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Developing Collective Leadership:
Partnering in Multi-stakeholder Contexts
(Included in Part IV of the book *Leadership is Global: Bridging Sectors and Communities)*

Executive Summary*: In this chapter, Alain Gauthier, a senior leadership coach and facilitator working worldwide with the top management of major corporations, the United Nations, and other international institutions, describes in detail the application of the partnership paradigm in multi-stakeholder context. Based on his experience in facilitating the emergence of sustainable local and global partnerships, the author discusses multiple approaches and tools that can be applied to help diverse leaders mature together as "boundary crossers", while addressing critical issues that cannot be solved within a single organization or sector.*

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how collective leadership skills can be developed – along with genuine partnering attitudes and competencies – to make multicultural partnerships and networks across the public, private and civil society sectors both effective and sustainable.

It is primarily based on my experience in designing programs and adapting learning tools to develop leadership in multi-stakeholder contexts, as well as on numerous exchanges with some of my colleagues in the field. I have spent many years helping leadership teams and leaders grow through facilitation and coaching – one organization or sector at a time. But my more recent work has convinced me that partnering across sectors offers unique challenges and opportunities for leaders of any sector to accelerate their own development, while contributing to solve some of the world's most intractable problems – such as hunger, poverty or depletion of natural resources.

I have structured the chapter around a series of questions on leadership, partnering, and approaches to capacity building, and added a few practical tools in the appendix. To illustrate some of the questions and approaches, I have also interwoven the story of an actual development effort that I co-lead recently for a Global Foundation, starting with the following vignette.

The place is a hotel in a tropical resort on the West African Coast that has seen better days thirty or forty years ago. The time is September 2004. Thirty-five people are assembled for three days – at the invitation of the country's Minister of Health – to create the collective capacity to design, launch and sustain a nutrition program that will reach the most vulnerable members of the population: women of child-bearing age and young children. The group includes civil servants from three ministries, representatives from local millers, multinational *food companies and UN agencies, as well as consumer advocates, community organizers, academics and researchers. Two representatives from a neighboring country have also been invited because they are engaged in a similar program. The facilitating team includes the partnership development officer of the Global Foundation that will finance the program for three years, a local consultant, and myself. Our charter is to help create the conditions that will enable effective partnering among the local and international actors that need to be involved. The goal is to launch the program successfully so that it can be sustained beyond the three-year grant. The Foundation will make the grant funds available only if the country demonstrates its willingness to create a partnership or alliance that will orient and oversee the management of the program.*

This gathering is designed as the first in a series of partnership- and leadership-building workshops. Most people in the room know each other because the country is not very large and many activities are concentrated in the capital. But the first exchanges between participants reveal that they have little if no experience of working in collaboration, even within the same sector: some rivalries among ministries and among food processors are surfacing, as well as numerous individual attributions about other participants or organizations. What will be needed to help the group take its first steps toward becoming a learning community, and for collective leadership to emerge among the key protagonists?

What is collective leadership?

Leadership can be defined as speaking, listening, and acting in a way that enables an organization or community to address its key challenges most effectively.

Collective leadership (or co-leadership, for short) is, simply stated, leading together as partners. Petra Künkel (1) defines it as “the capacity of a group of leaders to deliver a contribution in service of the common good through assuming joint and flexible leadership, according to what is perceived and required”. Each co-leader feels no need to personally stand out or impose their views, but cultivates the ability to know or sense what needs doing.

Steve Pierce observes that in many non-Western cultures, leadership is considered a collective rather than an individual capacity; leadership is defined then as a relationship or a process, not a person.

Unlike individual heroic leadership, co-leadership embraces the diversity of people and perspectives, and frees up self-initiative and collective intelligence. When practiced across sectors, it creates the conditions for societal learning and innovation through an increased sense of interdependence and a deeper trust in self-organization.

What are some key conditions for effective partnering?

A good amount of research and practical work has been done over the last 15 years on the conditions in which partnering can be most effective. I have been involved myself over that period as a consultant, facilitator, and coach in helping people collaborate and partner at three different levels: within an organization (such as physicians, nurses, administrators, and board members in a hospital), across organizations (such as member companies of the Society for Organizational Learning), and across sectors (such as ministries, businesses and civil society organizations in countries applying for a grant from the Global Foundation mentioned in the vignette).

Using Ken Wilber's four-quadrant framework (2), I have found that effective partnering requires four types of conditions that are complementary and interdependent:

- Individual intention: Co-leaders commit to mutual respect, transparency and learning, are willing to surface and challenge their assumptions, and adopt a win-win-win perspective.
- Individual behavior: Partners genuinely listen and give helpful feedback to one another, walk their talk, respect jointly-defined ground rules and honor their commitments.
- Culture: The partnership is characterized by shared values and vision, perceived complementary viewpoints and skills, open and frequent communications, search for synergy, and a long-term view.
- Structure: The partnership structures and systems include concrete common goals and priorities, behavioral ground rules, agreed upon measures of impact, shared benefits and rewards, clear accountability, and shared responsibility for the whole.

