

# **Moving from Leadership to Stewardship**

by

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*"Canadians are more likely not to have confidence [in their leaders], and the sad thing is that confidence relates to many issues that are very, very important to them. I think it's almost a public policy despair."*

- pollster Nik Nanos<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The mechanism of leadership was designed for a different era. It's time to retire it as the pre-eminent mechanism of social coordination.

Cleveland once defined 'leadership' as "bringing people together to make something different happen."<sup>2</sup> It is in fact a social mechanism to facilitate coordination and cooperation among diverse elements of a community. Communities form in response to the belief that more value can be obtained by working together than can be gained by working separately. Leadership is so rooted in groups that the idea of leaders acting by them themselves is a complete non sequitur. Leadership helps to coordinate the productive activities of community members while mitigating the potential for conflict that grows with the increasing diversification of community members.

However, leaders don't become leaders on their own. Leaders are created by followers<sup>3</sup> and they are chosen by followers on the basis of:

- a) their *ethicalness*, that is, they are seen to operate for a collective good; and
- b) their *effectiveness*, that is, they are capable of coordinating various community actors in a value adding way. The net collective benefit increases with leadership.

Over the thousands of years that this notion of leadership has evolved, however, the concept most consistently identified with leadership is that leaders are always identified with being "in-charge". Leaders always told followers what to do and followers, well, just followed.

However, the concept of leadership has become increasingly more nuanced and varied in recent years. We've heard about servant leadership, collaborative leadership, bureaucratic leadership,

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<sup>1</sup>MCGREGOR, Janyce "Canadians lack confidence governments can solve issues," CBC News, Jul 25, 2012 accessed at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/07/24/pol-premiers-advancer-nanos-poll-priorities.html>

<sup>2</sup> CLEVELAND, Harlan. *Nobody in Charge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002:xv

<sup>3</sup> BLOCK, Peter. "As Goes the Follower; So Goes the Leader", *AQP News for a Change*, American Society for Quality, July 1998

leadership by example, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, narcissistic leadership, facilitative leadership and many others. A quick scan of the *Harvard Business Review* yields over 8,000 leadership articles and over 50 variations in leadership style (Figure 1). And, according to Barbara Kellerman of the Kennedy School of Public Leadership, the global industry that has grown around these numerous forms of leadership accounts for more than \$50 billion annually – and that just in terms of corporate training and development<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 1: A Plethora of Leadership Styles**

<b>Traditional: Leader as Cause</b>		<b>Leader as Catalyst</b>
<b>Functional</b>	<b>Dysfunctional</b>	<b>Stewardship</b>
Expert leadership	Autocratic leadership	Servant leadership
Hierarchical leadership	Coercive leadership	Facilitative leadership
Bureaucratic leadership	Bully leadership	Team leadership
Authoritative leadership	Narcissistic leadership	Collaborative leadership
Elite leadership	Ideological leadership	Empowering leadership
Visionary leadership	Totalitarian leadership	Collective leadership
Decisive leadership	Pathological leadership	Participatory leadership
Delegative leadership	Despotic leadership	Relational leadership
Consultative leadership	Cult leadership	Emergent leadership
Laissez-faire leadership	Non-leadership - follower	Authentic leadership
Transactional leadership		Partner leadership
Task-oriented leadership		Community leadership
Charismatic leadership		Action oriented leadership
Leadership by example,		Transformative leadership
Paternalistic leadership		Level 5 - Quiet - leadership
Romantic leadership		Learning leadership
Coaching leadership		Dialogic leadership
Political leadership		Boundary spanning leadership
Efficient leadership		
Change-oriented leadership		
Goal-oriented leadership		
Executive leadership		
Leader as theorist		
Cross-cultural leadership		
Situational leadership		
Strategic leadership		
Adaptive leadership		
Exchange style leadership		

So much has been written on the subject of leadership that whole sections of bookstores and libraries are dedicated to it; and of course our entire system of public sector governance is predicated on it. Unfortunately, as the term ‘leadership’ has evolved and the contexts in which it is applied have changed, the notion has become so unwieldy that it is no longer helpful in determining what someone might actually mean when they use it.

<sup>4</sup> KELLERMAN, Barbara, *The End of Leadership*, HarperCollins, New York, 2012: 154

Traditionally, much of what falls under the rubric of leadership involves taking charge, imposing, managing, dominating, controlling, providing answers, finding fault, persuading, correcting, punishing, rewarding, or inciting fear. Even among charismatic and romanticized leaders, it is the will of the leader that ultimately prevails, albeit readily, over the will of followers. To wit, leadership has been traditionally expressed in terms of the *leader as cause*<sup>5</sup>, the great man theory<sup>6</sup>, the master chess player directing (or manipulating) a collective game in which others play the role of pawns - inconsequential tools to be used or discarded at the leader's discretion. At best this concept is a highly patriarchal and, at worst, it has been responsible for some of the most unpleasant excesses among both organizations and human 'civilization'. Nevertheless, over the last forty years leadership has wormed its way into every discipline, every industry, every government, and every not-for-profit institution. Leadership is now widely regarded as the principal path to achievement, influence, wealth and power. Today one can not gain stature in a career without being regarded as a 'leader' – despite one's professional or technical expertise.

Of late, however, leadership has been falling into disrepute. Despite the immense sums being spent on leadership training there is no real evidence that it has made much of a difference. "We are no more capable today of making good leaders, or reducing the effects of bad leaders, than we were forty years ago," says Kellerman<sup>7</sup>. "Leadership," says Denis Desautel, "has essentially become a game without a master"<sup>8</sup>. "Large corporations are vast and complex entities with customs and attitudes that are hard for any one leader to change. So why", asks Justin Fox of Time Business, "do we [still] talk as if the CEOs are truly in charge"<sup>9</sup>. Or as economist Tim Harford observes, "I see the God complex around me all the time ... I see it in our business leaders. I see it in the politicians we vote for — people who, in the face of an incredibly complicated world, are nevertheless absolutely convinced that they understand the way that the world works."<sup>10</sup> Kellerman is probably the most harsh on leadership. "The leadership industry has not in any meaningful, measurable way improved the human condition...It's a fraud."<sup>11</sup> From the almost unimaginable excesses, arrogance, incompetence, and

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<sup>5</sup> BLOCK, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2008: 41

<sup>6</sup> BASS, B. M. *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*, Free Press, New York, 1990; JAGO, A. G. "Leadership: Perspectives in theory and research". *Management Science*, 28(3), 1982: 315-336

<sup>7</sup> KELLERMAN, Barbara, *The End of Leadership*, HarperCollins, New York, 2012: xiv

<sup>8</sup> PAQUET, Gilles., "Leadership In Turbulent Times: An Interview With Denis Desautels", *Optimum Online*, Vol. 31, Issue 2, Dec 2001

<sup>9</sup> FOX, Justin. "The Limited (but real) Impact of CEOs", *Time Magazine*, October 20, 2006 accessed at: [http://business.time.com/2006/10/20/the\\_limited\\_but\\_real\\_impact\\_of/](http://business.time.com/2006/10/20/the_limited_but_real_impact_of/)

<sup>10</sup> HARFORD, Tim. *Trial, error and the God complex*, TED Global, July 2011. Accessed at: [http://www.ted.com/talks/tim\\_harford.html?quote=1003](http://www.ted.com/talks/tim_harford.html?quote=1003)

<sup>11</sup> KELLERMAN, Barbara, *The End of Leadership*, HarperCollins, New York, 2012:xiv

criminal behaviour that have been revealed among leaders of the global financial sector responsible for the 2008 economic meltdown<sup>12</sup> to the ongoing failure of public sector leaders to seriously address any of the nation's major issues, leadership is not making a positive contribution. It's not that we have become bereft of leaders. On the contrary, it is, as the *New York Times* has declared, that the entire "leadership class" is being shown to be "fundamentally self dealing."<sup>13</sup>

According to Robert Sibley, "the breakdown in trust in recent decades has been the consequence of a loss of confidence in society's leaders, whether politicians or, more recently, chief executive officers." Any restoration of trust, he says, "requires trustworthy leaders who can act as role models."<sup>14</sup> However, it takes a large amount of denial to believe that the problem of leadership is simply leaders and that we need only to replace bad ones with good ones. These incessant "corporate scandals and worldwide financial catastrophe [have shaken] the cult of the heroic CEO to its foundations"<sup>15</sup>.

