

White Paper  
WINTER 2018

# Leading Change: Building Our Collective Capacity



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## The scale and complexity of our problems today is both a source of breakdown and opportunity.

It is prompting us out of the age of individualism into a new era of collective action. This is the only way we can get out of the mess we are in. We now know that expert-driven, top-down solutions, policies, and plans quickly become obsolete. The shift to more collective responses to the current crises is happening, led by courageous groups who are exercising a new kind of leadership. What is this new kind of leadership that we need?

### **Leadership paradigms are changing.**

We are shifting away from the heroic image of the leader who carries the weight of the world on his or her back. Margaret Wheatley calls it “leader as host”, calling forth the involvement of the wider community to lead change. Peter Senge calls for a generation of “systems leaders”, who can work together in service of the whole. Otto Scharmer speaks of building platforms of collaboration between change agents who can co-sense, co-presence, and co-create the emerging future together. Tom Atlee speaks of leaderful communities, that awaken the collective wisdom. This new era of collective action asks us to open our perception, to be nimble, to step beyond silos, stretch ourselves and embrace diversity. It taps into a growing need to be of service, to make a difference, to be part of something greater.

### **Leadership is becoming more collective in nature, but leadership for what purpose?**

Being fully aware of the challenges we are in, we cannot accept a type of leadership that perpetuates the status quo. Many of us are yearning for a world that is sustainable, socially-just, and spiritually fulfilling. But even the word “sustainability” has become jaded. It’s helpful to point out Tom Atlee’s distinction between weak

and strong sustainability. Weak sustainability mainstreams specific social and environmental concerns, while maintaining the same definition of progress we have today, keeping the status quo intact. Strong sustainability advocates for altering systems at all levels as well as cultural and institutional norms to address the real needs of communities and the environment at all levels. The goal of strong sustainability is to strive for resilience (in the face of changes and disruptions) and systemic health.

### **From these roots, a leadership approach is born.**

It is an approach that has many names and faces. Here we will call it “Participatory Leadership”. It is pushed by the winds of social innovation and its social technologies such as the Art of Hosting. It is also nourished by the human potential movement, and the development of consciousness through mindfulness, awakening our 3 centers of intelligence: head, heart, and body. It is embodied leadership, working to enliven us individually and collectively through movement practices. It has a systemic and integral view, to serve the whole while preventing blindspots, silos, and scapegoating. These roots constitute a fundamentally relational approach, addressing the deep human needs of belonging, meaning, and contribution, often achieved at the scale of a community.

### **We know what we want, how do we get there?**

Many of us have been part of initiatives that promised a different future, often leaving us disappointed. We have witnessed the same dynamics play out again and again. These dynamics point to an undercurrent of fear and distrust in society, a “looking out for #1 attitude”. Many of us have been socialized for competition, consumption and

accumulation, concerned only for our own interests, often blind to the common good. Or, we may even have the common good as our vision, but are unable to address the difficulties of working across differences and sectors. How do we break these patterns, and start to walk the talk? We do so by building our collective capacity.

**We can build our collective capacity by participating in the "Leading Change" training.**

In this approach to leadership, we can experience the power of collective action on behalf of the greater whole. We have created a model of five competencies to continually develop, and a toolkit of practices and methodologies that can be used flexibly in situations as the need arises. The five competencies are:

- 1. Facilitation:** We need to be able to create safe and inspiring spaces to host conversations that matter.
- 2. Vision:** We need a guiding star, a shared vision that will provide a sense of common purpose, strong enough to keep us together and overcome the many obstacles in the road
- 3. Community-building:** We need to create a sense of joint identity, a culture rooted in values, practices, and stories, that enhance our sense of togetherness, learning, and impact.
- 4. Communication:** The foundation for this type of leadership rests on how we communicate, address our difficulties, and build relationships.
- 5. Self-mastery:** This approach needs each individual to continually self-develop and self-regulate through mindfulness practice, each of us becoming the change that we want to see in the world.

*What are the outcomes of the "Leading Change" training?*

Through building these capacities, we start to generate a set of collective assets, intangible and tangible in nature. The most important one being trust: the perceived sense that we can rely on each other and that "we are in it together". Our shared vision becomes a treasure of meaning and direction. It points to a journey to undertake together, full of discovery and co-creation. The community we build offers a diverse talent base to address a variety of individual and collective needs that emerge in this journey. Our communication abilities make us resilient in face of the inevitable conflicts. The knowledge base generated strengthens our understanding, purpose and resolve. When we start to practice the tools and methodologies, we make them our own, for a sense of empowerment and a feeling of "we can do this!"

**We wish to plant and nourish seeds in countless communities around the world; communities of concerned citizens who want to play a role in turning the tide.**

We believe we are in the midst of a great transition towards a more sustainable planet. Each example of communities like Bayou opens the door of inspiration and empowerment for many others to do the same. We hope the next one to be the Indianapolis area, which is ripe for this kind of intervention, as countless change agents envision a new future for their city. In time, we hope to see a critical mass of communities, demonstrating the kind of participatory leadership we need today to care for ourselves, each other and our planet.

For more information and registration, please visit our website:  
<http://www.byronfellowship.org/leadingchange/>

## *Leading Change In Action: Bayou LeBatre, Alabama*

**Communities in different parts of the world demonstrate the Leading Change journey.**

An example is Bayou LaBatre, Alabama ("Bayou"). Bayou represents a number of coastal communities in the United States that face recurring natural and human-made disasters. A group of 10 concerned citizens set aside 1 week of their busy schedules to develop their collective capacity and think about their town of Bayou and how can they be of service. The participants represented a wide variety of sectors including economic development, education, health, infrastructure, local government, citizen organization, and tourism.

**The training and the assembled team left the week with a number of assets in place.**

The most powerful asset was the collective capacity created. The participants themselves led a day of community involvement, where they shared another key asset: their shared vision for Bayou. A guest from a potential funding organization who heard this vision, was instantly struck. She invited the group to be part of a regional planning initiative that needed grassroots leadership and participation, precisely the kind that was practiced here. This has opened the door for the potential funding of initiatives that stem from their co-creation.

**These assets allowed the community to take more effective action.**

Another asset was the platforms of communication and collaboration that were put in place (WhatsApp group, google docs, zoom calls, etc). These enabled the group to prepare and exchange vital information during Hurricane Nate (September 2017), making them more responsive and resilient facing this storm. These stories were picked up by the local paper, gaining media attention, inspiring wider interest in this initiative. Three concrete outcomes (interest by a potential funder, disaster preparedness, and media attention) were quick wins that showed the group how much is possible through their Leading Change initiative.

**A seed was planted in that community; a very promising seed.**

This seed is a network of talented people who care about their community and are willing to facilitate spaces of meaningful conversation, for others' voices to be heard, and to co-create a new story for their town. This seed dreams of becoming a forest of interconnected and robust trees, with strong roots capable of withstanding any storm, any disaster that comes to their area.