



**Evolutionary Leadership for Systemic Sustainability:
*Building a Just, Sustainable and Flourishing World***

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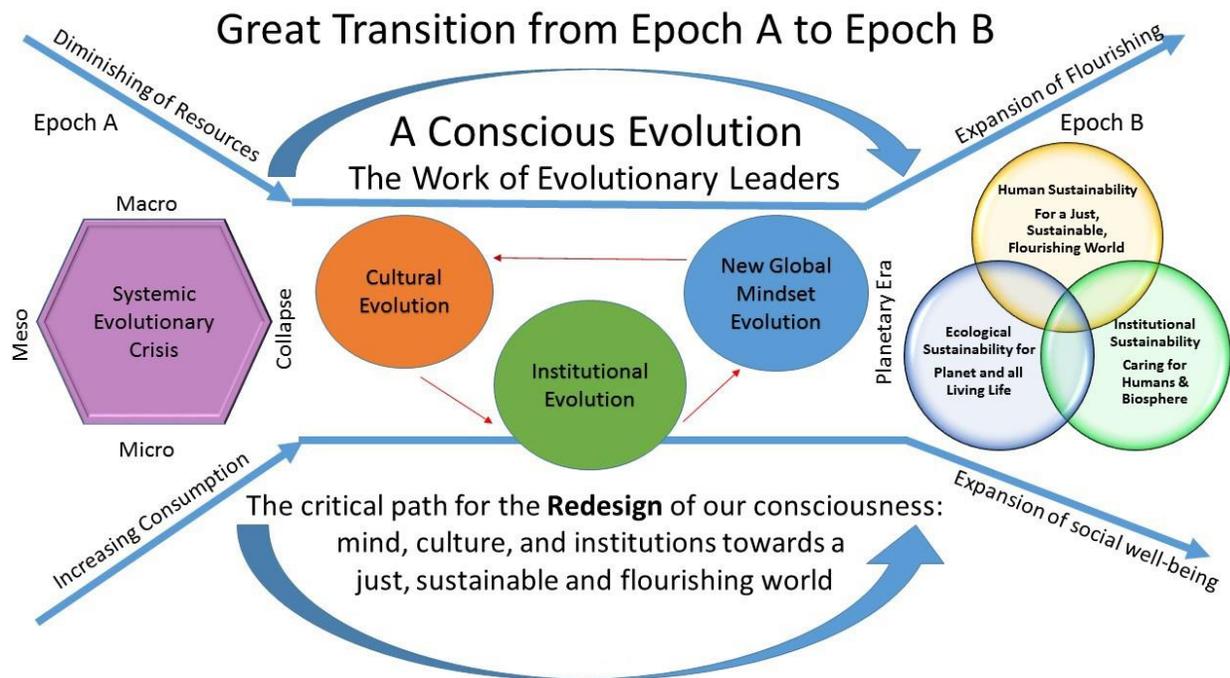
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Purpose

This essay offers a radical and evolutionary methodology for developing evolutionary leaders by learning a set of seven competencies and by consciously designing new systems for sustainability. This is an invitation for you to become an evolutionary leader in order to create change through ‘action’. By applying the following competencies, to themselves and the world, leaders will learn to broaden their worldviews and expand their capacity for effective action to bring forth a just, sustainable, and flourishing world. This essay goes beyond the why we need to evolve to the how we can influence a conscious social evolution.



“The most meaningful activity in which a human being can be engaged is one that is directly related to human evolution, this is true because human beings now play an active and critical role not only in the process of their own evolution but in the survival and evolution of all living things. Awareness of this places upon human beings a responsibility for their participation in and contribution to the process of evolution.”



If humankind would accept and acknowledge this responsibility and become creatively engaged in the process of meta-biological evolution consciously, as well as unconsciously, a new reality would emerge.”

Jonas Salk, 1983

The Journey

Evolutionary leadership provides a philosophical compass/purpose, a map of the territory, a set of tools/competencies, and a clear direction towards the creation of a just, sustainable and flourishing world/Planetary era. Just as early explorers brought back stories and artifacts of fascinating new worlds, our society needs a fleet of leaders willing to set sail to bring forth new visions of flourishing and compelling futures. This journey is a learning and collaborative process. We will understand the “know why” this journey is critical for humanity, and also apply the “know how” knowledge, tools and strategies in order to start building a new world.

On this journey, people all over are starting to wake up to the fact that our world is not sustainable. We cannot continue to grow and grow without acknowledging that there are limits to growth on a finite planet. If quantitative growth continues unbounded, it will impact our communities and our world in negative ways contributing to our evolutionary crisis. Right now our life-supporting ecological systems and other key worldly systems are in peril. The world seems to be awakening to this challenge. These ideas were presented to us by Jonas Salk and by more recent observers such as Jared Diamond in his book “Collapse” Nothing is more evident than the Paris Climate Agreement saying, “after four years of negotiations, nations succeeded in forging a global, legally binding agreement to address climate change when they convened in Paris for the 21st Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC. (<https://www.americanprogress.org> by Gwynne Taraska posted on December 15, 2015) As you can see, we must recognize the fact we are slowly killing our ecosystems around us and putting our future and survival in jeopardy.

