

**Leadership:  
Following into a Shared Enterprise**

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## Preamble

This paper was produced out of a discussion about leadership, collectives and communities. Our experience is that the vitality of leadership, or better said, effective leadership, manifested in a collective's vitality, is an organic phenomenon in which *leading* and *following* are inseparable aspects of a whole. In the opposite direction, our experience is that collectives fail, underperform and get into a deterioration cycle (socially predatory and environmentally exploitative/depletion) when the organic flow of leading and following is broken, and the collective loses its unity with the whole.

Our concern with the subject was renewed because of the accelerated dynamic of development of Internet groups, communities, and collectives. We are interested in reviewing our understanding of leadership to make it more attuned with changes in social practices brought by the Internet, the Open Source phenomenon, and what is being called the Web 2.0 (intelligent devices and services available in the web to facilitate and support all sorts of networking activities). The theoretical background guiding our speculation and preliminary distinctions and frameworks is continental phenomenology.

As a matter of illustration of a larger phenomenon, let us refer to Open Source projects.

Projects in the Open Source environment have brought forth a very interesting practice called “forking”. This practice allows for the production of discontinuous innovations when developing software based in a particular kernel. If there is a disagreement in the design team on the strategy for developing the code, it is a valid path of action to split the *design and development collective*. This opens up a whole new version of the software led by a new design and development collective (which of course is always formed by a subset of individuals working in the original team). The “forking” practice expands flexibility, experimentation, diversity, and also creates all sorts of demands on software compatibility. If we extrapolate this phenomenon of Open Source to other social and business spheres, and we think about it as a more general form of business and social collaboration, we are able to efficiently manage complex and innovative projects. And we will find ourselves in a whole new scenario that will demand a new understanding of leadership, management, and many other valuable business practices.

In the subtle web of networked networks, which connects individuals, groups, social collectives, institutions, business organizations and the whole community, is embedded a vast multiplicity of dynamic resources and identities that nurture and project a particular community. It is in this enriched environment where individuals meet each other, work together and collaborate. It is the vast network we belong to; it is the vital and nurturing soil from which social action thrives.

Leading through this differentiated texture of social entities is the challenge we are interested in thinking about. In particular, leading in an environment in which there are no external forces controlling the game, where there are no predefined hierarchies

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defining the roles, where the evaluation of performance is based in peers' assessments, and where improvement and innovation unfold from an expanded and incommensurable network of hardly identifiable nodes. In this emerging context, we claim a key aspect of leadership is that capacity to engage and *follow the communal activity*, the capacity to be unsettled and opened by challenges and sensitivities that largely transcends one's own.

One of the most immediate and significant changes is that Internet-enabled emergent collectives show a more fluid and autonomous relation with leading roles. The collective can in-form itself without the mediation of stable or even visible leaders, along with promoting new types and forms of leadership.

We expect, and we work for, a world in which technologically supported social networks will be able to develop and produce all sorts of valuable innovations in social practices. A critical issue is that *Social Networks and Hierarchical Institutions*<sup>1</sup> work with a different and often contingently conflicting logic. We can see symptoms of these frictions all over the places (Microsoft/Linux, Private IP/GPL, Internet Control/Internet Neutrality, etc). How we cope with this historical tension between collectives and hierarchies will affect the performance of emergent business collectives, social initiatives, government, and communities.

Our intuition is that a good part of our theoretical frameworks to understand business roles is becoming increasingly restrictive. In this paper, our aim is to start a speculation on a notion of leadership relevant to empowered social networks or collectives. Perhaps more properly, we should call it "Collectiveship."

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Steven. [The Success of Open Source](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

## Framing the Inquiry

In this discussion paper, you will find yourself in the middle of philosophical articulations. We recommend that you try not to understand each paragraph, but to get a sense of the whole. Just let your intuitions speak to you and let new horizons show up for you. If we succeed in opening new conversations and invigorating your intuitions, we will be satisfied. And if you share with us your own experience and thinking, that would be the best we could wish for.

We consider that the modern-individualistic notion of leadership, in which the leader is the special individual with the capacity to transcend the collective, needs to be reviewed. He or she is able to see the future, and the solution to the current challenges, of the collective in advance. The leader is seen as the one that will rescue the collective from its limitations, and will repair the symptoms of their illness.

What is missing is a more encompassing and organic understanding of leadership, in which leading is not a static attribution or prerogative of a particular individual, but rather a modality of coping with particular situations. So, the one that is leading in a particular situation is also following in the next. In this sense, leadership can be articulated as the ability to maintain and to promote the circulation of power in a collective's dynamics for the sake of the organic unity of a mutually-shared enterprise. Leader(s) are the ones that clear the obstructions and let the collective, or the community, manifest itself.

We first must understand what leadership is if we are to understand its role when vital problems arise. The *lack* of leadership likely accounts for why the problems have become acute, and leadership cannot be aroused simply when a crisis occurs, as if it were slumbering and could be called upon as needed. The loss of leadership and its consequences go far deeper. The model of leadership presented here explores how leadership is sustaining.

What is needed is a re-evaluation and reconsideration of the role of leadership. Rather, thoughtful reconsideration is foremost the simple acknowledgement that things are not going well; Combined with this, the first step in the healing process is a review of the role of leadership with the possibility of bringing it to bear by letting it be. Letting it be, however, is conceivable only once we think through the ecology of leadership and its life history. To that end, on the basis of a thoughtful consideration of the nature of leadership, we seek to coax it out of its hiding place in the midst of collectives that enjoy good leadership. To undertake to restore, without first attending to the nature of what is to be restored, would be a fruitless endeavor.

Fundamental to such considerations is to approach leadership as the mark of a healthy organization. Dysfunctional organizations most often reflect deficient leadership and its gradual deterioration over time. So imperceptibly gradual is the loss of functional leadership that its decline may go unnoticed until acute problems arise. The role of

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leadership in organized groups (whether formal businesses or in-formal gatherings) has been poorly understood on the basis of hierarchical, political models of the distribution of power. Its association with power in the crudest sense has diverted attention away from its function in the constitution of a collective.

When the function of leadership is diminished, a growing absence may be felt, but what to do about it is not obvious. The nature of leadership is so elusive because, on the one hand, when it is truly is happening, it cannot be circumscribed *in its spontaneity and vivacity*. An organization comes alive in its leadership. On the other hand, in the absence of leadership, of course, it cannot be found at all. That absence is not a hole or void that can be easily identified and easily filled in, for in the absence of leadership the lifeblood of an organization has been drained away. The vigor of the group is sapped, and a debilitating malaise sets in.

To awaken the *possibility* of leadership in situations of extreme challenges, requires a perceptive understanding of what leadership is about, in order to discern the causes of its atrophy and how its function can be strengthened. Leadership occurs dialogically with respect to concerns shared with followers: the distinction between leaders and followers should become clearer and their respective roles more clearly defined in what follows. Suffice here to say that the leader is the one who focuses and the follower is the one who is focused into the whole collective that seeks, but the distinction will emerge in and through the dialogue itself. Such considerations are necessary if we are to have any hope of reviving its essential role in the health of an organization. Even more important in these matters may be the continuing vitality of any social group organized around a set of aims, practices, and goals. The care of leadership and taking it into care originally (before disruptions) is the wiser course of action rather than resuscitating it after it has been lost. In either case, however, the central role of leadership in the constitution of collectives is a theme that must be taken up for the sake of the wellbeing of the community.

To the extent that leadership is more about maintenance and discovery than it is about mere change or novelty, dysfunction is viewed here as the loss of the equilibrium of the interactive constituencies and, thereby, the loss of communication and focus. It is a loss of balance and a lack of clarity; novelty, apart from balance and clarity, is blind and leads nowhere. It is by no means simply the loss of the ability to bring change. Novelty is easy and commonplace; thinking is difficult and rare.

A *collective* is defined here as the particular, unique set of practices that are informed by and grow out of the committed activities of individuals that comprise a shared enterprise that is carried out in a shared space and time. This articulation is not necessarily and probably is not even at first expressed verbally. It is reflected predominately in the way in which the members of the collective are interrelated in the structural integrity of the organization. *Words follow the articulation and come to it expressly in the course of the association, which in its existence develops a vocabulary and an idiom that both suits and distinguishes its way of being.* The intercommunication of what is held in common is held in the balance, which contrasts and supports the

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collective in their common allegiance to shared goals and aims, which confirm a sense of historical identity that we call **inauguration**.