While the message "*the problem with leadership is leaders*" is overly simplified, it is being captured in all forms of media and repeated again and again, undermining the perception among potential followers that leaders can be trusted. "Nearly every pillar of American society has revealed itself to be corrupt, incompetent or both,"<sup>16</sup> says *Time* magazine. But this has not just been a strictly American trend, nor has it been simply a corporate trend, as evidenced by the MP expense scandal that wreaked havoc on the UK Parliament in 2009.<sup>17</sup>

And neither have we been immune to this trend in Canada. We are currently witnessing what appears to be an endless parade of federal, provincial and municipal leaders through the justice system, accused of ethical violations or outright criminal behaviour. Parliament has been declared a "sham"<sup>18</sup>. Four Senators have been accused of financial impropriety, prompting the national news media to claim there is public "contempt for the whole institution"<sup>19</sup>. The testimony of a former Prime Minister of

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<sup>12</sup> FERGUSON, Charles. *Pedator Nation*, Random House, New York, 2012

<sup>13</sup> BROOKS, David. "Who is James Johnson?" *New York Times*, 17 June 2011, p.A35.

<sup>14</sup> SIBLEY, Robert. "Trust us on this". *The Ottawa Citizen*, 11 April 2009

<sup>15</sup> COLLINGWOOD, Harris. "Do CEOs Matter?" *The Atlantic*, June 2009: 54-60

<sup>16</sup> HAYES, Christopher. "The Twilight of the Elites", *Time*, 11 March 2010

<sup>17</sup> \_\_\_\_, "MPs' expenses: Full list of MPs investigated by The Telegraph", *The Telegraph*, 08 May 2009 accessed at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/mps-expenses/5297606/MPs-expenses-Full-list-of-MPs-investigated-by-the-Telegraph.html>

<sup>18</sup> WHERRY, Aaron. "The House of Commons is a sham", *Macleans*, 18 February, 2011

<sup>19</sup> GEDDES, John. "Canada's Senate: Chamber of disrepute", *Macleans*, 8 March 2013

Canada is declared by the presiding judge in the Airbus inquiry “to be not worthy of any credence”<sup>20</sup>. The Charbonneau Commission continues its circus of naming high profile public figures who have received illegal payments from or otherwise consorted with mobsters, including an icon of Quebec municipal government who has been arrested on gangsterism charges. Three ex-senior executives of what once was Canada’s most august corporation, Nortel, were charged with fraud<sup>21</sup>. Pierre Duhaime, SNC-Lavalin’s ex-CEO, has been arrested for fraud. As Nik Nanos laments in *Policy Options*<sup>22</sup>, “increasingly, fewer Canadians have confidence that our leaders can address the concerns that matter most to them.”

Nevertheless, as important as these ethical lapses may be in contributing to the declining status of leadership in the public eye, they are only part of the story. Confidence is declining even among ethical leaders who are being shown to be increasingly ineffective. The growing inability of leaders to be ‘in control’ or ‘in-charge’ results from the increased uncertainty and complexity in the environments in which they operate and may be contributing even more to the undermining of leadership. Today leaders lack the full knowledge, resources or authority to accomplish their organizational intents on their own. Consequently, in environments where leadership has become so widely distributed, leaders take a beating either because they become lost amid successful, shared governance approaches or, at the other extreme, because their ‘take charge’ attitudes result in the legitimate efforts at cooperation being derailed.

For instance, GE’s iconic, ‘take-charge’ leader Jack Welch, who for over a decade has successfully claimed a level of control and credit for change at GE in the 1990s, has been revealed as more of figurehead than the “great man” of myth. Jeffrey Immelt, Welch’s successor at GE, sat down recently with a *Financial Times* reporter and laid bare his perception of Welch’s contribution saying, “anyone could have run GE and done well in the 1990s. *A dog could have run GE.*”<sup>23</sup> Why? Because there were so many good people in the middle of the organization that did the actual job of running and coordinating the company for him. Being in-charge was irrelevant. It was essentially symbolic. “CEOs can [still] matter,” says Collingwood<sup>24</sup>, “but we all might be better off if they didn’t”, because

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<sup>20</sup> COYNE Andrew. “The judge isn’t buying it. Nor should we”, *Macleans*, 4 June 2010

<sup>21</sup> Although later exonerated, the RCMP believes that decision may have resulted from the RCMP’s own lack of capacity to properly investigate complex frauds. In QUAN, Douglas. “Nortel acquittals prompted RCMP to question their ability to combat crime, letter shows” *Postmedia News*, 2 May 2013

<sup>22</sup> NANOS, Nik. “Canadians Rate Highly the Issues Close to their Day-to-Day Lives”, *Policy Options*, August 2012

<sup>23</sup> GUERRERA, Francesco “A need to reconnect”. *Financial Times*, March 12, New York, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> COLLINGWOOD, Harris.. “Do CEOs Matter?” *The Atlantic*, June 2009: 54-60

their potential to invigorate an organization has been shown to matter much less than their potential to damage it. Jeffrey Pfeffer agrees. “Bad leaders can make a huge negative difference – because they drive [good] people out.”<sup>25</sup>

Now more than a decade after Welch was at the wheel at GE, the coordination challenge is even greater still, and CEOs have even less control over their organization’s fate. According to the *Mckinsey Quarterly*, “Leaders ... are operating in a bewildering new environment in which little is certain, the tempo is quicker, and the dynamics are more complex. They worry that it is impossible for chief executives to stay on top of all the things they need to know to do their job... they feel overwhelmed.”<sup>26</sup> In realities where knowledge is contested, where power is shared and commitments must be negotiated, traditional leadership is hugely constraining and if leaders are not “overwhelmed”, their persistent claims of being ‘in control’ or ‘in charge’ are simply fraudulent.

Just the simple fact of increasing the scale of an organization has the effect of increasing complexity, making it ever more difficult for CEOs to assert control. “Many of these [global] companies”, says Dave Gray<sup>27</sup>, “are collapsing under their own weight. As companies grow, they invariably increase in complexity, and as things get more complex they become more difficult to control.” *The Economist* recently asked, “why the big gap between trust in leaders and the institutions they lead?” They answered, “leaders have been slow to adapt to the requirements of a world in which top down is no longer the best way to lead, or in many cases even a viable one.”<sup>28</sup> As complexity grows, the coordination challenge increases in accordance with Ashby’s law of requisite variety. At some point, mechanisms of coordination, like leadership, must radically change or be replaced.

