

— HOW TO —
**CROSS BOUNDARIES,
BUILD BRIDGES,
AND LEAD CHANGE**

LEADERSHIP

for a

**FRACTURED
WORLD**



DEAN WILLIAMS

Author of Real Leadership

Foreword by *His Holiness the Dalai Lama*



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—**Doris Sommer, Director, Cultural Agents Initiative, Harvard University**

“Given the deeply held but often conflicting beliefs of people everywhere, this wonderful book is necessary reading for each of us attempting to navigate the complex realities confronting organizations and people today.”

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“A must-read for any leader! Our world is so globalized on the one hand and so divided by intolerance and tribalism on the other it needs leaders who are able to understand enigmatic problems, appreciate conflicting perspectives, and operate in complex environments. This book will help you become a global change agent by helping people transcend their differences and work together in the construction of a new world order.”

—**Jamil Mahuad, Mayor of Quito, 1992–1998, and President of Ecuador, 1998–2000**

LEADERSHIP

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LEADERSHIP — *for a* — FRACTURED WORLD

Dean Williams



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Leadership for a Fractured World

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To Rosie

To Mum

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Foreword

By His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Many of the world's problems and conflicts arise because we have lost sight of the basic humanity that binds us all together as a human family. We tend to forget that despite the diversity of race, religion, ideology, and so forth, people are equal in their basic wish for peace and happiness.

When we see pictures of our blue planet from space, there are no signs of boundaries. It's a vivid illustration of the oneness of humanity. This is why we have to make the well-being of humanity our primary concern. We have efficient education and remarkable technological development, yet we still face many problems. None of us want these problems, but we seem to create them for ourselves. Why? Because we are too self-centered; we place too much stress on our own narrow interests with not enough consideration for the needs of others.

Today, despite ongoing conflicts and the threat of terrorism, most people are genuinely concerned about world peace, far less interested in propounding ideology, and far more committed to coexistence.

During the twentieth century, a greater number of human beings met their deaths through violence than at any other time, and the damage done to the natural environment was very serious. But as a result of these experiences, humanity is becoming more mature. This is evident in the growing concern for peace, non-violence, and human rights. Even politicians increasingly talk about “compassion” and “reconciliation.” Despite a faltering start, the twenty-first century could become one of dialogue, one in which compassion, the seed of nonviolence, will be able to flourish.

We may sometimes feel that we can solve a problem quickly by force, but such success is often achieved at the expense of the rights and welfare of others. One problem may have been solved, but the seed of another is planted, thus opening a new chapter in a cycle of violence and counterviolence. Preventive measures and restraint have to be adopted right from the start. Clearly leaders need to be alert, far-sighted, and decisive. Mahatma Gandhi, who was such a leader, pointed out that, if we are seriously interested in peace, it must be achieved through peaceful and nonviolent means.

I believe that in ancient times the status of men and women was more or less equal, with everyone sharing an equal load of work. Then, with the establishment of settled communities, power became a factor between them. And the basis for power was physical; therefore, because they are generally physically stronger, men came to predominate. In modern times, with the introduction of education for all, the basis for power, survival, and improvement has been the brain, so the difference between men and women has changed and become less obvious. Now, when the world is so much more interdependent, compassion and warm-heartedness are required, and women have an equal responsibility to lead.

In today's reality, the only way of resolving differences is through dialogue and compromise, through human understanding and humility. We need to address the gap between rich and poor. Inequality, with some sections of humanity living in abundance while others on the same planet go hungry, is morally wrong and practically a source of problems. Equally important is the issue of freedom. As long as there is no freedom in some parts of the world, there can be no real peace and in a sense no real freedom for the rest of the world.

Perhaps the most important factors that inhibit us are short-sightedness, narrow-mindedness, and selfishness. The challenge for leaders is to help people transcend self-interest and the immediate interests of their group in order to collaborate and promote shared happiness.

I hope and pray that readers of this book by Dean Williams will contribute to the good of the world by taking the initiative in giving a lead wherever they can to help our communities and societies solve the toughest problems. Peaceful living is about trusting those on whom we depend and caring for those who depend on us. If even a few individuals create mental peace and happiness within themselves and act responsibly and kind-heartedly toward others, they will have a positive influence in their community. Our goal should be a more peaceful and equitable world, not only for the present generation, but also for our children and the generations to come.

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Preface

This book is about helping people and groups that have great differences come together to solve shared problems. It is about providing leadership to address the interdependent challenges, real dangers, and abundant opportunities generated by the fractured, complex, and unpredictable world in which we live. Interdependent problems cannot be resolved by one group acting alone or in isolation, and therefore a new notion of leadership and change is needed. Today we need to be global change agents.

By “global change agent,” I do not mean someone crisscrossing the globe solving world problems but anyone, at the local or international level, who has a broad mindset and is committed to making the world a better place. The global change agent (1) mobilizes people to cross the boundaries that divide groups to address shared problems; (2) helps groups bust the boundaries and maladaptive practices that keep people from effectively responding to emerging threats and the demands of a changing world; (3) works with divided and fractured groups to build a relational bridge by healing wounds, reducing the mystery of the other, and resolving conflicts; and (4) intervenes when a group

is stuck to stimulate sufficient creativity to transcend confining boundaries to produce breakthrough solutions.