A group must find its aims and goals in its beginning, which is its original constitution. The constituencies of the collective are inaugurated in the beginning, and the leader can renew, re-constitute, and reconfigure through re-inauguration. **Imagination** is the immediate focus here and now brought into being by the leader, who participates in the inaugural event by constantly keeping it in sight on behalf of the group.

The leader, moreover, is not sitting apart in a control booth, as if a superintendent that looks on from the edge. The leader is a conduit through which communications pass and are facilitated as the natural disposition of the unimpeded flow of what is in-forming the group dynamics. What is flowing and the nature of this process will be considered below at length.

Power flows, but power will be construed in terms of communication as a linguistic event. *To lead is to conduct*. What conducts is conducive. While the conductor of the symphony, for example, does not himself *make* music, his role is indispensable, and his stamp is distinctive. What in-forms by gathering and bringing together what stays together is in the broadest sense of the word **communication**. The conversation that in-forms is what is either restored (when leadership is eclipsed) or maintained (when leadership is vigorous) by the conduit of leadership in its proper role in nurturing the vitality of communities.

Communication, as the term is being used here, is not about bits and bytes, nor is it about tidbits of daily news. Communication in the conventional sense too frequently becomes mis-communication in the sense of being diverting, and the cause of a loss of focus. **Mis-communication** has been used to refer to what is diverting and interrupts the flow of genuine in-formation. The leader, who focuses the shared concerns of the group, filters out dis-in-formation on behalf of the shared concerns and goals of the group so as to maintain a well-in-formed group, which is well-focused. A group that is well-focused will tend not to propagate dis-in-formation because the leader keeps the group in-formed.

The collectives are constituted as a whole by a project held in common, and that project ultimately constitutes the conversation at every level. The project held in common constitutes the identity of the group, which is the condition of the possibility of that project. *This identity cannot be specified or grasped in its totality by any "statement of mission."* To do so would be a travesty of the inaugural event and would destroy the inner dynamics of the group through gross objectification. Nevertheless, that in-forming project can be instantiated in this particular undertaking. Thus the **constituting project**, which tells the group what it is up to, can be distinguished from **particular undertakings**, which are the genius of the moment and arise out of the spontaneity of the group that is well-in-formed. Undertakings, however, must be grounded in the original, identifying, inaugural event that is creating the group and is giving it its identity.

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The whole, which cannot be grasped in its entirety by anyone, including the leader, reveals the parts in their integrity as they are being **in-formed**. This formation is always incomplete because the in-formation in its flow is always re-forming. For example, sales, accounting, financing, the body shop, etc. all are constituencies of an automotive dealership, the *primary* aim of which is to satisfy the identization-through-transportation concerns of customers. Likewise, the administrators, the teachers, the students, admissions, the custodial staff, etc. are constituencies of the university, all of which share the common concern of excellence in education. The common goals and aims, whether understood as the in-forming project as such or as particular undertakings, **intend** the group to be by in-forming it.

In light of the preceding discussion, in-formation now can be understood to exist at two levels: (1) At the ontological level, in-formation is what in-forms the group as a whole with respect to its fundamental identity, what constitutes it as a community, and what its beginnings are in the inaugural event to which it belongs. This in-formation is about the shared concerns, which bring it into being *as a whole* and sustains its integrity over time. The formal sign of this fundamental level of in-formation is actualized in the mood of the group, for it tells what matters to it. This in-formation enlivens because it is embodied in the activities of the group and is evident in all its dealings. The leader is exemplary in that he most of all displays what the French call *esprit de corps*.

(2) At the ontic level, particular, concrete instantiations of the first level may become **in-formational** as instantiations of the first level. Consequently, mission statements, statements of professional intention, professions of business ethics, etc. can express **fundamental matters of intention**. They may even provide concrete ways of coming to terms with first level concerns, but this second level of in-formation must remain grounded in the first level. This means that such intentions arise out of a spontaneous thinking about what is called for by what is fundamentally inarticulable, namely, the mood of the group and what in-forms its way of being at the most profound level of its existence.

Leadership, when it thrives, is about promoting and maintaining the balance of constituencies in such a way that everyone concerned in the collective finds a way of caring that responds and co-responds in smooth, integrated ways that arise spontaneously out of the ongoing conversation. This role can be accomplished only when the leader, who intends the group, is constantly in-formed by the group of its intentions as they actually are being carried out in ongoing activities. The leader in his openness to the **governing identity** of the group is constantly in-formed by it such that in his formation he in turn successfully can in-form the group of *its* intentions. He is carried along by this in-formation so that he can carry on his leadership in the midst of the group, which is responsive to these common intentions that are being held up and held forth by the leader. Insofar as the leader is in-formed, he conducts the in-formation through the group in a balanced way, which promotes the flow of in-formation for the sake of the common enterprise. The leader, as conductor, in this instance is both follower (in being conducive of the reception of the intentions) and follower (in being conducive to the appropriate

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flow, which balances those intentions). As a conductor, he must listen and at the same time assess and pass along what he carries along.

I describe what is happening when the group is well-in-formed and well-focused as **assessment-in-action**, when the leader conducts the operations with the baton of the symphony conductor. What he hears through listening is interpreted and integrated in such a way as to harmonize. For the leader of a group, that interpretation may emerge in subtle shifts and emphases in practices. The shifts may be unsettling, of course, because of different inflections that are called for by the situation. The **situation** is what emerges as the **totality of inflected practices**, unsettledness, and the kinds of decisions that allow for positive action in that particular moment, on that particular occasion. These kinds of *decisions* never cut off or close down. They are far-sighted because they open up from themselves in that they are fundamentally grounded in genuine in-formation.

The mood of the conversation, which determines how the group finds itself, conveys the sense of caring. Whether the conversation is understood as a flow of information, a flow of power, or even as a flow of authority is unimportant so long as *what* flows is not quantified or congealed as a substance that can be gathered, stored, bartered, or conferred. The lingering of in-formation leads to sedimentation, closure, and lack of balance, all of which are inimical to equilibrium. Open and ready communication, both in the reception and the facilitated flow, is the sign of a caring community. The leader is the conductor of that care, not because he cares more than anyone else, but because he can focus much like a lens. The lens cannot generate light on its own: it takes up the scattered light, diffracts it, according to its own index, and then displays a coherent spectrum.

As this kind of lens, the leader does not seek out the bizarre and the extravagant for the sake of unsettledness. Unsettledness is first and foremost what characterizes the healthy flow of in-formation in the group and is the condition of the possible of concretely deciding. Unsettledness, therefore, *already* exists for the sake of the existence of the group dynamics. **Consequently, unsettledness is for the sake of what is already known.** The spectrum of what is displayed through the lens of the leader is necessarily what is *already* enlightening: it cannot be invented, which is to impose on what is *already* disposed. Of course, by its very nature the very spectrum produced will include the contrast of the diverse components so as to produce greater brilliance. Indeed some of the colors may not have appeared before, but are “brought out” in the order and discipline of the spectrum.

Another way to put this is in terms of hearing. The leader, as conductor, hears what is being finely played in the responsive constituencies and harmonizes the sounds. He is not looking for dissonance in the bizarre and extravagant, much less in the deviant. He is looking for what we call the **con-venient**, that is, he is looking for what is coming together organically. He is finely attuned to the group and its disposition. Of course, this audition, too, may be hearing what is distinctive and may imagine ways in which what is distinctive can be integrated *distinctively* for the sake of harmony of sounds. In other words, new sounds are to be heard, but these diverse sounds only appear new insofar as they are harmonized in the consonance of the work. To dwell on dissonance for its own

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sake as a mode of novelty, for example, may become the limitation of modern music such as the twelve-tone scale.

*The loss of caring is the sign of the absence of leadership, and the mood of group will sour.* Making up for that loss frequently leads in frustration to two extremes: (1) A desperate attempt is made to stabilize a precarious position through entrenchment; but, when things are out of joint, merely digging in one's heels is likely to prove unsatisfactory in the long run. (2) The other extreme is a kind of failing about for something new that might solve the problems, once diagnosed. Salvation through mere changes alone, however, becomes blind to what is happening because the leap forward is ungrounded and overhasty and does not account for the mood. In either case, a loss of vision occurs either in the narrowness of a myopic reliance on a mechanical steadiness, on the one hand; or the blurred vision of accepting something new at any cost, on the other hand, loses focus. Merely to shake things up and to let them settle as they may is never called for because such a desperate measure is destructive of community.