The modern industrialized world has brought many benefits to humankind, especially those living in so-called developed countries. Most of us living in western countries enjoy luxuries and simplicities that our ancestors could never have imagined. Purified water, video Skype, solar panels, and grocery stores with shining fresh produce all year round. People now have a better understanding of the universe, earth, evolution, DNA, the brain, neuroscience, and many other dimensions of life. Life is much better for a significant portion of the population on our planet. Yes, in many ways the world is a much better place than hundreds of years ago, but is it really? This is just one ‘narrow’ worldview amongst many that are in the world.

At the same time, other observers like Peter Senge in his book “Presence” describes the modern global corporation as a new species on our planet which he contends that while corporations bring products and services to many people, they also in unintended ways contribute towards the destruction of our natural world. Peter Sale in “Our Dying Planet” offers scientific data of the slow destruction of our biosphere and ecology. He also offers four positive scenarios for the future of humankind that could be inspiring for evolutionary leaders.



Systemic Evolutionary Crisis: EPOCH A

Human beings are being faced with a systemic evolutionary crisis and a choice to do something about it. To continue along the path of our industrialized world, focusing on quantitative growth, and short-term visions, while ignoring the negative externalities that will affect the next generations to come. Or we can develop a systemic perspective that can see both the negative outcomes as well as the positive outcomes of the modern world. Rather than arguing for the positive or the negative realities, we must begin to integrate into our consciousness both of these perspectives, so we are able to develop a new social paradigm that brings forth a new epoch for humanity; a socially just, environmentally sustainable, and development of well-being and prosperity for all people.

Sustainability professor John Ehrenfeld points out in his book “Sustainability by Design”, there is a looming difference between sustainable development and sustainability. And most of what is being done by people, business, and governments can be described as sustainable development. That is changing some of the external problems, products, and processes, but does not tackle the root of the problem, our consciousness, or the social paradigm. Without a shift at this level, even the most ‘green’ companies’ still operate with a focus on quantitative growth and assume that we live on a planet without limits to growth. According to Ehrenfeld, sustainability requires a shift toward a new mindset, new cultural values, and a new societal paradigm. Making small changes or tweaking the systems within the current mindset of quantitative growth and sustainable development will only delay our trajectory toward collapse and possibly, the ‘sixth extinction’ mainly caused by humans. Humans have a real choice to build a sustainable world, the question is: are they ready for the Great Transition?

The Great Transition: EPOCH B

The great transition to a just, sustainable, and flourishing civilization or the Planetary Era requires evolutionary leaders taking action in the following three key areas:

1. A new ‘Global Mind’: a new mindset/worldview
2. A Cultural Evolution
3. An Institutional Evolution for systemic sustainability

These are the leverage points to be used in the design of a conscious evolution toward sustainability. Our world already has enough knowledge, technology, and resources to support us living a well and sustainable lives. We do not have to wait for all the technologies to be invented to begin this transition, though more innovation would indeed continue to support this great shift.

In my years of teaching, coaching, and developing leaders for corporations, universities, NGOs, and governmental organizations, I have studied much about leadership and have come across many transformational theories and methodologies for developing leaders. Some of these theories apply to the private sector, some to the public sector, and most are designed to bring out the best leadership qualities in that particular sector or organization.

What they all have in common is that they are focused on developing leaders to be effective within the paradigm of their selected social sector or organization. This results in the fact they often miss the big picture of our global reality. The challenge that we are facing is way beyond the paradigm of any particular



sector or organization. In this moment of time, we have to start thinking as a global citizen, In other words, most business schools and leadership programs are designed to run organizations more effectively, but typically do not to support human well-being and the ecological systems. I call this the paradigm of effectiveness. Effectiveness is important, but for what purpose?

Given the thousands of books and theories on leadership that one could find on Amazon, the hundreds of consultants, and leadership programs offered, it is easy to think that those people are learning about the very best and progressive leadership methodologies possibly. You would think future leaders are focusing on the big picture or the modern crisis of our times, or that they are being educated to build a sustainable world. That is not the case.

Most leadership theories and programs are focused on making the modern industrial/capitalist world run more effectively, not to change the paradigm or the culture for a sustainable, just and flourishing world. On the other hand, most literature about our world problems, says little about leadership. The following table depicts an overview of some of the best theories on leadership.

TYPES OF LEADERSHIP AND THEIR FOCUS

Type of Leadership	Primary Focus	Example
Evolutionary Leadership	Taking a stand for building a just, thriving, sustainable world	Evolutionary Leadership for Systemic Sustainability
Adaptive Leadership	Identifying the adaptive challenges and mobilizing people to working on them	Leadership Without Easy Answers
Transformational Leadership	Using transformational language to open possibilities and create a better future	The Three Laws of Performance
Authentic Leadership	Operating from core values throughout the organization	Authentic Leadership
Situational Leadership	Individual and team development and performance	The Situational Leader

Evolutionary leaders are people that are **competent and effective** within their own organization, while also having the vision and competencies to bring about a great transition toward a new just, sustainable flourishing civilization. While there are many exemplary people that I would describe as evolutionary thinkers and leaders, the world needs many more.

