

LCLI UPDATE 2017-NOV

'Generative leadership' Fellows project

"We believe that the way we most often think about and act in relation to leadership is flawed. It is ... too instrumental (even when it is called "participatory"), too narrow in its scope, and too tentative in its grasp of forms of leadership that are not "positional" or hierarchical but nonetheless critical to the life and health of human living systems and communities."

This, the guiding perspective that drives the Fellows project on generative leadership, was adopted at a meeting in November last year held in Cape Town. This is the conviction that then led us to propose a Writeshop on the theme.

So it was, after some months of planning, that 18 of us, including 13 LCLI Fellows, gathered in the first week of October for five intense days to begin scoping the project. We met at the small but perfect Mont Fleur Conference Centre among the Fynbos¹ on the mountainside near Cape Town (widely used by local universities and others and the place where "future scenarios" were built for South Africa after the demise of Apartheid). Five others were drawn in as corresponding members.



A major step

We are partnering in this project with the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) in Cape Town, an internationally respected training agency (www.cdra.org.za) who also play a key role in the international Barefoot Connection (www.barefootguide.org), from which emerge accessible, collaborative writing projects known as the *Barefoot Guides*. These are freely downloadable, and meant for wide use in communities and institutions across the world.

Our Writeshop kickstarts the process of producing a Barefoot Guide on Generative Leadership—a first concrete outcome of our Fellows project and a catalyst for further exploration and dissemination, into which we will draw any Fellows who wish.

In fact, many Fellows were wonderfully gracious in contributing to the costs of the Writeshop (we know not all could who would have liked to). Without this we would not have managed. Deeply encouraging, we anticipate that *all* Fellows will in due course see the worth of what we have been able to put in motion as a result.

¹ "Fynbos," literally "fine bush," refers to the indigenous flora of the Western Cape in South Africa, the smallest, oldest and most diverse of the world's six floral kingdoms. Table Mountain Park above Cape Town alone has over 2200 species—more than the whole of the UK—and the one you will likely know best now found around the world is the geranium, discovered in the 17th Century and eventually shipped from France to America by Thomas Jefferson in 1786. Photo: Leucodendrum, taken above Mont Fleur.

What happened?

Over the five days of the Writeshop, exquisitely facilitated by the CDRA (Nomvula Dlamini, Doug Reeler, Beulah Tertiens-Reeler, and Liz Smith), we spent time individually and in groups sharing and probing the rich experiences, insights and ideas brought by each participant. By the third day we began to do some first rough writing, again shared and probed. This will continue over time, drawing in others who were not present, including any other Fellow who wishes to offer their thoughts.

By the end of the week we had an array of concepts, narratives, other literary devices, diagrams, and the like to work with. We now needed to draw these into an overall outline of what a Barefoot Guide (BFG) on generative leadership should be about. This is being carried forward by a six-person editorial team (in italics) from the Writeshop who will see it to completion.

This BFG is not an end point. As indicated, it is but the beginning, albeit a significant one. It is meant to allow the LCLI Fellowship as a whole to think along with those who were present at the Writeshop about a refreshed if not wholly renewed understanding of leadership, drawing in what we already know that fits and expanding it as far as we can.

So what fits?

We can't be dogmatic about this, but we share a common sense that anything we might call "generative leadership" will be something that embraces at least two essential features:

- a) A grasp of the profoundly complex, dynamic character of human systems as in themselves "alive," filled with agency, coherence, connection, intergenerativity and hope, and animated by the creative freedom that marks human beings in their capacity to cope with and transform both nature and themselves;
- b) A deeply moral vision of a common future for us all at a time when such a vision is being seriously undermined in many parts of the world by people described as "leaders" but whose understanding of leadership is bound to their or a particular group's or society's supposed but narrowly defined self-interest rather than to the interest of all. (You will be aware of this in your own context and of the harm it can do into the future).

Where are we now?