Global change agents who can exercise leadership are needed at all levels of society and in all domains of human activity. The book is for leaders in business, politics, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, education, and government. It is for anyone who must work across silos, divisions, and borders to exercise leadership. It is for those with considerable power who seek to lead from positions of authority and for those with little power who seek to lead from the margins or at the grassroots. Fundamentally, the book is for those passionate and committed people who desire to contribute to a better world. The reality is that, in so many areas, our world is fractured, and small fault lines and deep chasms divide groups. There is much work to be done at both the local and international levels to fix what is broken, pursue value-adding opportunities, and help groups transcend their differences to create something of worth for all.

The ideas and principles presented in this book have been shaped by conversations I have had with many leaders and change agents. At the Harvard Kennedy School, I chair The Global Change Agent executive education program, and I have been enriched by the experiences and insights of the participants. I also direct the World Leaders Project, based at the Center for Public Leadership, and have had the special opportunity to interview many leaders to get their advice and lessons. These include Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Mary Robinson of Ireland and the United Nations, Shimon Peres of Israel, Malcolm Fraser of Australia, Felipe Calderón of Mexico, Lech Walesa of Poland, and the Dalai Lama, to name just a few. I have also interviewed many change agents in business, public service, education, NGOs, and civil society. These are people at

the forefront of change, whether as activists, organizers, educators, entrepreneurs, managers, thinkers, or innovators.

The book also draws on my experience helping groups change. I have worked with many corporations on leadership development and cultural change to help them become more adaptive and globally competitive. I have participated in large-scale change initiatives in educational reform in Australia and the United States. I have also been an adviser to many different governments, including Nigeria, Brunei, and East Timor. For several years, I served as the chief adviser to the president of Madagascar, helping him facilitate the development of one of the poorest nations on the planet. Significant progress was being made until a rogue faction in the military launched an ugly coup in 2009.

When it comes to leadership and change, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. This book captures my insights.

Leadership for a fractured world is a complex topic, and no single theory can do it justice. Therefore, I have adopted a multidisciplinary approach in the writing of this book by drawing on research and theories from anthropology, social psychology, human development, and business.

The book is also a contribution to the adaptive leadership framework, as first articulated by Ronald Heifetz and Riley Sinder in their seminal paper that distinguished leadership from authority, and technical work from adaptive work.¹ Both are my friends, colleagues, and collaborators, and we continue to work together to push the frontier of the understanding and teaching of adaptive leadership.

How should you use this book? I have not written it with the intention of giving clear-cut prescriptive answers, as one might do in writing about performance management where the problem and goals are clear. This is a book about addressing messy, adaptive

problems that have no clear textbook answers. I present guidelines, ideas, and cases that illustrate ways to think about how to approach these kinds of problems. By describing an array of cases of men and women succeeding or failing in a variety of contexts, I hope that you, the reader, will draw connections to your own particular leadership challenges. Think about what the boundaries are that confine or limit you, your group, or organization. Think about the boundaries that need to be crossed, busted, or transcended. Think about the kind of leadership you need to provide to make the world a better place. I hope the principles presented will help you on your leadership journey.

INTRODUCTION

It's a Crazy, Fractured World

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI (1469–1527)

It's a crazy world, and it is a fractured world, and we all feel the stress and see the fractures, and frustratingly ask, "Where is the leadership?" I have been wrestling with this question for a long time.

As a young doctoral student, I lived for a time in the remote rainforests of Borneo with a nomadic tribe called the Penan, where I studied social and cultural adaptation. The Penan hunted with a blowpipe, wore a simple loincloth, and had boar tusks protruding through their pierced earlobes. One evening eating sago palm and roasted monkey around the campfire and telling stories, a small group of Penan young men arrived after having spent a month away working for a logging company. They brought with them a "boom box," and I shall never forget when they turned it on and Madonna's voice could be heard screeching through the forest, "Like a virgin, touched for the very first time. . . ." As she sang,

I thought, "This is surreal—and depressing—as the Penan's life will never be the same."

The intrusive aspects of globalization had disrupted the Penan's life and also disrupted one of the world's most magnificent and essential rainforests—and not just because of Madonna's singing, but because of the competition of diverse groups for scarce and valuable resources. The developed nations of the world wanted the hardwoods in the Penan's forest for the building of houses and furniture, the government wanted the revenues from deforestation for development, and entrepreneurial businessmen and some politicians saw an unprecedented opportunity to make a quick profit. Saving the forest and ensuring the Penan had a say in their future was a complex challenge involving many groups with competing priorities and values: the local government, environmental activists, the World Bank, the nations that purchased the timber, and, of course, the Penan themselves.

The reality is that even though media technology is breaking down boundaries and connecting us in unprecedented ways, fractures are abundant and all groups are in a state of volatility and vulnerability—whether it is the Penan of Borneo or an investment bank on Wall Street.

Today we need men and women who have the courage and the capacity to orchestrate multidimensional problem solving and change to address complex challenges. This is a different kind of leadership than what we have become accustomed to. Traditional forms of leadership, in particular what I call "big man leadership," tend to advance the interests of one group over another and inadvertently perpetuate fractures and divisions.

Fractures and divisions are reinforced by group boundaries. Boundaries could be professional, structural, cultural, ideological, ethnic, gender, or religious boundaries, to name just a few. They

create and protect spaces within which coordinated work and living processes take place. A boundary is a form of constraint, but it is also a frontier. As a frontier it presents fascinating opportunities for exploration, learning, expansion, and creative discovery. To mobilize people to address interdependent challenges and to orchestrate change, leaders work at the boundaries. While traditional leaders reinforce boundaries, change agents exercise leadership to help groups expand boundaries, cross divides, and build bridges to address shared challenges.

