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# **RE-IMAGINING GOVERNMENT – PART 1**

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**Governments Overwhelmed and  
in Disrepute**



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## Preface

Take a moment and consider that today, in 2018, we have a system of collective governance that was designed and built for people who lived so long ago that none of them remain alive—not even their great-grandchildren. That system of government was created in a time when most people were farmers; when education was rudimentary and rare; when science was only just beginning; and when transportation involved largely walking and horses (although, if you were very fortunate, you might take a ride on a steam train or a sailing ship). It was a time when doctors were not much more than butchers, and the ideas of antibiotics, vaccines and DNA were unknown. Cities were a social blight of overcrowding, poverty and sewage. Slavery had just officially ended in the US, but the practice was still prevalent in much of the world. It was a time when people rarely left their village or town, and had little sense of the world. Needless to say, there was no Internet or Facebook, no cellphones or computers, no TV or radio, no movies, no Disneyland and no summer vacations. There were no drones, no satellites, no rockets, no moon landings, no planes and no cars. There wasn't even electricity.

And yet, surprisingly, the system of democratic government that was designed for that time is presumed, by almost everyone, to still be the best form of social coordination we could possibly use today. That system is also assumed to require no significant adjustment for the obvious advances in knowledge and technology, or the behavioural and cultural changes that have occurred over a century and a half within the populace. This is not to say that the basic principles of democracy—"rule by the people"—have lost their lustre. Quite the contrary, the vast majority of people around the world persist in their commitment to democracy's basic tenets, even when the rules and mechanisms by which democracy is energized in society seem a bit dated.

Yet, despite being surrounded by relentless social change, there remains a strong cultural resistance to even considering changes to our system of governance, as if the social contract established over a century ago between citizens and their governments is so fragile that any amount of technical tinkering would bring the whole democratic edifice crashing down.

To some, democracy is no longer a living, breathing process, but a fragile museum piece that has taken on a rigid, canonical stature as if it had been etched in the ancient tablets given by God to Moses. And strangely enough, the more these sclerotic structures of democracy are challenged by the realities of everyday life, the tighter people hold on to them. They consistently and obstinately mistake the aging institutional *form* of democracy for the *spirit* of democracy.

Moreover, it is these same, persistent institutional failures that are eroding popular faith in the system of democracy itself. You would have had to have lived as a hermit over the last decade not to have heard something along the lines of: governments are ineffective; government institutions are not satisfying the needs of citizens; government leaders are corrupt or out of touch; government bureaucracies are too slow or too stupid; governments no longer represent their electors; governments are no longer perceived as fair, or they are just incapable of looking out for the common good.

While all these shortcomings are invariably placed at the feet of political and organizational leaders of different stripes, in my opinion, this is erroneous— even though it is quite clear some leaders are assuredly better than others. The bigger problem is that our governance system has not evolved at the same pace as society, and this has created an inevitable disconnect that *no* leader, no matter how brilliant or well meaning, can ever bridge. It's like trying to run today's *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* on an ancient Atari 2600 console. It doesn't matter what the skill of the player is, it just won't work.

This book is my attempt to understand the degree of disconnection that exists between the structures of our existing government and the roles government is being called on to play—both now and in the near future. This will help to identify where the biggest misalignments are, in order to help us focus on what needs to be transformed and how to have the biggest impact. The sequel to this volume, *Re-Imagining Government Part II*, will attempt to sketch out how our governance system might be redesigned to make it more effective in a modern-day context.

This work is the culmination of almost 20 years of research and experience— work frequently done in conjunction with colleagues at the Centre on Governance at the University of Ottawa, which, in various ways, has concerned itself with learning how to get people to work together better. It is also the product of work done with a host of public, private and civic clients and partners who have been forced to consider new ways of working together to address issues of urgent concern to them. Their insights and innovations have been both marvellous and inspiring.

To begin with then, we should be clear that government is fundamentally about social coordination. Most simply, it's about how we try to prevent tripping over each other as we go about our lives in close proximity to one another. But government is also how we organize ourselves to accomplish things collectively that we could never do alone.