According to John Hagel, co-chairman of Deloitte’s Center for the Edge, the erosion of American business leadership is part of a systemic decline dating back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1965, he says, the return-on-assets for all American firms has eroded by 75%. “The erosion has been sustained and significant. There is absolutely no evidence of it leveling off, and there is certainly no

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<sup>25</sup> FOX, Justin. “The Limited (but real) Impact of CEOs”. *Time Magazine*, October 20, 2006. Retrieved online at [http://curiouscapitalist.blogs.time.com/2006/10/20/the\\_limited\\_but\\_real\\_impact\\_of/](http://curiouscapitalist.blogs.time.com/2006/10/20/the_limited_but_real_impact_of/)

<sup>26</sup> BARTON, Dominic, Andrew Grant, and Michelle Horn. “Leading in the 21st century”, *McKinsey Quarterly*, June 2012. accessed at [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/leading\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_century/leading\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_century](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/leading_in_the_21st_century/leading_in_the_21st_century)

<sup>27</sup> GRAY, Dave. “The connected company”, *Communication Nation*, 08 February 2011 accessed at: <http://communicationnation.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/connected-company.html>

<sup>28</sup> M.B , “Leaders without followers”, *The Economist*, 21 January 2013 accessed at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2013/01/world-economic-forum-davos>

evidence of it turning around.”<sup>29</sup> Despite 40 years of training better leaders, corporate productivity continues to decline. This point is underscored by another study<sup>30</sup>, one in which the performance of companies run by award winning, "superstar CEOs" consistently underperformed in their markets after their CEO's award. Hagel sees this malaise also being manifested in the lowered survival rate of U.S. corporations which has declined by 80% since 1937 to as little as 15 years. Hagel attributes this decline to the fact that “American business leaders were essentially not prepared to move towards a more open and collaborative business model.”<sup>31</sup>

Is leadership's luster off only in the private sector? No. In a recent Canadian survey<sup>32</sup> by the Institute for Research on Public Policy and Nanos Research, researchers found that only 9.4% of Canadians had confidence in the federal government's ability to solve problems, while 18% had no confidence at all. This is a far, far cry from the 70% confidence levels that the federal government enjoyed in the 60s and 70s. And as bad as this may be, things are even worse for the provincial governments. However, after digging deeper into their responses, the researchers concluded that when Canadians say they have lost confidence in government, what they were really saying was that, much like Hagel's comment about American business leaders, they doubted Canadian government leaders were willing and able to develop the partnerships needed to solve the complex, transformational issues that mattered most to citizens.

So not only is the public being confronted on an almost daily basis with the ethical failings of its public, private and not-for-profit leaders, but also the perception is that leaders lack the abilities to undertake the relational governance<sup>33</sup> to effectively orchestrate the required social cooperation. How then, in the context of collaboration and partnership, is it still possible to “bring people together to make something different happen” without leadership? If “no one is in charge” as Cleveland claims<sup>34</sup>,

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<sup>29</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, quoted in “Running Faster, Falling Behind: John Hagel III on How American Business Can Catch Up,” *Knowledge@Wharton*, 23 June 2010. accessed at: <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2523>

<sup>30</sup> MALMENDIER, Ulrike and TATE, Geoffrey A., *Superstar CEOs*. 7th Annual Texas Finance Festival Paper. 2 February 2005

<sup>31</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, quoted in “Running Faster, Falling Behind: John Hagel III on How American Business Can Catch Up,” *Knowledge@Wharton*, 23 June 2010. accessed at: <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2523>

<sup>32</sup> LENIHAN, Don and Graham Fox, *Federalism upside down: Who speaks for Canada now?*, *iPolitics*, Aug 7, 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2012/08/07/lenihan-fox-federalism-upside-down-who-speaks-for-canada-now/>

<sup>33</sup> RUBIN, Hank. *Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective Partnerships in Communities and Schools*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2002

<sup>34</sup> CLEVELAND, Harlan. *Nobody in Charge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002

how then can coordination occur among diverse and often competing organizations and stakeholders? What takes the place of leadership as a means of social coordination?

On the face of it, what appears to be needed is a mechanism to coordinate among groups of leaders.

### **A Different Kind of Coordination Mechanism**

As our discomfiture with leaders and leadership has grown, we have witnessed (Figure 1) a mounting body of leadership expressions that do not fit the ‘leader as cause’ mould. For instance, Lester Salamon once observed that complex problems and the need to work with others demand different types of leadership skills, in particular what he described as *enablement skills*, which help to bring people together, to facilitate their learning and working together, as well as to manage the inevitable conflicts.<sup>35</sup>

Although such concepts still envision leadership as the principle mechanism of coordination, they posit that coordination can be achieved, not by someone ‘taking charge’ or through their powers of persuasion or coercion, but rather, through the ‘leader’ acting as a catalyst of collective purpose, of shared commitment and of joint action among groups of owners seeking to cooperate. Instead of followers acting as tools for the success of *causal leaders*, the task of these catalytic *leaders* is to ensure that those with whom they work became successful in their own right. This necessitates adopting a more supportive, “how can I help” role from their ostensive ‘leaders’ and is the intrinsic appeal of notions like “servant leadership”<sup>36</sup> and “facilitative leadership”<sup>37</sup>.

In this ‘catalyst’ conception, the element of leadership involving “bringing people together to make something different happen”<sup>38</sup> remains, but the elements of control and dominance are absent. But is the current generation of leaders up to the task of catalyzing, empowering, and collaborating? A

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<sup>35</sup> SALAMON, Lester. *The tools of government: A guide to the new governance*, Oxford University Press, London, 2002

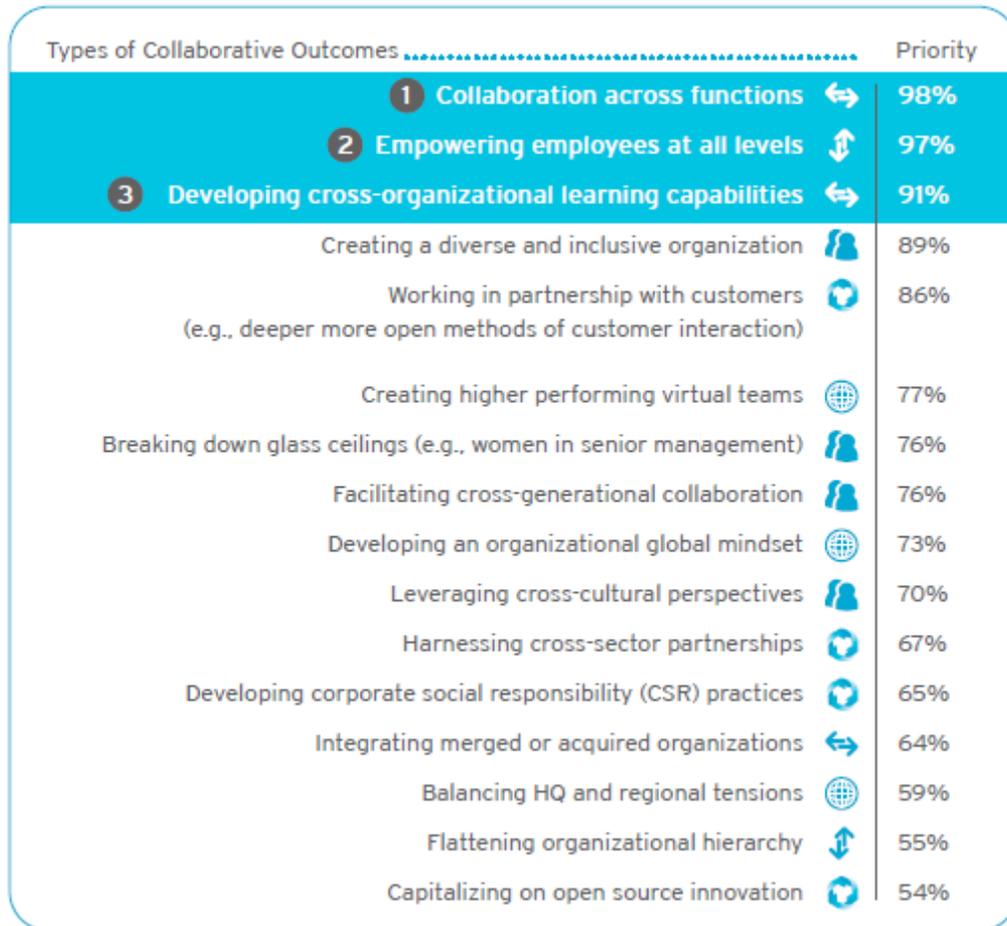
<sup>36</sup> GREENLEAF, Robert K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1977