Restoring proper, genuine leadership must look like a return, that is, like a return to the inaugural event and an identity that has been lost. When identity is lost, either through the negligence of leadership or through the flight of leadership in the face of the loss of concern on the part of followers, no amount of new things will restore this lost integrity. In fact, a mere change may become a diversion away from fundamental problems. The **existential question** about who we are must be addressed first, and this is precisely why our approach is an existentialist one: **what is to be done is always conditioned by who we are.** In being who we are, what is to be done emerges with extraordinary clarity in an irresistible momentum that carries us forward.

The penchant for mere novelty in particular suffers from the modern predisposition to believe that something new will always solve problems, usually associated with the old, and that novelty is tantamount to salvation. The modern faith in the power of the new and its irresistible seduction leads invariably to still more problems because structural issues are not raised, let alone resolved. We rob Peter to pay Paul in the firm belief that novelty alone will remedy our ills. "If we merely leave the old behind in favor of something new, our problems will go away" is an attitude that postpones. "Whatever you do, change, invent, and make all things new" becomes virtually a mantra, but moving ahead constantly never gives us a chance to catch up in a frustrating world that always appears dissonant and out of balance. Unfortunately, the fundamental problems, once thought solved by the new, resurface and in due time are repeated, albeit perhaps with some momentary respite, to the extent that *identities* are lost. *Identities can never be created; they must be found in the givenness of what is already constituted.* The new too often is nothing but a veneer that quickly enough wears thin. The new, as a patch on the old, creates the disharmonies of discontinuities and the loss of identity in the plunge into the anonymous for the sake of novelty. The loss of identity, when history fades into a future that leaves behind, can never be realized because it has no place (no space and no time) in that it does not belong to the collective. *That future is not its own.* This kind of future brings no gain, and its yield is only frustration. Life loses its zest, and constant insecurities promote a mood of disquietude in a world of dissatisfactions. Of

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course, this does not mean that alternative ways of doing things is undesirable or does not matter. The issue, as should become clear, is *how* we uncover alternatives in the course of *thinking through* the possible as what already is.<sup>1</sup>

When leadership fails to maintain interactions (open communications in the broadest sense of the word), each part of the organization tends to be directed inward, focused on itself, and each becomes more territorial and thereby loses the broad perspective on the common aims and goals of the whole. The collective then begins to dissociate, to fragment, and finally to disintegrate. Of course, inertia may perpetuate a long, painful decline. The level of discomfort ultimately determines when help is sought, as all other measures prove inadequate. Unfortunately, often it is only in distress that the ***question concerning leadership***, which under healthy conditions remains in the background, is raised for the first time. This paper is designed to understand leadership as the vital sign of health. Therefore the fire alarm model of leadership, as what is called out in case of emergencies, is an inadequate and even demeaning. Leadership is by no means the defibrillator that is designed to resuscitate the dying community by shocking it back to life. On this basis, what is remedial must serve for the ***restoration*** of the *conditions* that nurture leadership. Leadership can appear only when the mood is encouraging, and forcing leadership into the situation can lead only to disappointing results and *ad hoc* solutions. Leadership cannot be extracted from the situation and cannot be put into the limelight, where it will wither and show only a pale reflection of itself. The presupposition is that leadership can appear or reappear, but that is possible only after the reconstitution, often the spontaneous reconfiguration, of a lost equilibrium and the restoration of lost conversations. Its revelation may be halting and is never sure, but patience is the soul of caring. *It does not seize the moment, but rather it lets be what is already there in the moment: the moment seizes us!*

Consequently, *the dysfunctional organization cannot be led*, just as the body cannot be coordinated in its movements when a bone is broken until the break is healed. For restoration to happen without deformity the entire body must accommodate to the weakness in order to allow healing to occur. So, too, a concentrated, *communal* effort must be embarked on by those who genuinely hold a project in common to re-establish the conditions of the possibility of leadership-and-followership as the prerequisite of a caring group of people seeking a common project. Only in the context of the focus of a committed collective can true leadership emerge and be sustained properly. ***A committed community is what calls for leadership.*** Alternatively and otherwise, directors, bosses, and a myriad of bureaucrats may suffice, but none can *lead*, although many will claim to do so.

Through the caring contributions of *all* the constituencies, leadership may once again emerge. In the absence of leadership, these conversations may be scattered at first,

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<sup>1</sup> Another, critical examination of what is meant by thinking, a topic that deserves its own separate and careful treatment, should be read in conjunction with this essay on leadership because *thinking* about leadership is the primary concern of this paper. Thinking is, like leadership, itself an art. The implication of what we are saying here is that what has gone missing in many conversations about leadership is a willingness to make it a theme for genuine thinking, and this essay reflects an approach that grows out of just such a meditation on thinking.

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but their appearance is the prerequisite for composing an invitation to the return of leadership. In order for this to happen and to confirm the concern of the collective's constituencies, the concern of others may be necessary. Calling upon "outside collectives" who are experienced in dealing with issues of leadership is the sign that genuine concern continues in the organization under duress and that that organization understands the need for the reevaluation and reintegration of leadership. The expertise of the others will be about understanding the dynamic equilibrium of the organization and what future is coming toward it. The sign of their concern is not innovation but rather is restoration, not the possibility of bringing (let alone imposing) something new. **Convention must precede invention.** What is to be must be sought and prized in what already is and has been. The inordinate stress on mere invention is a misunderstanding of the **temporality** of leadership. As **welcome guests**, who respond to a **gracious invitation**, these others are open to an engaged sharing of how the collective understands itself to be what is already is. Only unwelcome guests impose themselves insistently and unthoughtfully on a host.

Finding out how it goes with the group is to participate in a mood that tells the concerns within the context of the articulation of the collective's constituencies. The capacity to articulate these concerns to **caring guests** is the restorative balm that brings the healing that is finding what truly belongs to the group and how it can be at home with those concerns, which it already embodies. This sense of being at home with the goals and aims of the group is another mood that supervenes in the fullness of the articulation in the presence of *caring guests*, who through their reception by the group, are enabled to extend their own **corresponding invitation** to the calling of another mood, which opens a proper space for the flow of information. Moods happen in the course of committed engagement that opens up in the **situation**. Moods cannot be forced or planned. They inform the situation as a calling to be there in the situation. In just such a situation, which must happen spontaneously in the course of being with the others, leadership can come into its own and can return to where it belongs, namely, to the prosperity of the group that is held in the balance.

The accepting mood of the guests, who have been invited, is crucial: they cannot be **objective observers**, the "professional consultants," who bring a well-studied, rational scientific method with surefire results. They cannot be merely disinterested and dispassionate, or otherwise disengaged by acting at a distance, as if some *dues ex machina* that will save the day. They must belong in the not yet settled **acceptance** of the collective's constituencies and in the **offer** of their own caring, as a measure of mutual concern. The belief that "objectivity" alone can discover the truth is belied by the importance of moods and involved engagement in coming to terms with the most important things in our lives, for example, the family. The greatest gift of the welcome guests, who care, is their **cooperative good will**, which nourishes trust and the kind of openness that is neither offensive nor defensive. Good will does not fend at all: it is longsuffering and enduring; it gathers what has been scattered in a care-ful engagement.

The failure of leadership is noticed first in the disequilibrium that results from the loss of reciprocal caring. For a wide variety of possible reasons, the networked roles that

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once sustained communication have become clogged. This failure shows itself as a falling out through an intransigent settling in when the constituencies become entrenched due to indifference, suspicion, or even resentment *because* the flow of information has been blocked. The job still may be done, but the work is minimal; and the quality suffers. The settling in of this kind of *sedimentation* sedates because everyone becomes self-satisfied and convinced that he is doing his job without looking out for or caring about the overall effect of the work being done. Tedium sets in, and not caring is the bane of excellence in every work. The job as such may get done, but the tasks degrade as they become menial and are mechanically performed. The focus of concern is internalized on details and minutia that obscure the role of the partial task, which loses its sense of purpose and meaning, because that task can derive its meaning only from a sense of the whole. Genuine concern is the sign of excellence, and the concerned community is the cradle of the caring individual. Only the caring individual, under the umbrella of a caring community, can feel the wellbeing engendered by the mood of satisfaction that comes from a life in common as the life worth living.

