



Leadership for a New Paradigm: Planetary Moment and Momentum

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Abstract

This is a unique moment in human history. It is a unique opportunity to generate the momentum needed for rapid transformation of national and global policies and institutions. We are confronted by challenges of a magnitude and urgency greater than ever before at precisely the moment when humanity faces a global leadership vacuum. These complex, multidimensional, interrelated challenges have already generated unprecedented awareness of fundamental flaws in prevailing ideas, values and institutions; a growing recognition of the need for a radical reordering of values and priorities; a greater willingness to embrace new policies; and a groundswell of public support among the younger generations for new solutions to safeguard their future. Leadership is needed to seize the moment and harness the momentum of the awakened energies to generate a shared vision, aspiration and social preparedness. Catalytic strategies are needed to overcome the inertia of established practices and the resistance of entrenched powers and vested interests. This will require the integration of knowledge about diverse fields, unprecedented cooperation between sectors and nations, and unparalleled coordination between the multitude of multilateral institutions. The transformation should culminate in a global social movement guided by the universal values of human security, human rights, wellbeing for all and harmony with nature. This is a Planetary Moment and a time for global leadership to generate Planetary Momentum.

Humanity is presently facing a nexus of challenges of unparalleled scope, magnitude and complexity. COVID-19 is only the most visible and immediately impactful, posing severe threats to the health, wellbeing, livelihoods and economic security of billions of people around the world. The urgency of this crisis has nearly eclipsed attention to other imminent threats to global security—global warming, war, weapons of mass destruction, the retreat from democracy, populism, rising inequality, the polarization of society, terrorism, uncontrolled migration, disruptive emerging technologies, and decreasing confidence in science and public institutions. These threats are interconnected and linked globally in complex ways we do not fully understand, defying remedy by piecemeal strategies or unilateral actions. The unparalleled series of asymmetric shocks they impose can only be effectively addressed by concerted, coordinated multilateral action by and on behalf of all nations in the world community and our international agencies for global governance.

The world confronts a global leadership vacuum at precisely the moment when inclusive, cooperative, anticipatory, participatory, *value-based leadership* is urgently needed to address

the greatest challenges of all time. It requires leadership in values to affirm the primacy of human wellbeing and universal human rights in all its dimensions as set forth in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The work of the World Academy of Art & Science is premised on the power of thought to change the world. These challenges demand *leadership in thought* to formulate a comprehensive, integrated, value-based theoretical and practical framework of solutions that encompass the multitude of sectoral issues and stakeholder perspectives within a unifying transdisciplinary perspective—a coherent, human-centered paradigm that envisions all facets of our existence as inseparable aspects of a single global reality.

Translating these ideas into effective action will require transformational leadership at the level of institutions in all fields and at all levels. Complex multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral crises cannot be effectively addressed by piecemeal policies and uncoordinated actions of countless specialized institutions acting independently. This will necessitate an unparalleled coordination between the multitude of multilateral institutions responsible for different sectors of global society; the departments of national governments; networks of universities and scientific research institutions; businesses; and networks of specialized civil society organizations focusing on one or another of these crises.

These challenges can only be addressed when the goals and targets elucidated in the SDGs are translated into a coherent framework of catalytic strategies designed to release the energy and initiative of progressive forces in global society to break the inertia and resistance of outmoded ideas, policies, institutional roadblocks and narrow vested interests. Unleashing the power needed for the global social transformation will only be possible when humanity is sufficiently awakened to the urgent and compelling necessity of concerted, coordinated collective action at the local, national and global level and the action of governments is supported, empowered and compelled by the emergence of a global social movement for the common good of all humanity. Successful initiatives of the past such as the international campaigns to ban landmines, eradicate polio, restore the ozone layer of the atmosphere, promote responsible sustainable investments, and promote renewable energies illustrate the type of strategies that have been effective. This requires the emergence of coordinated leadership initiatives within and by national academies and scientific research institutions, universities, the media, business and civil society, and among youth who represent the next generation of leadership.

These monumental leadership challenges would be near impossible to meet in normal times. But these are not normal times. The contemporary world is already very different from what it was just a few months ago. The psychological impact of Covid-19 has been and continues to be enormous. It has generated unprecedented planetary awareness and momentum, greater than that created by the nuclear arms race during the Cold War, the global financial crisis of 2008, or the growing existential threat of climate change. Today there is a greater awareness of the urgent need for fundamental changes, a greater preparedness for coordinated, collective action, a greater willingness to embrace new perspectives and approaches at least in some areas. The urgency, scale, severity and future consequences of

coronavirus pandemic present a compelling opportunity for collective leadership and action at the global level.