<sup>37</sup> SCHWARZ, Roger M. “Becoming a Facilitative Leader”, *R&D Innovator*, vol. 5 (8), August 1996 Accessed at: [http://www.winstonbrill.com/bril001/html/article\\_index/articles/201-250/article231\\_body.html](http://www.winstonbrill.com/bril001/html/article_index/articles/201-250/article231_body.html)

<sup>38</sup> CLEVELAND, Harlan. *Nobody in Charge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002:xv

global study<sup>39</sup> by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) suggests not. While 86% of the senior executives they surveyed believed it was “extremely important” for them to work effectively across boundaries in their leadership role (see Figure 2), only 7% of these executives believed they were currently “very effective” at doing so. In similar survey by the CCL, more than 90% of respondents

**Figure 2: Boundary Spanning Priorities of Senior Executives**



Survey participants were asked to rate the level of priority they would place on various collaborative outcomes over the following 5 years. **Source:** YIP, Jeffrey Chris Ernst, and Michael Campbell. *Boundary Spanning Leadership: Mission Critical Perspectives from the Executive Suite*, Center for Creative Leadership, 2011

said that collaboration was vital for their leadership success. However, when asked a follow-up question, “Are the leaders of your organization good at collaboration?”, fewer than 50% of the respondents replied that their leaders were good at it. “In a horizontal world,” say O’Leary and Vij,

<sup>39</sup> YIP, Jeffrey Chris Ernst, and Michael Campbell. *Boundary Spanning Leadership: Mission Critical Perspectives from the Executive Suite*, Center for Creative Leadership, 2011

“there are many times when collaboration is needed, but often one does not know how to do it and do it well. Collaboration yields immense leadership challenges.”<sup>40</sup>

This observation comes as distributed governance models are being utilized more and more to respond to complex, wicked problems through collaboration and partnership. According to IBM’s 2012 Global CEO Study<sup>41</sup> employee empowerment is being combined with increasing openness and transparency to offset the command-and-control style of leadership that has characterized the modern corporation. IBM’s study involved a survey of more than 1,700 Chief Executive Officers from 64 countries and in 18 industries and it also identified the growing use of team-based environments, the promotion of experiential learning techniques and the use of high-value employee networks. “The trend toward greater collaboration extends beyond the corporation to external partnering relationships. Partnering is now at an all-time high”. More than two-thirds of CEOs surveyed planned to partner extensively.

“To deal with the complexities of today’s world,” says Wayne Wouters<sup>42</sup>, Canada’s Clerk of the Privy Council and most senior public servant, “we need to work with each other, and we all need to collaborate with citizens, the private sector, academia and civil society to resolve the problems and challenges we face...Collaboration, consultation, partnerships - these need to be the hallmarks of the Public Service of Canada in the future.”

The Clerk’s comments resonate strangely with the results of the IRPP-- Nanos poll referenced earlier. For even as the Clerk has repeatedly underscored the importance of collaboration, the poll suggests that the decline in the public’s confidence in government centers precisely around the perceived inability of government to work effectively with others. Some issues such as natural resources, border protection, safe communities, research and development (R&D), trade and international affairs continue to command public confidence and, not surprisingly, the attention of governments. But other issues -- such as health care, jobs, education, the environment, the aging population, social programs, living standards, productivity, first nations, and, in particular, the balancing of budgets – command much less confidence. These are the type of ‘wicked problems’

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<sup>40</sup> O’LEARY, Rosemary and VIJ, Nidhi. “Collaborative Public Management: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?”, *The American Review of Public Administration*, vol. 42, May 16, 2012: 507-522

<sup>41</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, IBM CEO Study: Command & Control Meets Collaboration, Press Release, IBM, Armonk, N.Y., 22 May 2012 accessed at: <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/37793.wss>

<sup>42</sup> WOUTERS, Wayne. Speech to the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, Victoria, BC, 29 August 2011.

complex described by Rittel.<sup>43</sup> The public seems unconvinced that those who say they have answers actually do. The required solutions usually involve many steps and lots of players, which the public interprets as a significant challenge for governments. In essence, if governments have to collaborate, the public has little or no confidence that they will or can.

When no one is or can be “in-charge”, the incessant political cries for better, stronger, more effective and forceful leadership are meaningless. Traditional command-and-control style leadership is quite antithetical to the facilitation of cooperation among people and independent organizations who may all legitimately see themselves as ‘leaders’. With no followers there are no leaders. The oft prized attributes usually associated with good leaders – their confidence in their own knowledge and judgment, their ‘take charge’ attitude, their willingness to whip people into line, their dominance – almost guarantee collaboration fails. Few seem to grasp that if no one is willing to follow, leadership is irrelevant. Among a peer group of leaders a different mechanism of social coordination is required.

If we want to encourage a different set of behaviours, then we need to start with a different language. The multiple and nuanced ideas of leadership listed above in Figure 1 will have little real impact. What my colleagues and I have found is that the command and control notion of leadership is well entrenched, to the extent that when, for instance, the term ‘*collaborative* leadership’ is used, audiences don’t grasp the distinction. Practically speaking, the ‘*collaborative*’ adjective just falls off and audiences tend to instinctively fall back on the ‘leader as cause’ notion with which they are so familiar.

### **Stewardship over Leadership**

In the end, the use of terms like ‘collaborative leadership’, or ‘facilitative leadership’, or ‘servant leadership’ prove to be a disservice. They simply perpetuate a confusion that the coordinating behaviours required among owners are no different from those applied to followers. The dynamic between leaders and followers requires that leaders be perceived to be ethical and effective by virtue of having more power than followers in terms of their knowledge, resources or authority in order to produce benefits for the followers. Otherwise why follow? The dynamic among owners is quite different. Benefits are produced by the interaction of owners amongst themselves -- not through the conduit of the leader. It is more of a peer-to-peer relationship than one of dependency. It “often comes

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<sup>43</sup> RITTEL, Horst, and Melvin Webber; "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 4, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Inc., Amsterdam, 1973: 155–169

down to how people move from fatalism to an awakened faith that they [themselves] can shape a different future”<sup>44</sup>.

Therefore I think it’s time we stop confusing people in our discussions about collaboration and partnership and drop the leadership language entirely and begin referring to the *leader as catalyst* type of behaviours in a different way. I suggest we simply adopt the old language of ‘stewardship’.

Good stewards are ultimately bridge builders and relationship managers. Their principal task is to help to sustain the commitment that each employee, partner or collaborator may bring to the shared work and to help guide the collective process. These are the self-effacing insiders identified by Jim Collins<sup>45</sup> who put their organizations ahead of themselves and focus on surrounding themselves with good, committed and talented people.