In a similar perspective, Riane Eisler (3) characterizes the partnership model by: equal value (or equivalence) among partners; mutual trust and a low degree of fear or aggression; myths and stories that honor and validate partnership; egalitarian structures and leadership based on level of self-actualization.

A number of interviews with experienced partners have confirmed my own findings that partnering at its best is a transformative experience that enables each co-leader to grow personally, while generating benefits for the whole that could not have been produced otherwise. This is only possible when partners are committed to both support and challenge each other, so that optimal learning conditions exist within the partnership.

What makes collective leadership particularly essential and challenging in multi-sector partnerships?

Multi-sector partnerships have been advocated – since the 1992 Earth Summit and the UN adoption of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – as the new development paradigm for addressing some of the world's toughest problems such as poverty and malnutrition. It only makes sense to combine diverse perspectives and capabilities in order to generate novel whole-system solutions that no single sector could design and implement on their own.

In Künkel's terms, these partnerships are "collective change interventions geared at contributing to more sustainable development between the private, public, and civil society sectors". They can be viewed as "a response to complexity and to the need for multi-actor change in behavior". Ideally, representatives from the three sectors agree to share risks and benefits equitably, and to fully use their complementary perceptions, competencies and resources for the greater good. In contrast, when two of the sectors rely on the third one to handle an issue without proper checks and balances – as in the case of the privatization of water supply in some developing countries – the solutions have proven not to be beneficial to all stakeholders involved, and therefore not sustainable. American entrepreneur Jim Rouse points out that business leaders have to learn to think and act "beyond borders' in order to correct the imbalances created by the system that generated the wealth.

The Global Foundation mentioned in the vignette acts as a broker in pooling and disbursing large sums of money from private and public donors in the field of nutrition. It has a very ambitious vision: significant reduction of malnutrition in at least 40 developing countries by 2010, consistent with the UN's nutrition-related MDGs. This vision can only be realized through effective multi-sector partnerships that make wise use of the best resources and practices available locally, regionally and globally. It implies that a country's local government works in partnership with local businesses and local NGOs, as well as donors, international agencies, international NGOs and multinational corporations.

Over the last 15 years, the Prince of Wales' International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) has studied a number of public-private partnerships and distilled what they learned in a series of books and courses. On the whole, relatively few cross-sector partnerships have consistently delivered on their expected outcomes. One of the reasons is that not enough emphasis has been put on the development of co-leadership capabilities and the corresponding changes in partners' habitual ways of thinking and behaving. The research done by IBLF and others in the field has shown that multi-sector partnerships are never easy, comfortable, secure, safe, quick, or cheap. Successful partnerships are values driven, and require from all partners commitment to a larger goal, involvement of the heart, willingness to communicate and cooperate across boundaries, creativity, courage, perseverance, accountability, and collective responsibility for the whole, i.e. co-leadership capabilities.

What are some of the initial steps that can be used in addressing the challenge of multi-stakeholder partnering?

A first step in building partnering and co-leadership capacity is for the representatives of each of the sectors to acknowledge openly their respective and complementary resources, competencies, and weaknesses. For example, in his work with Global Action Networks, Steve Waddell (4) points to:

- Local governments' regulatory and taxation power, their enforcement apparatus, but also the slow pace of their decision making and the difficulty in coordinating projects involving several ministries.
- Local NGOs' community bonds and trust, as well as their support and voice for the vulnerable and marginalized, but also their limited material means and – for some – their ideological bias.
- Local businesses' production and distribution systems and their efficiency, but also their difficulty to integrate long-term concerns and their focus on customers with medium and upper incomes.
- Multinational companies' technology, logistics and marketing know-how, but also their lack of experience and credibility in serving the needs of the poorest people.

A second step for the participants is to recognize as well the challenges that are specific to multi-sector partnerships. Some of them are linked to the *characteristics of this type of partnership*, as summarized in IBLF's Partnering Toolbook (5):

- Each sector tends to have attributions about the others. For example, the public sector is often perceived as bureaucratic and intransigent, the private sector as single-minded and short-term oriented, the civil society sector as combative and territorial. These attributions reflect significant differences in worldview between sectors that do not vary greatly from country to country.
- Each partner organization may have conflicting priorities, competitive issues within their own sector, and some degree of intolerance vis-à-vis the other sectors.
- The general public may be skeptical or have inflated expectations of the value the partnership can bring in a short amount of time.
- The local political, economic, and social climate, and the country's ability to access external resources may also affect the effectiveness of the partnership.
- There is no clear hierarchy among partners, although there are obviously differences in power and influence.
- Partnership leaders may have inadequate partnering beliefs and skills, be too narrowly focused on their role, or have restricted internal authority or

external influence.