If groups and institutions do not have enough people providing leadership to address fractures and to mobilize people to tackle interdependent problems, they will fail to deliver on their promise, persist in a state of mediocrity, and might even collapse. They will certainly not be as productive as they could be.

For example, a multinational software company that I advise is struggling with the challenge of being a truly global company. It has more than ten thousand employees in different parts of the world. The dilemma is that internal silos inhibit the communication, coordination, and problem solving needed to take the company to the next level of performance, innovation, and profitability. Many of the executives, by inclination or preference, stay within their group enclave, get stuck or lost in hierarchy and procedure, and do not display the initiative needed to cross boundaries and build the relationships needed to produce innovative breakthroughs for the company. A senior human resources executive who saw this pattern as a high-priority challenge asked me, "How can we shake these people out of their comfort zones and get them to be global leaders of change?"

Companies are not alone in this challenge. Educational systems, governments, and every group or tribe in the world today face the challenge of dealing with complexity, interdependence,

inhibiting boundaries, and the demands for change. Whether you are the police chief in Ferguson, Missouri; a community activist in Bogotá, Colombia; a school principal in Geelong, Australia; the mayor of Beijing; the head of an NGO in Liberia; a software engineer in Silicon Valley; or a businessman in Tokyo, you must learn how to provide change agent leadership to address the array of complex problems and challenges facing your particular group, organization, or community.

Chapter 1 of this book talks about why the world is a crazy and fractured place. It explains how the cultural drift of groups—the habitual ways of thinking and operating—thwarts problem solving and creative work as it pertains to addressing interdependent challenges. The chapter explains why big man leadership—the expression of prominence, dominance, and tribalizing—is insufficient for dealing with complex problems, and why global change agents are needed.

Chapter 2 addresses the diagnostic work needed to figure out where the fractures are and why they persist. It explores how cultural practices, sacred values, and group narratives generate divisions between groups, reinforce group boundaries, and impede interdependent problem solving. The chapter presents a diagnostic framework for analyzing group dynamics and determining both the adaptive and maladaptive features of group behavior. Maladaptive group features will need to be modified, while adaptive features can be leveraged to support the work of problem solving and change.

Chapter 3 presents the specific leadership challenge of crossing boundaries. To provide leadership, you must cross multiple boundaries to mobilize diverse groups to tackle interdependent problems. Crossing boundaries is not easy or natural. It can also be risky because you must leave a state of predictability and safety for a state of vulnerability and uncertainty. You need to be responsible

for what blessing or threat you represent to diverse groups and find wise partners to help navigate the terrain and deal with boundary keepers if you are to succeed in your leadership efforts.

Chapter 4 explains the leadership challenge of busting boundaries. Boundaries are reinforced by group values, habits, and practices. They can be like walls that limit people's capacity to see and respond to the realities of changing conditions, new threats, and exciting opportunities. Group members might not consider the boundary as a constraint but as a welcome protective barrier that allows them to continue doing what they always have done. The task of the change agent is to challenge one's own group's boundaries, help people appreciate what is at stake if they do not change, and work with them to eliminate those practices that reduce their capacity to connect, adapt, and succeed.

Chapter 5 presents the leadership challenge of transcending boundaries. Transcending boundaries is creative work. It is about helping the group depart from the familiar and venture into unfamiliar terrain with a spirit of exploration, experimentation, and discovery. It includes harnessing the power of diversity to engage in innovation to generate novel and breakthrough solutions.

Chapter 6 presents the leadership challenge of building a bridge between groups. Enmity, or the fact that different groups are simply a mystery to one another, may cause or perpetuate a deep divide between groups. Wounds must be healed, the mystery must be reduced, relationships must be rebuilt, and collaborative work on behalf of a shared future must begin.

Chapter 7 explains how to expand your personal boundaries in order to increase your capacity to provide leadership for a crazy and fractured world. Leadership requires getting others to expand, bust, and transcend boundaries, but if you cannot do likewise, how can you lead? Expanding personal boundaries is

about broadening your mindset to become more globally oriented, developing in cultural and moral wisdom, and enhancing your capacity to operate in complex, chaotic, and diverse environments.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, speaks to how to keep oneself from fracturing or succumbing to the strain of leading in a crazy world. In exercising leadership as a global change agent, it is easy to get tired, become cynical, burn out, or give up. The burden of responsibility, as well as the risk and danger, cannot be taken out of the work, but you can increase your capacity, effectiveness, and resilience in the face of these demands. Your personal challenge is not only to survive but to thrive, and to find joy and satisfaction in this noble work of making the world a better place.

PART 1

Preparation

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CHAPTER 1

What Leadership for a Fractured World Entails

The world in so many ways is fractured. The fractures in groups and between groups could be wide fractures that divide, hairline fractures that generate a state of susceptibility and vulnerability, or latent fault lines that can crack open when some sudden change erupts due to internal or external pressure. Many groups, institutions, and communities are in a fractured state in varying degrees. Somehow, we seem to hobble along, but the reality is few things quite live up to their promise. In fact, what we repeatedly see are systems breaking down—be they institutional systems, economic systems, political systems, or environmental systems, to name but a few—and we all frustratingly ask, “Where is the leadership?”

To provide leadership for a fractured world, we need a different way to think about leadership. We cannot think of leadership exclusively in terms of the “big man” or the “tribal boss” who

represents the interests of their group alone. We need to distinguish real leadership from formal authority.¹ Leaders today must be agents of change who are willing and able to cross boundaries, connect groups, and orchestrate multidimensional problem solving and change. Without that kind of leadership, the fractures that separate us will only get worse.

