



Humanitarian  
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Institute



# A New Age of Humanitarianism

From Paternalism to Eco-Mutualism

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Report commissioned by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy  
and Save the Children



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# 1. Synopsis

## Part One

Part one sets out the aims, and then summarises the humanitarian sector, placing it within a broader social context. Our entangled environmental, technological and social ecosystems are continually disrupting our world and we move towards a new paradigm, from late modernity to the Precarious-Interdependence Age (P.I. Age). The report navigates this process, setting out the challenges and identifies Eco-Mutualism as a new age of humanitarianism that can address these challenges.

**Modernity's Gaze** Humanitarianism has had many successes and has grown exponentially. However, there are many critiques and concerns about the future of humanitarianism. This report shortcuts the critiques, setting out an argument that the biggest challenge the sector faces is to transcend its attachment to the ideology of modernity. The current state of humanitarianism is pervaded by modernity's discourses such as, rationalisation, control, hierarchy, bureaucracy, centralisation, paternalism, instrumentalism, audit and target culture, neo-colonialism and so on. In recent years, humanitarian governance has also become entangled with the desires of big government donors. This results in a lack of agility, innovation and of positive relational engagement with many local actors. The sector feels 'stuck', unable to escape limited and binary ways of thinking, such as localisation versus centralisation or global north versus global south. Disenchantment sets in as leaders and humanitarian workers feel trapped within the machinic organisations and the modernist processes that humanitarianism has unwittingly created. The report believes that the P.I. Age demands very different understandings, practices and approaches. These cannot come from existing paradigmatic ways of thinking, and the sector has to transcend modernity's gaze in order to engage in the radical new age of humanitarianism that is urgently required.

**Eco-Mutualism: A New Age of Humanitarianism** Drawing on Michael Bartlett's work on the ages of humanitarianism, the report expands on his work, first adding two new forces that have shaped humanitarianism over the ages i.e., interdependency and modernity. Secondly, it adds a new age of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism that can unleash new leadership, new energy and engagement throughout humanitarian ecosystems. The report explains Eco-Mutualism and how it can re-energise the humanitarian sector.

## Part Two

**Leadership** The report moves into the leadership space, recognising that any radical change demands new leadership. It sets out the four dominant discourses of leadership that appeared over the past century, mapping these to humanitarianism over the ages. This gives insights and a shared language as to what leadership is, and how the different discourses and approaches apply to humanitarianism.

**Eco-Leadership Formation** to deliver Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism. The report shares insights from our research, theory and practices of Eco-Leadership, offering a clear way forward to deliver Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism. This approach changes the very co-ordinates of how leadership is thought about, developed and taken up in practice. We also share five months engagement and research in the sector that reveals alignment and support for our Eco-Leadership approaches.

We finish with a manifesto of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism, to capture the essence of the approach and then conclude the report.

## 2. Part One: The Humanitarian Context

### 2.1 Aims: A new Age of Humanitarianism

#### From Paternalism to Eco-Mutualism

The aims of this project are to offer new leadership approaches that fit the purpose of leading the humanitarian sector into a new age of humanitarianism. This will be achieved through unleashing Eco-Leadership approaches<sup>1</sup> throughout humanitarian ecosystems, not through top-down imposed change. We aim to co-create through mutual engagement, different ways of thinking about leadership and organising and delivering aid, which will harness leadership potential and re-energise the sector.

The core aim is to take the sector from its current ethos of paternalism, into an emergent new age of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism, to meet the challenges of our Precarious-Interdependent age<sup>2</sup>. The Eco-Leadership Institute is partnering with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and Save the Children, to co-create 'Ecosystems of Development'. We begin by supporting humanitarian leadership in the Ukraine region.

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<sup>1</sup> Western S. (2019). Leadership a critical text. Sage Pub

<sup>2</sup> The Precarious Interdependent Age or P.I. Age, is a term used by Dr Western, the meaning will be shared later – first published use in Western S. (2020) Covid-19 an intrusion of the real, the unconscious unleashes its truth. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 34:4, 445-451

## Box 1. Four Core Aims

### Four Core Aims

The four core aims of this wider project are:

- Developing an emergent '**Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism**' for the P.I. Age (Precarious-Interdependent age).
- Delivering **Eco-Leadership Formation** to develop new leadership approaches to shape the future of the humanitarian sector.
- Co-creating a **cultural shift across the sector: from paternalism to mutualism**, from hierarchy to ecosystemic engagement, and from dependency to interdependency cultures.
- Unleashing untapped **leadership potential** and **re-energising humanitarian ecosystems**

These aims are long-term, part of a 10-year vision, beginning this work in the Ukraine region.

The next section offers a view of the context facing the humanitarian sector.

## 2.2 The Humanitarian Context

### **A new generation of humanitarian leaders is coming.**

*Gareth Owen offers an opinion piece that neatly summarises the context:*

The foundations of world order are being rocked by events in Ukraine and a global hunger crisis of unprecedented dimension. Humanitarian leaders are confronted with a major upheaval in international affairs, creating conditions vastly different from those in which traditional aid agencies developed their premises for intervention.

It demands an aid system that is more inclusive and equitable, where humanitarian citizenship is not bounded by self-limiting and self-serving institutional forms and intransigent power dynamics. Future humanitarian endeavour must therefore be reframed within a far larger, complex political struggle: the fight to resurrect international solidarity and promote genuine self-determination. The necessity of this is no longer in question, rather it is a matter of how it will be achieved.

A new attitude to leadership and alliance-building is required, more critically reflective and eco-systemic in outlook.

#### **A new leadership paradigm**

The term "[Eco-Leadership](#)" describes a new leadership paradigm for today's networked and interdependent global environment in which the form and purpose of organizations is reframed to emphasize connectivity, ethics, human spirit, and belonging. For many potential leaders, the full power of these natural behaviours remains untapped. This is where the [Humanitarian Leadership Academy](#), or the HLA, comes in — to help hone and unleash this new wave of future-facing leadership spirit.

In Ukraine, the HLA is developing a new kind of leadership program in partnership with the [Eco-Leadership Institute](#) to empower local leaders.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2.3 Beyond Modernity’s Gaze

Alongside the praise for the good work of the humanitarian sector there have been growing opinions and critiques. These critiques come from a diverse spectrum of voices, from theoretical and academic, (Fiori et al., 2021; Slim, 2022) the voices of senior leaders in the field (INGO's CEO report<sup>4</sup>), from think tanks and practitioner reports, and from grass-roots voices on the ground (Ukraine Polish NGO Open letters - see appendix). The critiques highlight real problems, but often struggle to provide workable solutions, and in our view miss out underlying challenges. The critiques do three things:

- 1) Turn to repeated patterns from the past for solutions e.g., a common problem is ‘there is wasteful bureaucracy and too much regulation’, the solution proposed is to ‘make the machine more efficient’. Trying to solve the problem with the tools that created it won’t work. What is required is the critical capacity to ‘look away’ and re-configure the problem rather than try and resolve it.
- 2) Challenges are positioned in a binary blame context e.g., ‘localisation is good, internationalisation is bad’ or ‘Global South good but disempowered, and Global North is controlling and bad’. Whilst this report shares many of these critiques, it believes that positioning the problems in this way is also part of the problem. Splitting between good and bad doesn’t solve problems, it embeds polarised positions. It also leaves out complexities and oversimplifies the categories. Also utilising psychodynamic thinking, we see how there is often a great ‘pleasure in

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from opinion piece by Gareth Owen OBE, 5<sup>th</sup> Dec 2022. [A new generation of humanitarian leaders is coming.](http://www.devex.com)  
[www.devex.com](http://www.devex.com)

<sup>4</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ingos-long-humanitarian-century-leadership-survey-report-what-leaders-international-ngos-think-about-challenges-they-face-and-future-aid-and-development-sector>



displeasure<sup>5</sup> taken. Complaining about problems and blaming a 'bad other', whilst investing in a group identity of being a part of the 'good tribe' is pleasurable but perpetuates rather than resolves the challenges<sup>6</sup>.