One of the simplest and most erudite depictions of this comes from Benjamin Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, who has described a truly powerful steward as being someone who does not appropriate power from others, but, "depends for his power on making other people powerful”<sup>46</sup>. The more powerful, effective and successful he/she makes others, the more valuable and powerful they themselves become – the very essence of good stewardship.

If leaders are created by followers; so by that same measure, stewards are created by owners. “Stewardship begins with [our] willingness to be accountable for a larger body than ourselves -- an organization, a community.”<sup>47</sup> Ownership is not about control it is about choice. In choosing to be accountable, we are choosing ownership of our own condition. And it is the reality of distributed ownership that sets stewardship apart from leadership because owners are unlikely to relinquish their ownership and responsibility for their condition to someone else. There may well be someone, or even several people, who can convene, facilitate, and look out for everyone’s collective interest. But amongst a group of owners, it is unlikely that someone will be in a position to control or dominate the group. Yet that same person may be immensely valued for his/her ability to provide encouragement, inspiration, facilitation, education and conflict resolution in order to help others to cooperate -- not as followers or pawns – but as equals. “Making others powerful”, as Zander put it, is not something that can be bestowed or imposed. It’s a choice owners must make for themselves.

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<sup>44</sup> SENGE, Peter et. al. *The Necessary Revolution*, Doubleday, Toronto, 2008:369

<sup>45</sup> COLLINS, Jim. *How the Mighty Fall*, HarperCollins, New York, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> ZANDER, Benjamin. *Collaborative Leadership: Awakening Possibility in Others*, address to the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos, Switzerland, 27 January 2008.

<sup>47</sup> BLOCK, Peter. *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 1993: 6

Fostering that empowerment is often the steward's most important task. Moving to a stewardship model isn't just as simple as leaders changing direction. Not only are there likely to be institutional barriers that perpetuate the belief that only a centralized, leader-dominated, hierarchical structure can do the job with effectiveness and efficiency<sup>48</sup> but people themselves – employees, citizens, stakeholders and potential partners – may have to overcome their own habits of dependence and entitlement<sup>49</sup>. The steward may help, but the principle choice remains plainly with those being empowered. What is often helpful in this regard is being constantly confronted with a situation in which no person -- leader or otherwise -- can obviously be expected to resolve on their own. If one recognizes that “I can't do it alone”, then just maybe “I can do it with others”. Not only is this often the first step towards shared ownership but, it is also the principal rationale of any human community.

Still, such a recognition typically serves only to get people to come together and open up to the possibility of collaborative change. It is not sufficient in itself to sustain cooperation or the collaborative process. Working collaboratively is almost invariably an exercise in contingent cooperation<sup>50</sup>, requiring that partner cooperation be continually reinforced while the potential for non-cooperation be vigorously resisted. This is not accomplished either through altruism or by decree but through the application of a variety of inter-related mechanisms which can be applied heuristically as the need requires. Although these mechanisms may be numerous because of the uniqueness of each collaborative in terms of people, organizations, issues and context, they can be grouped into six basic families:

- *possibility mechanisms*, which reinforce the purpose and future towards which collaborators act;
- *commitment mechanisms* that encourage risk-reward sharing and elicit contributions in an environment of openness and transparency;
- *social learning mechanisms*, which encourage mutual understanding and permit partners to experiment, prototype and learn from each other;
- *shared governance mechanisms*, that reinforce shared ownership and decision-making while allowing for dissent;

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<sup>48</sup> PAQUET, Gilles. “Leadership In Turbulent Times: An Interview With Denis Desautels”, *Optimum Online*, Vol. 31, Issue 2, Dec 2001

<sup>49</sup> BLOCK, Peter. “As Goes the Follower; So Goes the Leader”, *News for a Change*, Association for Quality and Participation, Vol. 2(7), 1998:11-13.

<sup>50</sup> WILSON, Christopher.. “I Will if You Will: Facilitating Contingent Cooperation”, *Optimum Online*, Vol. 37(1), April. 2007

- *mechanisms for joint action* that coordinate and align the capacities of partners towards a common goal; and
- *mechanisms of mutual accountability*, monitoring, and evaluation, including mechanisms such as developmental evaluation<sup>51</sup> and the joint celebration of progress and success.

Applying these tools is not the task of an all-knowing, father figure acting for the good of all but rather, it is the responsibility of all those willing to participate authentically in a collaborative process of trial and error.

"I believe" says John Hagel, "that the opportunity for [stewardship] in this regard is to flip the natural psychological reaction that we have to uncertainty. All of us, when confronted with uncertainty, tend to magnify risk and discount reward, and that tends to lead us not to act but to stay on the sidelines, hoping that somehow, somewhere things will clarify and then we can move."<sup>52</sup> The role of stewardship is therefore to increase the collective sense of opportunity in a future that everyone is willing to live into while diminishing the perceptions of individual risk associated with moving towards it via shared ownership, social learning and working together.

If everyone's in charge, then the burden of stewardship must be shared in a way that does not raise one personality above all others. In periods of uncertainty and rapid change, organizations need to develop relational mechanisms that constantly probe their environments, their employees, their networks of suppliers, customers and stakeholders<sup>53</sup> and be willing to co-create with them what Lane and Maxfield have referred to as 'generative relationships'<sup>54</sup>, "relationships that produce new sources of value that cannot be foreseen in advance". This requires a greater reliance on the processes and practices of engagement rather than on the traditional practices of leadership dominance. Instead of falling into the trap of pursuing certain ends, effective collaboration allows participants to hold fast to the processes which will allow them to arrive at a desirable destination but one which they may not initially see quite clearly, if at all. In this manner both the practice of stewardship and the work of collaboration are more art than science, replete with multiple techniques and skills that permit unique and innovative solutions to emerge.

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<sup>51</sup> QUINN-PATTON, Michael. *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*. New York: Guilford Publications, 2010

<sup>52</sup> HAGEL, John "Running Faster, Falling Behind: How American Business Can Catch Up", *Knowledge@Wharton*, June 23, 2010, accessed at <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2523>

<sup>53</sup> GROVE, Andrew. *Only the Paranoid Survive*, Doubleday, New York, 1996

<sup>54</sup> LANE, David & Robert Maxfield. *Foresight, complexity and strategy*. SFI WORKING PAPER #1995-12-106, Santa Fe, NM, 1995

In the end, however, as much good stewardship is about owners, it also represents good collective process that is not limited to a single personality or even a specific collection of people. Stewardship is a collective capacity that reflects the status of participants as owners with interlocking obligations to each other and that ultimately gets embedded in the culture, customs and norms of their relationship and the relationships between their respective organizations. Everyone is in-charge.

### **Glimpsing Stewardship in Action -- Hints of Things to Come**

Stewardship begins with the recognition that people can't do everything themselves. Consequently, the 'in-control', 'in-charge' characteristics of leaders becomes impractical when they require others to come to their aid. If the organizations or people who may need to be co-opted are not in an organization's employ, then they are unlikely to be responsive to top-down commands of leaders. They may not (as the following *Goldcorp Challenge* story illustrates) even be known to the leader. Not only do such situations introduce added complexity, but how can one hope to control a relationship with people you don't even know?

This loss of real control can also result in leaders surrendering their claim of control, choosing instead to be led by others. As the creation of *Brazil's HIV-AIDS Strategy* illustrates, when leaders allow themselves to be led by others they open their organizations up to engagement, experimentation and innovation. In the process, their previous leadership role is transformed into stewardship as the erstwhile leaders adopt the characteristics of educators, facilitators, brokers, networkers, and knowledge mobilizers.

