On the other, in their real understanding of human nature — how our hearts and minds, bodies and souls actually work — they can be highly pragmatic and

effective in bringing about both sustainable and meaningful transformation. Therefore, if used with diligence and dedication, the real inner work methods can support us to live more wisely and effectively.

By helping us to integrate the inner and outer dimensions of our lives, they facilitate what I call the “vertical integration” within the emerging wisdom civilization, which is also at the core of integral medicine. This vertical integration of the inner and outer complements the horizontal integration towards balanced and holistic systems integrity for both ourselves and society as a whole. In its breadth and depth of inclusiveness and maturation, this holism allows us to become more complete and systemic. Consequently we act more wisely — like a ‘Mensch’ — the lively Yiddish term, which elevates the German word for ‘human’ to describe a truly ‘humane’ being.

Inner work based leadership — “my life is my message”

While leadership in the emerging wisdom civilization is broadly distributed, and depends more on the countless acts and attitudes of the many than on a few outstanding individuals, it may be helpful to consider that some of the most admired leaders of the 20th century were deeply inspired by inner work practices. They demonstrate how the integration of personal development and public functioning can manifest our individual and societal potential.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of most impactful socio-political and spiritual leaders of the 20th century, was a deeply inspired pragmatist. Grounded in and inspired by his inner work, he orchestrated the peaceful withdrawal from India of the British, then the world’s most powerful colonial empire; and with it, sealed the fate of global colonialism. He described his leadership with poignant simplicity: “My life is my message.” He suggested that we, too, can “become the change we want to see in the world.” His tremendous inspirational power did not spring from hierarchical authority, but from the depth and authenticity of his consciousness, which he developed with constant spiritual practice.

In his autobiography, entitled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi reveals the nature of his inquiry practice, which supported his work in the world: “What I have been striving and pinning to achieve these thirty years, is *self-realization*” (a term used in many spiritual traditions to describe the awakening to our fundamental nature, which in its integration allows us to ‘become’ rather than only think about the change we want to see in the world).

Gandhi continues: “I live and move and have my whole being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures into the political field, are directed to this same end.” And he adds: “as I have all along believed, that what is possible for one is possible for all.”

Gandhi, Parks, King, Mandela, Havel...

In the U.S., Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King were grounded in the true meaning of Jesus’ spiritual and social change teachings. It inspired and supported them to lead the U.S. from the dark ages of racial segregation towards the gradual implementation of civil rights. King had also been inspired by Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnam’s Engaged Buddhism teacher and another inspired pragmatist, who taught non-violence in the midst of the Vietnam war, when he directed the country’s largest non-partisan civil society organization.

Hated by both warring parties for not taking sides, except that of the civilian population, he eventually had to leave the country, and became next to H.H. the Dalai Lama one of the most popular Buddhist teachers in the West, pointing also to fundamental similarities between the

teachings of Jesus and the Buddha, and maintaining that the pursuit of outer peace needs to be grounded in the practice of inner peace. King expressed deep gratitude for the cross-cultural inspiration by both Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh, which reconfirmed his stance to remain non-violent in the midst of white aggression and black frustration.

Another great leader of the emerging wisdom civilization found his inspiration in the arts and philosophical humanism. Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright and dissident, became the most visible leader of the peaceful ‘Velvet Revolution,’ which, shielded by Michael Gorbachev’s world-changing Glasnost and Perestroika, melted decades of communist domination in the inspiration of secular humanitarian values.

Nelson Mandela was born into a lineage of African nobility and spirituality. He combined his roots with modern legal and military training, and the fate of being a long-time prisoner, to evolve the depth of humane maturity that allowed him to forcefully, but peacefully, end apartheid. He is another inspired and pragmatic testament to how humans, even those so profoundly abused, can choose peace over revenge, and in so doing, inspire a whole country, and many others around the world.

We will win together, or not at all

What makes these wise leaders essentially different from their old-paradigm counterparts is that their non-violent victories were achieved not *against* others, but *with* them. When Gandhi said he wanted the British to leave as friends, he spoke from the depth of our fundamental wholeness, which is at the core of all wisdom traditions. The authenticity of his intent was also reflected in Gandhi’s refusal to benefit from Britain’s weakness during World War II to advance India’s liberation. That unity of being was also present in King when he reminded his followers that segregationists were not their enemies, but needed to be included in “agape,” the ancient Greek term for wise love that supports personal and social healing.

This didn’t mean that King particularly liked the people who abused his community and democracy, spat in his face and ultimately murdered him. But, like Mother Theresa, who loved Jesus in every beggar, and suggested that we measure the openness of our hearts by how wide we draw the circle of whom we call family, King saw through the egoic distortion of our human psyche, into the core of those who, still lacking the clarity and courage to love, couldn’t help themselves but hate those whom they feared and didn’t understand.