Leadership Is Needed to Help Groups Transcend the Tribal Impulse to Solve Interdependent Problems

Most people do not fully appreciate the systemic nature of their problems. We think and act parochially. The cultures of our respective groups and the respective roles we play in these groups often cause us to view problems through the narrow and myopic lens of immediate self- or group interest. Consequently, groups are inclined to see only pieces of a complex problem and end up working on their own small bit without making much headway.

Even though we live in a globalized world, in many ways we are still very tribal. By “tribal,” I mean that we affiliate ourselves with groups that inform our identity and from which we derive meaning. These days, many of us belong to multiple tribes—the company tribe, the church tribe, the family tribe, and even many online tribes. Tribal groups since the beginning of time have been important for community and security. When a group gets too big or amorphous, it is easy to get lost and feel uneasy, so for biological, psychological, and cultural reasons we retreat to the safety of some form of an identity group or tribe.

Social science research on group behavior supports the notion of tribalism and explains how it generates in-groups and out-groups. The renowned Harvard biologist and naturalist, E. O. Wilson, has

articulated the tribal impulse by arguing that as human beings, we have innate tendencies, predispositions, and emotional capacities that lead us to identify with a group—or tribe—that provides fellowship, protection, coordinating mechanisms, parameters for action, and frameworks for interpreting the human experience.² While tribal by nature, we are willing to create networks of tribes to expand boundaries, colonize territory, engage in trade and agriculture, and go to war and defeat enemies. In his insightful book *Moral Tribes*, Joshua Greene, who directs the Moral Cognition Lab at Harvard, describes how our brains are designed for tribal life, leading us to make choices to advance our own group's interests at the expense of others and to rationalize such behavior as appropriate and moral.³ The tribal impulse indicates that we want to be around people who are similar to us in terms of values, looks, language, humor, food, and desires.

The tribal impulse can be seen even in progressive places such as Belgium, the nation whose capital houses the headquarters for the European Union. The EU offices in Brussels may symbolize unity, yet all is not well in Belgium. Some Dutch-speaking people of the Flanders region want to separate from the French-speaking people of the Walloon region. Their tensions are rooted in historical, economic, cultural, linguistic, and political differences. Rather than do the hard work of learning from one another and maintaining a viable and thriving nation, too many people would prefer to call it a day and retreat to what they believe to be the safe confines of their tribal identity.⁴

The tribal impulse is evident in commercial enterprises, too, as it pertains to professions and departments. Conducting research at a major American newspaper, I noticed how the suspicions between the journalists and editors on one side and the business managers and marketing people on the other side kept the

two groups from talking to one another. In fact, they worked on different floors to avoid interaction. What surprised me was the intensity of the contempt each group had for the other. The journalists detested the fact the business people made decisions based on market demographics and advertising revenues. The business people deplored how ignorant or naïve journalists could be about the realities of running a company that had to make money in order to survive.

Being tribally oriented is not a bad thing; in fact, it has many benefits. The problem, however, is that many of the challenges that we face today cannot be resolved if we think parochially and act tribally.

The tribal impulse is reinforced by group boundaries. These boundaries make addressing systemic, interdependent challenges very difficult. There are many kinds of boundaries, including religious, cultural, professional, geographic, economic, class, and ethnic boundaries. Every group has a boundary. Nature has boundaries, and all organisms have boundaries. The boundary protects the space that allows group activity to take place. If a boundary is absent or too permeable, the group or organism is weakened and could die or simply disappear.

While boundaries are essential for distinguishing group membership and for coordinating domains of group activity, their function is to keep some people in and others out. They work well in helping groups engage in routine problem solving, but they can be constraining and burdensome when dealing with interdependent problems. Complexity does not honor boundaries but transcends them, as with a global financial crisis, a virus such as Ebola, sectarian warfare, or environmental pollution. If people are unwilling to transcend their boundaries and address an interdependent problem, they put at risk not only their group but the entire system.

Recently I met with some managers from one of the world's leading multinational software companies who were struggling to deal with a complicated challenge where a division overseas was having difficulty in getting its perspectives heard in the headquarters. By virtue of the reluctance to open the boundary and let the "foreign" perspective be included in the problem-solving and strategy-formulating processes of headquarters, vital data were not being considered, which in turn had an impact on overall company performance. This is a problem every large company struggles with. Boundaries that inhibit performance develop easily.

Managers in such environments can become excessively parochial, operating mostly within their boundaries and seeing no reason to cross boundaries, bust boundaries, or join with others to address a shared challenge. In boundary-laden organizations, silos begin to emerge that become rigid barriers to success. These silos lead people to engage in protective games, petty politics, and turf battles, which are activities that add no value to the organization but actually diminish value.

Globalization is breaking down many boundaries, yet many old fractures persist and new fractures are being generated. Former U.K. prime minister Gordon Brown stated that "globalization has generated opposite gravitational poles of production and consumption, and today the world arrangements look unbalanced and unsustainable." He added that while there are benefits to globalization, "they cannot be secured without a willingness to address, at a global level, the underlying economic, democratic, social and political weaknesses of globalization."⁵ In other words, the problems generated by globalization are complex, interdependent, and systemic in nature and cannot be resolved by thinking parochially or acting tribally. Before the global financial crisis

of 2008, Brown saw the need to get financial regulators to work together at a global level to understand the true scale of risk and act on it by creating an early-warning system. "I will forever regret my failure to bring other countries on board or persuade them of the urgency of action," he lamented. "I can see with hindsight . . . that it was impossible to build an international consensus."⁶

Leadership Is Needed to Help Groups Generate Shared Progress

While the tribal impulse is natural and brings many benefits, problems arise when groups pursue their goals without concern for the interests of other groups due to very different and often competing notions of progress.