Re-establishing the balance of caring becomes the immediate task of all concerned, when things are not going well, just because, once out of kilter, the adjustments and realignments that must be made can be made only in concert through response and co-response. Just as the entire physiology of a drowning man must be focused immediately on life-saving strategies without any thought to the satisfaction of the synaesthetic experience of a fine meal, the entire focus of each constituency a collective that is in distress must be concentrated on strategies that reestablish the kind of equilibrium which will once again allow for the satisfaction of excellent leadership. If the lungs refuse their oxygen, no amount of effort by the muscles will save the body. So, too, each constituency must be attuned to the shared enterprise. Each adjustment must be responsive to and coordinated with all the others, just as all the organs of the body must be enlisted for escaping a life-threatening situation. Under conditions of health, such coordination is taken for granted, even as we do not think about walking; but the occasional sprained ankle, lower back or knee pain (not to mention a life-threatening illness) calls attention to what is indeed a complex coordination, which we enjoy when, freed of pain, we can enjoy a pleasant evening stroll. So, too, the health of a collective is taken for granted when all is going well, but breakdowns illustrate just how remarkable the phenomenon of leadership actually is.

The role of leadership is to foster the coordination that is the concern of all to prosper and to grow, by facilitating opportunities for engagement in such a way that the constituencies are each called upon to perform an allotted task that is carried out through an appreciation and on the basis of common goals. This is similar to the coordination of body movement through the coordination of the brain and spinal cord of the central nervous system. The discomfort of the sprained ankle causes the entire body to stumble, regardless of the good intentions of the brain and the muscles. The entire organization is challenged by a weak member. Although we may make our way hesitantly, every part of the body is stressed when any part compromised. So, too, the collective body, when not properly coordinated, loses vitality and stumbles in its aimlessness.

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The excellence of leadership is the ability to maintain the coordination of the constituencies in the reliability of their expertise to get the work done for the sake of the whole. The leader, however, is never prideful because he, like the conductor of the symphony, knows that his efforts amount to nothing without the commitment and trust of others, who, by giving what is their own, acknowledge and recognize and hence validate the role of the leader. *Leadership ultimately, therefore, is the gift of others*, whose care is elicited and whose help in turn is enlisted by the **gifted leader**. The leader whose followers care only out of basic needs alone, for example, for financial security, is no leader at all, for he has no true followers but has only those who tag along and are easily disaffected by the slightest challenges. Those who lack leadership fall apart into strife and bickering because they lack the cohesion of a coordinating project, invested by a leader, and so cannot really be seeking followers at all.

The authentic follower prospers in the good graces of a gifted leader, and the leader thrives in the prosperity of his followers. The tragedy of the common in a radically individualistic society is that everyone (which is to say, no one) is supposed to be a leader because the leader/follower distinction has devolved into a superior/inferior distinction that is defined by contentious power relations. On the contrary, followers allow (indeed, need) leaders to lead, and leaders allow (indeed, need) followers to follow. This kind of allowance is a letting be of what comes together in a spontaneity that can be neither forced nor enforced. Where everyone strives for power (or “power-sharing”) power is quantified, apportioned, and doled out as if it could be contained. The containment of power is an illusion: like a hot coal from the fire, power is too hot to handle and either will pass quickly from hand to hand or will result in the callousness and desensitization of anyone clutching onto it.

The leader enables and elicits the **trust** of others because he first of all can risk trust. As a manager, he does not need to micromanage because he can allow for the care of others as corresponding to his own. He is willing to risk trust, not for the sake of change, but for the sake of what may happen among those who belong together because they are mutually committed to a common project. The wise leader gathers around him a working group, all of whom communicate well and readily in a variety of ways, including both the rhetoric of words, of course, but also (perhaps even more importantly) through a rhetoric of practices, which is expressed tacitly in the shared work that is being done. The great conductor cannot manage a group of recalcitrant musicians, who would play their own tune and not be responsive to the conductor. The **congeniality** of that working group is the most immediate external manifestation of good leadership and is, therefore, the litmus test. Congeniality is a matter of the mood, and the mood exhibits what matters. For example, the astute patient, upon entering the doctor’s office in a large practice, can immediately sense the disposition of the staff. Whether the staff is at ease with the work and with each other comes across immediately in the reception of the patient. This congeniality will be reflected even in the décor and the architecture of the space of the office environment and the waiting room. The congeniality of the mood of the workplace is the first clue to the efficacy of leadership in any organization, although as much could be said for any meeting place of any group. The group, or community, projects its sense of itself in time and space, and that projection is reflected in the

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concrete materials that support its existence. For example, a dirty, unkempt physician's office is unthinkable. The composure of the patient is pre-determined by his reception, when he first enters the office space.

A critical aspect of congeniality is the conversation that is going on in the group. Sometimes leaders listen by talking as a means of creating conversations that need hearing. At other times, leaders speak by being silent in a way that demonstrates an openness and acquiescence to, even a premonition and acknowledgement of, the future that is coming toward the group. It is this future that in-forms the group and gives it common cause, and the leader is conducive to many simultaneous conversations. The key to leadership is an intuitive capacity to let be, which is neither the exercise of power nor its abandonment because, I will make more explicit below, power cannot be *handled* in his way. Power is not a tool to be manipulated. The misconception of power as a commodity to be accumulated, dispensed, and often imposed—a concept that is inimical to all things organic—at best creates an efficient, productive machine, but that machine, in spite of its immediate profits, will stagnate eventually, precisely in the way in which the giants of the great America automotive industry have declined precipitously in recent years.

This *letting be* is a kind of reticence that holds in reserve. It does not force itself on others but rather holds back in anticipation through the openness that constitutes itself as trust in what can be when lucid moments of insight happen, most often unexpectedly. The leader, however, is neither laid back nor passive but is engaged actively in his role, but that role is not the arbitrary wielding of force in the name of some ideal vision to be imposed from above. The leader is not a dreamer of ideas (the role of the merely clever inventor). He is rather a talented actor who carries out the integrity of the whole because he is invested in what is. To create futures is trivial: it is to live in the realm of the poetaster; it is the stuff of science fiction writers. To create the past, on the other hand, is to find oneself and to engage concretely and fully with whom one really is. The leader is a great novelist who is telling the story of a community as it is unfolding. His talent is to be able to tell this story as “our story.” This storyteller is like the shaman who, by holding up and illustrating, is constantly reminding the community of the ties that bind it and the shared identify that in-forms its existence. However, the leader can bind in this way only because he himself is bound inextricably to the story he is telling. For this reason, leadership is not merely a position in a hierarchy of power, for which substitutes are readily interchanged. Leadership permeates every fiber of a community, in which it **indwells**.

The contrast here is between the physical model of the solar system, in which the sun commands the planets in their orbits, and an organic model, in which the brain, while it coordinates the body, nonetheless, depends on the heart for its oxygen. Only through the proper functioning of all the organs can health be maintained. If the brain becomes overbearing and drives the heart beyond its capacity in unaccustomed ways, the heart fails. When the heart fails, the brain suffocates; and the body disintegrates. The wisdom of the brain does not lie in the holding back of moderation or in the pressing forward into extravagant overindulgence, but rather it is to be found in the history and experiences of the body in question.

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The model of leadership proposed in this paper admits of no handbook of rules or simple primer. Nevertheless, examples of good leaders abound. However, we could not distill from a general survey either of past or present models how to produce good leaders. Leadership embodies organically the inexpressible wholeness of the group and is not merely a circumscribable position that could be analyzed abstractly for the sake of universal principles to be applied to any situation. What I say here should not be so misconstrued: my assertions are intended to describe a commonly misunderstood phenomenon and are to be taken neither as prescriptive nor as exhaustive. My comments should be taken as no more than as the occasion to provoke genuine thinking about leadership.

The appropriate metaphor for understanding how leadership is passed along is the difference between learning how to do math problems and how to play tennis. We can take classes from a teacher in order to learn how to do algebra, for which certain rules and strategies can be learned. While at the novice level of tennis instruction, some strategies also can be learned, of course, from a teacher, one ultimately needs a coach, or a mentor, in order to learn the game. We would rarely refer to a “math coach,” but the acquisition of skills requires the exemplification of masters and apprenticeship, not dissimilar to the ways of learning in a guild of masters. These masters are sometimes referred to unthoughtfully in modern terms as experts, but the master has no expertise: he has only his way of being and doing, which he cannot confer like a faculty confers a degree on a graduating student. He demands neither conformity nor imitation from the apprentice. He does presume, however, both appreciation and commitment to what is held in common, and these are the qualities that grow through initiation. They are qualities that cannot be taught, and whatever may be taught is useless without them. What he has to give is himself and a charisma that holds in trust the common enterprise. Leadership is a skill that only can be imparted by those who are acknowledged to have demonstrated successful mastery.