Lester Milbrath in his book *“Envisioning a Sustainable Society”* proposes that we are going to have to learn our way out of the current unsustainable world paradigm. **Learning is the spark that will ignite the cascading changes that must follow as our systems evolve.** We need to learn how to design new social and technological structures. We also need to learn a new value system and practices in order to promote



a cultural evolution. We need to learn how to be evolutionary leaders, at the forefront of a blossoming just, flourishing and sustainable world.

Another evolutionary thinker Paul Raskin, Director of the Tellus Institute, has written a book “Journey to Earthland” where he invites us on the journey for the great transition towards a just sustainable world. He offers a detailed scenario of the future, of what a sustainable world would look like with all its benefits. What this book offers in my opinion is an excellent roadmap for evolutionary leaders.

Becoming an Evolutionary Leader

An important element in directing a social evolution is Evolutionary Leadership. Most of the books that tell us about our global problems, or that propose solutions, fail to address the issue of leadership. They assume that the leaders already in charge of our institutions know how to lead a conscious cultural evolution. When in fact, most leaders are really good at making the existing system work effectively but are not prepared to lead their institutions toward a great transition or toward a sustainable world. Imagine if all the presidents of our universities made a declaration that the purpose of their institutions was to educate evolutionary leaders and to build a just, sustainable and flourishing world. Imagine MIT, Harvard, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Wharton, making that declaration. Universities are only one of several key institutions in our society.

In Daniel J Sherman’s writing he suggests a strategy for transforming higher education:

“For sustainability to realize its full transformative potential in higher education and society, it must transcend an association with prescribed practices and even specialized areas of study. Sustainability must become a pedagogical big idea, capable of complementing and connecting avenues of inquiry across the academic disciplines that organize and prioritize teaching and learning on campus. If sustainability is employed as a method of examining the relationship between environmental limits and human values, decisions, and actions that shape the future, it will transform not only what we do on campus, but also how we think.”

To be an evolutionary leader is to recognize that our world in its current state is not sustainable for billions of people and for the biosphere. The facts tell us that we are living on a dying planet. We are facing great global problems, and that the majority of these problems are systemic and interdependent to other social and natural systems. Problems like water shortages, energy security, poverty, terrorism, and climate change to name a few. And, these are not just local problems, but rather systemic global problems. Becoming an evolutionary leader requires learning to think, observe, design, and mobilize in new ways, and this requires learning new leadership competencies.

In his book “The Evolving Self” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, states:

“The goals and values we now have are appropriate to a species blindly struggling along with other species in the stream of life. They are appropriate to passengers, not to navigators. But whether we like it or not, we are now the pilots of Spaceship Earth. For this role, we need a new set of instructions, new values, and goals by which to steer a course among the many unprecedented dangers.”

Below I present the framework that I have developed to serve this purpose.



The evolutionary leadership methodology that I present in this paper suggests that leaders learn seven critical competencies or skills that would empower them to be effective in their current roles in their organizations, while also becoming part of a global network of evolutionary leaders. This would begin a global citizen's movement directing and empowering a conscious evolution. These seven competencies would support a new self, a complexity of consciousness, a new mind, and a set of powerful skills for leading and mobilizing social change.



Seven Competencies of Evolutionary Leadership

I. Personal Evolution

Personal evolution is creating a new mindset and a new worldview that is committed to evolving the self, creating a new mind (levels 4 & 5 as Robert Kegan suggests), to developing a complexity of consciousness, and an evolutionary & ecological mind. It is becoming aware of the new 'observer' of self within the world and to be conscious that we are shaping the world and the world is shaping us in return. In this sense, a person who chooses to become an evolutionary leader commits to transforming their own mind, worldview, personal consciousness, as well as helping others to do the same. Personal evolution also invites the leader to recognize that we human beings are emotional-loving beings and that emotions coupled with reason are stronger than reason alone in building positive human relationships. This results in higher emotional and relational intelligence, and the capacity to build trusting and effective relationships. According to Daniel Goleman, this emotional intelligence is often more important than IQ, especially in leadership roles. Personal evolution invites leaders to declare a life purpose that gives meaning and direction to their lives. A transcendent purpose that integrates being part of the human evolution, a purpose that can provide meaning and coherence to one's life, and mobilizes oneself to become a force for good.



II. Emotions and Generative Language

Evolutionary Leaders use the power of emotions and language to generate new realities, to declare new ideas, visions, purposes, values, systems, institutions, narratives, and goals. The most powerful emotion that we can bring forth is Love/Loving. It is the emotion that sets the foundation for relationships, for caring, for seeing the 'other' as a legitimate 'other' as Humberto Maturana claims, and for setting the context for **generative dialogue**. Generative language facilitates the articulation of new possibilities. It also empowers people to declare bold stances and transcending purposes for a just, flourishing, and sustainable world. Generative conversations promote the effective coordination of action, in order to mobilize people to learn, to collaborate, to innovate, to evolve, to build a better world. Generative language is transformational, it shapes human reality and elicits commitments to effective action. Generative language facilitates the emergence of new narratives, and new values and cultures. Evolutionary leaders tell a story of life and human beings that promote meaning, purpose, solidarity among people, and harmony with our natural world.