Other challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships arise from the *kind of issues* they are called to deal with:

- These problems are complex by nature, and cannot be solved using simple, traditional solutions. Using Adam Kahane's distinctions (6), they usually involve a large number of actors and stakeholders that have diverse perspectives and interests – what Kahane characterizes as "social complexity"; they can only be solved by considering the system as a whole and over time rather than by fixing some of its elements piece by piece – "dynamic complexity"; they don't usually have precedents and require emerging rather than existing solutions – "generative complexity". These three kinds of complexity compound each other and require an inclusive, systemic and creative type of co-leadership.
- When dealing with persistent and worsening issues such as malnutrition, poverty, or environmental degradation, first-order change (adaptation within the current rules of the game) or even second-order change (redefining the rules of the game) will not be sufficient. As Bettye Pruitt and Steve Waddell note (7), "third-order change redefines the game itself; all the system actors need to participate and rethink their roles. For example, learning and change of this scale occurred when people concerned about ocean fisheries shifted from thinking about 'species management' to 'regional ocean management'…When third-order changes happen across a society, we refer to them as 'societal learning'". Third-order change is sometimes called transformation: it uses the energy of the system to correct or reinvent the system itself.

<u>A third step</u> is for the partners to agree on a few key principles or values, as well as on a common language that will enable them to address the problems they face within the context of a shared understanding:

- *Partnering principles* such as equity, mutual benefit, and transparency are likely to appeal to each of the sectors. Equity implies an equal right to be at the table and a validation of those contributions that are not measurable simply in terms of cash value or public profile. A healthy partnership works toward achieving specific benefits for each partner as well as common benefits to all partners. Openness and honesty in working relationships are pre-conditions of trust – only with transparent working will a partnership be truly accountable to its donors and other stakeholders.
- *Language* should also be used as a partnership-building tool by agreeing on and using terms that are neutral rather than "imported" from one of the sectors. For example, benefit will be preferred to profit, agreement to contract, action plan to business plan, working group to committee, review to evaluation, and participation to consultation.

In the case of the West African country, a good part of the first and second days of the workshop were spent in both large and small groups *acknowledging the differences in competencies and viewpoints across sectors. A consensus began to emerge on two or three principles around which to structure the Alliance. And participants started to adopt a common language, with the help of the communication distinctions and tools introduced and demonstrated by the facilitators. They gradually shared an understanding of the roots of their difficulties in collaborating on the launch of the nutrition project. A willingness to speak and listen more openly became palpable by the end of the second day.*

What are some of the learning approaches that can be most effective in building co-leadership capacity?

Capacity building means developing the personal attitudes and skills, relationships, agreements, supporting infrastructures and resources required to do the work. It also means continuing to improve the ways it is done, thus enabling self-reliance and sustainability.

<u>Changing attitudes and behaviors</u> requires action-learning strategies:

- Individual leadership competencies – such as self-awareness, listening, appreciating diverse views – improve gradually through practice, and particularly when dealing with conflictive or paradoxical issues.
- Making a partnership work over time – by increasing the quality of relationships and agreements among partners – provides a fertile ground for understanding interdependencies and developing co-leadership skills.
- Changes in individual attitudes and group beliefs or norms make new structures, systems and incentives effective; together they enable shifts in individual and collective behavior that are enduring.
- Action-learning works best when designed to achieve "multiplying benefits" – when all learning is in the service of purposeful change and all change is designed to support on-going learning.

<u>The action-learning approach</u> I helped design and partly implement with the Global Foundation included the following steps:

- Develop with IBLF – and make available in 16 languages – *The Partnering Toolbook* (5) to guide the creation and launch of a partnership in the countries that respond to the Foundation's request for proposal. The *Toolbook* includes a description of the key phases in the partnering process – from scoping and identifying the potential partners all the way to sustaining or terminating the partnership – as well as eight tools to help design, develop, manage, and evaluate the partnership.
- Interview local leaders to determine country-specific needs, and involve them in designing a customized co-leadership capacity-building program.
- Conduct an initial co-leadership development workshop in order to create shared values and vision, and to establish both individual and collective action-learning patterns as a foundation for subsequent work.

- Develop a network of local or regional facilitators and coaches, and enable them to adapt learning approaches to the evolving needs of the local partnership.
- Broaden and deepen the shared vision with a wider group of leaders – whose commitment will be crucial for the success of the Nutrition Program – and translate it with them into a few strategic priorities that will mobilize the energies and provide a common practice and learning field (8).
- Orchestrate and offer individual and team coaching within and across each sector to facilitate Program implementation.
- Conduct follow-up workshops to reflect on the progress of the Alliance, share the lessons learned, and further develop local capacity to lead and collaborate.