In so doing, King did not only move to liberate the oppressed, but also the oppressors, whom he knew acted out of disconnection from their essential nature. For him and others who have realized the fundamental goodness of life, ‘evil’ is a temporary distortion of heart and mind, not an ultimate ground of reality. They are, therefore, able to lead the world together, not against each other — a crucial leadership capacity in the increasingly interdependent and well-armed global village.

The depth of self-realization which these leaders manifest in their words and deeds reverberates in the echo chamber of our interconnected hearts. The countless millions who are inspired by these and the many less-famous leaders of the emerging wisdom civilization intuitively recognize, and reach for, what so clearly manifests in these powerful and compassionate leaders. Somehow we know this light of essential humanness that shines so brightly through Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Thich Nat Hanh, Nelson Mandela and Vaclav Havel, Mother Theresa and

Wangari Mathaai, the recent Nobel Peace laureate, who is helping to advance Kenya and the world towards sustainability and equality, one woman and one tree at a time.

Becoming the change we want to see in the world

I call the depth from which these and other outstanding leaders act “*Presence*,” the essential nature of pure life, which, beyond specific paths and practices, is the source of our goodness and intelligence, our courage and creativity, our love and strength — in sum, all aspects of our “wisdom” as well as our capacities to apply it, which also include life’s inherent capacity to sustain itself.

These and the countless other qualities of Presence — like the many parts of a dynamically self-sustaining eco-system — are fundamentally unified and mutually enhancing, yet manifest in each of us in distinct individuality. What we admire in leaders and aspire to in ourselves is actually our potential to embody Presence, which inner work practices and life as a whole can help us to discover and mature — as Gandhi said, “what is possible for one is possible for all.”

This doesn’t mean that we will all become identical twins, but that beyond our personal and cultural conditioning, we can become uniquely ourselves, and as such be also united and sustainably co-creative from the essential ground of our shared humanity. Unity and individuality are only a paradox in the superficiality of our ego personalities, not in the realness of being, which can pervade any aspect of our daily lives.

Sufism, a mystical tradition of Islam, calls the many inspirational and pragmatic qualities of Presence the *ninety-nine names of God*. They are also inherent in indigenous teachings, and in the deities of Hinduism or Tibetan Buddhism, which orients us towards embodying our *Buddha nature*. They are also at the core of ancient Western philosophy, Christian saints and angels; indeed, we can find them in all genuine ideals — old or new, religious or secular. Because ultimately, we idealize and long for nothing more than life’s essential nature, that evokes all that we call divine or otherwise perfect, and from which all authentic systems of ethics emerge.

While it is helpful to many, we don’t need to believe in God, spirituality or religion to develop these qualities of Presence. We just need to find what works for us to become more and more awake and alive, real and mature.

Integral leadership approaches

If you study the wiser leadership approaches, like many described in this book, you might agree with me that, consciously and unconsciously, they attempt to engender these qualities of Presence, as well as apply the wisdom traditions which support their realization and integration. In other words, the leadership approaches of the emerging wisdom civilization are beginning to translate the essence of life and of these diverse inner work teachings into the complexity of modern day societies.

Like the developments in the economy, governance and medicine, this process of reinventing leadership and its frameworks and practices is far from being complete. There is much more to understand and integrate before our leadership approaches will reach their full potential of inspiration and pragmatism.

Also in this regard, we must appreciate the extent of the challenge. There is a reason why Gandhi and other outstanding leaders deemed it necessary to place inner maturation into the center of their lives. Fundamental transformation will generally not happen by reading a few books, doing a few daily minutes of inner work exercises, and a few weekends of psycho-spiritual workshops or their

leadership equivalents — though these can all be good beginnings. The gravitational force of our ego personalities needs more to allow real transformation into the potential of our being.

While momentary openings into deeper dimensions of consciousness can be quite easily achieved, their integration requires ongoing dedication. In over twenty years of mediation practice, psychological work and spiritual inquiry with myself and many others, I have learned how gradually real transformation happens. Just as learning to master an art or a profession, inner work requires much practice. But as we immerse ourselves not only into the concepts of these inner teachings, but especially into their experiential aspects, we do change in very fundamental ways. In my experience, no challenge is greater, more meaningful and fulfilling — especially when we attempt to live our transformation in the midst of the world, where our every act becomes a mirror to our development, or the lack thereof.

When I look back at my many mistakes and failures in life and work, they were mostly based on psychological and spiritual immaturity, while my successes and growing capacities emerged from inner inspiration and maturation. Also for that reason, my inner work has become more and more central to my life and service in the world, to the point where they have become indistinguishable. I witness similar developments in my leadership colleagues who have tasted the richness of practice, and in the leaders and leadership practitioners I teach and coach. One by one, we are finding our particular ways to let inner work inspire and support ourselves and our service in the world, both in terms of deepened realization and pragmatic functionality.