Far from written in stone, in early days with lots still to be decided and worked on, here's a first broad indication of what the editorial group has distilled from the contributions of those who attended this 1st Writeshop or corresponded with us:

The "learning image" that metaphorically shapes the elements of the planned Barefoot Guide comes from LCLI Fellow Craig Stewart and his trained understanding of a river that runs through his suburb and has long been canalized. The canal, a metaphor for a controlling view of leadership that contains everything within it and that, as far as possible, carefully manages everything outside it, has over time produced a dead stream of water with many negative and originally unforeseen ecological side-effects.

In recent years, now much more aware of the complex life of a river and its ecology, holes have been strategically bashed through the concrete of the canals, creating spaces for new life to break through, connect, and spread. Already the result is clear: life has come back to the water, plants long gone have returned, insects and birds are once more thriving, the water is cleaner, the surrounding grasses and trees are once more connected to the water, and the

Present at the Writeshop:

Jim Cochrane (South Africa), *Teresa Cutts* (USA), *Nomvula Dlamini* (South Africa), *Gary Gunderson* (USA), *Marcellino Jonas* (South Africa), *Mosi Kisare*, *Horst Kleinschmidt* (South Africa), *Sandy Lazarus* (South Africa), *Anita Marshall* (South Africa), *Laura Chanchien Parajón*, *Doug Reeler* (South Africa), *Kirsten Peachey* (USA), *Liz Smith* (South Africa), *Craig Stewart* (South Africa), *Soma Stout* (USA), *Lisa Swanepoel* (South Africa), *Beulah Tertiens-Reeler* (South Africa), *Emily Viverette* (USA)

Invited Corresponding members:

Walter Flores (Guatemala), *Jørn Lemvik* (Norway), *Nee Meas* (Cambodia), *Bret Nicks* (USA), *Gertrude Pswarayi* (Zimbabwe), *Aziz Royesh* (Afghanistan), *Jerry Winslow* (USA)

larger ecology is not just healthier but some of the side effects of the canal, such as poor run-off from surrounding areas where people live, are being overcome.

Learning to work with the living environment rather than primarily seeking to control it is the most fundamental point. Seeing how much canalization, for all its originally anticipated benefits, not only failed in the long run to deliver them but also stifled the life that is needed to generate—not just re-generate—the whole is the key insight and creating wholes in the concrete to allow life to emerge while doing whatever one can to support its emergence is the key action.

This, then, is the image that governs the way we see the BFG on generative leadership. The “river” of life and its wider “living system” is the whole that we need to see clearly, for which we may then act intentionally, within which we need to live fully in all its dimensions, and which our practices need to match. Above all, not limited by what is actual, we need to live in concrete, anticipatory hope towards that which is possible beyond what is actual, aware of our capacities to do so. This is the logic that finds its expression in our first provisional outline of the Barefoot Guide I am including below (details may not be obvious and they will change but you should get the general idea).

Generative Leadership: A Companion *- A River Runs Through It -*

“If you can learn ... to read the river and the fish and yourself, and to do what needs to be done without one wasted motion, you will have attained some of the grace and economy needed to live a good life. If you can do it and understand that the river, the fish and the whole world are God's gifts to use wisely, you will have gone the rest of the way. ... [You will learn] how to behave no matter what life brings; about how to wade into the unpredictable stream and deal with whatever happens with grace, courage and honesty.”

Roger Ebert on *A River Runs Through It* (Norman McLean)

SECTION 1

SEE THE WHOLE: Ecology of Spirit

- i)* Life of a River ~ Canalized Leadership *ii)* Leadership in crisis ~ ‘Dragons can be beaten’: Justice, Inequality
- iii)* Bringing back life ~ the system as alive ~ Embracing the Informal
- iv)* 4 Social Forms: Project, committee, limited domain collaboration, *poiesis*

SECTION 2

ACT FOR THE WHOLE: Commonwealth of Ends

- i)* For what ends? ~ Moral responsibility *ii)* Reauthoring the World *iii)* Culturing the Will
- iv)* “Leading Love” ~ Love, trust, patience *v)* *Poiesis* (expanded)