The distinction between an equilibrium and stability is important: equilibrium is about the functional capacity of the whole to be organized toward a shared goal. This state requires constant adjustments through communication and concern to maintain a balance. The tendency of every organization is to become staid and fixed on what has worked in the past just because stability is easier to achieve than a creative equilibrium, which requires the constant attention of leadership. Leadership, therefore, is not about coping with the instabilities of the world but in fact is about maintaining (and sometimes creating) the instabilities that allow for the freedom of a surpassing equilibrium. Stability is the bugaboo of those ill-equipped for adventure and the dynamics of concerned engagement. A dynamical equilibrium, which is always poised for the vicissitudes of what may come its way, is the buffer that can absorb the insults of a constantly changing environment in a world that is never stable. This instability in the world is not taken negatively: it is a positive opportunity—not for change as such—but for an ever-growing sense of the task at hand. The good tennis player does not plant his feet solidly in one place and then move once he sees the trajectory of the returned ball. On the contrary, he

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is in constant motion and is ready for all contingencies and whatever comes its way. This is not what a skillful player *ought* to do; it is what a skillful player naturally does.

We talk about the quest for stability as resting on one's laurels. Leadership, confident of itself, *produces its own instability* as the promotion of process. The issue is not innovation as such but rather is finding the way that can be owned. Leadership is about the insight into our "own way to be" as what is encountered by letting be a future that is already on its own way to us when we are ready for it. Too often we are so preoccupied with innovation and seeing so far on ahead that we cannot see what is already there immediately before us. Only by letting the future innovate us will we be able to see what truly lies before us. If we were to insist on the language of innovation, then we would have to say that innovation is not something we do; it is something that happens to us in unexpected, fortuitous ways. The question then is one of readiness instead of and beyond aggressive neediness.

Consequently, leadership is about generating unsettledness, which prompts and calls forth what is enabling and responsive in the ongoing engagement with the world. Not to invent new worlds and new concerns but rather to discover old worlds and old concerns by making them *one's own*—this is essential for leaders, who have a less traditional relationship to time than can be encompassed by the faith that we can invent the future. The modern tendency to impose the future at the expense of the past has been one of the greatest sources of suffering in the modern world. The leader is attuned to time in another way. He leads, not because he sees ahead, but rather because he sees before him the possibility that already is. Like the conductor of the symphony, he sets the tempo for the concerted effort, but in so doing he is necessarily sensitive to the demands of the composition and the abilities of the players. In this way, both coming out of and coming into one's own is the point. This process is neither a leading away nor a leading the way: it is the looking ahead that is looking back in finding its own way. The future returns from one's *own* past. The future in this curious sense is catching up with us, *if we let it be by not trying to invent it*.

Leadership is an existential skill because it is about existing the world in and as its own possibility and is not about inventing abstract futures, which represent empty possibilities. Constant invention is a kind of fleeing from and precludes every catching up with ourselves. Such invented futures are the dreamy asymptotes of those who would take the future by storm, and our history is filled with a boatload of just such ideal futures run aground on the unforgiving shoals of history. The good leader does not lose the past in order to gain the future: he uncovers the future in the past. *We do not invent the future: the future is inventing us, if we are letting it be*. Many of our most perplexing problems arise out of a misunderstanding of our relationship to time and the way in which we commodify it for the sake of the illusion of the control and mastery of our lives.

To illustrate further the implications of the conception of leadership that is proposed here, I will consider corollary notions that concretely buttress this way of thinking about leadership: (1) **Mentoring** is the means by which leadership is passed on

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historically and distributively. How can a proven leader pass on his skills to successors or peers? If we can produce no primer or book of instruction and we cannot outline a surefire method, the how is this ability that is leadership either to be acquired or passed on? (2) **Narratives** are the stories that lend cohesion and historical concreteness. The leader must be a storyteller, and he must be able to tell story that binds and ties it together compellingly and convincingly enough to attract the rapt attention of those who share the world that is founded on that story. (3) **Power** is the most misunderstood concept of all, and its relationship to leadership remains the most nebulous of all the components of leadership. Indeed the acid test of leadership is its relationship to and understanding of power, and power itself cannot be separated from an understanding of time. The prototypical modern lament is that *there is no time*. The leader is the one who *finds the time* that is appropriate to the community and its primary concerns. Time is lost in a collective, and indeed there is no time when leadership fails. Ultimately, misunderstandings of power and its “exercise” and attempts to domesticate it create fault lines that undermine and vitiate leadership.

### Mentoring as a Way of Imparting Skillful Leadership

The association with those who are experienced in the ways of a shared world of concern is indispensable for acquiring the skills of leadership by anyone who is called to leadership. A critical distinction first must be made between the teacher/ student and mentor/ apprentice relationships. A teacher is someone who *transfers* the *knowledge* that he has gained over years of *study*. Scholarship is foremost. The student in turn receives the knowledge through disciplined study, which can be evaluated through an examination, which often tries to be “objective.”

A mentor, on the other hand, has *no knowledge* that can be transferred. Rather, he has an *understanding* that has resulted from the *experience* of years of *practicing* a skill. Knowledge indeed can be transferred, but understanding only can be shared in a situation of mutual concern. The apprentice then is called on to *demonstrate* how his *skills* have developed over time with the mentor: examination in this case is a practical demonstration, which rarely can be objective. The teacher can lecture the attentive, diligent student, who acquires the knowledge and can re-present it to the teacher on the examination. The apprentice, on the other hand, cannot re-present his skill: he can only show it practically in an embodied way under the appropriate circumstances. If leadership is a skill, then anyone who aspires to genuine leadership can come into his own only in the *presence* of a proven leader. The model is learning the forms (*kata*) in the martial arts. The physical moves themselves are not difficult to learn, but how to execute the form with grace, precision, and discipline can be is a skill that can be imparted only by masterful supervision. Only a master can evaluate the level of skill attained.

Consequently, I truly can learn algebra, car repair, or construction from a teacher, but I will never acquire the skill of leadership from “surrendering” to a teacher. Those who give “instructions” are teachers, not mentors. Masters are guides, but they cannot determine another’s path among the shared concerns of the community. Together, they generate a rhythm of deep aspiration and mutual encouragement, which exemplify the mood of the community in its working together.

The relationship between master and apprentice necessarily is reciprocal, for neither master nor apprentice can exist without the other. Of course, it is easy to differentiate the master from the apprentice on the basis of experience, but far more important is the temporal tie that inextricably binds them: mastery is the authentic future that is coming to the apprentice; and apprenticeship is the authentic past that the master lets be as his own. Each brings to the other his own; each brings the other into his own. This temporal chiasma is a mutual completion that forms an indissociable unity: apprenticeship apart from genuine mastery is blind; mastery apart from apprenticeship is unfulfilled. The gift that either brings to the other is the enabling gift of time, that is, how they are being with each other, each in his own way. This con-fusion of time that typifies

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the master/ apprentice relationship is a synchronicity that coordinates the activities of the group, as well.

Leadership is not something that can be learned from a teacher. It must be practiced as an **acquired skill**. The master also can be likened to a great coach, who promotes skillful players. The skills of great coaches, especially in football and basketball, are highly valued and sought after, but these skills cannot be reduced to a set of rules or “instruction” to be followed. Often, these leaders are the most idiosyncratic and the least understood, not *because* they bring novelty, but because they are *attuned* to the mood of the team. What needs to be done cannot always be rationalized, but it must follow from a profound sense of the dynamics of the collective. What I mean to emphasize here is that innovations can and do arise from the mood, but innovations will be disruptive if they go against the grain and defy the mood. If the mood is dire, and the group is in a funk, then every measure will seem futile until that mood passes.

More particularly, the capacity for mentoring and the capacity for acquiring the skill for leadership emerge in the course of **character development** in and through a caring relationship, predicated on the emergence of concerns in common and in-formed by a shared enterprise. Consequently, leadership cannot be learned by rote by means of an instruction manual, and *not everyone should be viewed as a candidate for leadership*. Authentic leadership is founded on an excellence of character and not on an exuberance of cleverness and a good measure of liberality and likeability, which are traits too often mistaken for leadership. Virtually anyone with enough perseverance and time can learn to play a musical instrument, but few have the rare talent for excellence. Talent can be developed and nurtured, once recognized. With respect to leadership, the recognition of talent will be difficult, and no infallible guidelines are possible. However, as is the case of sports, those who achieve excellence will attract talented people, and talented people will gravitate toward them. It is a matter of time and play: a great coach will always find time for talented players, and talented players will devote their time to great coaches. The bond that is created is beneficial to the life of the community.