III. Systems Being and Thinking

People need to recognize that we human beings are living systems and part of the larger system of nature. This awareness expands our sense of self and our relationship with others, with nature, and the cosmos. Being aware of this fact that we exist within a multiplicity of systems: natural systems, living systems, social systems, and technological systems, to name a few. Kathia Castro Laszlo invites us to think of ourselves as 'systems beings'. When we identify with these systems our sense of self-being expands, our consciousness expands and becomes richer in its complexity. Systems thinking is a powerful tool for observing the dynamics, patterns and possible outcomes of systems. It is a discipline for seeing wholes not just parts. It is a method for 'seeing' the visible and invisible causes of our world problems. Fritjof Capra in his book 'The Systems View of Life' reminds us that our world's problems are systemic in nature but are often diagnosed as isolated problems, poverty, hunger, energy, war, population growth, and climate change, the disappearance of rain forests, and species, human rights. All of these are often understood and treated in isolation, instead of seeing them as part of larger system. Most of our leaders in corporations, NGOs, and government deal with parts of the system and have a short-term understandings of the behaviors of complex systems. Systems thinking shows us that we can influence the dynamics of these systems. It can direct our ability to design new social and technological systems to promote justice, well-being, prosperity, and harmony with nature. Peter Senge in a recent talk shared on how our world is becoming more interdependent and the trend is going up, while our ability to see and understand this interdependence is going down. Therefore an urgent need for systems being and thinking.

IV. Ontological Designing

Ontological designing, as defined by Anne-Marie Willis "is a way of characterizing the relation between human beings and lifeworlds." The human world that we live in is a product of human design. Design is a powerful distinction and a powerful discipline that can be used for good and/or for bad. We need ontological designing to be ethical, sustainable with a focus on 'futuring'. Futuring is the means of using a systematic process for thinking about, picturing possible outcomes, and planning for the future. Ontological Designing according to Tony Fry, is a discipline for consciously designing our lifeworlds, our



institutions, our products, our processes, and our self, so that they contribute toward the futuring of sustainment of life on this planet.

Ontological Designing according to Anne-Marie Willis is a theory that claims:

- Design is something far more pervasive and profound than is generally recognized by designers, cultural theorists, philosophers or lay persons;
- That designing is fundamental to being human- we design, that is to say, we are deliberate, plan and scheme in ways which prefigure our actions and makings-in turn we are designed by our designing and by that which we have designed (i.e., through our interactions with the structural and material specificities of our environments);
- That this adds up to a double movement-we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us.

The founding fathers of the American Constitution were, for the most part, conscious designers of a new system of government. They designed this political and democratic system to support democracy and freedom of this new country. The original design did not include all people but has been improved over the years, and amazingly the design still works. For example, it has been a continual evolving process and journey in the women's and gay rights movements. We as a society are still working through injustices and inequalities. It shows that people can be conscious designers or unconscious designers. Humans are continuously designing in one way or another.

I first studied Ontological design with Fernando Flores in his ontological design course. Flores has been applying ontological design principles to the design of the self, management practices, computers, organizational design and many other domains of life. It was at that time it became clear that evolutionary leaders have to be aware that everything follows these design principles and to evolve the world it has to be done with purpose.

Our institutions were designed to promote the well-being and development of the people. The institutions of education, government, commerce, health, religion, and many others often had an ethical purpose, to support the humanization of human beings, to create ethical social systems. The ethical design is about envisioning and building a system that brings about human development, well-being, justice and freedom. At a sermon in New York City architect and designer William McDonough presented an excellent overview of what ethical and sustainable design could do for human beings and our planet, his talk "*Design, Ecology, Ethics, and the Making of Things*", gives us an overview of what is possible when we integrate these distinctions into an evolutionary framework:

"Sustainable design is complementary to ethical design, in the sense that our well-being also depends on the goods and services that we consume. Sustainable design is more than ecological design or green design. Sustainable design is systemic because it begins with the understanding that any product or process of manufacturing or building has to take into consideration all the other parts of the system that it interacts with. Sustainable design begins in the mind of the designer or leader and continues its process from raw materials to manufacturing, to delivery, to consumption, to recycling, to feedback to the designer, and toward the full life cycle of the product and process. Dieter Ram is an excellent example of a sustainable designer, and his ten principles for design should be part of any evolutionary leader/designer education.



William McDonough in his book “Cradle to Cradle” offers a discipline for sustainable design that would transform how we design, make, buy, use, and dispose of stuff.”