Progress, according to the dictionary, means a move toward a "higher or better state." Any human organizational, social, political, or economic system will contain differences of opinion about what is meant by "higher" or "better" and the pathway for producing progress. For example, the prevailing belief among some groups is that democracy is the essential engine to generate progress throughout the world. But, as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, American-style democracy cannot succeed without deep learning work to modify the values, perceptions, and priorities of multiple groups. And there are some groups that believe that progress can only be achieved by coercively getting other groups to abide by their beliefs, and should they refuse they need to be eradicated, as we have witnessed with radical religious groups in Iraq and Syria. In the context of the United States, the Republicans have one view of progress and the Democrats have another view, and within each of these groups are subfactions with their own particular beliefs about what progress is and how to generate it.

Healthy debate and the exchange of perspectives is a good thing, but when groups demand that their view of progress is the right one and the view of other factions is flawed or outright wrong, then the divisions make shared problem solving impossible. In 2013, for example, the fractured political culture in Washington led to a government shutdown when Congress failed to enact legislation to appropriate funds for the fiscal year.

People's definitions of progress are informed by their cultural heritage, group values, and personal aspirations. It is not enough to say that "we all want the same thing." We do not all want the same thing. As the previous examples indicate, even if our notions of progress are similar, the strategies and actions for producing progress may differ radically.

A leadership challenge is to keep groups from defining progress in narrow, parochial terms such as winning or beating the competition, and to view progress as making things sustainably better for all. In the context of an interdependent world, if you are attaining your goal through destructive competition, then instead of getting practical results, you might be setting the conditions for ongoing conflict and great loss—to your own group and to others.

Leadership Is Needed to Fix a Maladaptive Cultural Drift

Sometimes the impediment to progress lies in the deficient problem-solving processes embedded in the cultural drift of groups. All tribes, groups, and institutions have what I call a "cultural drift." The cultural drift is the group's shared, taken-for-granted values, practices, and priorities. It is the habitual way of operating. Members of the group essentially drift along in its cultural river, without thinking deeply about the implications of their actions

and choices, because the cultural drift provides a set of processes and procedures for solving routine problems and addressing predictable challenges. This patterned behavior might work well in some contexts but be ineffective in others. Unless the group can modify its cultural drift to address complex, interdependent problems, a breakdown in the system could occur.

To illustrate the power of the drift in shaping and constraining action, consider what happened when an earthquake and tsunami struck the east coast of Japan on March 11, 2011, leading also to a nuclear disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. After the tsunami hit the plant, a meltdown occurred at three of the six nuclear reactors, releasing substantial amounts of radioactive materials into the environment, and causing a mass evacuation of two hundred thousand people. An analysis by an independent commission concluded that while the tsunami triggered the event, it was also a man-made disaster that was the product of cultural, managerial, and regulatory deficiencies in the company, in the government, and between agencies. The chairman of the committee, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, stated:

What this report cannot fully convey—especially to a global audience—is the mindset that supported the negligence behind this disaster. What must be admitted—very painfully—is that this was a disaster *Made in Japan*. Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to “sticking with the program”; our groupism; and our insularity.⁷

Chairman Kurokawa was particularly critical of the company that owned and ran the power plant, TEPCO. The report highlighted that management had a “disregard for global trends and a disregard

for public safety,” and the company was a business that “prioritized benefits to the organization at the expense of the public.”⁸ His report was also tough on the government, pointing out that the breakdown was made worse because the agency responsible for promoting nuclear power was also the agency charged with regulating the industry. The conflict in interest resulted in the lack of best-practice procedures and protocols needed to maximize safeguards and minimize the possibility of a disaster.

The report also drew attention to the fact that Japan’s democratic processes were deficient in that the people’s dissenting voices were not heard in a robust public discussion. Greater community participation and a strong civil society might have served as a watchdog to cast light on the flaws in government, industry, and prevailing cultural problem-solving practices pertaining to nuclear energy. But Japanese political authorities have never encouraged or valued groups agitating from the sidelines or raising potentially embarrassing or threatening questions. The report illustrates that the cultural drift that had served the country and its institutions well for generations—and still does for many challenges—had some maladaptive features that exacerbated the calamity.

Japan and TEPCO are not unusual. Authority figures in all groups, institutions, and cultures generally protect and promote the prevailing cultural drift as it pertains to problem solving and decision making, even if it has maladaptive features.

Groups, governments, and companies need adaptive and responsive cultural drifts. Given that it is a high-velocity world with extraordinary opportunities suddenly appearing and just as quickly disappearing, groups must be able to respond with speed and precision. For corporations, it is the age of hypercompetition. The abundance of new knowledge and technologies generates rich possibilities, yet human nature, the fractures that divide us, and

the flawed features of the cultural drift of institutions make it difficult to capitalize on these advances to produce advantage for all.