- 3) Another response is taking the problems to a higher level, into theory and an ideological plane of how westernised-liberalism or a dominating westernised hegemony has impacted on the sector. This higher-level critique is valid and highlights the need to decolonise, but it rarely offers practical moves that can disrupt the norms and lead to a post westernised-liberal order. Rhetoric such as 'decolonise and localise' are pervasive in the sector, but how to decolonise and decentralise, and how to decolonise locally as well as internationally is made less clear. Whilst there are important moves being made, Samantha Powell Chief of USAID acknowledges the failings; she says;

USAID has set the 25% target for funding to local organizations, it has also set another target aiming to have 50% of funding include local voices. The key question now is how to successfully undertake more locally driven development when previous initiatives have failed. <sup>7</sup>

The implementation of humanitarian aid continues to be delivered via the same structures and cultures, infused with paternalism, control and modernity's discourses. What is left is a sector with many tired and disillusioned humanitarian workers and leaders, committed and passionate about their work, but feel stuck. They see no escape from the 'humanitarian machine' and no compass to guide them forward. Several humanitarian CEOs interviewed for the INGO leadership report express this 'stuckness'.

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<sup>5</sup> Stavrakakis, Y. (2007). *The Lacanian left*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Western S. Autonomist leadership in leaderless movements: anarchists leading the way. *S Western*. *Ephemera: Theory & politics in organization* 14 (4), 2014.

<https://ephemerajournal.org/contribution/autonomist-leadership-leaderless-movements-anarchists-leading-way>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.devex.com/news/usaid-chief-samantha-power-details-localization-push-102256>

## Box 2. What do we mean by Stuckness?

### INGO CEO Report

#### What Do We Mean by ‘Stuckness’?

INGO Leadership Report. *The Long humanitarian Century*, pg. 4.

A sense of wanting — indeed needing — to move their organisations in new and different directions came across strongly from the CEOs we interviewed. But this desire was matched by doubt and frustration as regards their freedom and scope to do so. CEOs referred to factors internal to the aid sector making change much more challenging, alongside radical uncertainties in their external environment which NGOs are having difficulty in comprehending.

As always, the CEO’s role is to identify destinations, to map a course, to navigate and negotiate the obstacles getting in the way— but they perceive the current conjunction of exogenous and endogenous factors as making this a particularly complex task. Everywhere, the effectiveness and efficiency of INGOs is being scrutinised, competition is growing and the demands of compliance are increasing. Movements around racial equality have also raised fundamental questions about INGOs and their role, with calls for a more localised, ‘decolonised’ (i.e., involving real shifts of power from the global North) and inclusive aid and development sector.

How well can INGOs adapt to this increasingly complex global situation? Can they avoid being so consumed in the day-to-day, so absorbed in their own internal dynamics – including defending themselves from attack – so ‘stuck,’ that they fail to confront the radical uncertainties that they face in their external environment? Can they adapt to the new realities and stay effective without ‘losing their souls’?

At the heart of the problem is that the sector is ideologically and unconsciously entrapped in modernist mindsets.

This attachment to modernity is a collective unconscious way-of-being. Leading through results and efficiency driven management control is a taken-for-granted norm, with little critical reflection on how this excess, produces dehumanised organisations and relationships. Leaders think ‘this is just how the world is’, and their thinking is supported by consultants, coaches and leadership development programmes that re-enforce this modernist view. Each time a ‘new solution’ is sought, a repetition from modernity’s playbook is proposed. Disrupting these normative and modernist ways of thinking is now required to open a space for different options to emerge.

The report will next set out a brief description of the modernity mindset and how humanitarian leaders have been planning and thinking like modernist architects. It will then describe the transition from the modernity mindset to Eco-Mutualist mindsets.

### **Humanitarianism entrapped in Modernity’s Gaze**

To understand the challenges humanitarianism faces, the sector urgently needs to re-think how it operates. No fundamental change will occur unless we expose the discourses, practices and ideologies that unconsciously pervade the humanitarian sector, entrapping it in a way of thinking and being.

A lot written is in the sector about the impacts of Westernised-Liberalism, the need for decolonisation, localism and to shift power from the Global North to the Global South. Whilst these critiques are very important and real, they are problematic. These structural categories of international, national and local, are entrenched modernist forms. Discussions about how to shift from one category to another e.g. from Global North to Global South, keep us trapped in the stuck categories which undermine the real changes required. No such distinct categories exist, except in the modern imaginary. In the lived world, boundaries are porous, and international, national and local merge and blur. Whilst agreeing that the sector is far too centralised and has a

top-down ethos, creating binary opposites with fixed boundaries compounds the status quo and doesn't enable a different narrative or vision to emerge.

Localisation for example, creates two problems. Firstly, whilst progressives calling for localisation consciously aim to be emancipatory; unconsciously a repetition of oppression takes place. Localisation is a replacement signifier for 'developing countries' as discussed in an interview with Amruta Byatnal, Senior Editor at Devex:

***"I hate the word localization with a very strong capital H."***

***And what about its sister term, decolonization?***

***"I hate that even more," she said. "These are all fantastic buzzwords, but they all emerge from global north supremacy... low and middle-income countries were previously known as 'developing countries.' Then that phrase was replaced with the term 'global south.'"***

***"There's a hierarchical structure and mindset.... Nobody is really challenging it. Decolonizing is still putting us at a lowest level. Localization is also putting us at a lower level. So, when do we become equals? When will that mindset shift?"***

***We refuse to use the word localization; we call it ecosystem development. Because I cannot bring about any change on my own. You can't; none of us can."***<sup>8</sup>

The second problem with localisation is that it creates binary and false categories of 'local versus central' when these categories are blurred and entangled. Actor-Network theory (Law, 1993) and Eco-Leadership theory (Western, 2019) challenge these socially constructed boundaries. Modernity has always been about purity, categories, clear boundaries and reductionist science, but the world just isn't like this and is becoming ever more entangled.

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<sup>8</sup> David Ainsworth and Amruta Byatnal, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022. [Localization? I hate the word. Decolonization? I hate that even more. www.devex.com](https://www.devex.com)

This doesn't mean ignoring the international, national and local organising structures. Funding and governance structures are organised partly in this way, so we continue to work with them, yet realising that they are not the whole picture. These categories limit our understanding and the map they represent is not the territory that is on the ground. Taking an ecosystemic perspective enables us to work with and beyond these categories, liberating us from stuckness. As Hugo Slim writes, "Many aid agencies seem genuinely 'hybrids' that combine local, national and international" (Slim, 2022, p.228)

Professor Kristina Roepstorff also critiques the localisation agenda as too binary and not acknowledging the entanglements between local, national and international: she writes: "As such the localisation agenda risks perpetuating the very issues it wants to redress. A critical localism is thus proposed as a framework for much needed research on the localisation agenda"<sup>9</sup>

The idealisation of localisation is also problematic. Local actors are big, medium and small, impactful and inefficient, knowledgeable and lacking. Some local actors have better networks and resources and can Hoover up international funding, leaving other dynamic and important less powerful micro-actors without resources.

The task is not to shift from one category to another, North to South or International to Local but to see beyond these categories and to critically 'look awry'. North, south, international and local are entangled, blurred and relational. Hierarchy, power and resources will always be present and contested, it is the way we relate to them that really matters. To create change is to reconfigure ways-of-thinking, not to repeat the thinking of the last century. The challenges is to undo humanitarian attachments to being expert professionals or managers in control, and to co-create new ways of being

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<sup>9</sup> Roepstorff K. (2020) A call for critical reflection on the localisation agenda in humanitarian action *Third World Quarterly* Vol 41, No 2 (2020-Pg 284-341)

together. Eco-Mutualist approaches undo this modernist, hierarchical, binary and linear way of thinking.

The sector is not alone in the modernity entrapment. Aside from a few pioneering leaders and organisations, most private, public and social organisations are also enthralled by a modernist ideology, which is why collectively we struggle to address the climate crisis. Yet there is change coming, and the new discourse of Eco-Leadership is much sought after in many sectors.

In recent years the Eco-Leadership Institute<sup>10</sup> has utilised Eco-Leadership as new way of thinking directly in Microsoft, Investec Bank, HSBC Bank, the Further Education and health sectors, Ford Motors USA, the University sector, the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Many of our associates, coaches and consultants who are trained to work with Eco-Leadership influence many teams and organisations in diverse countries. Change is coming!

**To summarise:** Modern era practices are no-longer fit for purpose, they are too linear, machinic, paternalistic, divisive and controlling. Humanitarian organisations and institutions are caught in the pervasive modernist ideology with ‘management’ being its master signifier. A master signifier unleashes a chain of signifiers, and ‘management’ unleashes familiar signifiers such as control, hierarchy, bureaucracy, efficiency, growth, rationality, science and measurement. All of which are endemic throughout the sector.