Sustainable design principles should be at the core of all organizations and institutions because it should touch all the key stakeholders, the people, the processes, the product, the building, the consumer, the life cycle, and the natural systems. Ehrenfeld’s interpretation of design is broader than it is commonly used, as he connects ontological design with care for the human and the world, so that to design with the purpose of ‘care’ in mind, brings forth a new approach to designing our lives, our artifacts, and our culture, while caring for the natural world. When we combine ethical and sustainable design we can create better institutions, better products, and a just and sustainable social system.

V. Systemic Sustainability

Most people think of sustainability as an environmental issue. I propose that we think of systemic sustainability as a macro-complex system made up of three important systems:

- Environmental sustainability
- Human sustainability
- Institutional sustainability

Each one of these systems supports the existence of the other systems. They are mutually interdependent. Together, the three systems bring forth an emergent complex new system: sustainability as a coherent property that supports the well-being of all three systems.

We cannot have ecological sustainability without human sustainability and social justice, and we cannot have human sustainability without institutional and ecological sustainability. We human beings are now the stewards and caretakers of our systems. We are the pilots of our Spaceship Earth. This is a big responsibility and the sooner we understand this responsibility and confront this challenge the better our chances for survival as a species. I will say more later in this paper.

VI. Adaptive Work and Collaboration

An adaptive work is a means to tackle adaptive challenges in which learning must occur in order to come up with an effective solution. Our world today is full of adaptive challenges, and our leaders often misdiagnose these challenges and treat them as technical problems. Leaders think they have the answers to these problems already, which actually causes the problems to persist. Problems such as: global poverty, hunger, climate change, energy, nuclear proliferation, and many others are examples of adaptive challenges. Adaptive work requires people to confront tough issues, confront losses, change of values and power structures and also make choices. Systems thinking helps us understand those dynamics and the mental models that often are at the root of our social systems which can block us from doing adaptive work. Ronald Heifetz a professor of adaptive leadership proposes that the job of the leader is to identify the adaptive challenge, and then to elicit the collective intelligence of the group or community to solve the problem, as opposed to the leaders having the answers. It is through this collective intelligence that



helps see all the different possibilities towards the many solutions to help evolve our world towards sustainability.

For systemic sustainability to work, we need to be able to interact with the creation of human sustainability as if it is an adaptive challenge. There are many adaptive challenges such as ecological sustainability and institutional sustainability to name a few. To change our current economic model from quantitative growth toward “Qualitative Growth,” as Fritjof Capra and Hazel Henderson invite us to do, also requires us doing deep adaptive work.

Collaboration is the fuel for the engine of adaptive work. Adaptive work at the social level requires a great deal of collaboration between these subsystems. For example, the business sector needs to collaborate with civil society and with governments. More transparency and sharing knowledge among institutions is a must. Professor Michael Porter has described collaboration between business and other sectors as creating ‘shared values’ in order to come up with solutions to social and ecological problems. By increasing the amount of collaboration between people would generate an increase in the sharing of ideas, projects, and best practices across organizations and nations, resulting in greater innovation for solving tough global problems. Evolutionary leaders need to become part of a global network of leaders and organizations working for a just and sustainable future.

VII. Wisdom and Evolutionary Visions

This final competency supports leaders in understanding our evolutionary history as living systems, and as human beings. The objective of this competency is to provide leaders with a practical understanding of wisdom and the role of visions in charting new paths toward a just and sustainable future.

Given our human predicament in confronting the threat of climate change and an evolutionary crisis, we human beings and our leaders are in desperate need to think about our future using the best thinking that we can develop, and that is where the role of wisdom can be useful. Wisdom can serve as the moral compass for making our evolutionary choices. Wisdom asks us to discern what is important in life and in conserving life. Wisdom asks us to take the long-term view and to define the common good. Our imaginations, visions and scenarios of the future can also guide us, as evolutionary leaders, toward the future.

The Dalai Lama offers another useful perspective about wisdom. He proposes, “Wisdom is the capacity to use our intelligence and education in order to make distinctions and judgments between positive and negative choices, reflecting on their consequences and keeping in mind our long term interests in our wish to live a happy life, eliminate suffering, and contribute toward the happiness of others and a better world.” Given our human predicament and the tough choices that we have to make, wisdom becomes an even more relevant part of leaders’ mindsets.

This competency also supports designing scenarios and visions of a just, sustainable and flourishing world. Evolutionary leaders must work within the **creative tension** of solving tough local and global problems immediately, like poverty, hunger, and climate change and being inspired by visions of a better future. This creative tensions creates a ‘pushing force and a pulling force’ in order to mobilize people into action. Evolutionary leaders have to put their visions in terms of evolutionary timelines and use their wisdom and



competencies to design and direct the process of human evolution. They have to think strategically in terms of 10, 25, 50, or 100 years or more. It is time for leaders to envision that we can design and build a better world.

Evolutionary leaders need to not just problem solve, but also ‘being designers’ of new institutions and new futures. Evolutionary leaders do not need to reinvent the wheel for there are many powerful positive scenarios and tools in use already. Tools and disciplines like ‘backcasting’, shared visions, and scenario building are available to leaders. The Tellus Institute has created some good examples of sustainability scenarios. Paul Raskin beautifully describes them in his new book “Journey to Earthland”.