There Is Too Much Prominence, Dominance, and Tribalizing—and Too Little Leadership

Where is the leadership to address the problems of a fractured world? What is leadership? If a Martian were to say, “Take me to your leader!” most people would probably take them to the dominant authority figure of a group, organization, or community. They would not necessarily take them to the provocative change agent who may have little status but is courageously crossing boundaries, asking tough questions, and seeking to mobilize diverse groups to face reality and tackle messy, shared problems that endanger a group or community. They would think the direction-setting, charismatic harmonizer who gets everyone marching in the same direction is the leader.

Indeed, most people generally think of the traditional, strong, boundary-reinforcing boss as the leader. It might be an expression of leadership, but it is what I term *big man leadership*, and it has both strengths and weaknesses. At its essence, big man leadership is about power, position, and formal authority. The conventional notion of leadership in most institutions and societies places the burden of direction setting, problem solving, and decision making on a dominant individual or elite group. The so-called leader is expected to show the way forward, protect the group, maintain group boundaries, and solve problems with minimal disruption to people’s lives. His or her role is to be a symbol of the group’s ideals and to act in ways that advance the group’s interests, even if it is at the expense of other groups or the broader system. For many problems, big man leadership and the expression of formal

authority is adequate to drive disparate groups to focus on the right set of tasks to achieve shared objectives. Today, however, power is dispersed and the world is too complex to rely exclusively on big man leadership. Leadership depth and breadth is needed.

The default strategy of big man leadership as it pertains to dealing with problems is generally through the expression of *prominence* ("Look to me—I'll fix the problem"), *dominance* ("Listen to me—Do what I say"), and *tribalizing* ("Follow me—I'll advance your interests"). Libya's Muammar Gaddafi is an extreme example, but the essence of his behavior illustrates the way many big man leaders operate as they go about the work of problem solving and change.

I once sat next to Colonel Gaddafi and his team for three days at an African Union meeting in Ghana. He was a surreal character in his extravagant flowing robes. When Gaddafi stood to address his fellow African heads of state, he received a standing ovation—for different reasons. One was the novelty factor. He looked unique and his flamboyant style of dress was a bold statement of grandiosity, sending a signal that he considered himself a force to be reckoned with. He was also seen as someone who stood up to the West and took a stand for Africa. Then he started speaking. While every other head of state spoke only for the allocated fifteen minutes, Gaddafi spoke for an hour. By the end of his speech, which was a rambling and erratic soliloquy on the threats of neo-imperialism and the need for Africa to be united in order to fight its Western opponents, most people were bored, chatting, or asleep. Even with his glorious outfit he could not hold their attention, and polite but weak applause was given as he concluded. What began with a bang ended with a fizzle.

Gaddafi was trying to be the agent of change by convincing his fellow African leaders that they should create a united Africa,

something like the European Union or the United States. He failed because he did not understand that most Africans were resonating to different priorities than his. Gaddafi was still acting as the revolutionary zealot, while other leaders had practical concerns pertaining to building healthy economies and regional networks that would lift their people out of poverty by promoting trade relations for global competitiveness.

On October 20, 2011, three years after the Ghana speech, Gaddafi was killed by his own people. He was a tragic character who had the potential and resources to do great things in his own country and the region. His grandiose delusions and political ineptness, however, led him to pursue strategies that did little to generate the transformations that he publicly espoused. Instead, his actions perpetuated the divisions that had already existed while generating new ones.

It is not just wild dictators that provide big man leadership. Talented managers in all institutions can be guilty of such behavior. Their approach might succeed in generating results in a relatively stable and bounded environment, but when confronted with a novel or complex challenge their approach might manifest serious deficiencies. Consider the case of Lehman Brothers.

Lehman Brothers, one of the world's largest and oldest investment banks, collapsed in 2007 because of flaws in its corporate strategy and notions of leadership. Even as the U.S. housing market was faltering, CEO Richard Fuld pursued a highly aggressive, leveraged business model, putting the firm at even greater risk. Unlike some competitors that had had the foresight to sense the pending collapse and make a midcourse correction, Fuld refused to rethink his strategy or listen to those inside and outside the company who raised serious questions. He was too confident in his own answers—after all, he had been relatively successful at

Lehman Brothers for eighteen years. When he realized how bad the situation was, rather than be entirely truthful with investors, he presented an upbeat message regarding the company's strategy and financial well-being. Had he put reality in front of his management team and investors early enough, solutions might have been generated that saved the company.⁹

Before the collapse of Lehman Brothers, Richard Fuld explained his ideas on leadership to the students at the Wharton Business School.¹⁰ His first principle was that "leaders earn the right to lead because they know more than others." His second principle was to "build a strong team around you" by promoting collaboration and harmony and discouraging conflict and open disagreement. "What I need," he said, "is peace in the family." His third principle was to "pick a strategy and stick with it." I suggest that Fuld's leadership principles contributed to the collapse of Lehman Brothers. His leadership challenge was to create the conditions that allowed, even encouraged, people to question the prevailing strategy when they anticipated danger, even if it generated internal conflict. Fuld was a talented big man leader, but his leadership was insufficient to save his company from collapse.

Big man leadership is really about authority, formal or informal. It is about one individual managing the group boundaries, showing the way forward, and articulating what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. It can be expressed through benevolence and paternalism, and it can also be expressed through the aggressive assertion of power. Either way, there are limitations to what can be accomplished by relying exclusively on formal authority or prominence, dominance, and tribalizing.

Prominence is about status, and by virtue of having status, the group looks to you. Prominence leads to enormous burdens being placed on select individuals to be the problem solvers and experts.