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<sup>10</sup> [Eco-Leadership Institute](#)

## **Box 3. *Form follows Function*': How Humanitarianism mirrors classic modernist architect thinking.**

### **'Form follows Function' Louis Sullivan**

#### *Humanitarianism mirroring modernist architects*

The phrase "form follows function" became the guiding motto of Modernist architects after the 1930s, and refers to the practice of designing buildings in a minimalist form, focusing solely on their functionality and removing excess such as decoration. The problem with this utilitarian formula, is that it works in an imaginary space that doesn't account for our interdependencies, relationships or connectivity. The modernist architects created building projects based on disconnected closed-systems. The form of each building is designed to fit its particular function e.g. a concrete brutalist office block is created to provide maximum office space at minimal cost, yet it does nothing to enhance, or integrate it into its environment. Nor does it account for externalities in the ecosystems, such as environmental damage or pollution, and it does nothing to imagine the power and importance of 'non-functional' aspects such as aesthetic beauty or relate to human relationships, to nature, love, compassion and friendship.

Modernism produced great efficiencies and huge advances in urbanisation, medicine, mass production and mass consumption. Yet this was at the expense of the natural environment and of human flourishing. Modernism at work turns people into 'human resources' they become cogs-in the-wheel-of-the-machine, and the home becomes a 'machine for living' (Corbusier *Towards a New Architecture*). Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film, *Modern Times* captured dehumanisation in the factory and Frederick Taylor's scientific management approach, taken up by Harvard

Business school and applied almost universally was deemed a dehumanising approach by critics from the outset. Yet today, the ‘Controller leadership discourse’ (Western 2019) which is today’s inheritor of these modernist management ideas, thrives within the humanitarian sector.

Humanitarianism unconsciously follows this dictum, ‘form follows function’. It has created industrial-scaled, corporate machines in its attempt to be as functional and efficient as possible. Like other successes modernity produced, Big Aid and the international humanitarian machine has produced big impacts, saving millions of lives. Yet as we are discovering, it has also created many problems, and like modernity’s impact on the planet, Big Aid is proving unsustainable.

Whilst the logic of utilising data, numbers, rationality and efficiency to produce the best results is understandable, and in part necessary; the problem is that like the architects, humanitarians have become trapped in closed-system, reductive thinking that creates a huge cost on the human condition, and which limits adaptivity and innovation.

When employees in Save the Children refer to the organisation they passionately serve as ‘the machine’ we know there is a problem.

The modernist gaze became entangled with capitalism early on, and the two cannot be separated. Market forces have always shaped the humanitarian sector in relation to funding, and this was turbo-charged during the neo-liberal drive for growth in recent decades.

As aid agencies expanded fundraising and marketing departments, the quest for effectiveness simultaneously contributed to the commercialisation of Western humanitarian cultures. By the turn of the millennium, as a consequence of the fusion of charitable and commercial cultures, aid agency executives were no more out of place in the world of business than Bill Gates was in the aid sector. (Fiori et al., 2021)



## You can't fatten a pig by weighing it

Audit culture (Power, 2000) meant that the setting and measuring targets and goals, created a parallel workload and distorted humanitarian aid work. Organisations learn how to 'play the game and follow the money' instead of focusing on actual needs. Within the sector a huge audit machinery was amplified after the terrible failings of the Rwanda genocide (Slim, 2022) and the huge increase of government funded aid led to donors demanding more regulations and checks. However, as in all audit work, much of it is pseudo-scientific measurement (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2006). Evaluation work done by consultants, friends and assessors too close to leaders in humanitarian organisations, play the game and give the right answers to renew contracts. Shandiz Moslehi et al. in their 'systematic review' of international humanitarianism evaluation, found a lack of coherence, and that there was no standard agreement of humanitarian effectiveness and that the standards were vague. She went on to share that there was a heavy bias to report what went well rather than what went badly (Moslehi et al., 2016). Slim also reports that there is a "notorious custom in the humanitarian sector of getting insiders to evaluate humanitarian performance or critical friends who are more friendly than critical, hoping to get the next assignment... Objective whole sector reviews like the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition in 2006, are sadly rare." (Slim 2022: 209)

The word evidence-based is used as if it reflects scientific neutrality and hard facts, yet whilst the aims of audit culture are important and authentic, the problems are self-evident. The impact of too much regulation and bureaucracy, plus the questionable methods used, and the unspoken knock-on impacts of creating instrumentalist cultures where people hit targets rather than needs, requires a re-thinking.

The 2022 Ukrainian NGO Open Letter that criticized the INGO response, began with the first point demanding less bureaucracy and less 'Controller Leadership':

**Cut the bureaucracy.** Despite official statements of international organisations that they seek to support local public initiatives in Ukraine, the reality is that in order to receive these funds, tens, or hundreds, or even thousands of procedures are required. We don't have the human resources to do this, nor do

we think this is a priority. Trust and accountability are basic principles for cooperation. *'If not now. When? Open letter signed by 93 Ukrainian NGOs<sup>11</sup>.*

Thomas Lay, East and Southern Africa Regional Humanitarian Director, Save the Children sums up the Big Aid modernity agenda:

Since these events in the early 1990's multilateral aid has evolved throughout late-modernity with a series of structures and processes designed to: prioritize effectively, enhance the speed of delivery and avoid duplication of effort whilst holding agencies accountable to high standards of programming, financial scrutiny and duty of care to staff and end users of aid. The mechanical managerialist processes that have been established in the pursuit of these objectives have orientated around quantitative aggregation and are presented as the country level Humanitarian Response Plans or Flash Appeals each contributing to the Global Humanitarian Overview...

...Consequentially the corridors of aid are echoing with uncomfortable, emotional, defensive, and polarised discussions around how many layers of prioritisation we've reached when discussing resource allocation and whether the current system is fit for purpose. As nothing is too big to fail, it begs the question; 'what's next? (Lay, 2022)

The modernist mindset has a further lack, perhaps it's greatest. It's reductionist and linear way of thinking doesn't account for systems, networks, interdependencies and holistic understandings. Modern science takes objects apart to understand how they function as independent objects. Gaia theory, systems theory, actor-network theory, quantum theory, Eco-Leadership theory and many other systems approaches, try to understand how things work together, how they implicate each other, how patterns reveal connectivity and interdependencies.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://philanthropy.com.ua/en/program/view/akso-ne-zaraz-koli>

The humanitarian sector has to escape modernity's iron cage, and fast develop eco-mindset capacities to adapt and innovate successfully into the future.

## **Humanitarians and its discontents**

The paradox of humanitarians being so attached to the de-humanising forces of modernity's instrumentalism gets missed in the sector. Discontent and disillusionment of humanitarian employees is well referenced, but the connection between the modernist ideology and the discontent is missed. Perhaps this points to a lack of critical thinking and theory in the sector which we believe is an essential part of the work to be done. Even when aspirational change is expressed, the language and methods remain entrapped in modernist ideology. For example, the Grand Bargain Process 2.0 reframes their overall objective as:

Better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations through enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and greater accountability, in the spirit of Quid pro Quo as relevant to all.<sup>12</sup>

Frederick Taylor, famous for scientific management and the 'efficiency craze' in 1910 that began modernity's domination of organisational behaviour, could have written this Grand Bargain statement.

To conclude this section, Ryokan the Zen poet wrote this haiku:

*"If you point your cart north,*

*When you want to go south,*

*How will you arrive?"*

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<sup>12</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain/>

The humanitarian cart is pointed north, towards modernity's methods of efficiencies, measurement, control, hierarchy and closed system thinking. Yet it claims it wants to go south; to be more local, egalitarian, collaborative, adaptive, innovative, agile, systemic, holistic, inter-connected, and mutual. So how will it get there?

Our Eco-Mutualist approach doesn't attempt to dismantle modernity's approaches from top-down. Efficient, high-quality delivery, with reasonable controls that are well regulated are necessary. 'Controller leadership' is necessary, but it shouldn't dominate as that just alienates those trying to collaborate and deliver.

Modernity and its methods cannot be uncreated or 'dissolved into thin air' overnight, nor should we wish them to be. The challenge is not to overthrow the old modernist order, pro-claiming a post-modernist humanitarianism. The very call for revolution and transformation are themselves modernist practices.

The task is to utilise and improve what is good in the current system, and to create change at the edges in parallel. To lead and innovate from the margins, to embrace ecosystems and mutualism as core practices will subvert the modernist mindsets over a period of time.

Vertical relations (hierarchies, international power) will always be in relation to lateral relations (peer to peer networks, local to local, communities of practice, collaborative work). We do not proclaim a utopian ideal of getting rid of top-down power and recognise that the relationship between the vertical and lateral is distorted, and urgently needs to change. Marginalised voices from the edge need greater exposure and not just for altruistic reasons. Unless they are engaged with, important knowledge, insights, innovations and experience gets lost.