As you read through the seven competencies, you see that they complement each other. When these competencies are gathered together as a system, a person who embodies these competencies becomes a new observer of the world, develops a complexity of consciousness, an evolving self, and becomes a new type of leader which I call an **Evolutionary Leader**. Many people still interpret leadership in the mindset of the old paradigm. The old paradigm is where leaders are people in roles and positions that have ‘power over others’, or ‘degenerative power and authority’. With this old idea comes the thought that leaders have all the answers and that they are giving orders for others to obey. This is an outdated paradigm of hierarchy with leadership that demands obedience from those around them.

With evolutionary leadership, we are offering a new interpretation of leadership based on an ethics of love, partnership, collaboration, co-inspiration, and empowerment. We are calling for leaders who can identify adaptive-evolutionary challenges, embrace the collective intelligence of the people, creating shared visions, coordinate effective actions to solve tough problems, and who can mobilize their communities to build a better world. In this sense, anyone can be a leader, and anyone can learn to be an evolutionary leader. You can be an evolutionary leader, with or without formal authority. Ronald Heifetz, in his book “*Leadership Without Easy Answers*”, describes how anyone can assume a role of leadership. He offers some powerful distinctions and practices for tackling difficult adaptive challenges. What we need are networks of leaders, communities of leaders. Paul Raskin suggests a Global Citizens Movement (GCM) across the world, people learning these competencies, learning from each other, collaborating, in order to confront the adaptive-evolutionary challenges facing all of us on planet Earth.

The Work of Evolutionary Leaders: Designing and Building EPOCH B

The main work of evolutionary leaders is to support the psychosocial evolution toward a just, sustainable and flourishing world/Planetary era, at this point in human evolution. After achieving that new foundation of sustainability, other evolutionary challenges may show up, and new visions may emerge, but at least we would have made the lives of billions of people better. Doing so will be conserving our biosphere on which human life depends on, as well as designing societies and cultures that foster human development, love, ethics, and other basic human needs.

The Evolution of Consciousness / Mindset / Worldview

Evolutionary leaders are people that are committed to the evolution of their consciousness, mindsets, and worldviews. As they embark on this journey of self-development and personal evolution they help to develop a new self-identity, as global citizens as well as local citizens of their countries or cultures,



and would engage in developing mind level 5 as Kegan suggests. A mind level 5 is a systemic, global, dialectical, wise, ethical, and evolutionary way of thinking/being.

Evolutionary leaders are also teachers, mentors, coaches of other people and other leaders in their evolution of consciousness. Evolutionary leaders apply the 7 competencies to their own personal life, as well as to their role as teachers, consultants, coaches, and leaders of organizations and institutions.

Cultural Evolution

On this path towards a transition to a sustainable civilization is a cultural evolution. Human beings are culture-making animals, and with our capacity for language we can generate myths, narratives, values and social norms that bind us together to shape our sense of self-identity. Cultures as social systems are usually conservative systems. They serve to maintain order and to promote survival by passing on wisdom from the past.

A culture from a linguistic perspective is a system of narratives and conversations that often keeps its members from stepping out of their myths, narratives, and norms. When we think of moving a society from one type of culture to another we are facing some very difficult adaptive work. The Age of Enlightenment that contributed to modern ideas like democracy and human rights established these new narratives that began to shape cultural evolution in recent times.

A great deal of work and talk is being done in the name of sustainable development. I mentioned earlier, those changes are often taking place in what are called proximate drivers in a society, such as changing the technology or some laws (Slide #4 below). What is needed to promote a transition toward a sustainable world is understanding and learning to deal with the ultimate drivers of human behavior. Understanding the needs and values of human beings, our relationship with nature and our planet, power structures, and the cultural lifestyle that people have gotten used to. We need to focus our culture on the values of loving, learning, quality, relationships, community, conservation, democracy, freedom, development, life, solidarity and focusing on the art of being and humanization.





A lot of adaptive work, by leaders who recognize that a cultural evolution requires some kinds of losses, as well as some kinds of gains. Ronald Heifetz points out that *“Leadership requires a diagnostic capacity to be able to assess the resistances that accompany painful adjustments.”* Heifetz calls this, doing adaptive work so that people can choose better social adaptations and a better future for all the stakeholders. The good news is that cultures can and do evolve.

Systemic Sustainability

Evolutionary leaders, equipped with their seven competencies as their toolkit, can get to work on building systemic sustainability. I am not saying that a single person takes on this task; rather, each person may work on a dimension or aspect of systemic sustainability. I am proposing that no matter what part you are working on, you ought to have a vision or an idea of the whole system to which you are contributing.

I think it is important to define some key distinctions, as we use words to construct our realities. Webster's New World Dictionary defines **sustain/sustainable** as:

“The capacity to keep in existence, to provide for the support, to provide sustenance or nourishment for, to strengthen, to encourage.”

What do we want to keep in existence? I propose that we want to conserve life on this planet and in particular complex life, which may be very uncommon in the universe.