Over the years, however, I have observed that while most people will freely admit that they can probably accomplish more together than they can separately, they are generally not very good at it—working together, that is. All too frequently you hear complaints about how “it's too difficult”; “you can't trust people”; “too many cooks”; “if everyone's accountable, no one is”; and so on, and so forth. Consequently, most people tend to shy away from situations that require them to collaborate or work in partnership with others—especially in government—unless there's no other choice for them. Unfortunately for them, in today's world, *there is no longer any other sane choice but to learn to cooperate.*

Furthermore, most people continue to be obsessed with the idea of the heroic leader, “the saviour,” who they believe will protect them from all manner of shortcomings, relieve them of the burden of having to work things out with their neighbours themselves, and do so while magically ensuring that all of their preferences will be met regardless of everyone else's. These “leaders” prey on our immense sense of entitlement. Government, for instance, should absolutely protect me against the costs of falling sick, but I shouldn't have to pay taxes to protect someone else. Government should ensure that that my outdated job of digging coal is protected, but government should not collect taxes to help create new jobs in the clean energy economy of tomorrow. Amazingly, many people defer to these heroic leaders even when it comes at the cost of their own best interests and well-

being. From an economics point of view, these attitudes go totally against the commonplace idea that people are “rational actors.”

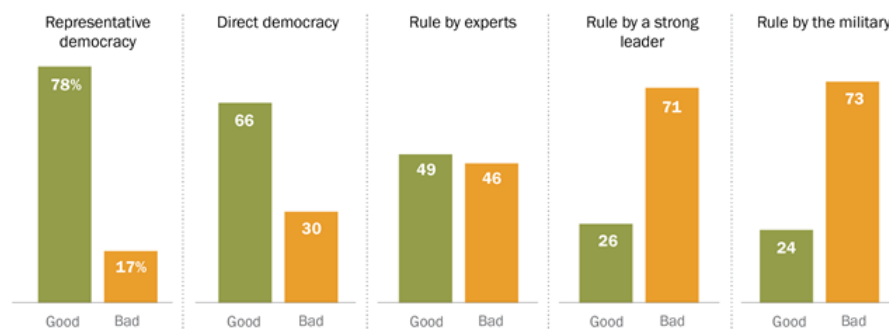
Inevitably, the narrative of this “great man” (and it’s almost invariably a man) involves him being bold enough, confident enough, or stupid enough to make choices that others would normally run away from. For example, in his acceptance speech to the US Republican National Convention in 2016, political novice Donald Trump said, “Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why *I alone can fix it.*”<sup>1</sup> Such hubris! Often without any regard to their rationality, the decisions of the “great man” are then imposed on others, usually with religious-like fanfare, but inevitably favouring one person, one group, or one organization at the expense of all others in a “win-lose” scenario reminiscent of medieval conflicts. In fact, the degree to which such inequitable decisions are successfully imposed is often seen as a proxy measure of the leader’s “greatness.”

In a recent survey of 38 countries conducted by the Pew Research Centre, while “more than half in each of the nations polled consider representative democracy a very or somewhat good way to govern their country, in all countries, pro-democracy attitudes coexist, to varying degrees, with openness to nondemocratic forms of governance, including rule by experts, a strong leader or the military.”

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**Widespread support for representative and direct democracy, but many are also open to nondemocratic alternatives**

Would \_\_\_ be a good or bad way of governing our country?



Note: Percentages are global medians based on 38 countries. Full question wordings for political systems: Representative democracy, “A democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law”; Direct democracy, “A democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law”; Rule by experts, “Experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country”; Rule by a strong leader, “A system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts”; Rule by the military, “The military rules the country.”  
Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey, Q29a-e.

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Source: Richard Wike, et.al.. 2017. “Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy”, *Global Attitudes Survey*, Pew Research Centre, October 16. Accessed at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy/>

Our modern history of organizational and political interactions has tended to play out like a real-life *Game of Thrones*, serial performances of zero-sum games that involve a revolving cast of

“white knight” leaders acting as deciders and arbitrators of who wins and who loses. The “great man” is the one with the courage to make tough decisions when others might pause and waver.

Our tolerance and acceptance of this “great man” myth is not the product of informed rational choice, but it is more a cultural legacy whose roots have long ago passed out of memory. Everybody just knows that some one must be in charge. Not only do such cultural relics fail to guarantee any current usefulness or efficacy, but they are generally significant impediments to collective learning, social adaptation and evolution.