<u>The initial co-leadership development workshop</u> – *such as the one mentioned in the vignette* – is designed as a learning process that integrates both individual and collective learning disciplines. I have used its basic format with groups in diverse geographic and cultural settings to help develop high-performing and learning teams, and adapted it to a multi-stakeholder context:

- The group is first introduced to the foundations of *dialogue and group learning*, practicing in small groups high-quality advocacy and inquiry, as well as genuine or empathetic listening. This activity develops the capacity to see reality at a deeper level – by learning to surface and question one's mental models and attributions about others in the group or the issue at hand.
- Individual members are then asked to clarify their *personal values and vision,* and to share them with a few other participants. Each small group then reports the values mentioned at least twice by their members, and the facilitator helps the large group come to a consensus on a few common values for the partnership; each person is then invited to name a characteristic of the working climate (e.g. convivial, challenging, supportive) that would enable them to function at their best. The composite desired working environment that emerges becomes the first aspect of their *shared vision*.
- The group then clarifies who the *key stakeholders* are – whose attitudes and behavior would be affected by or contribute to the program (e.g. women and children, local community advocates, producers and distributors, health officials, etc.). A number of them will be represented in the room but others won't. The group members express in short statements and in the present tense what they would want each stakeholder to think/say/do about the program – if they were surveyed or interviewed when the program is successful (e.g. 3 years from now). A *shared systemic vision* will emerge out of a dialogue on the key themes that cut across the statements from the various stakeholders.
- The participants then compare their vision statements to what they think each stakeholder would say if they were surveyed or interviewed today, in order to *assess the main gaps between the desired situation and current*

reality. By selecting a few crucial areas in which the gap is greatest and where the program can make a significant difference, the group chooses then a few *strategic priorities* that it will commit to actualizing over the next 12-18 months. The role of each partner is specified for each of these priorities, as well as the initial steps that will enable the group to review its progress toward them.
- Finally, the participants choose and commit to respecting *a few ground rules* that translate their shared values into desirable behaviors and would enable them to work most effectively together – for instance, speaking one's mind without offending, suspending judgment when listening, dealing with facts not rumor. Each group member then publicly identifies the one or two rules that will most challenge their habitual behavior, says why, and seeks the help of their partners in changing it. Participants are reminded that trust is earned over time by consistently honoring one's commitments.

There are <u>several conditions</u> that will enable a group of partners <u>to benefit most</u> from this type of workshop and subsequent steps, and thus develop individually as co-leaders:
- Partners are willing to learn from each other, build on their complementary skills, and facilitate each other's growth.
- Individual differences in values, perspective or skills are not just tolerated but valued by everyone. It means that all group members treat one another as equivalent – i.e. of equal value – rather than implicitly comparing and ranking each other as more or less important than they are.
- Several group members are willing to make themselves vulnerable by sharing their personal stories, strengths and weaknesses, to take the risk of voicing "undiscussable" issues, and to be called on their individual behavior in public; their example is likely to be followed by others, as time goes.
- At least a few partners demonstrate a level of maturity that enables them to understand and relate in a constructive way to all other members of the group, rather than react defensively to their words or behavior.
- Each meeting is carefully prepared, with input from every participant on the purpose and outcomes of the meeting, on each agenda item, and on the process to be used.
- Group "rituals" such as individual check-ins (sharing one's state of mind and heart in the moment), moments of silence, shared evaluation of meetings, and check-outs are valued as ways to cultivate the collective field in which true dialogue and learning can take place.

In the West African case, a number of these conditions were met by a critical mass of the participants. In particular, some of the business leaders, consumer advocates, community leaders and international agency representatives set the tone by speaking openly, sharing their own doubts *and personal challenges, and demonstrating a willingness to listen and be influenced by others. The three facilitators were also attentive to embody co-leadership attitudes and behaviors among themselves and with the other participants throughout the workshop.*

What types of tools and assessments can be used to enhance and monitor co-leadership development?

In my experience, a number of tools can help facilitate the emergence of true partnering. They can be introduced before, during or after the initial co-leadership capacity-building workshop. I will mention a few of them here which are available on my website (www.coreleadership.com) and in other books or websites.