Radical change will not take place through hierarchical command, or another restructuring. Edgy ideas that speak to people's condition become contagious and go viral. Concepts, language and power relations change through the actual experience of collaborative practices.

The humanitarian sector is an ecosystem set within many other ecosystems. It therefore requires an ecosystemic approach to offer dynamic, innovative, impactful, thoughtful and sustainable change.

## 2.4 Eco-Mutualism: A New Age of Humanitarianism

### Introduction

“What are the ‘political forms’ through which a ‘new cultural order’ might be constructed, out of what Gramsci called ‘this multiplicity of dispersed wills?’”<sup>13</sup>

This section sets out a conceptual space, and then discusses the ages of humanitarianism drawing on Michael Barnetts’ work in his book ‘Empires of Humanity’. The report expands and builds on Barnett’s framework to develop an emergent, new age of humanitarianism called Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism.

#### Process of crises and a new cultural order

Gramsci theorised crisis as a process not an event, and believed a crisis was an opportunity to construct a new cultural order, which could be formed out of a diversity of aims<sup>14</sup>. Gramsci’s insights are important for the humanitarian sector which faces its own ‘crisis as a process’ and it definitely consists of a ‘multiplicity of wills’, and a diversity of aims. Stuart Hall explains, “Gramsci’s recognition that every crisis is also a moment of reconstruction; that there is no destruction which is not, also,

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<sup>13</sup> Jenny Turner [Vol. 44 No. 21 · 3 November 2022](#) London Books Review: A Difficult Space to Live

<sup>14</sup> Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the prison notebooks. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

reconstruction...that every form of power not only excludes but produces something. That is an entirely new conception of crisis and of power.”<sup>15</sup>

The humanitarian sector faces this process of an unfolding crisis. The crisis from the demand side is well documented. The environmental challenges ushering in known and unknown humanitarian crisis such as mass migration, and long-term aid is becoming a norm with huge refugee camps, some with third generation refugees such as Dadaab in Kenya, with no solutions for resettlement<sup>16</sup>. Pandemics and resource wars are on the horizon, and there seems no sign of relief from the ‘process of crisis’ ahead.

From the supply side, as governments retreat from generous funding, humanitarians have to make difficult choices when prioritising aid. The funding changes demand a re-thinking of business and operation models and asks questions of what aid can and should deliver. The unfolding crisis of an over-centralised, global north dominated, bureaucratic sector looms large. ‘Big aid’ has made great progress and has also created its own crisis, as it has become top-heavy and unsustainable. It creates disenchantment for those working in the ‘machine’, and anger from those at the edges who regard big aid as paternalistic and in need of decolonisation<sup>17</sup>. The expansion of humanitarian aid into human rights and protection has also created unlimited demand on the sector and diverse humanitarian actors with different humanitarian models also a challenge the status quo: China and India for example.

The question humanitarians face is how to construct a new humanitarian cultural order - a new age of humanitarianism - in the face of the unfolding ‘process of crisis’. A new age of humanitarianism will not be constructed from more of the same. Messiah Leaders (Western 2019) who offer shiny (repackaged) new visions, or institutions offering a ‘new’ universal lists of humanitarian rights or humanitarian obligations, or

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<sup>15</sup> Stuart Hall (2017) <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/makingdifference/2012/2/4f439dbb9/dadaab-worlds-biggest-refugee-camp-20-years-old.html>

<sup>17</sup> The New Humanitarian (2022) <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/08/12/Decolonising-aid-a-reading-and-resource-list>

more rhetoric on decolonisation, will not provide the deep change that can construct a new age of humanitarianism.

Stuart Hall points to the need to construct ‘a unity out of difference’:

“the illusion of the intellectual is that ideology must be coherent, every bit of it fitting together, like a philosophical investigation. When, in fact, the whole purpose of what Gramsci called an organic ideology is that it articulates into a configuration different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations. It does not reflect, it *constructs* a 'unity' out of difference” (Hall, 2017)

This report suggests a practical, and yet radical way forward. New political and organisational forms are required to lead the humanitarian sector through the ‘process of crisis’, into a process of regeneration, reconfiguration and reclamation.

Humanitarianism is global movement that has a ‘multiplicity of dispersed wills’ which demand ecosystemic approaches that can co-create a unity out of difference. Rainforests thrive only when bio-diversity flourishes, human and socio-technical systems thrive only when diversity flourishes. A new humanitarian cultural order will be constructed on the basis of a unity that thrives not in spite of, but because of, its diversity.

## The Ages of Humanitarianism

The humanitarian sector urgently needs to adapt as it traverses away from modernity’s gaze and embraces the Precarious-Interdependent Age. This report addresses this challenge with a forward-looking lens, presenting frames of thinking drawing on 15 years of developing Eco-Leadership theory and practice, Eco-Leadership formation approaches, and learning through theory development drawing on action-research approaches. We propose a way forward that can help those who are stuck become unstuck and find ways to support the disenchanting to become re-enchanting. A way forward that has been designed and developed with the clear aim to escape modernity’s gaze, and to enter a new paradigm.

Michael Barnett's work on the Ages of Humanitarianism taken from his book *Empires of Humanity*<sup>18</sup> (2013), offers a good overview to succinctly frame the humanitarian journey thus far. This report aims to bring to life the next age that we call Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism.

Drawing on Michael Barnett's work, the report adds new dimensions that can be seen in Table 1. The black text replicates Barnett's Ages of Humanitarianism (2013: 30) and the red text are our additions. Barnett identifies three forces, *destruction*, *production* and *compassion*, that have impacted on humanitarianism since 1800. The report adds two more forces, *interdependence and modernity* which have powerfully influenced humanitarianism over these ages. On the far-right column the report adds a new age of 'Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism' which is the emergent response to the Precarious-Interdependent Age.

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<sup>18</sup> Barnett, M. (2013). *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.



**Table 1. The New Age of Humanitarianism**

<b>Forces</b>	1800-1945 Imperial Humanitarianism	1945-1989 Neo- Humanitarianism	1989-2022 Liberal Humanitarianism	<b>2019 - P.I. AGE</b>  <b>Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism</b>
<b>Destruction</b>	Great Power war and colonialism	Cold war and decolonization	Liberal peace	<b>Resource Security</b>
<b>Production</b>	Commerce	Development	Globalization	<b>Digital Economy &amp; Protectionism</b>
<b>Compassion</b>	Civilization	Sovereignty	Human Rights	<b>Human Agency</b>
<b>Inter- dependence</b>	<b>Christian Paternalism</b>	<b>Democratic Paternalism</b>	<b>Liberal Paternalism</b>	<b>Mutualism</b>
<b>Modernity</b>	Control	Bureaucratisation	Governance/ Growth	<b>Ecosystems of Development</b>

Below we explain how the two new forces of Interdependence and Modernity, impact on Barnett's three ages of humanitarianism.

## Interdependence

Interdependence is a force that informs the relations between international, national, regional and local bodies, between humanitarians and recipients, donors and aid bodies, warring factions, and diverse online and local communities. Interdependence is often resisted, with an idealised fantasy that one party is in control and the other is dependent (a very modernist view). Yet interdependencies are at the heart of all humanitarian aid work. Humanitarians traditionally recognise interdependencies through compassion and their responsibilities to the suffering other, yet this recognition has been historically caveated by ‘we know what’s best for you’. This transforms interdependent to dependent relationships and leads to paternalism in different forms.

Our interdependencies are a constant force that have shaped positive economic and social relationships, and also wars, famines and disasters. Entering an age of Precarious-Interdependence, our interdependencies with the environment, alongside human social relations are finally being fully recognised due to the environmental emergency.

In the three ages of humanitarianism outlined by Barnett, the humanitarian sector has responded to the force of interdependence under the shadow of paternalism.

**Christian paternalism in the imperial age.** Interdependence was a one-way street. Humanitarianism was dominated by Christian Paternalism, a belief that “Christianity and the West defined the values of the international community, liberal and religious inspired humanitarians set out to nurture new kinds of compassion, accepted new responsibilities to the distant suffering other, and aspired to release civilising processes to reduce human suffering” (Barnett, 2013:30)

**Democratic paternalism in the Neo-Humanitarian age.** The cultural view of interdependencies shifted and paternalism took shape in a post-colonial context. The infantilising civilizing ideology of the imperial age was no-longer acceptable. New forms of global governance proclaimed that the western rich and powerful had an

obligation to ‘teach’ the rest of the world, which altered the tone, rather than the workings of paternalism” (Barnett, 2013:31). As new nations were emerging and freeing themselves from direct colonial power, the West believed it had a responsibility to teach them their democratic values. Colonialism was being replaced by new forms of paternalistic ‘democratic’ governance, of which humanitarianism played its part. Interdependency was a recognition of the need to support the suffering other; but still from a top-down position.