Richard Rochefort, founder and former Senior Director General of Service Canada College, once illustrated this phenomenon to students in one of my classes. He described some social science research in which six chimps were put in a cage and then fed bananas. Naturally the chimps went for them. But when they did, a loud obnoxious sound was introduced, frightening them, and causing them to back away. After a several experiences like this, the chimps learned not to go for the bananas and the loud noise was never used again.

Then the researchers started replacing the chimps one by one, taking the original ones out of the cage and putting new ones in. Each time a new chimp came in, bananas were once again introduced, and naturally the new chimp tried to go for them, but each time it did, the older chimps would beat it back until it, too, stopped going for the bananas. The loud noise was never heard by the new chimps. Eventually all the original chimps were replaced, but their replacements would still not go after the bananas. Even though none of the remaining chimps had ever experienced the obnoxious sound, they had all learned to go against their basic nature and not eat the bananas. Rochefort pointed out that this phenomenon of socially learned behaviour is similar to our cultures in organizations and in society. None of us really challenge why we accept unquestionably the assumption that “someone has to be in charge.” We simply follow it out of blind habit and Pavlovian peer pressure.

Additionally, the perpetuation of the “great man” myth buttresses our need to find justification for our own abdication of social responsibility. We don’t want to be inconvenienced by our democratic responsibilities, so we’re all too willing to delegate the job to others who say they will do it for us. We choose to believe these agents are “great men” who can look after things on our behalf because: we imagine they know nearly everything; that they have special and uncommon insights; and that they have superior capacities that are unknown to us—beliefs which, of course, they do everything in their power to encourage. Yet in today’s world, the hard truth is that *no one* has all the knowledge, resources or power to do anything of significance in society— least of all address any of the complex concerns currently of importance to citizens.

When, for instance, have our elected leaders responded to questions about a problem by saying, “I really don’t know; let’s find out together”? They don’t do this because, as US President Truman once remarked, not having an answer is tantamount to admitting that you’re not an expert and that you don’t have the “right stuff” to be a “great man.” Accordingly, “great men” have become particularly adept at evading, dissembling, hedging, spouting vagaries and outright lying in order to maintain the public fantasy of their superiority— although in truth, the only secret they hold is

usually that they just don't know. A humble leader, willing to learn from others, is in fact an absolute rarity.

Equally rare, especially politically, are those leaders who can bring together all the diverse voices of their community or society and inspire their collective creativity and wisdom. This is the social equivalent of being a conductor of an orchestra, bringing all the varied contributions of different people together to orchestrate social cooperation and collective impact. Instead, what's usually on order are wannabe generals, playing politics as partisan warfare, pitting one group against another, where winning or losing is the only possible outcome, and where collective learning is rarely, if ever, on the agenda.

When confronted by complex or wicked problems, "great men" prefer familiar, black-and-white answers to issues they over-simplify. This enables them to communicate to the media in friendly "sound bites," and to demonstrate their brilliance and effectiveness with quick instinctive decisions. Instead of having to take the time to understand a problem's complexity, or to attend to a variety of perspectives, or to assemble the collective learning and shared commitments necessary to resolve it, they just wing it. It's laziness, pure and simple; at best, it's a recipe for institutionalized mediocrity.

This combination of incomplete understanding and quick decision-making, not only leads to ineffective action, but it also produces rich fodder for all those rebellious critics who inevitably resist a leader's claim to being "the one true patriarch," invariably with the aim of replacing the existing "patriarch" with themselves. Under the universally mistaken assumption that a government's past shortcomings can be wholly attributed to one person—regardless of the system in which they operate—the failures of one leader become fertile ground for more "great men" to arise, like weeds. In such an environment, important practical concerns, such as avoiding the possibility of operating with incomplete understanding, or with limited creativity, or with weak implementation capacity, are never addressed because they are always assumed to be a function of the leader's "greatness."

In contrast to popular belief, however, the complex, socio-economic challenges of today's world do not respond well to the simple, linear solutions of "great men." Nor is trying to funnel society's creative capacity through a handful of individuals even the best way to marshal society's collective potential. As we hear from a growing chorus of actors from all sectors of society, there is an urgent need to find better ways to cooperatively utilize our vast collective resources—both tangible and intangible. Yet, this ambition remains largely unrealized because "great men" and cooperation have proven so far to be antithetical.