- *The Partnership Assessment Questionnaire* uses Ken Wilber's Four-Quadrant Framework to prompt each partner to reflect on their individual intentions and actual behaviors, as well as the current culture and structure of the partnership. I developed a first version of this tool for inclusion in *The Partnering Toolbook*, and recommend that individual co-leaders refer to it regularly, at least at each stage in the evolution of the partnership.
- *Strategies for building partnerships* – adapted from Ros Tennyson's and Luke Wilde's book *The Guiding Hand (9)* – suggest a number of alternative ways to deal with the skeptic, change mindsets among partners, cope with multiple demands, and handle the "pressure" to go public in the early stages.
- Some of the tools based on Chris Argyris' "action science" can be very useful in helping partners surface and challenge their mental models, beliefs and assumptions (*The Ladder of Inference* and *The Left-hand Column), as well as* engage in dialogue and mutual learning (*Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry).* They are described in Sections 35 and 36 of *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (10).*
- The *polarity map* offered by Barry Johnson is a useful tool for helping a group of partners look at the upside and downside aspects of two solutions that are polar opposites. When combined with the practice of high-quality advocacy and inquiry, it enables a group to move from an "either or" position linked to considering mostly the downside of each pole – the polarity is then experienced as a dilemma – toward a "both and" approach that will attempt to combine some of the upside aspects of both poles. It helps develop the partners' capacity to work creatively with paradoxes.
- The *six components of trust* – adapted from Stephen Hacker and Marsha Willard – distinguish components of trustworthiness and trust willingness. This tool can be used to assess periodically the quality of interpersonal relationships within a partnership and lead to enhanced self-awareness and learning. Individual assessment results can be usefully shared and

discussed among partners.

- Bill Veltrop proposes on his website (11) several tools or "wholeness lenses" that can be very useful for self-diagnosis and improvement. In particular, his *Rainbow Lens* offers partners a language to assess the quality of the group's energy as well as the quality of relationships and agreements. Looking at current reality through this lens, co-leaders can determine how they can personally contribute to move the partnership toward a healthier and more sustainable state.

In the West African case, tools such as the ladder of inference and high quality advocacy/inquiry were introduced and practiced during the workshop; the practice in small groups enabled participants to become more aware of their own "growing edges" while addressing some significant communication issues among them. Other tools included in the Partnering Toolbook were recommended for future partnership development work, with the local consultant's help.

As in any action-learning approach, it is important that the <u>effectiveness</u> of the co-leadership capacity-building program be <u>monitored over time</u>. I suggested several specific measures of effectiveness to the Global Foundation, in addition to the outcomes of the Nutrition Program itself. They combine subjective, inter-subjective and objective assessments:

- Periodic self-evaluation and peer evaluation by the partners themselves, using some of the questionnaires and assessment tools mentioned above, supplemented by internal surveys and interviews.
- Documentation by the meeting facilitators and personal coaches of the progress in co-leadership made by individuals and the partners group as a whole, while preserving confidentiality.
- Learning history capturing the evolution of the partnership, on the basis of individual and group interviews of the partners, other stakeholders, and facilitators, and on the meeting notes and evaluations.
- External assessment of the quality of the partnership and of the value it has created for the stakeholders after 1 or 2 years of functioning.
- Documentation of innovative practices and other lessons learned in the partnership that could be disseminated to other countries and regions with similar conditions.

To properly monitor the progress of the partnership, co-leaders need to take the time for evaluation and reflection, and be open to observation and feedback. Both conditions are essential if they are going to learn individually and collectively what is required *over time* to sustain true collective leadership. Equal attention to quality of results and relationships is one of the key characteristics of effective co-leaders.

What are the characteristics of emerging types of leaders?

In the context of multi-stakeholder partnerships, some leaders play the role of "bridge-builder" between members of the alliance. My colleagues and I agree with Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde (9) that most successful tri-sector partnerships are created, built and nurtured by one or more individuals who have taken on the role of the partnership's "broker" or "midwife". Although it is rarely formally acknowledged, the broker's contribution is essential for a partnership-based development initiative to achieve its goal.

- The broker's role and tasks will vary with the specific conditions and the stage of evolution of the partnership. (S)he can either operate within the initiating organization as a coordinator or innovator, or be independent from any organization as an animator or pioneer.
- The broker's skills usually cover a wide range. They include rational analysis, understanding of the past, administrative skills, precise speaking, and professional detachment, as well as imagination, vision of the future, people skills, active listening, and personal engagement.
- Some of the personal qualities needed by a partnership broker are: trustworthiness and integrity, willingness to take risks, equanimity in the face of pressure, personal modesty, and dedication to the principles of partnership.
- Tennyson and Wilde observe that the broker's role, skills and qualities significantly overlap the attributes of the types of leaders that are most needed in the 21st century: accountability, concern for sustainability and cooperation, desire to bring people together across traditional boundaries, effectiveness in convincing others to work together for a common purpose and to build lasting relationships. The authors consider that "partnership brokers epitomize the new style of leadership, operating as catalysts for change by 'guiding', rather than 'directing'…They operate like 'servant leaders', combining a great dream (or vision) and day-to-day practical implications".