#### **Goldcorp Challenge**

Don Tapscott has been a long time advocate of collaboration, especially mass collaboration. In his best selling book *Wikinomics*, he tells the story of Goldcorp, a small Toronto-based mining company that in 1999 was struggling to survive; its Red Lake Ontario gold deposits apparently played out according to the firm's own expert geologists. After hearing a lecture about Linus Torvalds and his open source approach in the creation of Linux, "[Goldcorp CEO Rob] McEwen had an epiphany... If Goldcorp employees couldn't find the Red Lake gold, maybe someone else could. And maybe the key

to finding those people was to open the exploration process in the same way Torvalds “open sourced” Linux.”<sup>55</sup>

Despite being in an industry long known for its secrecy and strict regard for proprietary data, McEwen recognized that to succeed he needed help from others. However, to get that help he had to open up the firm’s data stores to the world’s geologists. And so he did. He created the Goldcorp Challenge. Offering \$575,000 in prize money to the participants with the best estimates and methods of extraction, he received submissions from geologists, physicists, computer scientists and many others from all over the world. “There were capabilities I had never seen before in the industry,” said McEwen. The challenge resulted in eight million new ounces of gold being discovered, taking the firm’s net worth from \$100 million to over \$9 billion.

Tapscott observes that McEwen’s genius was to recognize that the knowledge and expertise he needed lay beyond the boundaries of his firm and that to tap into that, he needed to a) connect with the people who had it and b) to engage with them in a way that made them willing participants in Goldcorp’s own goals.

### **Brazil’s HIV-AIDS strategy**

In 1990, Brazil had one of the world’s worst HIV-AIDS infection rates -- double that of even South Africa -- and the World Bank predicted that by 2000, 1.2 million Brazilians would be infected. Given Brazil’s generally poor economy and meager health care infrastructure, the Bank advised the government of Brazil to focus on prevention rather than treatment. It was thought Brazil could not afford the scale of retroviral drugs or treatment regimes needed to treat those hundreds of thousands of people already infected. In essence, the experts told them that the sick couldn’t be saved.

In their groundbreaking 2006 book, *Getting to Maybe*, Brenda Zimmerman, Michael Quinn Patton and Frances Westley explored what happens when a government like Brazil admits to not having all the answers and seeks the help of its citizens. In Brazil’s case there was no charismatic leader to either inspire or coerce people into action. No one was in charge. Yet guided simply by a shared communitarian value that no one should be written off, people from all walks of life and organizations from every sector of Brazilian society began to contribute to possible solutions. Rather than seeing a solution framed by scarcity, Brazilians took on the challenge framed by the abundance of

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<sup>55</sup> TAPSCOTT, Don and Anthony D. Williams. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Portfolio-Penguin Publishers, Toronto, 2007: 8

what actually existed in the country. For Brazilians the choice was about how to deliver help: not about to whom should help be delivered.

“The government’s brilliance” say Zimmerman and her colleagues, “was to ask questions about how things really worked across the country and to enhance the [existing] natural patterns, relationships and behaviours.”<sup>56</sup> The government chose to share leadership with its citizens, committing to highlight and share local innovative successes broadly -- whenever and wherever those approaches evolved. The role of government changed from being the driving force of change to being the facilitator of collective intelligence. As a consequence, Brazil’s infected population is even today only half that predicted for 2000 and its infection rate has improved by 33%, now better even than the USA.

When it comes to collaboration, Peter Block points out that, “questions are more important than answers”<sup>57</sup>. Answers only reiterate what you already know, whereas questions are pregnant with possibility. Leadership today is obsessed with providing answers. Stewardship, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with asking questions in order not only to generate collaboration out of previously independent action, but also to create a shared possibility that collaborators will want to sufficiently live into to justify their working together. Structuring diversity is a strategy used by stewards to bias group interactions towards inquiry.

In looking at the *Governance of Technology Startups* (below) we can see how intentionally structuring diversity can provide a foundation for ongoing inquiry and act as a source of innovation. The experience of the *Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Corporation* on the other hand, shows how embedding diversity can be a stimulus for innovation but also provide a mechanism for increased accountability and be a hedge against the unproductive institutional competition that is all too common in the public sector.

### **Governance of Technology Startups**

In any collaborative endeavour a key strategy of good governance is to ensure a diversity of perspectives to avoid group think and foster better accountability. This is a well established practice, for instance, in the governance of technology startups. Unlike in the boards more mature companies;

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<sup>56</sup> WESTLEY, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Quinn Patton. *Getting to Maybe: How the World Has Changed*, Random House Canada, Toronto, 2006: 136

<sup>57</sup> BLOCK, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2008

the membership of a startup board is not decided by the CEO but is the product of various interests who demand a stake in decision making in exchange for their contribution to the new enterprise. A typical startup board might comprise owner-entrepreneurs, angel investors, key customers, bankers, engineers, and even important suppliers – each there to protect their own interests and to contribute their perspective on every aspect of the new business. The board reflects a situation of co-governance where the parties collaborate in creating successful outcomes for a firm which will benefit them all. No one perspective ends up dominating because of the independence of the board members and the board becomes, in effect, a learning forum in which multiple perspectives are brought together for more creative impact. Such boards represent a modern adaptation of the ancient parable of the blind men and the elephant, which depicts decision making under incomplete knowledge and where a comprehensive understanding is obtained only by the sharing of information among the all parties (the blind men).

### **Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Corporation**

Can a similar co-governance model be found in the public sector, where governments regularly use their claim on the ‘public interest’ as a legal and moral cudgel to beat potential partners to submit to their will? An interesting example is described by Claude Rocan<sup>58</sup>, former Director General of the Centre for Health Promotion at the Public Health Agency of Canada. In a paper depicting the diverse relationships between government and the voluntary sector in healthcare, he points out the unique status of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Corporation (CPACC).

What he describes is a knowledge mobilization partnership involving the federal and provincial governments as well as various voluntary sector organizations. CPACC arises from the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, although it is neither involved in service delivery nor in the overall direction of cancer related activities. It has, however, been empowered by the federal Cabinet with policy authority and with the funding capacity to implement a national cancer prevention strategy. Federal and provincial government agencies participate in CPACC but are essentially in an arm’s-length relationship with it. CAPCC “presented an opportunity to build from a knowledge base beyond what state agencies could offer. The fact that all three major political parties supported the CSCC in the 2006 election campaign suggests a consensus that the existing governmental apparatus, for whatever reason, was not capable of achieving the goals of a national cancer strategy.”

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<sup>58</sup> ROCAN, Claude. “The Voluntary Sector In Public Health”, *Optimum Online*, Vol. 41 (4), Dec 2011

## Stewardship from Process

Stewardship is more than just a personality trait. It emerges as a collective capacity from the behaviours of group members and from group process. Creating stewardship is primarily a design process that involves the assembly of principles, rules, norms, behaviours, mechanisms and protocols, which together make up something similar to an ‘automatic pilot’ (to use an imperfect metaphor), one that is capable of steering the group or organization in ways likely to generate meaningful ownership, belonging and self-organization; social learning and wayfinding; innovation; and resilience<sup>59</sup>.