Outer work as inner work

Our work in the world can become an important part of our inner maturation. It challenges us in many useful ways, and helps to develop our capacities for wise living. Given that many of us focus our lives on work and action, we should consider making our work in the world a conscious part of our inner practice. Then we might rediscover and adapt such ancient practices as India's Karma Yoga, in which the union with our essential nature is furthered through service in the world. The spiritual potential of this path is beautifully expressed by Hanuman, who in the Ramayana, one of India's most holy books, says to Rama, an incarnation of the divine, whom he is full-heartedly devoted to: "When I forget myself, I serve you. When I remember myself, I am you" — in its depth, the oneness of life dissolves all forms of dualism.

When I inquired with a colleague from the Global Leadership Network about the development of his very sensitive and effective leadership facilitation style, which has helped to heal political conflicts and advance cooperative projects, it became clear to us that it was his work in the field, and not any formal spiritual or psychological practice, which had supported his opening into wiser action. Yet he also recognized that the deepened states of consciousness that opened in the context of his leadership work did not fully translate into the rest of his life, and that in this regard, additional practices and development would be useful. This kind of partial shift, which is already beneficial but lacks overall integration, is typical for the modern world, which generally favors specialization over holistic development — another core tenet of the emerging wisdom civilization.

When society evolves, so do we

Society benefits from our inner maturation. Similarly, so does our inner development benefit from the overall evolution of society, which includes the maturation of societal institutions and value systems. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is increasingly encoded (if not yet

fully implemented) in the world's legal systems, may serve as an example. It reaches towards reflecting and evoking the potential of humane life. As such treaties, born from our collective intelligence, become more broadly applied, they ground into daily institutional reality some of the deepest spiritual insights of diverse wisdom traditions. As this happens, these institutions offer people a concrete framework for wise living, which in turn can inspire and support them in both their inner development and their actions in the world.

Some inner work teachings are uniquely focused on the transformation of the individual, and contend that that alone will shift human consciousness, and subsequently the world. While I agree that individuals need to change, I observe that this evolution happens in constant dialogue with our external environment. If we live in the midst of war and human rights abuses, or even more subtle forms of abuse and unconsciousness, it is likely that we will contract into our instinctual survival mechanisms and defensive ego structures. If we are surrounded by compassion and wisdom, both in people, organizations and institutions, we will more easily trust to open into life, and mature into compassion and wisdom. Therefore, inner transformation greatly benefits from outer transformation.

In fact, it is often institutions that are “ahead” of individual mass consciousness. This is true for the UN's Human Rights Declaration, and also for the U.S. Constitution, which laid the groundwork to abolish slavery, while at the same time many U.S. citizens, and even some of its signatories, still ‘owned’ human beings. That is why the new institutions of the emerging wisdom civilization, such as responsible companies and co-creative multi-sector governance, integrative education and integral medicine, and their equivalents in science and technology, legal and social systems, the media and the arts as well as all other sectors of society, are all crucial for our inner development. I, therefore, call them “wisdom institutions,” because they express and engender wisdom.

Conclusion

- We live in a time between paradigms of civilization.
- Humanity is facing tremendous systemic challenges but also great opportunities.
- The old paradigm is still predominant, but fundamentally unsustainable.
- It is therefore being replaced by a new paradigm, which is already implementing wiser solutions across all sectors of society.
- This emerging wisdom civilization works better because it is both pragmatic and inspired in the depth of human inspiration and aspiration.
- It heals old paradigm paradoxes, such as the contradiction between sustainability and profits, which instead become mutually enhancing.
- In governance, it fosters cooperation between the three sectors — civil society, business and government — which together achieve broader representation and better results.
- In integral medicine's horizontal integration, it combines the best healing practices across cultures, demonstrating the value of diversity and the potential of co-creation.
- In its vertical integration, new forms of leadership overcome the artificial separation of “inner” and “outer” work, to support both personal and societal transformation.
- And so, life through our individual diversity and the fundamental unity of Presence continues to evolve — giving each of us the opportunity to co-create a better world.

p.s. In my heart of hearts

While the catastrophic prospects of our social and environmental unsustainability may be compelling, in my heart of hearts I feel that life will not give up on us quite yet. It therefore shows us ever more clearly and insistently that both we and our systems of civilization can and must evolve — with inspiration and pragmatism.

Chapter 2

ⁱ <http://www.svn.org>.

ⁱⁱ “The State of the World? It Is on the Brink of Disaster?” *The Independent UK*.
http://www.truthout.org/issues_05/040105EA.shtml, Wednesday 30 March 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ Financial Times, Friday, August 11, 2006

^{iv} See chapter 20 and the book *Natural Capitalism* by Hawken, Lovins and Lovins, Little Bear publishers.

^v Peter Drucker, 3 Nov 2001, “Will the Corporation Survive?” in *A Survey of the Near Future*, Economist.

^{vi} <http://www.empresa.org>.

^{vii} Research by Tom Valente, <http://theglobalacademy.org>.

^{viii} Financial Times, Friday August 11, 2006.

^{ix} *ibid.*

^x Research by Tom Valente, <http://www.theglobalacademy.org>.

^{xi} *ibid.*