## Telling Stories: Mythologies and the History of the Organization

The stories that we tell ourselves about the group largely determine how we interact with each other and consequently delineate the role of leadership, as well. These stories are told at several levels. Specifically, the **history** of my collective will involve founders, successors, and a particular kind of understanding how, from those beginnings, we have come to see ourselves through acting out the way we are. A business, for example, may claim a tradition of good service and customer satisfaction, or those who support it make take pride in the “good name” of the company. Often, appended under the business logo, is the year when the company was established, as if to say, “we have been in business a long time; we have a good track record; we are trustworthy, and you can rely on us.”

The leader is the keeper of the history of the community. Apart from traditional societies, the role of the keeper of history, the one who gathers and retells the founding story and imbues these myths with the urgencies of the present, is overlooked or relegated to an ornamental role. In the headlong plunge into everything modern, the past is viewed as a distraction that is to be overcome or set aside for the sake of innovation and the invention of the future, which needs no foundations, so it is believed, because that future can stand on its own. The past is a dispensable, disposable prop. On my account, as the historian of the group, the leader embodies the story of the group, its history, in his activities.

The honor of leadership is how it is entrusted with this story in the telling of it. Most importantly, he makes that story that is held in common for the sake of the group his own by renewing it, and his is the current interpretation, which adds to the history he cares about by carrying it out and living it out along with others who share that concern. Leaders who neglect their own history are indeed errant in the sense of wandering and losing their way and in the sense of mis-taking their role as leader as a position of hierarchical power. A group that has forgotten its history cannot be led because it has no duration and has nowhere to go in that it has no place to have been. To be prepossessed by innovation and the perpetual invention of futures is inimical to the substance of historical continuity and the development of a reliable character for the group. The discovery of who we are as a group, when that explicit question becomes urgent, is never the “who we are not” of inventing a future that we are not already. Lunging forward by leaping ahead through the invention of a future that has no past is to take the future by storm and not to let it be as what invents us. The coherence and integrity of any group grows out of and persists in its founding. The impetuous leap before looking for the sake of innovation founders in the forgetfulness of its foundations and flounders aimlessly.

Beyond these stories, however, is a meta-story of how groups are organized. In particular, the modern meta-story is **atomistic**. Somehow, according to this meta-story, individuals are collected into a whole that spontaneously forms a coherent whole based

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on the dominance of a leader. In this reversal, leadership is constitutive of collectives, instead of the collective as the locus of leadership, and we are left with “the world of a strong leader,” whose vision pre-empts all other considerations. Then his expropriating story is told, and everyone else must buy into that story by relinquishing any initiative or genuine participation in the telling and formation of the story. “Our story” is no longer “my story,” and I lose interest and become forgetful of shared goals and aims, which no longer are appropriate. The sense of story-telling that I want to convey insists that both leaders and followers contribute, each in his own way, to a renewal and reinterpreting of the founding mythology of the group and that the achievements of both make that story concrete and energize it in the practical life of the group in which all are included because all contribute.

That we overcome the atomic, modern meta-story is important in the articulation of the particular history of this group because *how* that story is told is even more important than *what* is told. In how the story is told, the respective roles of leaders and followers are predetermined, according to the telling. Is the relationship hierarchical or organic? If leadership in the story is so pronounced that followers become shadows or replaceable stick figures, then such a romantic ideal of the great leader will diminish the cooperative, integrated understanding of equilibrium that we were talking about above. On the other hand, if leadership in the story is so slighted and diminished that leaders are mere figureheads, then the group loses focus and fails to understand its fundamental insights as they are embodied and transmitted in and through the centrality of leadership. Without such figures, who are emblematic, the group would be anonymous. The organic model of community fosters growth by nurturing the flexibility of the constituencies in their mutual adjustments, which requires constant communication in the dynamic flow of power.

### **On the Dynamical Nature of Power: Power Circulates and Will Not Be Contained**

“Power” is one of the most overused and least understood words in the vocabulary of the modern world. Precisely the misunderstanding of power has been responsible for the misunderstanding of leadership and its role in organizations. First, let us try to describe the modern understanding of power as a quantity, that is, something that can be accumulated, held in reserve, dispersed, bestowed, or otherwise manipulable in an instrumental way. Then we will be in a position to propose an alternative, unorthodox way to understand power.

Conventionally, power is taken to be something an *individual* can have and can have at his disposal. In this way, power is subject to containment, as if a quantity, such as a grain, that can be measured and put into containers, for example, like a bushel of corn. We say quantitatively, “Money in power,” when we think of wealth as a quantifiable measure of power.

As some thing, power in the modern sense then can exert force like the power of an earthquake to destroy a building. This modern sense of power is based on Newtonian mechanics, and power is identified with force, either potential or kinetic. The gravitational force of the sun keeps the earth in orbit: the sun has this *power*, which can be mathematically quantified by the law of gravity. The force of the water on the dam drives the generators, which produce electric power. This understanding arises from way cause/ effect way of constructing the world, which is construed in terms of the clash of brute forces. This hypostasis of power, however, is problematic. Has anyone ever seen power? What does force “look like”? Although someone may come up with all sorts of answers, is not what we really see merely the *result* of what we metaphorically call “power” or “force”? We see the building cave in when he earth shakes; we see with the light produced by the electricity from the hydroelectric plant, but we do not “see” the power; we do not “see” the force. Am I not deluded into thinking force exists because I can create a mathematical equation ( $f = ma$ ) to describe it and because I can make predications on that basis?

Alternatively, I am proposing that physical, mechanical models are inappropriate for organic collectives. Power is not to be taken as the forceful interaction of parts that act and interact mechanistically according to mathematical laws. Rather, power can be understood as a circulation and as a movement in, of, and for itself. To the question “*What moves? What circulates?*” no answer can be given. Nothing circulates. To say, “*power circulates,*” according to this alternative, organic model, is redundant: power is nothing other than the circulation itself, and it is an artifact of language that, in order to make well-formed grammatical sentences, we must separate subjects from verbs. Consequently, technically, all that we can say is that power *is*. Power *happens*. To say more, for example, *what happens*, is either redundant or misleading.

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What is worse, mechanical metaphors are detrimental because they cover over the organic unity of communities for the sake of simplicity. The problem with the usual understanding of power is too much is said: to *define* power is to say too much, as if a definition could offer a way to control power. Even to *describe* power (as what circulates) is to say too much because that assertion as such is a claim to grasping the ungraspable, as if our description were producing deep insights. To the extent that either a definition or a description of power is hypothesized in order to learn how to use power, they will be useless: the instrumental approach to understanding power should be resisted.

Now just because we cannot fully describe power any further, let alone define it, does not mean that we cannot identify the *effects* of power in the *way* in which it circulates. However, it does imply that non-circulating power is a contradiction in terms, that is, power that does not circulate is not power at all. Power that is contained turns on itself in self-annihilation in the same way that matter and anti-matter neutralize each other. To seize power will result in powerlessness, at least in the long run. To say, therefore, that I “have” power is to misconstrue the nature of power, which *as such* cannot be contained. Likewise, it is problematic even to say that I “exercise” power, although clearly I do things, achieve ends, and affect what goes on around me. The question remains, however, how these activities are related to power and the answer is by no means obvious. The question, more astutely put, is how I am exercised by power.

While the work here is not intended as a treatise on power, which would required a far more extensive, subtle treatment, it will serve as a background for understanding the relationship between power and leadership, and we are suggesting a totally different way of looking at that relationship. Conventionally, leadership and power have been identified: the leader is thought to be in a position of power, and he is the one who, like a capacitor, holds, claims, and uses his power strategically, or even sporadically, for specific purposes, which as likely as not are self-aggrandizing. His power may be described as overpowering in the sense that all resistance is defeated by the force of this power of the leader. Followers in turn are deficient and limited in power, or otherwise *they* would be the leaders. In other words, the leader/ follower interaction traditionally has been *defined* in terms of power relations. To the extent that power is reified, it must be *somewhere* and *someone* must have it. Power, as a quantity, is always possessed. A “power vacuum” is short-lived. People will scramble for power. Power, as a commodity, can be owned and disposed of and bought and sold on the market. Like real estate, it could be an investment that brings returns. Indeed, if it is unclaimed and without an owner, someone could even *seize* it. In organizations, claims to power and its accumulation in the conventional sense are a common cause of strife and contention.