SECTION 3

LIVE WITHIN THE WHOLE: 4-Dimensions

<u>[i-ii] Space-Time</u>	<u>[iii] Presence</u>	<u>[iv] Persona</u> (virtues)
Rituals: Lament ~ Hurt & hope (<i>min. specs & ‘safe containers’</i>)	The Other, myself, group, environment Holding the space & person	The Reluctant Leader The Intuitive Guide
“Playing with Infinity” (artistry)	“Shaping, Waking, Growing, Cleaning up”	(... <i>A variety of virtues</i>)

SECTION 4

READ THE RIVER: Turbulent Practices

- i)* Working on equity ~ Philanthropy of poor ~ Gifting economy *ii)* “Hosting vs. Heroic” action
- iii)* Collective Intelligence ~ Storytelling ~ Community Defenders ~ Partnering for change /CBPR
- iv)* Leadership culture ~ Boundary Leaders *v)* (*Other, e.g. Theory U, etc.*)

SECTION 5

FLOW FORWARD: Possibility above Actuality

- i)* Maya Angelou: “Still I Rise” *ii)* What does this mean for an unequal world?
- iii)* Wisdom of: Abundance, interdependence, humility, critical hope *iv)* Effectiveness *v)* “Failing Forward”

What are our antecedents?

In 2004 Gary Gunderson, with Larry Pray, both LCLI Fellows, published a book on *Boundary Leaders* (Minneapolis: Fortress). We can call this an early foundation of what has become our theme of “generative leadership.” The idea of boundary leaders had already fed into a national program funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the USA that was led by Gary, Mimi Kiser, and other colleagues from the Carter Center to train local leadership in cities across the country with a view to aligning community based work with health systems.

For the LCLI it was one of our first Fellows, Francis Wilson, an economist who led the 2nd & 3rd Carnegie Inquiries into poverty and inequality in SA but is also deeply concerned with the damage done by Apartheid education to Black South Africans, who posed a key question at our first international workshop in Cape Town in Feb 2013. Francis wondered what it was that allowed Healdtown Methodist Mission School near Alice, Eastern Cape, to which he is connected, to produce a steady stream of extraordinary leaders like Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Govan Mbeki, JT Jabavu, and Seth Mokitimi (first black President of the Southern Africa Methodist Church).

He strongly suspected that it was not simply a matter of particular individuals—a great Headmaster or group of teachers (though they were needed)—but an unusual ethos and approach to education that made the difference. The motto of the school, as it happened, was: “They shall rise up as eagles” and so indeed they did where others in other schools who also had good teachers did not. What kind of ethos, what view of the human being and her or his learning allows this to happen?

So began our common interest in pursuing this question when the time was ripe. As the LCLI matured and the Fellows group grew, so too the question of leadership in our time became increasingly urgent for the group. Another key impetus came from Doug Reeler who had attended an international gathering of social movements in Tunisia, where he noted that a general sense of crisis in relation to leadership in communities, NGOs and social movements was discernible, and a desire for new thinking needed on what traditionally has been called “empowerment.”

After consultation with other LCLI Fellows, seven of us (Gary, Teresa, Kirsten, Doug Reeler, Craig, Jeremy and Jim) then held a meeting held in May, 2016 at Singletree Lodge, NC, USA, to thrash out “... the nature of and reason for a LCLI Fellows project on *generative leadership in complex living human systems* in the context of development theory and practice with wider application.”

That brought us to the Planning Meeting already mentioned in November 2016 in Cape Town with 12 Fellows (now including Nomvula, Beulah, Horst, Evance, and Sandy). At that meeting we also agreed that, as far as possible, we would over the next 18 months or so seek ways to use the BFG as a strategic catalyst for an expanded set of outcomes crossing multiple disciplines and fields of practices (which the LCLI Fellows represent) that would serve both the Fellows and their own institutions and networks as well as anyone in the world who might be interested.

Please join in

By now it should be clear that this LCLI Fellows project is one we hope has some relevance to you and your networks wherever you are engaged with or confronted by “living human systems” and motivated to enhance their life and the life of the whole. Even if we are not able to draw you directly into this particular project we still hope very much that you will find it something to be proud of in it as we proceed. Please feel utterly free if you are not already involved to make comments or contribute your own experience and insights, ideas and concepts. They would be more than welcome.