**Liberal paternalism in the Liberal Humanitarian age.** In the 1980s Neo-liberal economics/politics reshaped humanitarian interdependencies again. A *Liberal paternalism* was delivered through new collaborations between humanitarians and governments (shaped also by increased corporate power and influence). There was huge growth in humanitarian aid and humanitarian organisations mirrored the corporate world. Marketing functions began to sell ‘trauma’ in order to maximise fund raising, and to create unique humanitarian brands, as competition between the big aid organisations took a new turn. A new managerialism arrived mirroring the corporate world and RBM (Results Based Management) was pushed by governments who demanded more accountability (Fiori et al., 2021:39). Humanitarian governance and humanitarian intervention created a new machinery where power was held centrally, “to put it in slightly more worrying terms, the paternalism became buried in the machinery of humanitarianism” (Barnett, 2013:70). Interdependency again was the recognition of humanitarian responsibility in a troubled world, but it couldn’t shake off the paternalism.

## Modernity

*Control in the Imperial age.* Modernity’s influence in the early days of humanitarianism came with an accepted norm that those delivering aid were more civilised, developed and therefore were ethically in control. The aid delivered would be from a top-down, non-negotiable position. The humanitarian ‘civilised’ west knew best how to deliver aid to the deserving and suffering other, and did so with compassion, but also with total control.

Bureaucratisation in the Neo-Humanitarian age. In the post-war years, modernism became the driving force behind a new bureaucratisation and regulation in the delivery of aid. The organisational machine model produced a new managerial class and growth, but this was at a cost. Money spent feeding the organisational machinery, wasn't spent on direct aid. Locally based humanitarians had to answer to the bureaucracy which dominated with almost absolute power and as Slim writes; "These systems (regulations and reporting requirements) keep legions of humanitarians at their desks staring at Excel spreadsheets" (Slim, 2022:186)

*Governance/Growth in the Liberal age.* Humanitarianism was absorbed into the pervasive late modern epoch, dominated by neo-liberal economics and politics. Funding increasingly came from governments, which led to a problematic entanglement. Aid organisations became dependent on government funding, leading to foreign policy agendas of government donors muddying the waters of neutral humanitarian aid. This new wave of funding led to 'big aid' being delivered with business-minded leaders taking control. Humanitarian governance became problematic as did unchecked growth.

## **The Precarious-Interdependent (P.I.) Age (Western, 2022)**

The current state of humanitarianism aligns with Barnett's Liberal Humanitarianism age, retaining a modernist ideology of liberal paternalism, with a recent shift towards human rights. This focus on rights rather than needs, expands humanitarian demands exponentially, into a much wider territory such as protectionism, gender and identity rights.

The global order is fast changing, undermining the past dominance of Westernised-liberal paternalism. Even within the west, the long held liberal consensus is under pressure, as new populist, nationalistic, anti-global and authoritarian political movements gain momentum.

Late or 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) ushers in a paradigm shift. The utopian and progressive hopes that underpinned the enlightenment-modernity project are fast fading. The Westernised trajectory towards an 'always better future', that each generation will be happier and prosper more than the last, is no-longer widely accepted in the west, as the American Dream fades.

A precarious future disrupts assumptions that advancements in technology and science alongside the pairing of capitalism-democracy, would lead to 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 2012) and a technocratic governance towards a better future. The evangelic striving of a Christian-liberal paternalism that powered the first humanitarian age, then merged into a democratising paternalism, and finally into a liberal and human rights driven paternalism has run out of road.

Paternalism, underpinned by modernity's gaze, was the constant in the last three ages of humanitarianism. This has to change if humanitarianism is to adapt, be impactful, and gain greater engagement within the Precarious-Interdependent age. For humanitarianism to thrive, it must take a lead rather than be dragged into a new era. Our concern is that at present, there is a lack of a vision or road map to navigate the new paradigm of the P.I. Age.

### **What is the P.I. Age?**

The P.I. Age, signifies a shift from the dominant enlightenment idea that progress and growth are inevitable as science and reason increase our knowledge. Extractive economics are no-longer viable and nature is not separate from culture. Charles Taylor (2018) explains that in pre-modernity our 'porous-selves' lived in an enchanted material world, where we experienced the fears and joys of being completely immersed in a beautiful, frightening, enlivening and destructive cosmos. Through modernity we developed a 'buffered-self', where we discovered how to protect ourselves from the enchanted cosmos, placing ourselves as above it and separate from it. With humans at the centre of the cosmos, we took control of our own lives, the material and environmental world were objectified in order to fill our desires and to extract resources from it. To be succinct Taylor writes that 'humans transcended the world'.

The buffered-modern self has led to the place where we are today. Amazing gains in knowledge, life expectancy, healthcare, cosmopolitan urban lifestyles, alongside inhuman industrial scale wars, huge inequality, deprivation, mental health epidemics and most importantly a bio-diversity and environmental crisis that threatens our very existence.

The omnipotence of the belief that we transcended the world has come back to haunt us. The enchanted world continued on without us, its damaged spirits were talking to us but we were cut off and not listening. Whilst humanity, narcissistically gazed at our own reflections, the world heated and species died. Without realising it our buffered-selves have become porous again. Our disenchanted world can no-longer cut itself off from being part of the environment, part of the holistic, re-enchanted planet we co-habit with our multi-species companions.

Humanitarianism like other modernist movements, has been reluctant to let go of the idea of an anthropomorphic world where humans are in control. Acknowledging a porous-self that cannot separate itself from, or control our environmental ecosystems is a vital turn required for our survival in the P.I. Age. The question we all face is how do we now live together with our multi-species companions in an enchanted world?

An enchanted world means to pay attention to the material world in a different way, and to reposition humanity as part of, rather than as separate from the living world. Pre-modern understandings of the enchanted world are refreshed anew with quantum physics and new systems theories. A Quantum understanding reveals a dynamic alive world refuting the idea that the material world around us is dead and lifeless. Rocks are not static dead objects, and trees are not just resources to provide beauty and shade, or fuel for our houses. There is a liveliness, a connectedness and a relatedness in the material world. In the 1990s new science discovered the wood wide web, (Sheldrake, 2020) a mycorrhizal underground network found in forests created by fungi joining with plant roots. This network connects trees and plants together and transfers water and other nutrients and minerals between participants.

## Relationality and Connectivity

Moving into the P.I. Age, means to think using new ideas and new language, to let go of accepted norms. It means to shift from determinist and reductionist ways of being, to engage with generative and collaborative approaches.

### Box 4. Sympoiesis: 'to make with'

#### Sympoiesis: 'to make with'

Sympoiesis means to 'make-with' for as Donna Haraway says, "nothing makes itself" (Haraway 2016). Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism utilises sympoiesis as it underpins and brings to life mutualism and ecosystemic practice. A principle of Eco-Leadership is to develop eco-mindsets which means in practice to 'think-with' and mutualism means in practice 'making-with'. A rain-forest cannot survive without sufficient bio-diversity that enables the entanglements of life to 'make-with' each other. Fungal networks enable trees to communicate and they carry nutrients between trees, and our digestive systems cannot function without living micro-organisms supporting our capacity to make-food digestible and nutritious. Macro and micro-organisms and multi-species are in constant relationship with each other. Everything is precariously and resiliently interconnected and interdependent.

Likewise, the humanitarian sector cannot survive without diversity and inter-connectivity. It's future lies in placing mutualism and sympoiesis at the heart of the project, 'making-with' and 'thinking-with' is the only possible way forward.

We can learn much from indigenous and first nations peoples. Mishel McMahon is an Australia First Nations, Yorta-Yorta scholar who explains the relational ontology of her people.

Relational ontology is a view of reality that all entities; plants, animals, elements, seasons, skies, waterways, the land, the spirit world and humans are in relationship, like a web. First Nations peoples and many other groups around the globe have held relational worldviews for thousands of years. This ontology creates an infinite number of epistemologies, because it stems from relational philosophy, meaning entities change from landscape to landscape, thus creating different identities, cultures and languages. These infinite epistemologies have investigated for thousands of years correct concepts for astrology, agriculture, governance, health, communication, law and science. These perspectives can be different from Western-European ideas derived from Western ontology which centres humans in knowledge production (McMahon, 2017).