The activities of this ‘automatic pilot’ have six interconnected but separate tasks to perform:

- gathering together all the relevant actors and information to ensure a comprehensive understanding in terms of context, issues, actors and possible responses;
- creating an effective process or space for frame reconciliation to ensure that synthesis emerges and collaboration jells;
- avoiding the instinctive rush to decisions and actions as actions are less important than results;
- generating a mix of incentives and moral contracts likely to fuel both a continuous probing by the group, their co-learning and innovation, and their ongoing contingent cooperation;
- assuming failure and constructing ‘fail-safe’ and ‘safe-fail’ mechanisms to ensure resilience; and
- constructing *negative capability*<sup>60</sup> to create conditions that ensure that collaboration will be robust enough to survive.

As such the stewardship process embodied in this ‘automatic pilot’ needs to be designed to seek out anomalies; to mop up all kinds of relevant information; to seek out potential collaborators; to explore problem definitions; to reconcile and reframe different perspectives and paradigms in a dialogue among collaborators; to generate testable prototypes; to ‘fail early and to fail often’ but also to learn quickly from each experiment; and to disseminate both the good and the bad news, thereby allowing the knowing-doing gap among the collaborators<sup>61</sup> to be closed over time. In this regard, the collective capacity of stewardship boils down to effective collective learning. Hagel underscores with

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<sup>59</sup> PAQUET, Gilles and Christopher Wilson. "Inquiring Systems", in *Stewardship: Collaborative Metagovernance and Inquiring Systems*, by R. Hubbard, G. Paquet and C. Wilson, Invenire Books, Ottawa, 2012

<sup>60</sup> In the sense that it was used by John Keats as a rejection of established attitudes and preconceived notions in favour of experimentation and a willingness to co-create a future without being encumbered by the past.

<sup>61</sup> PAQUET, Gilles. *Governance Through Social Learning*, Ottawa: The University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa: 1999

this his observation that organizations are moving from being organized around “scalable efficiencies” to “scalable learning”. He says “the rationale of scalable efficiency is becoming less and less compelling, and the alternative rationale is scalable learning. The reason we have institutions is because we can learn faster as part of an institution than we could alone [but] most institutions are not structured or operated to deliver on that rationale.”<sup>62</sup>

As a part of this collective learning process, the various relationships being coordinated by stewardship are continually being transformed in an autopoietic way, through the information gathering and processing capabilities that the relationships mediate. What emerges from this is an *inquiring system*<sup>63</sup> -- a complex system for inquiring into the state, dynamics and evolution of a collaborative organization leading to the mutual adaptation and coordination among the participating partners. Such a system need not be the same in each of the private, public and social spheres, nor in every issue domain. In fact, the nature of the participants and the animating issues will always constrain the system in unique ways. Nevertheless, whatever the sphere or issue domain, there will be common challenges confronted by the designers of any *inquiring system* in order to produce the requisite stewardship.

One may broadly stylize these challenges in terms of the four key phases of the collaborative governance process that together function as a continuous loop of reflective questioning. These phases (see Figure 4) include<sup>64</sup>:

- A) Observational** – Is there anything wrong or unsatisfactory?
- B) Investigative** – What is the problem? Who needs to be involved?
- C) Relationship Design** – How can we work together in tackling the problem?
- D) Learning-While-Doing** – How can we learn and work together and evaluate our progress?

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<sup>62</sup> Boyd, Stowe. *Sociology: Interview with John Hagel*, 1 May 2013 accessed at: <http://stoweboyd.com/post/49386411425/socialogy-interview-with-john-hagel>

<sup>63</sup> PAQUET, Gilles and Christopher Wilson. "Inquiring Systems", in *Stewardship: Collaborative Metagovernance and Inquiring Systems*, by R. Hubbard, G. Paquet and C. Wilson, Invenire Books, Ottawa, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> WILSON, Christopher. *Collaborative Co-Governance: A checklist approach to networking and collaboration*, presentation to National Collaborating Centre for Public Health workshop, Niagara-on-the-Lake, May 6, 2011

These four phases operate against a background of six ongoing, collaborative activities that include: information gathering, relationship management, trust building and trust affirmation, co-creative learning, collaborative doing, and mutual feedback and reflection.

Within each of these four junctures, there may be a multiplicity of subsidiary activities and further questions linked to the nature of the specific issue and the character of the people and organizations involved. In general though, an *inquiring system* must build, as much as possible, on the practical rules, values and behaviours that are in good currency among its members to ensure their voluntary participation. For instance, among child and youth related professions, practices such as the protective and nurturing behaviours of professionals working with children and youth, must be incorporated into any *inquiring system* being used to guide a child and youth related partnership. Otherwise, the attention and interest of the partners who are steeped in these behaviours will not be effectively engaged.

**Figure 3: Four Inquiry Phases of Collaborative Governance**



The inputs of an inquiring system are drawn from the information gathered from diverse perspectives and experiences of the various partners and collaborators, as in the earlier example of the governance technology startups. These are compiled and acted upon through cycles of learning and unlearning that are generated in a process of ‘learning while doing’ that is based on trial and error.

This trial and error process is best facilitated by heuristic strategies<sup>65</sup>. The outputs of this inquiring system are reflected in not only system modification through time, but just as importantly the co-learning, shared commitment and mutual accountability among the collaborators.

Heuristic learning allows collaborators to efficiently deal with the uncertainty associated with a complex task, and, although there is no guarantee that any particular heuristic strategy will work, experience suggests that desired results come faster using them. In contrast, working with algorithmic strategies may guarantee success but at a much slower pace. A good example of this difference might be to imagine you've lost your pen in a big room. An algorithmic strategy would have you pace the room back and forth in a tight grid pattern until you find your pen. You are guaranteed to find it but if it's a big room, it may take a while. Alternatively, you might imagine what you were doing and where you were at particular points in the past. You may find yourself retracing your steps from one place to another across the room until you find your pen. At any location there is no guarantee you'll find your pen but you'll probably find it faster than the grid approach.

Large, easy-to-use repertoires of heuristics are part of the adaptive toolboxes that effective stewards endeavor to create. These heuristics can be matched to particular issue domains and partnership features, allowing collaborators to formulate an *inquiring system* that is 'ecologically rational' – i.e. well matched with their particular environment. Heuristics may be comprised of combinations of skills, abilities, practices, and techniques which are utilized precisely because they have proven effective in the past. For instance, one widely regarded and much studied heuristic is called 'tit-for-tat' and it is comprised of the abilities to cooperate, to forget, and to imitate<sup>66</sup> and it is generally used as a tool for instilling trust and cooperative behaviour.

In most governance regimes, the ability to draw on a variety of heuristics is a critical factor in determining collaborative success. Consequently, ensuring that sufficient heuristics are available and made use of becomes an important feature of stewardship in a successful *inquiring system*. Unfortunately, attention to heuristics and the connoisseurship skills associated with them, is not commonly encouraged. Organizations typically do not amass a body of heuristics to facilitate their

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<sup>65</sup> Strauss identifies 64 such heuristics that are regularly used in the practice of collaboration. STRAUS, David. *How to Make Collaboration Work: Powerful Ways to Build Consensus, Solve problems and Make Decisions*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco: 2002

<sup>66</sup> GIGERENZER, Gerd "The Adaptive Toolbox" in GIGERENZER, G. and R. Selten (eds) *Bounded Rationality – The Adaptive Toolbox*. The MIT Press, Cambridge: 2001, 37-50.

collaborative learning and tend, therefore, to repeatedly incur major collaborative start-up costs as the effort is taken up to develop them anew each time.