We speak of “power trips,” “power-grabbing,” or “power-hungry” in a pejorative way. What if power were not the kind of intoxicant on which one could “trip”? What if power were not something one could grab, or otherwise consume? Now saying all this does not imply that I think another way of understanding power will get to the *truth* of what power *really* is. On the contrary, what we are suggesting is a thought experiment: if were to imagine power in a totally different way, what could be accomplished? What

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would this imply for the well-being of a community and its welfare? What work could we do to restore the health of groups or to invigorate groups when a pathology of power has become disruptive? Could such a meme persist and compete in a radicalizing Darwinian universe? Could a leader instill just such a reconfiguration of the phenomenon of power as the basis of cooperation in the configuration of shared aims and goals?

Let us begin to answer some of these questions by *locating* power, if power does not reside in the leader. Power belongs to the fundamental constitution of the collective, and it resides within the circuits of interrelationships and communication that is the web of interactions among the constituencies. No particular individual or group of individuals “has” it, could claim it, or could accumulate it. An imbalance of power, created by any such presumptions, would immediately be redressed by restoring the balance and either excising or reducing such offending plaques. Rather, if power is to be located, it is to be found in the interstices of the constituencies and the modes of lively interactions among them. Power lies within the realm of communications; and, as we will elaborate at length in the next section, it is construed predominately as a linguistic phenomenon.

Within the network of power, **nodes of distribution**, which may shift, rise, and fall with respect to the various tasks called for by the ongoing concerns of the enterprise, which necessarily will emerge, often unexpectedly, over time. These nodes are where the effects of power become first visible and even tangible. Apart from these effects, power remains only a subtle humor. The leader, as the central node, is not, however, the center of power, nor is he its purveyor, let alone its broker. He is instead the one who *enlivens* power; he is the one less in control than the one who *conducts* the power in ways that allow the work to proceed briskly apace. He is a facilitator of power and never its residence.

Power *in its circulation* becomes the ability for the group, according to its own disposition, to express concretely its concerns in a caring way, which is reflected both inwards toward the satisfaction of the work well-done and outwards toward the excellence of reputation well-deserved for the sake of all those concerned. This sense of power brings a sense of well-being, vitality, and cooperation. Cooperation trumps competition because it is only through the achievements of the others that any particular constituency can, in its own way, excel. This form of power does not singe the soul of anyone trying to seize it and trying to hold on to it. On the contrary, power in this sense rewards the shared enterprise, and the mood of the group is the most immediate artifact of the healthy circulation of this “all too subtle fluid” through the articulations of the community. Power itself cannot be captured because it is elusive in its constant movement and is moving in the way in which, within networks of communication, the nodes are activated in their constant readiness for communication. Communication and in-formation are the traces of power and are further signs of a healthy circulation that is the mark of good leadership when it is infused throughout the constituencies.

The disposition of power within the group (indicated by the mood) is the primary means of evaluating the effectiveness of leadership in the organization. The

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sedimentation of power in an individual, designated the leader, is a sure sign of trouble ahead because followers are left bereft of power and, as powerless, they cannot truly follow, however much they may imitate or fall into line with policy. The obsequious civil servant is an example of this kind of powerlessness. The random distribution of power without any conductor, on the other hand, is just as much a sign of difficulties because leadership has been emasculated, and feckless leaders cannot lead, however much they may be liked or set out to please everyone. Notice in the first instance, the leader also is powerless because he has no genuine followers. Also, in the second instance, the followers, left to their own devices, have no power, because they are not invested with leadership. ***Collective's leaders and followers hang in the balance of the unimpeded circulation of power that courses through the organic unity of an intricate web of communication.*** The equilibration of circulating power creates the balance that holds in trust the common cause of the constituencies. The coagulation of power either tears apart in strife or stultifies in tedium. In sum: how leaders come to power (or better, how power comes to leaders) is crucial in the life of a community, and more often than not the failure of leadership stems from the abuse of power because power is misunderstood.

### **The Flow of Power through the Web of Communications That is In-forming the Group as a Linguistic Event**

We live in language. This simple assertion has many ramifications for understanding group dynamics and its transformation and permutations, as well as for the role of the leader, whose task is to maintain and to promote the circulation of power for the sake of the organic unity of the shared enterprise that is the concrete expression of shared concerns. What “to live in” means is by no means obvious, however. We say, for example that we live in a house; but we also say that we live in a family, that we live in fear, and that we live in the moment. Whereas we can use a house for our welfare and benefit, we ethically cannot use a family in the same way, nor in the throes of fear do we *use* this emotion. We are caught up in our family; we are overtaken by fear. To live in a family, to live in fear, or to live in the moment is far more like what it means to live in language than what it means to live in a house. The family tells us who we are: we are revealed to be sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers. Language, which can lend itself to a mood, predisposes us to how things matter, and we cannot make things matter simply by pressing language into service. We cannot use a mood, however, to make things matter. Likewise, to live in language is to be revealed and predisposed by it. In this remarkable sense, we do not use master, or otherwise use, language: it masters and uses us.

Language in these terms is powerful in the way that it circulates and in the ways in which its effects are made visible at nodes, where language is expressed in the words and propositions of reciprocal relationships. The misconception about language is that it is thought to be a collection of words at *our* disposal, as if it were a tool that could be designed to accomplish ends. This strategy usually is devised to outwit language, as if we did not live in language, as if it were a commodity, or as if we could bend it to our will by seizing upon it. In the end, however, for all our cleverness and insinuations, forcing language into words through the sieve of human design results in superficial constructions without solid foundations. When the resulting house of cards collapses, desperate measures lead to words of desperation and the flight from language to fantasies of the peoplespeak of brave new worlds. Reduced to a thing-like status and pressed into service, language abandons us, and words fail, even as communities collapse. The most pernicious, deplorable consequence of the abandonment of language by the modern view are the ideologies that infect the modern period as the most modern of all intellectual diseases. Ideology is not the exclusive province of nations. It was the promulgation of a pervasive Darwinian ideology that spelled the ruin of Enron. An **existential approach to language** leads us in an entirely different direction, if and when we listen to language. Since to listen is to hear what is spoken, to claim almost counterintuitively that “language speaks” is not too extravagant a claim. The leader of a group in particular is the one who has his ear especially attuned to this speaking.

Words are revealed by language: *words accrue to language* for the sake of its circulation and articulation in the activities of that group that lives in language.

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Language is the joyfulness of the life of communication and is peculiar to the human way of being in community, and our language tells us that *community* and *communication* are conjoined as what are held in *common*. Shared aims and goals, the enterprise shared in common, and the *fundamental* identity of the group all hinge on language. The collective fundamentally is a linguistic event, *when* language is articulated in the *life* of a community. The community, as a linguistic event, therefore, is primarily best described verbally. Its identity is fluid and resists nominalization. The community comes alive when it is freed by the good offices of a leader who understands the flow of the power of language in communication to break down rigid structures and to open the constituencies to risk themselves in uncertain ways for the sake of what is happening in the group dynamics. Language, as a flow, is never stodgy and resists the systematization and bureaucratization of controllers because language is always in excess and defies all efforts to retire it to a procrustean bed. It lies always just over the horizon for those who would grasp it in as much as language is always reaching out toward us.

To ask, “What we can do with language?” reflects a disdainful, instrumental view of language that characterizes the modern belief that we can tame language by domesticating to the current ideology. Even to presume to ask such a question is like sending an email that bounces back because we have the wrong address. We cannot ask in good faith, “What can language do *for* us? What can *we* do with language?” On the contrary, the proper question, *properly addressed, is*, “**What can language do *with* us?**” Language belongs to the common. It is not just a social resource to be exploited. To treat language harshly like a hammer pounding nail-words invariably will impoverish the common in the abandonment of language.

A popular and renowned philosopher of the last century (John Austin) created a stir by suggesting that we actually can do things with words and suggested another class of propositions that he called performatives. While language, of course, can be used in other standard ways to declare, to describe, or to appreciate (poetry), etc., spoken words can change the world. In other words, in the same way that we can use tools to build a house, he proposed, we can use language as a tool to alter the world, that is, to perform tasks that make a concrete difference in the affairs of the world. Speech act theory derives immediately from this mode of thinking about language. As a theory about language, it tears up language by its roots to reveal all its secrets only to find itself, for all its formal, logical clarity and analytical prowess, left holding the skeleton of a corpse: all the life has been sucked from it.