We cannot go back to pre-modern times, nor would we want to. We have developed too much modern knowledge, too much human focused agency, and have scientific-rational sensibilities.

How can we integrate our knowledge and rationality, and let go of our need to control and dominate? How can we live in a new companionship with each other, and our multi-species companions on our Precarious-Interdependent planet?

Do we build gated communities (more buffers) to keep the migrants out when the floods and famines come? Or do we re-configure our ways-of-being, to reduce our consumption, make choices about what we really need and desire, and welcome environmental migrants to share our safer spaces?

Vulnerability, precarity and interdependencies were already revealing themselves through the environmental changes and technological disruptions we faced at the turn of the century, and they became acutely amplified when the Covid 19 event struck. This pandemic was the marker for a significant paradigmatic change of era.

A published article claims that the Covid-19 pandemic awakened us to a new epoch, and the arrival of the P.I Age (Western, 2020).



## Box 5. The Precarious-Interdependence Age announced by Covid-19

### The Precarious-Interdependence Age announced by Covid-19

Alain Badiou writes that an Event (*événement*) is 'a multiple which basically does not make sense according to the rules of the situation. Covid-19 is such an Event, because it's causation is multiple, and it undoes our 20th century fantasy that science and mankind have conquered nature.

#### The real unleashes a truth

Covid-19 is not only a virus going viral. Covid-19 is a master signifier of contagion. A master signifier unleashes a chain of signifiers; contagion becomes contagious. Emotions go viral, economic tremors go viral, political and social anxieties go viral, facts and fiction go viral, narratives and stories go viral.

The particular truth unleashed by the Covid-19, is a repetition of a known truth that has been repressed. The truth of *precarious interdependence and connectivity*, is the truth enunciated by the signifier Covid-19. A truth that is reviled and repressed because by acknowledging it undoes the omnipotent fantasies of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity. Our life-worlds have always been interconnected and interdependent, but a great acceleration of connectivity has taken place in recent years. A triple ecosystem disruption has occurred.

**Technological Ecosystem** – the internet, mobile communications, AI, quantum computing are unleashing unprecedented change in political social and economic realms.

**Social-Economic Ecosystem** – hyper-globalisation in finance, trade and people, powered by the digital revolution, impacts in profound ways.

**Environmental Ecosystem** – the planetary environment and its bio-diversity are in a precarious place.

Each ecosystem above is embedded, entangled and synthesised in the others. This truth of *precarious interdependence* first announced itself in 2008 when digital finance led to a world financial collapse, leading to austerity and extreme suffering for many. Yet we turned a blind eye. The truth of *precarious interdependence* and connectivity announces itself in catastrophic local climate events; extreme air pollution, fires, famines and floods, as the climate crisis literally takes away the ground from beneath our feet. I grew up with an internalised sense of terra-firma, yet this firm-ground has become unstable. I shared with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantics a personal experience that nature was sacred and profound. Yet as Marx said under capitalism, 'All that is solid vanishes into the air, everything sacred is profaned.' Nature was a consistent presence in my life, seasons coming around, tides ebbing and flowing. Nature was volatile of course, but this was in accordance to the laws of nature, an aspect of its consistency. Storms and volcanoes being nature communicating its awesome, sublime power and beauty to us. Transcendent, beautiful and wonderful in micro and macro. I climbed mountains, touched clouds, looked up at the stars and looked down at the infinite beauty in plants. Nature was beyond humans reach, sublime and regenerating. Now I find myself as a part of a precarious and interdependent natural, technological and social world, not an observer of it. (Western, 2020)

The P.I age signifies how precarity and interdependence are the dominant features of life on planet earth and will be for the foreseeable future. Precarity and interdependency are interconnected forces. Unless we grasp the importance of our interdependencies and stop trying master the natural environment and dominate and control our social and cultural ecosystems, humanities survival and well-being will become increasingly precarious. Learning to live (and die) well in a precarious world (Haraway, 2016) means to live interdependently and respectfully with other humans, with the natural environment and with our multi-species companions. To live well, we must live interdependently in the environmental, technological and social ecosystems we inhabit, this is humanities task in the P.I. Age.

Modern minds must shift from separation mindsets towards eco-mindsets. Our ecosystems are hybrid: environmental, social and technological, these are not separate categories.

Precarity is the new normal. The environmental crisis impacts globally, and has implications for human welfare, bio-diversity loss, for mass immigration, food and water security, for economic stability and social well-being. Technological disruption brings many advances but also many uncertainties and challenges. The world of work is constantly disrupted, AI threatening to replace jobs and increasingly workers across the world live in a precarious state, the gig economy expands, algorithmic management surveys our every move, and even for the professional classes job security diminishes.

## Box 6. Staying with the Trouble

### Staying with the Trouble

“Living in a P.I age demands a different perspective. It requires us to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016). Not to seek short-term solutions, or linear answers, but to realise the precarity is not going to be solved, it is not going away and we must develop different mindsets, adapt our practices and adopt new ways-of-being to live in this precarious-interdependent world. It requires a radical re-imagining of how we live, developing new capacity for resilience, regeneration, renewal, innovation, collaboration, adaptive capability, and most importantly taking an ecosystemic approach to emergently and tentatively feel our way forward.” (Western, 2023)

The interdependencies between technology, people and nature, co-create the hybrid ecosystems in which we precariously live. Humanitarians are called to work with those living most precariously. Whether we like it or not, we are interdependently connected and entangled with each other via the environment, through technologies and through our social, economic and political networked society. There is no separation, no buffered-self, no outside.

The humanitarian sector needs to adjust and adapt its ways of leading and organising to meet the demands and the opportunities to co-create a different humanitarianism out of this new reality.

In the Precarious-Interdependent Age, the ‘crisis-process’ will not be resolved and each climate event will be followed by another. We ‘stay with the trouble’, working with emergence and ambiguity; the ‘crisis-process’ will be absorbed and worked with and lived with. Precarity will not be, cannot be, overcome or replaced by a stable or trouble-

free future. Mitigating the worst impacts, and learning to live well in diverse and difficult environments alongside our fellow earthbound critters, will be our future.

To learn to live well with precarity, means not to only think of it as a bad alternative to stability. Precarity is not only a negative force. A by-product of living with precarity is a different way-of-being that demands liveliness and alertness. To live well in dynamic co-habitation with other humans and not-humans, means to be less controlling and more collaborative. Precarity and vulnerability are partners and to live well with others means to live more empathetically.

Living well in the P.I. Age means learning to live fully in the present and ‘to stay with the trouble’ as we navigate a precarious future. To ‘traverse the fantasy’ offered by Messiah leaders, caught up in enlightenment narratives that peddle visions of a brighter future. To see through populist leaders who offer a bright future based on a return to a imagined nostalgic past, when life was pure, trouble free and stable. Staying with the trouble, also means shunning the doomsters who retreat into the paralysis of catastrophising, as a way of negating engagement.

Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. (Tsing, 2017:20)

The idea that precarity is an exception that can be corrected and made right, reflects the modern view of progress. Precarity is an essence of how we have always lived, but the buffered-self moderns went into denial in order to believe in the fantasy that they are in control of their lives.

For those living in poverty, closer to the environment and at the margins, precarity is a much closer experience. Not being in control does not mean having no agency. Living in a P.I. Age means to access the agency of the many, to draw on sympoiesis, and realise that utilising our our collective agency with others - human and not-human - enriches us.

Interdependency is also an essence of how we live, but the modernity narrative of hierarchy, dependency and control marginalises the idea of interdependency. Interdependency means giving way to the desire to have power and control over others who are dependent on us, or seeking Messiah and Controller leaders who can 'parent us'. To be interdependent means letting go of an infantile self, waiting for a saviour-leader and to realise our agency in an ecosystem. Much can be learnt from first nations and indigenous peoples who have lived alongside precarity and interdependent world views for millennia. Their understanding of the cosmos, is that of an enchanted world, one where all beings, human and not-human, are respected and have their place in the ecosystem, even those ancestors and spirits no-longer with us.

Precarity produces suffering and anxiety, and it can also produce an aliveness, a way of living that frees us from complacency and conformism. Interdependency means letting go of feeling in control which may be a loss, but it also means losing the alienation and existential angst of being separated from a living world.

When facing precarity we are forced to think, to be aware, to be alive. To survive and to live and die well, we have to think-together, to work-together, make-together and learn lessons from listening to all critters and all peoples, especially those voices from the edges and margins.