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Our world has already changed. The global exchange of information has multiplied through the coordinated action of multilateral institutions, all levels of government, scientific research institutions, the media and civil society organizations. The importance of controlling fake news has been universally recognized. Web-based distance learning is powerfully and irreversibly permeating education at all levels. The two centuries long trend toward concentrated employment in centralized workplaces is rapidly being challenged by the enormous economic and social benefits of online collaboration. The enormous cost and waste of human time from long commutes and the mounting environmental damage to air quality and climate from the frenzy of incessant physical movement of people have been dramatically reduced in a matter of few weeks, proving that changes in lifestyle are possible to halt and reverse global warming in time to avert irreversible damage to our planet, while enhancing quality of life and human relations. The general public and political representatives alike are demonstrating far greater awareness and willingness of the need for rapid change in the form of health-related policy measures, even very restrictive ones.

Still, most discussions and actions are concentrated on short term, quick fix remedies to prop up the existing, outmoded, unsustainable system, rather than on harnessing the opportunities generated by the crisis to provide the catalytic transformational leadership needed for transition to an inclusive sustainable paradigm. The major government expenditure programs under the rubric ‘Quantitative Easing’ are primarily designed to protect the wealth of the wealthy few, not the livelihoods and wellbeing of the many.

A consensus has yet to emerge regarding essential economic and financial reforms urgently needed to support full implementation of the SDGs and avert the consequences of the inevitable catastrophic economic, social and ecological impacts of the present world system. History confirms that paradigmatic changes of the required magnitude are very difficult to achieve in the absence of a perception of acute, highly tangible, immanent threat to human life and society. Leadership is urgently needed at all levels and in all fields to generate an integrated vision of the interconnectedness of all aspects of life on the planet, a blueprint for the promotion of change that will protect and promote human and natural capital and the social consensus and political will for rapid, radical change.

We stand at a crossroads and are compelled to make a collective choice. The intensity of recent events may be allowed to gradually recede, permitting us to sink back into the

complacency and security of business as usual, founded on long-discredited ideas, policies and practices which will eventually prepare the way for far greater, more calamitous challenges. This has been the result when humanity missed the unprecedented opportunities generated by crises in the past. The missed opportunities at the end of WWI led eventually to a far greater second world war. The missed opportunities at the end of WWII generated the far more menacing threat of global nuclear annihilation. The missed opportunities following the end of the Cold War have led to the current nexus of global challenges referred to above culminating in the existential threat of climate change.

Or, we can seize the opportunity generated by the crisis, build on the unprecedented level of awareness and willingness to prepare the way for more essential and beneficial changes that will avert the immanent threats that will remain long after COVID-19 has receded and move us toward an inclusive, stable, secure and sustainable social, economic and political paradigm for global human wellbeing.

The boundaries are no longer national. The challenges we face can only be met by working together rather than independently, in competition and opposition to one another. Today we need leadership which can awaken and enlighten global consciousness, foster positive human relations and unite humanity for the good of all. We need leadership with the mental knowledge and capacity to perceive and comprehend the complex nexus of evolutionary forces driving rapid social evolution and the process by which it can be consciously directed for the common good. We need leadership with the will to correct and avoid the errors of the past and make up for missed opportunities. We need leadership with an inclusive vision and values that affirm and encompass the wellbeing of all human beings. We need leadership with the inspiration and skills to empower, release and direct the energies of all humanity and the organizational capabilities to channel those energies effectively for productive, collaborative work. We need institutions that represent the whole world and every individual and not just the momentary possessors of wealth and power.

The leadership the world needs cannot be embodied in any individual representing a single nation, religion, culture or value system, though it needs to be sufficiently inclusive to be embraced and supported by individuals and groups of all nations, religions, cultures and value systems. Global leadership can only be represented by a synthesis rather than a selection out of the rich diversity of global society. Global leadership cannot be exercised by the power of any single organization controlled by vested interests based on military, economic or technological power. It must be governed according to the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the global consensus of 193 nations in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Leadership is the power to unite people to generate a power greater than that of any individual, including those who may guide it. That leadership can best be achieved by an inclusive social movement for unity that embodies and represents the aspirations and shared values of all and which gives rise to institutions governed by those values, rather than by values of a bygone era. Its call must be for inclusive cooperative global security and global prosperity. Its power must be drawn from the energy of unity, empowerment and harmony in

diversity rather than that of division, conflict and domination. Its strategy must be to replace divisive, nationalistic political conflict with universal cultural diplomacy based on respect and understanding. Its platform must be a network of networks bringing together all those who aspire for a peaceful, prosperous world for all.

WAAS has been emphasizing the need for a new social, economic and political paradigm to promote the wellbeing of all humanity. Such a radical and massive change cannot be achieved solely on the initiative of superpowers, national governments or by a few outstanding individuals. It will require the active involvement and support of all major stakeholders—governments, business, scientific and educational institutions, the media and civil society. In each field and at every level it will also require people-centered catalytic leadership strategies to overcome the inertia, obstruction and vested interests of entrenched elites. All these will have to be founded on a new value-system as a source of its ideas, power and action. Ultimately it must release the energy and collective initiative of the entire global society for rapid transition to a new paradigm.

The time has come to join together to create the essential global leadership needed for the 21st century. *This is a Planetary Moment and a time for global leadership to generate Planetary Momentum.*

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