The state of the world before and after these pronouncements (or propositions) are *performed* (obviously, by one vested with authority under the right circumstances) is really changed, according to this way of thinking. Ceremonially, for example, the betrothed are only married once the minister, with the proper credentials, under prescribed circumstances, says so. The miscreant really is guilty by virtue of the performance of the appointed duties of the jurors, who have been properly admonished by the judge, etc. The one indicted, who beforehand is said merely to have committed the crime *allegedly*, is guilty once the jury pronounces him to be so. Afterwards, the newspapers drop the “allegedly” without fear of a libel suit and call him the robber of the

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bank or the murderer of that person. The accused is not *proven* to be guilty (which often, of course, is not the case). Upon due deliberation, he is *said* to be guilty, and it is so, almost magically, on the basis of the authority vested in the group (the jury or the judges) that pronounces the verdict that the alleged wrongdoer is in fact afterwards the doer of wrong and is liable to punishment. The state of affairs in the world before and after can be said to have changed materially: the accused (innocent until ...) is transformed into the perpetrator (guilty). In other words, the claim is that something has been done with language. What can we do then with words? On this view, we can change the world.

What we use to accomplish material tasks in world are called tools. So in this way, language, under this description, is another tool, however unique, for mastery and control of the world. This view of language, therefore, is apropos for modern thinking and is perhaps the only way of thinking about language that is consonant with a view of the world as a reflection of the conscious subject, which *intends* its world into being. This world, however, is atomizing and precludes community. “Communities” become transient, virtual aggregations of convenience for the sake of aggressive, inventive subjects who care nothing about the commons and who cannot share concerns because they cannot communicate anything other than *their own* self-aggrandizing aims. They are the kind of hurried leader who, rather than lingering in language, impetuously imposes on it by presuming that it is something that can be managed. Yet all they manage to do finally is to transmogrify the community into a cult, created in their own image, that mirrors themselves and their own ambitions by creating the myth of the great leader. Communication halts, and everything revolves around the sayings of the leader. What ensues is the kind of “Darwinian scramble” so well exemplified in the philosophy of Enron’s Jeffrey Skilling, whose ethos resulted in disastrous consequences for innumerable people besides himself. The fall of a great corporation like Enron may be understood as the failure of language: it is the fault of the self-assertive leader who fails to appreciate the profound role of language in the life of his community. In such a case, communication halts; the constituencies fragment; and the life of the community drains away, leaving only a sham.

In the case of performatives, at a superficial, subjective level, of course, we do *appear* to be doing something with words, but *who* is this hypothetical “we” *who* is said to perform these words? Is he not the one *already* living in language? Could the words “I pronounce you man and wife” or “We find the defendant guilty” ever be performed (or do any work whatsoever) *unless* those making the pronouncements were already living in the language of the institutions of marriage or the system of justice, respectively? To say that we live in language is an existential assertion, and this far-removed from any instrumental view of language. Because we are thrown into a shared world that is *circumscribed* by language, which delineates, defines, and tells us who we are in the first place, we cannot master language, although we can use words when they are first grounded in language.

What is left out of the story about what we can do with language is nothing less than the world of language in which we first of all *already* live and from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Our society is inordinately litigious because it has been

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abandoned by language and has come to rely on the invention of words to tell us what is happening. Consequently, a cadre of ingenious lawyers will always find a way to master words to argue anything whatsoever, regardless of the consequences. The infamous case of Bill Clinton's questioning the meaning of "is" or what it means "to have sex" illustrates this point. The criminal pleas extenuating circumstances because law enforcement was negligent in not catching him sooner so that that he was able to continue his crime spree, which otherwise would have been stopped, resulting in a milder sentence. "Words gone wild" typifies our contentious age, and words, disjointed from language, indeed can do anything, except create a world worth living in. Disjointed words are the effects of the abandonment of language. What we must say finally is that, apart from language, we can do nothing with words. Words are never adequate unless they are grounded in the language of community, which engenders a trust that surpasses words. Words, left to their own devices, will always find a way to escape: only within the discipline of language can words truly serve us in our life together in community.

Consequently, the upshot of what we are saying is that words are not isolated moments in singular pronouncements (speech acts) that are invented for our use: they are gathered and revealed to us by language. Although the words that come to us are at our disposal in the way they reveal what matters to us, we cannot master or invent them because they never belong to us in the first place. They belong to language, and we cannot arbitrarily expropriate them, as if we *owned* them. We are owned by language, and the words vouchsafed have the status of being borrowed. They are on loan and not ours to do with as we would.

We cannot confront language by *telling* it what we will do with it, if only because we have no way, no means, of thinking or otherwise being outside of language. Only as we realize this do we fully grasp what it means to live in language. **Words come to us in lucid moments of openness to language in a community that in its practices and its disposition fesses up to its way of being in language.** As beholden for them, we take the words given under our care, and indeed we are respectfully care-ful with words. Unfortunately, language in our time has become embattled, and words have become weapons. The wanton use of words, which are thought to be as disposable as a plastic cup, alienates us from communities in a rootless world. We hire mercenaries, especially trained in the warfare of words, to carry out our wishes and to hold their ground. Consequently, it is incumbent on us to be concerned about language and the words given because words repay our care by enabling our concerns as they are expressed in the communal life. The legalization of words in a contentious environment is the unraveling of group coherence that results in the abandonment of language for the sake of words alone.

Therefore, the question subtly shifts from "*What* can we do with words as tools?" to "*How* can we respond to the gift of words bestowed by language?" This portentous shift from a quantifying "what" to a qualifying "how" makes all the difference because the latter conveys the disposition of caring and how concerns are being expressed. What is done may leave nothing in its wake, except the completion of the task. How something is done invites a response. Virtually any mechanic can fix my car, and I will pay for *what* was done as services rendered. If certain agreements were kept and the work well done, I

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may go back to him next time. However, *how* the work was done, for which I can make no payment, nor for which is any payment demanded, makes all the difference with respect to expressions of friendliness and a genuine concern for my welfare by way of caring about the safety of my car. To ask, “What can we do with language?” is tantamount to asking, “What I can do with my computer?” What is an effective and efficient use of this particular tool? Indeed we may well pay someone to teach us. How I treat customers and the way in which I convey my sense of pride in my work cannot be taught. This sense of pride comes from belonging to a community, the linguistic practices of which reflect a responsive to the strong leadership that maintains that sense of the worth of the work being done.

Words happen to us in our concerns when we let language tell us who we are in the flow of the power of communication in the dynamic equilibrium of the group. Power then is expressed linguistically at the nodes of interrelated constituencies by the way they call on each other to articulate in their practices the shared language that in-forms the group and enables it to find the appropriate words for what matters. The most telling effect of the flow of the power of words is in the communication and the words that come to bear in the situation. The leader is entrusted with the words that are inseparable from the identity of the group; he is the keeper of words as they are revealed in the conversations among the communicating constituents. We call this holistic view of language the rhetoric of the common. Conversations are enabled by the words that are expressed through the circulating power of language, which happens in common. These conversations can integrate and coordinate the work to be done only insofar as the group in common is listening to the language in which it is living. This listening, which brings the gift of words, is the essence of the lively conversations that in-form the group in its way of acting. What is shared in this way has its historical precedent in the Medieval common, which was land set aside for everyone. The common we are referring to here, of course, is the situation of language that is the locality of acting.

Listening is not a passive activity. Listening is what happens when conversations are reciprocal. Genuine speaking out cannot occur without listening because, before listening, there is nothing to be said. Likewise, when nothing is said, there is nothing to listen to. Speaking and listening enjoin each other in the kind of engagement out of which these two activities emerge. Speakers and listeners are not atoms whose valence is measured by the molecule of conversation. Consequently, I am by no means referring to an alteration of roles in the way that now I speak, you listen; now you speak, I listen. On the contrary, the excellent speaker is always attentive to and hence is listening to his audience in the speaking. In the same one, the one genuinely listening speaks his concern for what is being said. The silent speaking of listening and the silent listening of speaking are the keys to the conversations I am talking about. It is easy to expatiate at length, and it is easy to listen passively. To speak in the listening and to listen in the speaking is a rare ability that must be cultivated in the era of television when we have forgotten both how to speak and how to listen.

Once we are clear about the nature of language, we can return to the importance of the stories that embody linguistic practices and the actual performance, for example, of

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business practices in which conversations are occurring within the collective as well as with those outside the collective. Once a gift is given, the acting out of a response necessarily follows. I call the reciprocity of responsiveness **gratefulness**. Gratefulness in the sense is the basis of acknowledgement without which the communication of the gift is incomplete, and it is a linguistic understanding of mutual giving that we now turn to. Specifically, we can talk about the language of business and the way that language opens a situation in which the speaker is able to listen silently and the listener is able to speak silently because the level of mutuality and trust are called for by the situation.