Several other researchers and authors come to similar findings about the characteristics of emerging types of leader:

- Mark Gerzon gives many examples of "leaders beyond borders" at local, regional and global levels (12). By embodying and embedding the values of integrity, learning, trust, bridging, and synergy, these new leaders interactively address problems that cannot be solved in a just and sustainable way within the borders of one organization, sector or country.
- Jerry Porras found that *Build to Last* companies (13) were led by learning leaders or "organizational architects", whose focus was on building the company rather than charismatically leading it: they were thoughtful, quiet, humble, soft spoken, and good listeners.
- Jim Collins, co-author of *Build to Last* and author of *Good to Great* (14), observed that *Good to Great* companies were led by "level 5" leaders who demonstrated a paradoxical blend of personal humility and great ambition

for their organization. These leaders measured their true effectiveness by the number and quality of leaders who emerged at all levels in the organization.

- In *An Evolutionary Agenda for the Third Millenium* (15), Alan Lithman notes that leaders who work as "evolutionary activists" in this transition period tend to be self-giving (rather than self-serving), and demonstrate humility, sincerity and integrity in their daily behavior. They cultivate "inner sustainability" as a condition for promoting outer sustainability.
- Petra Künkel (1), who interviewed 14 leaders from different parts of the world for her forthcoming book, quotes one of them as saying: "When you operate with the importance of the collective, you don't have to have your ego out there. You work from within, or from behind". She adds: "Leadership is a conscious collective endeavor if the diversity of people and opinions is not only acknowledged but also encouraged". By gradually reducing personal anxiety and attachment to self, a leader reduces his/her need for self-protection and self-assertiveness, and opens the way to responsiveness, service, trust, and sustainable co-creation. To paraphrase Nelson Mandela, a leader's journey is a long road to inner freedom, freedom from fear and from the limitations of the mind.

<u>From a developmental perspective</u>, there is a significant shift that happens between "conventional" and "post-conventional" stages of personal development. Bill Torbert and Susanne Cook-Greuter (16) have designed an instrument – The Leadership Development Profile, adapted from Jane Loevinger – that has been used by more than 5000 people to become more aware of their own stage of development or "action logic", and of their "growing edge".

- *Conventional leaders* (approximately 90% of the sample) tend to conform to society's rules of conduct and expectations. They pursue rational knowledge, focus on what can be objectively measured, and have a time horizon from one to three years. They search for the most effective, efficient or right way, and achieve organizational goals through complex coordination of efficiently performed tasks. They tend to be "ethno-centric" – i.e. concerned with the well-being of a specific group of people – and react critically to action logics that are different from their own, believing that their own worldview is the valid one.
- *Post-conventional leaders* (approximately 10% of the sample) do things ethically to keep the system whole. They pursue wisdom and are aware of the limitations of the rational mind. They have a time horizon that can extend to decades or multiple generations, and prioritize options by viability and long-term consequences. They manifest empathy, maturely handle conflictual situations, and see more of the whole dynamic system.
  They collaborate with diverse stakeholders to optimize among competing goals across generations. They tend to be "world-centric" – i.e. concerned with the well-being of all living inhabitants of the Earth – and see all stages of development as equally legitimate and useful to an organization or

community. They are able to communicate with every other action logic in a way that can be understood and accepted, and open the door for further development.
- The key shift between conventional and post-conventional leadership is in the level of awareness and the capacity to be fully present to what is, rather than filtering it through mental models or past experience. As learners, post-conventional leaders are aware of who they are at their best, inquire continually into their worldview, and engage others in learning together. They keep cleaning, refining and tuning their own "inner instrument", and often ask themselves: what is trying to happen through me? They are willing to change the way they use their will, by both exercising it and surrendering it to a larger will.

In the West African case, it became clear that at least three of the participants were playing a role of partnership broker or midwife, and demonstrated many of the qualities of "level 5", "bridging" or "post-conventional" leaders. Although they were from different sectors – the local head of the international NGO designated as the executive agency, the representative of an international agency, and the director of the local subsidiary of a multinational corporation – the three of them were helping the group see the situation from the whole.

One of the outcomes of the workshop was that a number of other participants broadened their perspective on what was needed for the partnership to succeed, and felt empowered to contribute to that success from within their own organization. Many of them were also aware that individual coaching and additional facilitating work would be needed over the next year or so to help them adopt personal and interpersonal practices that would enable them to play their part as co-leaders.

What are some of the practices that co-leaders can adopt to accelerate their own development?

A number of <u>personal practices</u> can enable leaders to engage in individual action inquiry and shift from conventional to post-conventional action logics:
- Keeping a journal of one's personal observations, reflections and learning, particularly when dealing with challenging relationships, dilemmas or external change.
- Noticing one's contradictory or paradoxical desires and longings, and drawing the distinction between desires and intentions.
- Paying attention to one's state of being and to the quality of one's talking and listening, thus becoming more aware of one's habitual attitudes and behavior.
- Surfacing and challenging one's assumptions, with the help of tools such as the left-hand column, the ladder of inference, or Robert Kegan's four-

column conceptual map (17). Reflecting on how what one is doing is contributing to things being the way they are.
- Deepening one's intuition and inner knowing through consciousness-raising practices such as meditation, chi gung, martial art practices, improvisational theater; using body awareness as a way to transcend the limitations of the mind and deepen one's sense of what is.
- Developing one's capacity to sense reality at a deeper level and to "presence" what is wanting to emerge, for instance through solo retreats in nature (18).

