Book Review

by **Michael Marien** (Fellow, WAAS) and
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The Collective Leadership Paradigm Shift

The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future.
Petra Kuenkel (Founder/Director, Collective Leadership Institute, Potsdam, Germany).
Foreword by **Ernst Ulrich von Weizsaecker** (co-president, Club of Rome).
White River Junction VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, Jan 2016, 290p, $29.95.
(www.theartofleadingcollectively.net)

Anyone reading this book review is very likely to advocate "sustainability," probably using the broad UN definition of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and to be a member of one or more organizations advocating sustainability, peace, and/or robust response to climate change.

In his uplifting Foreword, WAAS Fellow Ernst Ulrich von Weizsaecker starts off by summarizing the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, as regards "the central importance of a new spirit to guide a global partnership for a people-centered and planet-sensitive agenda, based on the principle of our common humanity." (p.ix) The Panel urges five transformative shifts toward universal human rights and basic economic opportunities, sustainable development at the core of all development activities, transforming economies to provide jobs and inclusive growth, peace and good governance as core to human well-being, and forging a new global partnership. Together, these goals can be seen as "security and sustainability," both broadly defined, based on the recognition that we cannot have one without the other.

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Von Weizsaecker goes on to advocate reduced ecological footprints for rich nations, an increased Human Development Index for poor nations, stretching our thinking, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone, evolution of our collective human consciousness as a complex and ever-shifting matrix, willingness to venture into the unknown, commitment to continuous learning, and "a more conscious process of sustained transformation." But meeting the challenges of sustainability requires both an individual and a collective side.

"We need bold future thinkers who push us beyond the limits of our habitual thought, and we need better skills in collectively negotiating our path into the future." (p.xi)

This book is about the underappreciated "collective side," by a Club of Rome member who has spent decades in promoting collective leadership. Petra Kuenkel argues that a necessary paradigm shift is gradually underway. The traditional leadership paradigm refers only to individuals and expansion of individual skills. But most challenges of sustainability require building the capacity of groups and systems to move issues of common concern forward. "We cannot travel the path toward sustainability in silos; instead we need to harness collective intelligence and let it complement individual expertise." (p.34) Leading for sustainability requires leadership by many individuals toward a similar goal on a collective scale—what David Harries calls "leadingship."

1. Collective Leadership & the "Security & Sustainability Guide" Project

Before going further into the details of Kuenkel's book, it is useful to cite one of her concluding comments that "Certainly we need to look more deeply into the quantity and quality of our multi-actor collaboration efforts." (p.262)

For the past three years, we (Marien, Sales, and WAAS Fellow David Harries) have been looking into the *quantity* of multi-actor collaboration efforts related to security and/or sustainability as a WAAS project. The sheer quantity is remarkable: as of June 2016, we have identified more than 1,500 international organizations, or organizations of international interest, half of them formed since 2002. They include 70 groups concerned with climate change (the best-known being the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), 72 groups focusing on the energy transition, 45 groups concerned with oceans, 31 with looming freshwater deficits, 30 with food security, 32 with cities, 28 urging economics rethinking, 44 promoting sustainable business, 50 groups working for peace (overlapping with 24 groups focused on nuclear disarmament), 77 "green" foundations that fund many of these groups, and 33 UN agencies and programs with authoritative information and ideas. On the surface, it appears that "silo mentality competition" still prevails in these grand gaggles of groups, seen by Kuenkel as "enormous efforts conducted in parallel," often isolated and uncoordinated. (p.113)

On the other hand, many of these organizations are members of alliances, coalitions, consortia, and networks. We have identified 68 so far, such as the Alliance for Peacebuilding, Alliance for Sustainability and Prosperity, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group for megacities, Coalition Climate 21, Consortium for Ocean Leadership (102 groups), Corporate Responsibility Coalition, End Water Poverty (a 270-member coalition), Financial Transparency Coalition, Global Call of Climate Action (network of 450 non-profits), Global Partnership for Oceans (140 groups), Green Economy Coalition, Natural Capital Coalition, New Economy Coalition, Science and Technology Alliance for Global Sustainability (and its flagship "Future Earth" project), Sustainable Endowments Coalition, Sustainable World Coalition, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Urban Sustainability Directors Network, the World Green Building Council, and the WAAS-sponsored World University Consortium.

As to the *quality* of these efforts, it seems that considerable headway is being made. As Kuenkel notes, "Sustainability is on the agenda of every nation, every organization, and many

citizens today; it is a global movement that cannot be ignored." (p.4) But progress on many fronts—climate change, economic security, nuclear weapons, etc.—is mixed at best.　And this movement is ignored or greatly underappreciated by many, as illustrated by the minimal attention in major media.　Sustainability may be said to have truly arrived, for example, when *The Economist* and *Bloomberg Businessweek* include a sustainability section in their extensive annual Year Ahead outlooks, and *The New York Times* develops a weekly sustainability section in addition to its weekly or daily

> *"Every change endeavor starts with people seeing future possibilities."*

sections on Style, Food, Science, Arts, Sports, and Business, and when it reviews seminal books such as **The Age of Sustainable Development.**　Indeed, many of these alliances and coalitions may merely be an assembly of endorsing organization logos; a first step, to be sure, but hardly a learning organization that harnesses collective intelligence in a systematic way.

Regardless of the quality and effectiveness of these efforts, *the more important question is how these single organizations and multi-organization alliances can become even more effective.*　The potential for doing so is vast, and Kuenkel shows how it can be done.