Over the years, I have researched, participated in, and evaluated partnerships of various descriptions, and one other thing has repeatedly stood out. Most people, but most especially managers and organizational leaders, know very little about collaboration or partnership. They assume that because they may be a subject matter expert, or because they hold a leadership position in an organization, they automatically know how to behave in a collaborative setting. Unfortunately, when actual cooperation is demanded of them, they default to their MBA

knowledge, or whatever else they picked up in some leadership training course, which amounts to just about nothing of real value as far as collaboration is concerned!

Therefore, when they try to shoehorn those well-worn management rules and best practices into their collaboration work, they quickly discover that they are producing entirely the wrong impact. Consequently, they begin to feel discomforted, in over their head, and unsure of themselves, while still trying to present the obligatory pretense of confidence and being in control. Then, instead of seeing collaboration as the incredible learning and creative opportunity that it is, they fret about their loss of control, about time wasted in group meetings, about partners shirking their commitments, about a lack of accountability, and a host of other complaints. Not surprisingly, many just get fed up and quit.

Yet, there have also been times, when the need to resolve an issue was particularly acute, so strong in fact that the participants were willing to go off the beaten path and invent entirely new rules and behaviours to allow themselves to get where they needed to go. In the end, for those who stuck with trying to work together, this innovative practice was perceived as a very rewarding journey, both professionally and personally. In fact, my experience has shown that successful collaborators have consistently identified their participation in the collaborative process as being one of their most important accomplishments. And almost invariably, that participation has encouraged them to seek out new opportunities, to expand their scope of working together, and to embrace larger, more complex concerns. It is an attitude that is reflected by the idea that, “If we can do this together, then what else can we do?”

Nevertheless, I have often asked myself, why must the wheel be repeatedly reinvented each time groups and organizations choose to cooperate? Why do we not understand collaboration as well as we understand, say, management?

The answer to this is both cultural and paradigmatic. Our Western culture lionizes individual over collective achievement, even when those supposedly “individual” achievements would clearly never have happened in the first place without significant collective input. It’s the army that wins the war, but it’s the general who takes the credit. This age-old cultural bias is now reinforced by mechanistic and industrial management paradigms which presume that only an elite few have the wisdom, creativity and energy to make things happen. Employees are just so much undifferentiated raw material, and from the perspective of many organizational leaders, they are simply interchangeable widgets to be manipulated by those “enlightened” few. Among most practitioners, top-down is still perceived to be the only way to coordinate among a variety of organizational capacities.

That said, things are beginning to change. For instance, it should be obvious to everyone that because of universal education and universal (or nearly so) connectivity and access to knowledge, any reliance or dependence on a select few is both naïve and hugely problematic, not only for solving the tough complex problems of the day, but also for a healthy democracy. Limiting the task of social coordination to the capacities of a few individuals seriously constrains both understanding and innovation, while simultaneously encouraging authoritarianism and a population guided by entitlement and bribery, in lieu of their shared ownership.



### *Time to re-imagine a different way of working together*

So here we are today, almost a century after the advent of universal education and decades after the foundation of the global Internet, with many of our democratic institutions under attack for being quaint, ineffective, or at worst counterproductive to the needs of the time. In truth, we have witnessed the emergence of ideas like *multi-stakeholderism*, *cross-agency working*, *cross-sectoral collaboration* and *participatory democracy*—not because someone at the top felt inclined to be generous or inclusive—but because they have been understood as pre-conditions for social coordination and progress. Unfortunately, our public institutions generally show little progress on these fronts, beyond an ample amount of empty rhetoric.

Simultaneously, governments increasingly find themselves without all the knowledge, resources or power they need to fulfill their intents. This, because the issues they face require input nationally, regionally and locally. They also require input from many different disciplines and many different stakeholders. *No single government body*—no matter how extensive its legislative or taxing capacity—can be successful simply by working alone; that is, of course, if the measure of success is producing positive results in society.

While siloed governments were a standard feature of Westminster-style models of top-down government, today these structures are viewed with great distrust and suspicion due to their being overly bureaucratic and incapable of producing the results that their citizens want. They represent a design *malefit* that has contributed inexorably to an ongoing, de-legitimization of the State as a valid mechanism for social coordination, and to surreptitiously encouraging alternatives to government to compensate for the State's repeated failures.