We want to conserve our biosphere, and its species biodiversity, because we cannot live without our biosphere. And we want to conserve human beings, the most fragile species, yet at this time the most dominant and most dangerous animal on this planet. For example, the USA alone has over 5,000 nuclear weapons, of which the use of only a small number could destroy our civilization. We need to protect ourselves from the SAPIENS that we have been for thousands of years, shaped by the empire era and consciously evolve, to become ethical, loving, sustainable and global family Sapiens, of the planetary era.

I know there are several definitions of sustainability. I offer my own definition here because I think it is a good exercise in owning the words that we care about. So here is my definition of sustainability is:

“Sustainability is the capacity of our natural and social systems to conserve complex life and to support the development and quality of life of human beings in a world of limits for future generations — of all species”.

Systemic sustainability as a structure for conserving complex life and for the nourishment of complex life including human beings has three subsystems: environmental or natural, human, and institutional.

- **Systemic Sustainability: Environmental-Ecological Sustainability**

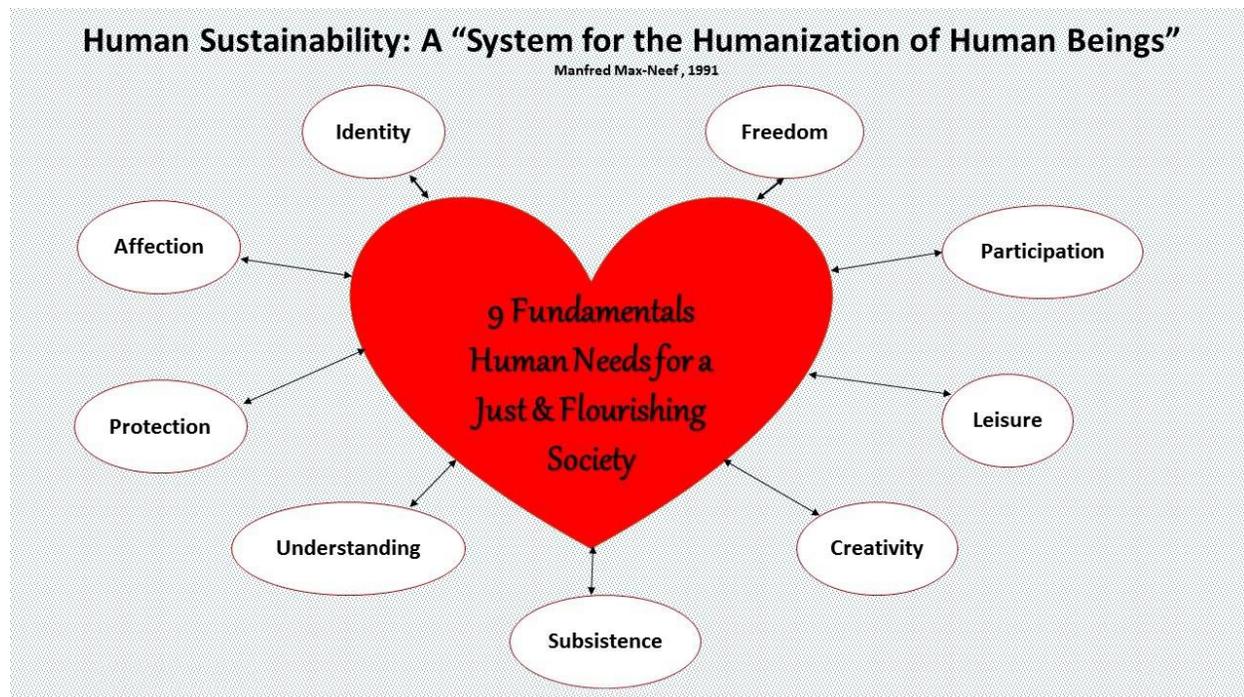
This system contains the biosphere and all natural systems. By conserving this system will allow our life support system on which human life depends on, to become sustainable again. Right now species are becoming extinct at an alarming rate due to our behaviors and actions. The rain forests are disappearing, and aquifers are going dry, while climate change threatens to destroy many species habitats. Most people still interpret the word ‘sustainability’ as dealing only with environmental issues. Ehrenfeld presents sustainability as an ‘emergent property of a complex system’, made up of natural, human, and ethical systems. This definition is complementary to the one I offer here.



- **Systemic Sustainability: Human Sustainability / Social Justice**

The conservation of human beings, in a sense, is our central focus but not at the expense of other species or ecologies. Purely from an evolutionary perspective, human beings appeared on this planet very recently. Regardless of the myths that we subscribe to, we are not the chosen species on this planet. Life was here on this planet before us and will be here after human beings become extinct. Evolution does not have human survival as its sole purpose, no matter what we do. If we act foolishly and destroy ourselves, the planet and its evolution does not care. I think we can learn a great deal from biology and evolution in an analogous way. That is to extract learning and principles from evolutionary and biological processes and apply them to human life, as Jonas Salk, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and other scientists have suggested. My concept of evolutionary leadership is based on the best theories of transformational and adaptive leadership, on evolutionary principles, scientific knowledge of our earth, and scientific knowledge about human beings and their evolution. The great works of people like Charles Darwin, Richard Dawkins, Jonas Salk, E.O. Wilson, Steven Pinker and many others have contributed to my understanding of human beings, human nature, and the evolutionary choices facing us today.