<u>Interpersonal practices</u> and collective action inquiry among co-leaders will also help accelerate the shift from conventional to post-conventional action logics (some of them have already been mentioned in the previous section):
- Practicing high-quality advocacy and inquiry – as well as empathic listening – to shift conversations from "talking nice" or "talking tough" to a *reflective dialogue*, where each protagonist inquires into and stops identifying with their own point of view, and attempts to see reality from the other's perspective (19); using silence to slow down the conversation and open up to what is trying to emerge, allowing oneself to be more open and authentic.
- Practicing presence and flow in a *generative dialogue*, where each group member listens from the whole and experiences a blurring of boundaries, where new ideas or solutions are created that no one claims as their own, and where collective intelligence emerges from a personal sense of connection to the source of creativity.
- Viewing and valuing differences as an expression of needed diversity.
- Considering and addressing conflicts or adverse events as opportunities to learn and to find out-of-the-box solutions; seeking out people who have different, even opposing perspectives, and imagine being in their shoes; learning to create a safe space for bridging adversarial positions, where trust can be built over time.
- Applying tools such as mental maps and systems thinking archetypes to address complex issues and deepen one's sense of interconnectedness.
- Building a shared vision with diverse stakeholders who bring different perspectives and competencies.

How can partnering across sectors help accelerate the development of collective leadership?

Looking at both the specific challenges of multi-sector partnering and the characteristics and practices of emerging co-leaders, it becomes clear that partnering across sectors offers <u>several key opportunities</u> for developing collective leadership, while solving societal problems for the benefit of the whole. I have summarized and regrouped these opportunities here under four interdependent developmental domains:

1. Embracing greater diversity
   - In a monograph titled *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (20), Jim Collins distinguishes between two types of leadership skills: executive and legislative. While most business leaders rely primarily on *executive* skill (i.e. ordering people to act), government and not-for-profit leaders must rely on *legislative* skill to achieve greatness for their organizations. Collins writes: "Legislative leadership relies more upon persuasion, political currency and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decision to happen". Both types are important for all leaders, but *executive* leadership alone won't work in the social sectors. In an increasing complex and connected world, it is likely that business leaders can learn a lot from their not-for-profit counterparts, not just the other way around.
   - In developmental terms, a different set of values tends to predominate in the culture of each sector. The public sector tends to be focused on order and equality, the business sector on opportunities and benefits, and the civil society sector on community and dignity. Partnership brokers and co-leaders learn to bridge these cultural gaps between sectors; they use a language and refer to principles that all others can understand and relate to. In so doing, they tend to operate from post-conventional action logics. In particular, they are able to move easily across diverse time horizons, decision-making styles and implementation capabilities, and apply change methodologies that are adapted to the needs and possibilities of each sector.
   - Cooperating across sectors requires openness and significant changes in attitudes among partners. For example, some NGO leaders will need to interact with corporate leaders they have spent years criticizing; although it may feel initially like "collaborating with the enemy", it will certainly enrich their perspective on key issues.

2. Practicing systems thinking
   - Development initiatives that involve several sectors are by nature complex, with very few precedents to learn from. They require an ability to look at the whole system and to sense reality at a deeper level, in order to detect emerging possibilities and realize them in a collaborative way. As John W. Gardner suggests, "the coming together of different segments of society creates a wholeness that incorporates diversity".
   - The process of transformation that can take place within a multi-sector partnership depends upon the adoption of entirely new ways of thinking and behaving about the issues at hand. It offers co-leaders an opportunity to examine and challenge together the deep mental structures and habits that sustain the existing system.
   - To be effective in addressing the issue they focus on, partners need to create a microcosm of the larger system, with all participants coming in on an equal footing, as issue owners and decision makers. It is a first

step in building system self-awareness that will lead to catalyzing collective action across sectors, and to creating a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.
- Partnerships, alliances and networks that involve actors at multiple levels offer an opportunity to connect global-national-local as different places in a networked world, rather than as a top-down hierarchy. This is a key skill in evolving organizations that are neither centralized nor decentralized, but “uncentralized”, with effective collective leadership at and across all levels.