Since the 1970s, for instance, voting participation has steadily declined in every Western country<sup>1</sup>, and is coincident with a dramatic decline in the public's confidence and trust in both their governments and their leaders. Not surprisingly, there are a growing number of substitutes for government, including both community-based and online collaborations, in which new mechanisms for social coordination are being experimented with. Even within governments, the old rhetoric around “streamlined silos” is out of fashion. In its place, there is talk of “integrated government,” “horizontal government,” and “whole of government” methodologies.

Yet, despite the rhetoric, governments remain deeply entrenched in their old “top-down” approaches. Read anything about government reform, and the first prerequisite for successful change that is identified is “support from the top.” Governments are woefully lacking in the frameworks, skills and mechanisms that would enable them to affect the more cooperative behaviours that underlie these more integrative styles of operating.

The traditional paradigm of government says that “government is about some combination of coordination, stabilization, redistribution and pedagogy while the primary function of the bureaucracy is to protect and preserve administrative institutions consistent with constitutional processes, traditions, values and beliefs”<sup>ii</sup>. But if one pulls back a bit from the specifics of what government does—making rules and laws, delivering services, operating multiple business lines,

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<sup>1</sup> Except where voting has been made legally compulsory, such as Australia or Belgium

generating revenues and providing protection—the basic *raison d'être* of government is coordination. Stabilization and redistribution are essentially tools governments use when their efforts at social coordination fail, and while administrative preservation is a device to pass on institutional learning, it is also a device to insure against periodic hijackings of government by groups of citizens fomenting non-cooperation in society.

Governments coordinate among groups and individuals in society; they coordinate between people and organizations, and they coordinate between governments. Laws, regulation, policy making—even taxation—are mechanisms through which governments potentially reduce the friction between people and organizations, and therefore promote less social conflict and greater social stability. Governments also coordinate among societal actors in order to foster social innovation, either to solve problems or to take advantage of new opportunities. And, until recently, they have represented the principal (if not the exclusive) social organizing power within society.

The basis of all this coordination has been government's traditional monopoly on coercion and its *perceived power* to punish or reward. This is a legacy of ancient, autocratic kings. More recently, in the last few centuries, this *perceived power* of governments has been augmented by the *legitimate authority* that has been conferred on them by citizens in democratic societies who have elected them to deal with issues of social concern and public interest. Over time, governments, empowered by these two sources of power, have co-evolved along with their increasingly more diverse societies to become a tremendous force for social coordination—albeit in a centralized, top-down fashion—one that was ultimately embodied in the notion of the Welfare State.

Yet a quick scan of recent media readily reveals evidence of an erosion of both the government's *legitimate authority* as well as its coercive, or *perceived power*. The perception that government leaders are ineffective and/or unethical is wearing away at the former, while technical innovation is eating into the latter. Whether it is highly regarded public officials being charged with “gangsterism”<sup>iii</sup>, or the obvious inability of any government to direct its economy as it responds to global forces beyond its borders<sup>iv</sup>, the perception is growing that governments cannot be relied upon to get the job done. Simultaneously, emerging technical innovations like “Bitcoin,” which operate independent of government monetary control,<sup>v</sup> or the repeated and intrusive hacks by small groups or individuals into government electronic infrastructures<sup>2</sup> suggest that governments are no longer in control.

Take away both of these enabling tools—*legitimate authority* and *perceived power*—it then becomes questionable as to whether governments can continue to be trusted to fulfill their traditional role as the principal coordinator of society. For some governments, like, for instance, Canada's federal government, the task of providing social coordination has simply been vacated,<sup>vi</sup> in favour of a focus on redistribution to mitigate the impacts of its coordination failures.

Restoring the ability of governments to once again effectively orchestrate social coordination lies somewhere between two collaborative maxims: *be helpful* to others, and *don't take all the credit* for someone else's work. Instead of seeking the kind of legitimacy derived from being able to

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<sup>2</sup> Like the Russian hack identified by the CIA of the Democratic National Convention during the 2016 US presidential election

impose solutions on others, governments today are more likely to garner legitimacy by helping others to solve their own problems in their own way.

For instance, it has been amply demonstrated that the standardized solutions characteristic of the Welfare State do not work for everyone, everywhere. Often these solutions are found to be palliative at best. However, being able to help those most affected by a problem to help themselves—with contributions of knowledge, resources or influence—dramatically increases the likelihood that those local solutions will actually work. When governments can act in this way as effective brokers or helpful partners, their reputations in communities soar. Those partners who are helped quite naturally tend to acknowledge the support provided by government, and in the end, there is no greater legitimacy than that which is bestowed upon you by others. If, therefore, governments can foster reputations that flow from their *perceived generosity*, then they will acquire a new place of respect and trust among the citizenry. But we are far from there.