## **A humanitarian response to the P.I Age**

There is a new formulation that offers a vision of a humanitarian response to the P.I. Age, shown in Table 2.

The humanitarian response to this epoch change will emerge around the two master signifiers: Ecosystems and Mutuality. An age of *Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism* will guide humanitarian work with a different ethos and dynamic from the previous ages.

Eco-Mutualism emerges from theory, research and practice developed in the Eco-Leadership Institute. Eco-Leadership formation offers practical leadership and

organisational developmental processes, designed to deliver Eco-Mutualism in the sector, and the practical applications will be discussed later.

Taking Barnett's three forces (in black), and adding the two new forces of interdependence and mutualism, the report next discusses the conditions that are emerging in humanitarian sector in the P.I Age.

## Table 2. The forces and the responses in a new age of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism

Forces	2019 - P.I. AGE Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism
Destruction	Resource Security
Production	Digital Economy & Protectionism
Compassion	Human Agency
<b>Interdependence</b>	Mutualism
<b>Modernity</b>	Ecosystems of Development

### **Force of Destruction: Response in P.I. Age is Resource Security.**

In the face of environmental impacts due to rapid climate change, bio-diversity loss, and social crisis such as the war in Ukraine, securing food, water, basic housing and living necessities will become increasingly important. The potential for mass migration and mass people displacement will add pressures on safer environments. There is already a clamour for the resources required for the new technological economy, such as rare minerals for batteries in electric cars. Resource security has economic, social and political implications and at worse will lead to conflict.

### **Force of Production: Response in the P.I Age is Digital Economy and Protectionism.**

The digital economy pervades all other sources of production, and will have an increasing impact on workplaces, as AI, quantum computing and other digital technologies become available. Economically, politically and socially, countries and blocs are trying to develop many protectionist measures to safeguard the digital economy and social well-being. Identity theft, fin-tech and crypto collapse, cyber-attacks, data theft, invasive surveillance and marketing techniques are all commonplace and growing concerns.

### **Force of Compassion: Response in the P.I. Age is Human Agency.**

Eco-Mutualist approaches will shift the current emphasis on human rights to human agency. Human rights has become problematic in two ways. Firstly, it imposes what is experienced by some as a 'Westernised-liberal agenda'. Secondly human rights enlarges the humanitarian field beyond crisis intervention and development aid, into unchartered and unlimited territory, increasing demand and increasing the size of the humanitarian machinery exponentially. This is not to argue for dismissing human rights which are clearly important. By switching the focus to human agency, human rights become decentred and de-westernised. By asking how humanitarian aid/development can support human agency i.e. increasing individual and collective capacity for people to take control of their own lives, provides a good place to start any



compassionate-mutualist intervention. Mutualism begins with acknowledging the agency of all. To acknowledge human agency, is to ask questions of human rights, but not from a top-down imposed western-liberal perspective. The questions of rights come from those whose agency is undermined.

### **Force of Interdependency: Response in the P.I. Age is Mutualism.**

Mutualism must displace the paternalism that has so dominated and become endemic in the humanitarian sector. Mutualism insists on relations based on mutual consent, striving to acknowledge and create shared value between all parties, and assuming shared responsibility and shared agency. Mutualism subverts paternalism, control and dependency relationships, and is at the heart of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism.

### **Force of Modernity. Response in the P.I. Age is Eco-Systems of Development.**

Late modernity remains with us, and whilst the P.I Age ushers a new paradigm, the force of modernity remains powerful. The response to the continued force of modernity is the combination of mutualism alongside 'ecosystems of development'. Focusing on ecosystems, is to take a holistic perspective, recognise other actors, see patterns, be aware of interdependencies, anticipate disruption. The focus is strategic and expansive rather than focus on operational functioning and reductionist targets. Eco-systems of Development are generative spaces that break with linear and controlling mindsets. An ecosystem cannot be managed or controlled, only nurtured. Eco-systems of development enable deep dialogue and listening, and create spaces where new leadership, new thinking and new ways of co-producing humanitarian aid can emerge. Eco-systems of development are the containers for new emergent ways of leading collaboratively and innovatively.

## **Eco-Mutualism: A New Age of Humanitarianism**

Ecosystems and mutualism provide two anchor points that are accessible and understandable. They provide a master-signifying pairing, that together unleash a chain of signifiers that can drive and inform the change that is urgently needed. They

offer the basis for creating a unity within diversity, as both terms signify that diversity is engaged with generatively. These terms can be harnessed and engaged with throughout the sector.

The Eco-Leadership Institute, partnering with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, aim to co-create these new leadership and organisational approaches to seed system-change in the Humanitarian aid sector.

## Box 7. Ecosystems and Mutualism

### At the heart of this project are the dual concepts of 'ecosystems and mutualism'

**Ecosystems** "Organisations are ecosystems within ecosystems" (Western, 2019).

Ecosystems, in relation to humanitarianism, are living and non-living entities entangled in complex and interdependent relationships. We live in hybrid ecosystems made up from technology, society and the environment. These entities and categories are not separate.

Today the word ecosystem is commonplace in organisational language e.g. business ecosystems, financial ecosystems, digital ecosystems, health ecosystems; this reflects the increasing recognition of how interconnected and interdependent are our worlds.

To have the greatest impact, to mobilise the best leadership and technological potential, to identify early opportunities and challenges, to spot gaps and lack in a system, to gain insights into the consequences of strategies and actions beyond the

immediate context, and to predict and respond to disruptions.....an ecosystemic approach to leading change is essential.

Ecosystemic approaches are generative, they engage participants from the margins, engaging new ideas and expertise from the edges. Patterns and spatial thinking reveal diverse opportunities leading to new connections.

Interdependencies are recognised and utilised to build collaborative alliances. Nodes and clusters of change agents can be identified utilising an ecosystem or networked lens. Change can spread virally and small changes can lead to big changes, when nodes are connected in the ecosystems in which the humanitarian work is undertaken.

**Mutualism** When humanitarian engagement is enacted with mutuality, challenges and opportunities are engaged with through consent, mutual responsibility, mutual agency and for the mutual benefit of all parties engaged. Mutuality doesn't deny power and resource differentials, but it engages without superior or paternalistic mindsets. Mutuality doesn't disavow the agency of all those engaged, but harnesses the agency of all, enabling the greatest potential to be achieved. Mutuality also recognises shared value creation, challenging the paternalism of identifying one party as giving away value and the other receiving it i.e. the rich donor, and the poor recipient. Shared value disrupts this paternalistic idea, and recognises that all parties engaged, gain value whether through financial value, social recognition, job satisfaction and identity formation, or through co-production of humanitarian aid and development that impacts on creating a better world for all. Mutuality undermines unilateral power relations in any form.

### **Decentralised perspectives**

Ecosystemic and mutualist thinking and practices are not top-down Western-Liberal dominated ideas, they are found across the world showing up in diverse ways, infused with cultural particularities. First nations and indigenous peoples, African, North and South American, Australian and Asian diverse cultures all have deep

histories and cultures of ecosystemic, holistic, collective and mutualist engagement within their worlds.

Pre-modern European ways-of-being were infused with holistic, ecosystemic and enchanted understandings of the material and social world. More recently theories are developing relational and holistic ways of sense-making the world such as Gaia theory, symplectics, complexity theory, quantum theory, Actor-Network theory and other systems theories that are emerging to open exciting new ways of understanding and engaging with the world.

***“Placing ecosystem-mutuality at the heart of all dialogues, conversations, planning and strategy meetings and operational activity, will radically change the co-ordinates of humanitarian engagement”.*** Dr Simon Western

Mutuality immediately possesses the question of informal power relations. Taking an Eco-Mutualist approach in meetings, asks who is at the table, who is missing and why? How many women or diverse voices are present? Who is speaking and who is being listened to? What value is being produced and for whom? Who has agency and who doesn't? Applying eco-mindsets seeks out new or marginalised voices, is curious to discover new experience and knowledge in the ecosystems, to seek out different technologies (low-tech and high-tech) and discover new resources currently out of the picture. It looks for solutions from local knowledge, knowing that leadership from the edge brings vital information and experience. Eco-leaders ask about patterns, resistances and hidden power sources in the ecosystem, always seeking connectivity and collaborations to support dynamic change. Ecosystemic approaches look for resources and ideas that are not obviously present in the ecosystems of any given context or situation. We draw on psychoanalysis in order to 'put lack to work' which means that by focusing on what's lacking, what's missing or not present, alongside what we know, so often opens up something very important that has been repressed from our minds. Often seeking gaps and lack in ecosystems, opens up new resources,

new connections and whole new ways of working that were previously unknown or hidden.