Human sustainability begins with providing every human being with his or her basic needs. Manfred Max-Neef offers an economic model that would focus on taking care of nine basic needs (as seen below). **His model shows that it is a system for the humanization of human beings.** If we provide human beings with their nine basic needs and strengthen their capacity for learning for life, we could tap into our human potential while focusing on our development and quality of life. It would allow having societies where people would flourish rather than focusing on “quantity”. They would instead focus on “quality of living” and new guiding principles like “sufficiency” would guide our lifestyles. For this to happen, it would require the support of key human institutions and a new type of culture, thus a cultural evolution.





- **Systemic Sustainability: Institutional Sustainability**

Human beings invented institutions in order to provide structures in order to organize their affairs and for increasing their capacity for survival and wellbeing. In our modern world we live through institutions and depend on them to keep our societies working. Today some of those institutions have forgotten their original purpose, only focusing on the survival of their own institution instead of providing the support, sustenance, nourishment, for the people to whom they were originally intended to serve.

Americans, in particular, are often ignorant of their institutions, and often resist them as impinging on their freedom. Powerful institutions and networks of institutions shape our world today. Often these are almost invisible to most people. Yet they have a great deal of impact on human and natural systems. Some of these institutions like our current economic system of Capitalism/Neoliberalism unconsciously contribute to our environmental degradation, climate change and other global problems. Today the American government has been greatly under the influence of Capitalism, as Al Gore explains in *THE FUTURE*. Capitalism needs to evolve and there are great new economic models like the ones proposed by Christian Felber, Otto Scharmer, Capra & Henderson, Capra & Jakobsen, and Herman Daly. In our approach to systemic sustainability, we focus on re-directing the objectives of our institutions toward the support of environmental-ecological sustainability, which would support human sustainability. These institutions need to evolve and direct their purposes toward social well-being and building a just and sustainable world.

Key institutions, such as the family, education, health care, governments, NGO's, and business, can **evolve to have as their purpose: sustainability of the environment, all nature, and human beings**. The purpose of our institutions should be to provide for the common well-being and developmental structures for human beings to become good human beings, to be ethical, socially responsible, and stewards of our



planet. This would support the emergence of what philosophers and social scientists call “the Good Society”.

This would require an alignment for each of these institutions to have an overarching sense of purpose, which they do not have in place now. Imagine the difference if each of these institutions were populated by evolutionary leaders facing adaptive challenges, and supporting collaboration, innovation, human development, and a cultural evolution.

The work of evolutionary leaders is needed in promoting a conscious cultural evolution. Leaders must be able to make social diagnostics of our complex systems, using all the competencies proposed in the making of an evolutionary leader. A cultural evolution will require each of us to go through our own personal evolution, by choosing our values, new narratives, developing a new ecological and evolutionary consciousness, and choosing a sustainable lifestyle. Many individuals are already making this kind of personal choice and personal adaptation, and some communities are choosing to change their social practices. An increasing numbers of people are choosing their material possessions through a new set of values and standards. Organizations and businesses are also adapting themselves through concepts like “Green Strategies” and practices that promote corporate social responsibility.

Building a loving, just, and sustainable world will eventually make the lives of billions of people more sustainable in the true sense of the word by taking care of their needs and supporting their development. The shift in values—from quantity to quality, from unlimited growth to development, from consumerism to conservation, from a throw-away mindset to a cradle-to-cradle mindset, from competition to collaboration—are all part of a cultural evolution. A conscious cultural evolution would also take us from a patriarchal culture to a partnership culture, where domination over and control of the other will be replaced by empowering and loving relationships. Riane Eisler describes this in the book: “The Power of Partnership”.

Building just and sustainable societies that will help build a sustainable global civilization is no small task. It will require thousands of evolutionary leaders working across nations in collaborative networks. No single individual or single organization, no matter how noble their purpose is can bring about a paradigm shift that is now required in our human history. We need to have collaborators across and within all sectors of society, namely the private sector with the civil society, NGOs, and the public sector. Evolutionary leaders will be the bridge as collaborative leaders promoting systemic sustainability and social well-being for all; building innovative new institutions, new technologies, and new ecological cities and communities. In doing so evolutionary leaders will help bring about a better life for all humans beings on this planet, and for all species for future generations. We are now the pilots of Spaceship Earth. We are capable of directing our human evolution and making this world flourish for all.

Our Choice: Entering the Planetary Era

Evolutionary leadership provides a philosophical and ethical compass for a complex world, a map and a clear direction towards the creation of a just, sustainable and flourishing world. We can be responsible for a conscious evolution and have the vision and courage to mobilize humanity for entering EPOCH B / the planetary era.



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