A colleague and former federal deputy minister once told me that governments will pay any price to be viewed as legitimate in the eyes of their constituents. In fact, legitimacy is the true currency of government. And while there is always some legitimacy to be derived from being able to punish people or enact laws, it pales beside the legitimacy generated from *perceived generosity*. Such legitimacy is naturally attractive: people *want* to work with you, they *want* you to work with them, as opposed to being forced to work with you or for you. It showers its recipients with a collective power that is willingly bestowed by others, as opposed to the power that governments have traditionally just taken for themselves. Unfortunately, this notion of *perceived generosity* is clearly lacking among today's leaders of government, because they remain stuck in an inherently feudal mindset of government by control.

Former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark, who once described Canada as a “community of communities,” recently commented, “I think the greatest threat to Canada is not some disease that will come, not some attack that will come. But we will just grow sufficiently indifferent [to each other] that instead of finding national reasons to come together, to be our best, to be excited about our whole country, we sort of slip off into our gated communities and stay there and watch the world go by.”<sup>vii</sup>

By being indifferent to each other, or retreating into a mean-spirited and isolationist “us-them” mentality, we risk losing our sense of wholeness as an inspiration for national creativity and strength. Without it, we enable the foundations of fear and terror to emerge from our continuous exposure to a world full of differences and uncertainties.

Those leaders who seek to separate us, or diminish our diversity, or who would have people turn against one another are inherently weak, often narcissistic and uncreative people. They are incapable of seeing beyond the most obvious limitations, or of productively utilizing life's great gift of diversity. In that light, the long decline in public sector legitimacy may also be tied to the inability of its leaders to connect with society's rich tapestry of people, or their inability to articulate the wholeness which emerges from them all. And without that sense of wholeness, the task of governing for everyone has become immensely more difficult, if not impossible.

Who then, if not the leaders of government, is best equipped to change government and make it more cognizant of the whole and more adaptable to an ever-evolving environment? The only plausible answer to that question is: those who are the actual owners of government—*the citizens*. But then, how could I, as a citizen, go about doing that?

First and foremost, I believe we must be able to imagine and give expression to a future in which we are all willing to share. That means developing a collective “capacity to imagine” that possible future and an ability to share it. Believing that my future can come only at the expense of another’s is a tried and true recipe for great tragedy. Similarly, believing that the future must be like the past is a ludicrous invitation to recreating the shortcomings of the past in the future. There is no more certainty to be gained from trying to impose the past on the future, than there is in trying to use the knowledge of horse-drawn buggies as a guide for space travel. Finally, the claims that the tools and structures that worked so well in the past, must *always* be good enough for the future is completely groundless. If new tools are available, we should use them. The past is past, so leave it there—no matter what the populists would like you to believe.

Without trying to make specific predictions of the future, or being able to explicitly identify all the tools we will need to create the future we want, this book and its sequel are meant to try and read the tea leaves and lay out some of the broad strokes of what isn’t working and what is likely to be needed. With these in mind, we can consider what might be possible and then we might imagine the types of governing tools we should be looking for to get us to where we need to go.

Consider this book like a “kernel” of software code. There are many others around the world who are also making valuable contributions in this area and maybe together we can come up with something truly transformative. Hopefully, this book and its sequel can offer enough detail that others can imagine their own possibilities based on it and then add or enlarge upon them. Therefore in an iterative way, we—you the reader, myself and many others— can begin shaping a new model of co-governance that can practically shape social coordination for the tomorrow we would like to live into, one that might ultimately encompass the totality of our human connectivity, our shared knowledge, and our collective power—not to mention our shared aspirations for the future of our children, our communities, and for all of humanity.