Certainly expertise in a particular domain of knowledge can give you status and prominence, but experts acting alone cannot solve today's problems. Expertise is about depth of knowledge, but complex problems span boundaries and require diverse perspectives and integrated sources of knowledge. All individuals, no matter how prominent or talented they might be, are subject to error, and there can be dire consequences when they act alone, get it wrong, or fail to mobilize different perspectives to be included in the problem-solving process. For example, during a congressional hearing on the financial crisis of 2008, Congressman Henry Waxman asked the former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, "Do you feel that your ideology pushed you to make decisions that you wish you had not made?"¹¹ Greenspan conceded, "Yes, I've found a flaw. . . . I've been very distressed by that fact."¹² Greenspan thought that the free market would generate its own corrective mechanism and cause banks to take responsible action to fix flawed strategies before things got out of hand. Such was not the case. Fifteen banks collapsed in 2008, others were bailed out, and on one day alone, more than \$1.2 trillion vanished from the U.S. stock market.¹³

We all have flaws in our reasoning and blind spots in our understanding that make it difficult to consistently provide successful leadership; therefore, on some challenges, it is easy for anyone to unwittingly become the source of counterfeit leadership—whether you are the chairman of the Federal Reserve, the manager of a nuclear power plant in Japan, the head of an NGO in Madagascar, or the CEO of a Wall Street investment bank with an MBA from Harvard.

Dominance is different from prominence. Prominence emphasizes "look to me, because I am the expert," while dominance

emphasizes “listen to me, because I am the boss” Dominance is the expression of power and a form of control to get people to “do it my way.” We see it expressed by the alpha chimp in chimpanzee communities, and we see it in human communities. Dominance is not necessarily negative as it does play an important role in maintaining order for a group and also in orienting people during times of distress. Any parent can attest to the need for displays of dominance from time to time, not that it always works. Dominance becomes problematic when it tries to solve problems for which the tools of command and control do not apply. To get people to face interdependent challenges, the exercise of leadership requires stimulating imagination and creativity, and the promotion of learning. Dominance is often used to suppress multiple perspectives, thwart creativity, and demand compliance—all in the name of maintaining the prevailing order and ensuring predictability and stability.

Tribalizing is the advancement of your group’s interests at the expense of other groups. It is a very primal dynamic that leads a group to bestow authority on someone to fight their battles, protect their well-being, and be the gatekeeper of the group’s boundaries. But oftentimes, if a group is to make progress by dealing with threats and taking advantage of new opportunities, the group must change some cherished values and practices. For many groups, protecting tribal interests and practices becomes more important than facing reality and addressing interdependent problems that can make life better for all groups.

Creating or perpetuating fractures often occurs through the words and actions of tribalizing authority figures and big man leaders. Fracturing actions give preference to your own group over another and trivialize, marginalize, or harm another group.

Fracturing words include disparaging comments about other groups, and speeches that appeal to your own group's narcissism and sense of superiority. Fracturing speech is divisive and exclusive, rather than uniting and inclusive. It perpetuates the myth that "We are good and the other is bad." It exploits the group's noble traditions and cultural pride to promote a sense of preeminence or uniqueness. It assigns all the bad stuff to an outside group and the good stuff to one's own group, and thereby allows people to avoid dealing with their own group's deficiencies and maladaptive values.

Fracturing tribalizing dynamics are common in politics. For example, the outspoken rock star Ted Nugent threw his celebrity weight behind a Republican candidate in Texas and, during an interview in 2014, he called President Obama a "subhuman mongrel." Not only were his comments fracturing, but they were offensive—not just to the president but to most Americans. Many members of the Republican Party quickly condemned Nugent's comments, but one powerful voice in the party, a former presidential candidate and media personality, Newt Gingrich, was glib. When pushed on the subject in a CNN interview, he agreed that what Nugent said was stupid, but he added to the fracture by turning it into a political fight, arguing that it was the Hollywood types and liberal media that were making all the fuss and that they had double standards.¹⁴ Gingrich missed a unique opportunity to do important bridge-building leadership work and in that moment acted in ways that trivialized others' concerns. He might have intervened to promote the debate on media bias at another time and used that special moment on CNN, where he had the attention of the entire country, to do some important work around race and tolerance, particularly at a time when people felt that political fractures and social tensions were harming the country.

Given the Problems We Face, Leaders Must Cross Boundaries, Build Bridges, and Lead Change

To provide leadership for a fractured world, leaders must be change agents, even global change agents. Even if you are exercising leadership at the local level in an NGO, a school, or a company, you need a global orientation to appreciate how global or systemic forces impact what is happening at the local level that generate the demand for change. You need to appreciate both the strengths and constraining aspects of culture and, when the problem calls for it, transcend cultural constraints and group boundaries to mobilize diverse factions to tackle shared problems.

Change agents are attention managers—they intervene to get and keep the spotlight on interdependent problems. Big man leaders put the spotlight on themselves. They use prominence and dominance to get the group to follow them, because they believe that they know what needs to be done. As attention managers, change agents want people to see the systemic nature of the challenge and appreciate what progress is at risk if it is not actively addressed. They are interested not in getting people to follow them but in getting people to face the complexity of the problem.