3. Leading change through dialogic processes
    - Multi-stakeholder dialogue is central to the change process in partnerships, alliances, and networks. It is key to achieve third-order change, i.e. transformed deep structures and relationships. Co-leaders learn to shift from consulting or managing stakeholders to including them in the core decision-making process. Dialogic communication allows coherence to emerge from diversity.
    - True dialogue is not easy to practice within an organization or a sector. Multi-sector dialogue raises the bar even higher, thus offering many opportunities to increase one’s proficiency as a dialogue convener and facilitator.
    - Dialogic processes happen best in a circle and require flexible or rotating leadership, one of the key aspects of collective leadership.
    - Partners learn to practice dialogue as a verb (vs. as an event), as a quality of conversation in their day-to-day activities, and as a way of relating to each other to achieve greater change impact. They have the opportunity to move into what Hal Saunders calls “sustained dialogue” – a systematic, open-ended political process that transforms conflictual relationships over time.

4. Engaging in personal change
    - The education, experience and references of leaders vary widely from sector to sector. Partnering will likely challenge each co-leader to stretch beyond their comfort zone, and invite them often to adopt more often a stance of not knowing.
    - Reflecting publicly on one’s behavior and lessons learned is hard enough in homogeneous groups; the challenge is magnified when working across sectors, where personal vulnerability and transparency are conditions for building trust.
    - Co-leadership is enhanced when human interactions are based on mutual respect and caring. Compassion for self and others and a sense of solidarity naturally develop among co-leaders, liberating their innovative potential as a group.
    - In successful partnerships, co-leaders engage in processes that induce them to make conscious decisions to change their behaviors, and to comply with rules by virtue of having participated in the rule making.

They learn through purposeful experiments to determine what works, and to acknowledge shared responsibility for both problems and solutions.

- Cross-sector partnering invites co-leaders to consider issues from multiple perspectives, for example as a citizen, a consumer, a policy-maker or a manager. Contributing to healing the fragmentation among sectors and society starts with healing the fragmentation within oneself and getting in touch with one's humanness.
- Partnerships rely on voluntary participation and coordination and it is the human connection that is the true lever for change. They cannot rely on the traditional uses of power and hierarchical structures that are prevalent in most businesses and governments. Learning to establish and cultivate that human connection is a key dimension of building collective leadership.
- Partners learn the importance of trusting oneself, others, and life, as a prerequisite for leading and building structures that are loose enough to embrace the complexity of people and life, and to enable collective intelligence to manifest.
- Several Global Leadership Initiatives are currently pursued by using the U process (see Adam Kahane's and Hein Dijksterhuis' chapter*),* which posits that transformative change requires accessing the inner source from which leaders make decisions, individually and collectively. This process offers co-leaders an opportunity to engage in a number of the personal and interpersonal practices mentioned in the preceding section.

Awareness of these opportunities has led some multinational corporations, local businesses, NGOs, international and other public agencies to actively seek to collaborate on multi-sector projects, not only to achieve desirable outcomes for the larger community, but also to offer accelerated development avenues to some of their most promising leaders. Over the last fifteen years, opportunities to partner or network on the most pressing global challenges have been increasing – with the growing number and influence of NGOs and civil society organizations, and the engagement of corporations in social and environmental issues, for instance as part of the UN Compact. Leaders in some companies have become network conveners to address creatively multi-stakeholder issues such as sustainable logging methods or the need for a global organic cotton exchange (21). Cross-organizational networks like the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) and GAN-Net (4) offer their members opportunities to engage in peer-shadowing, experience-sharing, and joint projects across sectors.

These initiatives can also be viewed as an attempt to fill the gaps left by the ineffectiveness of traditional intergovernmental negotiations, for example on climate changes or agricultural subsidies. They represent one of the answers to a growing sense of urgency among leaders in various walks of life, who are deeply concerned about the non-sustainable nature of current economic and social trends. As Jean-François Rischard says, "we are facing 20 global problems with 20 years to solve them". It will take an increasing number of collective leaders and "evolutionary activists" to meet these global challenges and respond effectively "to the crisis of the shared space between humans" that Martin Buber wrote about.

In conclusion, focusing purposefully on collective leadership development in multi-stakeholder contexts offer clear benefits at three levels: individual leaders can grow faster in maturity and find increased meaning in their work; organizations in all sectors can attract and retain people who are looking for significant challenges, while contributing effectively to solving critical problems; society's capacity to learn as a whole and heal its fragmentation also increases through the activity of diverse co-leaders acting as bridge-builders, partnership brokers or network conveners. Finally, the diversity of multi-sector groups and the complexity of issues they need to address represent a great opportunity to both apply proven action-learning approaches and to truly break new ground.

My hope is that this chapter contributes to strengthening the case for multi-sector co-leadership development among leaders who are concerned with the evolution of our organizations and society – both locally and globally. If pursued at the right level of depth and scale and with a long-term commitment, that orientation will result in profound changes in at least two key domains: 1) design and implementation of advanced leadership development and career plan options for business managers, public servants, NGO and community leaders; 2) policies and priorities of leadership associations, international agencies, NGOs, and donors who fund development programs.

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