It is no accident that the growing connectivity of the Internet has led to a reflective process that is beginning to question the very foundations upon which our governments were built— notions like representative government, the use of expert decision makers, and the obsession of equality over basic fairness. More access to information has given rise to the greater likelihood that people will ask questions. And with more than half the world’s population now using smart phones and able to connect with one another, it’s not just the world’s most repressive regimes that are being questioned, but the world’s most democratic ones as well. In light of all this global scrutiny, it’s no longer enough to be content with simply reforming existing governments—that is, fiddling around their edges<sup>viii</sup>, adopting, say, a newer, friendlier language of cooperation, while keeping the same old structures and operational assumptions alive. People are beginning to look for significant change—they just don’t know yet what form it should take.

In **Chapter 1**, I examine how governments—even the fundamental notion of democracy itself—seem to have fallen out of alignment with the needs of their citizens, resulting in an ongoing decline in public confidence that governments can act as a credible source of coordination in society. Yet, serious discussions to bring our systems of collective governance up-to-date, or any of their institutions, remain by and large a taboo topic. The idea of possibly walking away from our Westminster or republican models of government is considered heresy, not only among those involved in the public sector, but also by a public brainwashed into believing this man-made process has now gained the status of something sacred and inviolable—despite its obvious dysfunctionality.

For instance, the original design assumptions of our legacy system of representative democracy no longer exist. The monopoly that governments once had on social coordination has ended—and an increasing number of alternatives to government exist. The traditional Western models of government have been largely hollowed out in practice by both extreme partisanship and cult leadership, becoming little more than a husk of their former selves. Finally, the legitimacy of both our governments and their leaders is continually being undermined by both unethical behaviour and overall ineffectiveness. In fact, an entire generation of people from around the world is beginning to lose faith in democracy altogether<sup>ix</sup>.

**Chapter 2** looks at the extent to which our system of governance has become ineffective in dealing with the needs and realities of today. In the press, we can witness a litany of protracted public concerns involving: the provision of quality health care; the reduction of poverty; issues around indigenous peoples; climate change; the balancing of privacy and security; the growing unaffordability of education; the increasing infrastructure deficit; and government's overall incapacity to manage the economy. The very chronic nature of these concerns should flag the fact that these problems, together with their solutions, are systemic in nature, requiring contributions from many different people and groups, often crossing the lines between business, government and civil society.

Against this backdrop of ineffectiveness, there are a significant number of emerging policy challenges which demand unconditionally that governments operate in a more open and collaborative way. Until now, governments were designed primarily as mechanisms to achieve coordination via control, whereas these emerging policy challenges require governments to be primarily effective learners and collaborators. **Chapter 3**, therefore, presents this emerging public policy background to underscore the critical need for governments to function differently in the future.

As complex as current files may seem, these future challenges appear to be even more fundamental, existential even, yet they are receiving much less popular attention. These include concerns such as: the global viability of perpetual economic growth; the future of human work in an era of ubiquitous technology; the growing risk to humanity of unrestrained and democratized technological advancement; the global impact of unconstrained population growth; the growing threats to accessing basic resources (such as water, food, housing, and security); the inequitable distribution of society's wealth; the destabilizing threats of mass migration; and the continued solvency of governments addicted to debt.

These profound public policy concerns are further complicated by the Internet and the tools of the digital era. **Chapter 4** raises new challenges that stem directly from these new technologies: from trying to make sense of all the added information, in order to foster social innovation, to finding the necessary resources to implement change and ensuring that technology helps create healthier human communities—all while mitigating the possible impacts of putting this tremendous knowledge in the hands of everyone, including a few very disturbed individuals.

What all of these unresolved and fundamental concerns have in common is their complexity and their inherent “unknowableness.” More important, however, they all represent shared problems. That is, we each contribute to the problem and therefore we can contribute to its solution. Furthermore, they are all coming to the fore simultaneously, adding to the complexity of the challenge to government. In addressing them, governments can no longer lay claim to having all the answers, the knowledge, the resources, or the power they will need to affect solutions on behalf of their citizens. Governance has thus become a function that is widely distributed, requiring many people, many minds and hearts, and many organizations in and out of government to cooperate and coordinate amongst themselves.

The added social complexity that is generated by this growing diversity and distribution of governance has also given rise to fear and uncertainty in the minds of many, opening them to the “siren” promises of populists and demagogues. **Chapter 5** looks at this rise of populism that is stirring around the world as a symptom of this misalignment between democratic governments and their ability to fulfill the needs of their citizens.