2. Kuenkel's Contributions

Petra Kuenkel promises that her book "will help you navigate the collaborative journey." Conflicts, misunderstandings, failures, and hidden agendas are part of the journey, she warns, and sustainability is not one single issue, but a complex of issues.　But "collective leadership for sustainability can be learned and enhanced…helping leaders to implement "more outcome-oriented and constructive co-creation." (p.6)

Chapters discuss four types of complexity, sustainability as a global project to realign deep human values with human behavior, the paradigm shift from the individual to the collective, the costs of non-collaboration, making invisible structures that hold us prisoner visible, expansion of female leaders in top positions as essential to co-creation, co-created trust as the cornerstone for collective leadership, getting tangible results from collective action (co-design of initiatives, focusing on most easily attained successes, joint evaluation of results), empowering action groups by building communities of change-makers and change-promoters (by fostering trust-based co-creation), keeping the larger vision visible, a culture of iterative learning, using opportunities for cross-sector connections, scaling up collaboration (through stakeholder dialogue, cross-sector partnering, encouraging leaders to step into the unknown), and scaling up collaborative impact (take collaboration seriously, shift focus from events to collaborative change processes, design integral approaches, discover the passion for change).

A key element of Kuenkel's book is her six-dimension "Collective Leadership Compass" involving 1) Future Possibilities: every change endeavor starts with people seeing future possibilities; a vision statement is important; 2) Engaging Stakeholders: which is more than simply enlisting followers, and may require changes in vision and strategy; 3) A Culture for Innovation: within us, in our teams, in our organizations, and across institutions; 4) Humanity: developing our own humanity and caring for needs of the planet mutually reinforce each other; 5) Collective Intelligence: develop competency by encouraging difference and suspending judgment about it; exposure to different constructions of reality is paramount;

and 6) Wholeness: seeing things in larger context. This "Compass" is used throughout the book to illuminate various chapters.

Comment

The Collective Leadership Compass may seem overused for some readers, distracting from the central message that collective leadership is desirable and feasible. And some may already feel that they are engaged in collective leadership, raising the question as to whether there are sensible limits to this pursuit. The message in this book is that there are infinite possibilities and needs for improvement, and this may well be true.

The book begins by briefly describing a case study of developing a common code for sustainable coffee production, where various stakeholders were brought together by Kuenkel. Six additional case studies are provided, mostly involving public-private collaboration. In contrast, our Security & Sustainability Guide suggests the need for greater collaboration among NGOs, academic groups, and UN agencies that are ostensibly competitive and/or disconnected, although no one ever mentions this (e.g. 45 groups concerned with the plight of the oceans, including at least three consortia, and 28 groups involved in necessary rethinking of economics for the 21st century). Perhaps most of these groups are ripe to be brought together, but collaboration among similar groups with overlapping non-economic interests may be more difficult than assembling industry stakeholders who can readily see the economic benefits of cooperation. And bridging the distance and lack of awareness between security and sustainability sectors may well be the most difficult, but critical, challenge of all. There are at least several dozen groups that do encompass both mega-sectors, however, and it is worth trying for greater bridging here, and elsewhere.

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3. Further Reading

– David Peter Stroh, **Systems Thinking for Social Change.** White River Junction VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015. Especially see the "Four-Stage Change Process" involving building a foundation for change (including collaborative capacity), building understanding through systems mapping, building support through catalytic coalitions, and making a choice between the status quo and change; also has chapters on systems thinking for strategic planning and for evaluation.

– Steve Waddell, **Global Action Networks: Creating Our Future Together.** New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 244p.

– Jeffrey D. Sachs, **The Age of Sustainable Development.** Foreword by Ban Ki-Moon. New York: Columbia University Press, March 2015, 543p. Arguably the best overview of sustainability. Includes chapters on climate change, planetary boundaries, biodiversity, ending extreme poverty, social inclusion, education for all, health for all, food security, and sustainable development goals, which Sachs helped to formulate. Also available as a MOOC from the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

– Michael Sales and Anika Savage, **Life-Sustaining Organizations – A Design Guide**. Newburyport MA: Create Space, 2011, 226p. Presents a collective leadership development methodology that combines scenario planning and systems thinking to "interrogate the future" in order to arrive at present day strategy.

– Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, **Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective.** Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978, 356p. A seminal work from nearly 40 years ago, describing the relationship between interpersonal competence, collective leadership, and organizational learning.

– Peter Senge *et al.*, **The Necessary Revolution: Working Together to Create a Sustainable World.** New York: Doubleday, 2008; Broadway Books edition, 2010, 406p. Chapters on the business rationale for sustainability, positioning for the future, the imperative to collaborate across boundaries, building shared commitment, and new strategic possibilities. Petra Kuenkel cites MIT's Senge several times in her book.

– Dimitar Tchurovsky, "COLLABOCRACY: Collaborative Intelligence and Governance of Globalised Society, *Eruditio* 2:1, Jan 2016 (available online at World Academy of Art and Science website). On collaborative intelligence as "the most powerful human intelligence," and transition from a democracy to a collabocracy of problem-solving networks.

– Michael Marien, "Sustainability Past and Future: Ten Propositions on the Emerging Organizational Macro-System," *Eruditio* 2:1, Jan 2016 (online at WAAS website). On the history of sustainability thinking, barriers to the movement (it has a long way to go), major divisions among groups, security as both barrier and driver, infoglut as a major barrier driving fragmentation, and the need for a new paradigm for integrating the many integrative thinkers.

– Michael Marien, David Harries, and Michael Sales, **The Security & Sustainability Guide: 1,500+ Organizations Pursuing Essential Global Goals.** Forewords by Heitor Gurgulino de Souza and Garry Jacobs. A project of the World Academy of Art and Science. Interim Draft PDF, July 2016, c.270p. A provisional listing of over 1,500 briefly described organizations, with further descriptions for nearly 400 of them, an extensive subject index, and an overview of 125 information portals. To be distributed for comment to WAAS Fellows.

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