The rock star Bono exercised leadership as a change agent by getting President George Bush's secretary of the treasury, Paul O'Neill, to visit Africa with him and call attention to issues of HIV, rampant poverty, educational deficiencies, and disease. The two were branded the "odd couple" because they were diametrically opposites in style, politics, and professions. But for two weeks they conversed, debated, shared stories, and explored options for addressing some of the most intractable problems.¹⁵ The creative partnership of Bono and O'Neill served—for a moment, at least—to get many people thinking about Africa and the plight of the poor,

the sick, and the disenfranchised. It put the spotlight on issues that many people in the developed world prefer to ignore. One reporter noted that Bono “opened up new frontiers . . . by leaving the protestors of Seattle and Genoa behind him for the deep corridors of power, in particular the White House. The argument is that real change comes from influencing those in power, not throwing stones at them.”¹⁶

Many interdependent problems are adaptive problems. In our leadership classes at Harvard, my colleagues and I teach students to distinguish between adaptive and technical problems. Technical problems are clear-cut problems. The application of expertise or the accumulated knowledge of the group is generally sufficient to reach resolution. Even if the technical challenge is complicated, if you get enough smart people to address the problem and provide them with sufficient time and resources, they can fix it. Moreover, technical problems can often be solved within the current structures of an organization that are designed to process them with efficiency and routine. In contrast, adaptive challenges do not fall neatly into current structures. They fall across boundaries and require diverse perspectives. They demand questioning of each group’s assumptions; experimenting with novel strategies; and adjusting people’s values, habits, and priorities in order to make progress on the challenge.

When I worked for the government in Madagascar, governmental leaders clearly faced the adaptive challenge of halting the country’s exponential population growth. The population had doubled over the previous twenty-five years, generating an enormous strain on the environment and resources of local communities. When a young couple married, they were given the blessing by their elders “May you have seven sons and seven daughters.” This kind of practice, however, was not sustainable,

and it posed an adaptive challenge for people to modify the value for large families. The practice had become maladaptive in the context of a changed world and threatened the sustainability of the already fragile economy and ecosystem.

But even outwardly simple, technical problems can have an adaptive component. When working in Madagascar, I saw a development project fail because of the lack of understanding for adaptive work. In this situation, NGO personnel had built a well and provided a water pump to the village because they thought it would solve a routine technical problem. The women in the village would spend considerable time daily fetching water from a distant river, and the intention of the well was to “fix the problem.” The NGO believed the villagers would appreciate the well. However, some did not. After two weeks, the well and the water pump were destroyed. It was later discovered that it was the village women—the intended beneficiaries of the project—who had destroyed the well. Why? Because the well was an unwelcome disruption to their traditional pattern of living that included walking with their sisters and daughters in a daily ritual to fetch water. The new arrangement also meant that they had to spend more time in the village around their annoying men. No one had asked whether they wanted the well. Also, even if someone had asked, they might not have fully understood at that time how the change would impact the villagers’ lives. Such is the nature of adaptive challenges: they have layers of complexity and often generate unpredictable surprises.

To mobilize people to address interdependent challenges and to do the adaptive work of change, you must work at the boundaries. You must be aware of visible and invisible boundaries that impede change and thwart shared progress. You must be able to cross boundaries to engage diverse groups in the work of

problem solving and change. Sometimes, you must intervene to bust internal boundaries within your own group to open up the flow of information and get people to engage the outside world. For some problems, the leadership challenge is to help groups transcend their boundaries—to leave the safety of the known and to venture into the great unknown in pursuit of creativity and innovation. And there will be times when the leadership work is to help multiple groups bridge boundaries over deep divides in order to resolve conflicts, heal wounds, and reduce the mystery of the other in order to generate a mutually beneficial future.

To exercise leadership as a global change agent, you need to think about power differently. Even if you have considerable formal power, it will probably be insufficient to produce the change that you seek. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the former president of Brazil, expressed the limitations of his power this way:

I was always surprised at how powerful people thought I was. Even well-informed, politically sophisticated individuals would come to my office and ask me to do things that showed they assumed I had far more power than I really did. I always thought to myself, if only they knew how limited the power of any president is nowadays.¹⁷

You do not need formal, positional power to exercise leadership. Anyone can be a change agent, although in varying degrees and in varying ways, whether from the center or from the sidelines. Of course, some people have considerable power and can get attention easily and do big things. Some people have little power but can use what power they have to stand and be counted. They can raise an issue, challenge an assumption, and reach out to someone who is different, marginalized, or being harmed. They can support

others in their leadership work. Even small interventions can sow seeds that may trigger dynamic change processes if the problem is ripe and the window of opportunity is seen and exploited. Consider Rosa Parks, whose refusal to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 was a catalyzing action for the civil rights movement.¹⁸ Her example underscores that what is critical is not how much power you have but the courageous, strategic, and creative use of your power.

Courage is needed to tap the internal strength to cross a boundary, raise an issue, and challenge a group. It is the willingness to make an intervention, to stand and be counted, and to engage in the work of change, particularly when others are hesitating, resisting, or fleeing. Strategy is needed to have a sense of when to intervene and where to intervene. It is needed to figure out when to provoke and when to evoke; to know when to move forward and when to be still; and to figure out who to partner with and who to avoid. And, creativity is needed to get attention. People are overwhelmed with so many activities and obligations. The change agent must intervene into a sea of competing concerns and often conflicting priorities to generate engagement and trigger a positive reaction and interest.

Are there people today providing effective leadership for a fractured world? Absolutely. Many people—with and without formal positional authority—are helping groups, companies, and communities address deep fissures, transcend differences, and tackle their toughest challenges.

Consider the fearless leadership of Malala Yousafzai, the teenager who was shot by the Taliban for promoting girls' right to go to school in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Today she is a powerful advocate for the education of girls all over the world.

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