What is particularly unique and somewhat remarkable in human civilization today is that there are now more than just two options for resolving governments’ coordination challenges. Historically, leaders of government have often met these types of challenges either by *reducing social diversity* (and all the harshness and violence that implies) or by imposing more comprehensive and severe *systems of control*. **Chapter 6** explores the outlines of a different approach by imagining the dimensions of a government that may be more consistent with the times.

The chronic inability of governments to meet the needs of their citizens has already given rise to a host of new, creative behaviours—behaviours that are occurring on the margins of government or external to it. These changes tend to embody one or more of the following five mental shifts or metanoia:

- ◆ Recognizing that no one’s in charge;
- ◆ Shifting from leadership to stewardship;
- ◆ Focusing on scalable learning as opposed to scalable efficiency;
- ◆ Redesigning government around collaboration; and
- ◆ Generating stewardship from process design.

These five shifts have been observed as elements of an emerging *evolutionary* model of organization<sup>x</sup>, one that is likely to become more central to a modernized form of democratic government. With these shifts in mind, we can begin to imagine what government might look like in the future.

But just the act of “imagining what might be” represents a clear break from traditional thinking that assumes the future of government must always be like the past, only slightly different. I believe the collaborative challenges of our times are sufficiently great that we need people, lots and lots of people, thinking about what might be, and having the courage and enough skin in the game to be willing to embrace change, so that we can bring into being that which they can imagine. Our greatest challenges are shared, thus necessitating that the source of our respective solutions must also be shared.

Therefore, the **Concluding Chapter** is less a *call to arms* than it is a *call to imagine*—something requiring only a sense of ownership and a willingness to be open. In attempting to re-imagine government, I will try bringing all the pieces together to envision the possible contours of what a new model of government might be. This will set the stage for this book’s sequel, *Re-Imagining Government Part II*.

While to some, engaged as they are in the day-to-day activities of government, the very idea of transforming this giant behemoth of government organization may seem impossible or unimaginable, it really isn’t. It’s already being done. At the core of this transformation is a simple psychological shift from “Thou shalt do this” to “How can we help?” Beyond this, very little new needs to be invented. The tools are all basically there. Even the new social technologies that facilitate collaboration might be no more than those employed among healthy families and networks of friends. Therefore, it’s not good enough to claim that “I can’t,” because “you can.” You can certainly do what you can do, and together “we can” do something which is much greater.

However, each person must make a choice. You must begin by choosing the future that you want for yourself and your children—that is, if you want to avoid someone else’s future being thrust upon you unwillingly.

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<sup>ii</sup> PAQUET, Gilles and Christopher Wilson. 2016. “Intelligent governance: an alternative paradigm”, *Optimum Online*, Vol. 46, No. 3, September. Prepared for presentation to the 68<sup>th</sup> IPAC National Annual Conference, 28-29 June 2016, Toronto.

<sup>iii</sup> PERREAUX, Les and Ingrid Peritz. 2013. “Laval’s ex-mayor faces gangsterism charges”, *The Globe and Mail*, Montreal, 09 May.

<sup>iv</sup> COYNE, Andrew. 2015. “The things no party leader will say in Thursday’s debate”, *The National Post*, Toronto, 16 September.

<sup>v</sup> ANTONOPOULOS, Andreas M. 2014. “Andreas M. Antonopoulos Educates Senate of Canada about Bitcoin”, Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, “Study on the use of digital currency”, 11<sup>th</sup> session, 8 October. Accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUNGFZDO8mM>

<sup>vi</sup> PAQUET, Gilles and Christopher Wilson. 2016. *Intelligent Governance*, Invenire Books, Ottawa, June

<sup>vii</sup> KENNEDY, Mark. 2012. “Canada risks losing ties that bind, warns former prime minister Joe Clark”, *PostMedia*, 25 November.

<sup>viii</sup> HUBBARD, Ruth and Gilles Paquet. 2015. “The Canadian Federal Public Service: Tinkering Can No Longer Suffice”, *Optimum Online*, Vol. 45, Issue 3, September.

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<sup>ix</sup> GUILFORD, Gwynn. 2016. “Harvard research suggests that an entire global generation has lost faith in democracy”, *Quartz*, 30 November. Accessed at: <http://qz.com/848031/harvard-research-suggests-that-an-entire-global-generation-has-lost-faith-in-democracy/>

<sup>x</sup> LALOUX, Fredric. 2014. *Reinventing Organizations*, Nelson Parker, Brussels.