As a result, there is a need to develop more generalized *affordances*, or action possibilities, that make heuristics more easily discoverable<sup>67</sup>. A checklist, for instance, is a well known affordance that helps to stimulate the right and timely use of specific heuristics and their associated skills in order to facilitate more cooperative behaviour. Checklists are quick and easy to use; they focus the mind very economically on key issues; and they can do so at the right time. They do not provide answers or ways to generate answers, but they do ensure that key questions are asked at the appropriate time. They are like doors to a building. They provide access but with no guarantee of finding what one is seeking or even how to find it once inside. In this way, they can help steward coordination or collaboration in complex situations by ensuring that the *inquiring system* addresses the right questions. Then, coupled with additional heuristic strategies to deal with the outcomes of such questions, they afford support to collaboration and the engagement of its partners.

The effectiveness of checklists as facilitators of collaboration has been demonstrated in many areas. Atul Gawande has, for example, documented<sup>68</sup> the use of checklists for helping surgical teams to effectively and efficiently steward the collaborative activities of operating room teams. The use of operating room checklists was itself inspired by the use of the same affordance by aircraft pilots in the cockpit. In practice, checklists tend to evolve as social learning progresses, and as new experiences and contexts materialize.

The four phases of collaborative inquiry described earlier can be structured as a checklist of stylized questions that are likely to be confronted by collaborators, and thus help them develop the appropriate levels of stewardship. The table found in the Appendix, for instance, is an example of a collaborative checklist that might be used to help kick start the process of defining a context, identifying who should be included, as well as afford the opportunity to reflect on guiding assumptions, structures, technology, and even the theory of what the ‘collective enterprise’ is all

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<sup>67</sup> GIBSON, James J. “The Theory of Affordances”, in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing*, Eds. Robert Shaw and John Bransford, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977

<sup>68</sup> GAWANDE, Atul *The Checklist Manifesto*. New York: Metropolitan Books 2009. The results, when applied to the operating rooms, were phenomenal as revealed by the results of an eight-city pilot study that was carried out: complications dropped by 36%, operating room deaths fell by 47%, infections originating in the operating room dropped by almost half (Gawande p.154). Further, analyses of exit surveys of staff members coming out of surgery also helped uncover the key causal mechanism that explained why the checklist approach had been so successful. As it turned out, the key factor was that the use of checklists caused a significant increase in the level of communication among operating room collaborators.

about. These questions have been generalized from the experiences of many practitioners that my colleagues and I have observed over the last twenty years.

In the table, each column is the locus for a number of key ‘not-to-be-forgotten’ questions. But these ‘header’ questions can be subsequently unpacked into more detailed and issue specific questions that can lead to an array of heuristics and additional affordances that can ultimately help participants answer the four ‘big’ questions. Stewardship is generated as new information becomes available or as new circumstances materialize, and a regular interaction among partners in this climate of inquiry fuels a cycle of social learning, shared commitment, innovation, and mutual accountability.

Instead of localizing power, purpose, expertise and accountability in the one called the ‘leader’, such a checklist distributes governance among all the participants and generates coordination out of a shared process. It creates an opportunity for the partners to learn how they will be together; it allows the right questions to evolve in the right time; it affords time to sort out shared possibilities; and it structures a feedback process to monitor progress and affirm the mutual commitments of the partners to one another.

As a consequence, shared governance emerges, not from the heads of individual actors, but from the learning dynamics of the group and their context. This order through interaction generates a sort of collective intelligence, or “social mind”<sup>69</sup> which ignites some capacities and ‘action possibilities’ while suppressing others within a particular context.

I should point out that whether or not the particular collaborative checklist described herein is in itself ‘perfect’ is irrelevant. More important is its use. Even as is, it can serve to encourage collaborators to gain confidence and certainty from a process *even if the outcomes of that process may still remain uncertain*. Over time it can become fine tuned to the context of collaborators. And by the reduction of uncertainty it affords, it contributes to stewardship by facilitating collaboration among independent owners.

Learning to recognize when to use heuristics and affordances like checklists, in what situations and under what conditions, is a key element of social learning, and at the core of good stewardship and collaboration design. Participants in such social learning must become in effect ‘connoisseurs’ whose judgment in a particular context has been cultured from experience. Among

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<sup>69</sup> GOFFMAN, Erwin *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday 1959; RHEINGOLD, Howard. *Smart Mobs*. Cambridge: Perseus 2002.

collaborators, it is often observed that the experience of successful collaboration often translates into a greater willingness to engage in collaboration once again with the resultant implication that both the real and the perceived costs of future collaboration can be dramatically reduced.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Followers create leaders on the basis of leaders being perceived as both ethical and effective. With leaders and leadership being continually undermined, we need to seriously explore other alternatives to social coordination. I have proposed stewardship as an alternative, not as a new way of saying leadership, but as a completely different mechanism where owners create stewards.

Good stewardship is primarily dependent on process design rather than personality traits, meaning that mechanisms, such as heuristics, and affordances, such as checklists, together with judgment and connoisseurship play a much more important role than character or whim currently do with leaders and leadership. Accountability, which has largely disintegrated under leadership, becomes stronger and more transparent in stewardship regimes. There is growing evidence that the practice of stewardship is making inroads in public, private and civic organizations. Yet we do not have, as yet, an established theory of either stewardship or collaboration. Much of what passes for the latter remains rhetoric and fanciful.

That said, we need to break the stranglehold that leadership has on our organizations. We know that leadership is ill-suited to the modern challenges of distributed governance. We know that leaders and leadership are failing us. We know that leadership is counter productive to much needed collaboration and partnership. We know that leaders are lacking in either ethicalness or effectiveness or both. So why do we continue the pretense of following?

Stewardship is a promising notion. It is not dependent on personality, nor are its cornerstones – ownership, diversity, inquiry and experimentation – all that threatening. It is, however, unknown and uncertainty is not something that people like to embrace. Admittedly more needs to be done to explore both collaboration and stewardship, but isn't a little uncertainty still better than the certainty of leadership failure?

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<sup>70</sup> WILSON, Christopher. "Attention to Place" *Optimum Online*, vol.38 (1) March, 2008

**APPENDIX: A Provisional Checklist for an Inquiring System<sup>71</sup>**

<b>I</b> <b>Does the situation need changing?</b>	<b>II</b> <b>What is the problem?</b>	<b>III</b> <b>How will you work together?</b>	<b>IV</b> <b>How will you learn together &amp; evaluate your progress?</b>
1. Are there any detectable anomalies?	6. What is the task at hand?	<i>a. STRUCTURAL DESIGN</i>	12. What feedback & informational loops do you need to enable social learning?
2. What are the salient features of the issue domain?	7. What are the non-negotiable constraints within the mega-community?	10. What practices of collaboration and social learning can you use to produce short term success and long term commitment?	13. What processes of formal and informal collective learning do you have in place?
3. What are the causal mechanisms at play?	8. Who are the stakeholders that must be included and how will you involve them?	<i>b. CULTURE OF COLLABORATION</i>	14. How will you gauge ongoing performance and partner contributions objectively?
4. Can this be resolved by a single actor?	9. What are the risks and potential rewards among the various partners, and how will these be aligned?	11. What are the conventions & moral contracts that need to be negotiated to maintain a culture of collaboration?	15. How will you gauge changes in attitudes & behaviours among partners?
5. Who are the key stakeholders?			16. How will you resolve conflicts?
			17. What failsafe / safe-fail mechanisms are in place?
			18. At what point would you dissolve the collaboration?

<sup>71</sup> PAQUET, Gilles and Christopher Wilson, “Collaborative co-governance as inquiring systems”, *Optimum Online*, vol. 41(2), June 2011

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