A leadership approach that is underpinned by ecosystemic mindsets, and by an ethos of mutuality, undoes the legacy of our modernist paternalistic and centralised approaches. It releases actors from controlling-dependency relationships, and opens up interdependent spaces for collaboration, co-creation and connectivity.

Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism can harness the diversity of a multiplicity of wills in the sector. The pairing encourages emergence and adaption, so that existing humanitarian experience and expertise meets and engages with the local and specific context.

Eco-Mutualism creates a vision that produces unity and solidarity, without imposing conformity and sameness.

Part two now addresses how Eco-Leadership can be harnessed and nurtured to lead Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism.

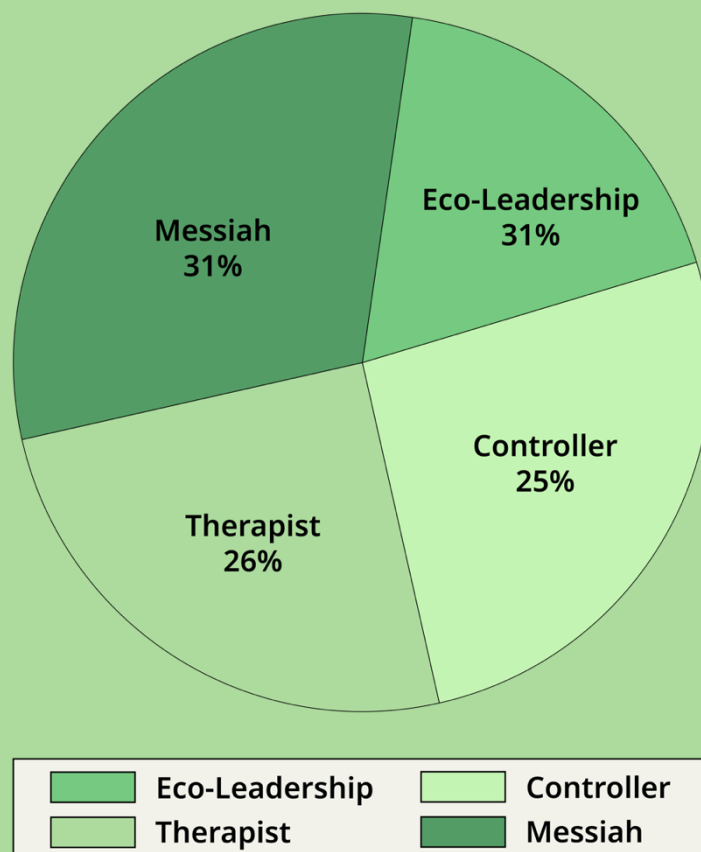
## 3. Part Two: Eco-Leadership for a New Age of Humanitarianism

### 3.1 Understanding Leadership: The Four Discourses

To review and develop new leadership in the humanitarian sector, it is necessary to broaden and deepen our understanding of leadership itself, and to create a shared language that enables differences to be discussed. Leadership is often talked about as if there is a shared understanding as to what it is; yet leadership is contested and plural, not a unified subject. In *Leadership a critical text* (Western, 2019) the first half of the book deconstructs leadership, using research and critical theory to challenge accepted leadership norms and to generate new thinking about leadership. The second half of the book reconstructs leadership, setting out four dominant discourses or approaches to leadership, these findings are based on doctoral and post-doctoral research at a leading university. The four leadership discourses establish, four distinct ways in which leadership has been practiced over the past century. Whilst this research is taken from a westernised perspective, in later research the four discourses of leadership were tested in a global capacity, and all the four discourses showed up in unique ways in each country and region (see Box 8).

## Box 8. Global Leadership Perspectives- a current position

### Global Leadership Perspectives - Four discourses across the globe



In the book, 'Global Leadership Perspectives: Insights and Analysis' (Western and Garcia 2018) leadership practitioners and scholars from twenty diverse regions and countries, explored leadership from their own cultural and social perspectives. We then

applied the four discourses of leadership to the leadership described in each region, and found all four present with their own unique and specific forms. The leadership discourses averaged across all twenty the regions is shown in the chart, with the more traditional leadership discourses of Messiah, Therapist and Controller dominating, and Eco-Leadership as a new emergent force.

Interestingly we found that in China and other Asian and Middle Eastern regions: Eco-Leadership and Controller leadership were combined as dominant pairings. Local leadership scholars related this pairing to a mix between patriarchal and authoritarian politics, and pre-existing and culturally embedded ecosystemic, holistic and environmentally balanced ways of thinking and organizing.

## Four dominant leadership discourses from the past century

Research identifies four dominant discourses of leadership that emerged over the past century (Western, 2019). Leadership discourses shape how leadership is thought about and practiced.

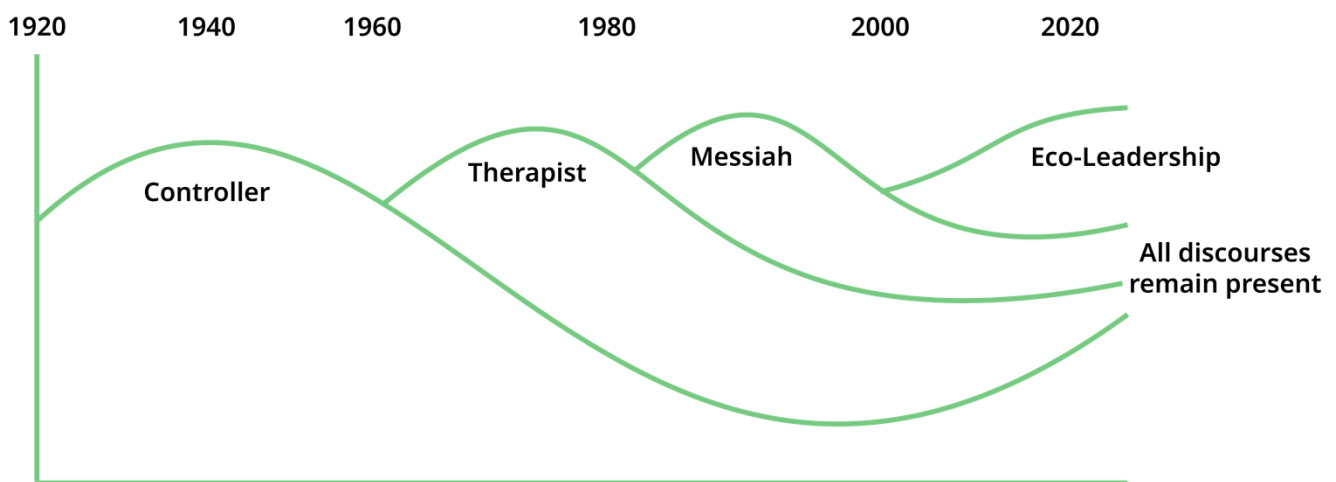
- A leadership discourse is the taken-for-granted way we think about leadership and practice it.
- Each discourse emerged in a particular historical period shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors. Yet each remains present and active.
- No discourse operates alone, in any given context all discourses are present, usually dominated by one or two of the discourses that shape the organizational culture
- All discourses are useful and necessary - they all have strengths and weaknesses



- Eco-Leadership acts as a meta-discourse: when present it aims to get the right internal balance between the four leadership discourses for each context.

## A brief overview of the four discourses of leadership

### *Controller leadership, Therapist Leadership, Messiah Leadership, Eco-Leadership* (Western, 2019)



### **The Controller Leadership discourse: Controlling resources to maximize efficiency.**

Controller Leadership is underpinned by scientific rationalism, and the drive for efficiency and productivity. It became dominant as industrialisation took place. Frederick Taylor and the 'efficiency craze' (Taylor, 1997/1911) epitomised this approach, which was then translated to the Fordist Production line and taken up by Harvard Business School. Early controller approach focuses on division of labour, time and motion studies, close supervision and control of workers and resources to maximise production. Controller leadership moved from the factory to the office, with the introduction of bureaucratic procedures, clear roles and hierarchies. People knew their place in work and held clearer social/class positions. Technologies, systems and processes were utilized to organise and control employees, resources and the workflow, in order to maximise efficiency.

Controller leadership focused on efficiency but was critiqued from the outset as being dehumanizing. Classic controller leadership led companies are McDonald's fast food, low cost airlines and Amazon warehouses. They are super-efficient and seamlessly connect machines and humans, but questions are asked about how they treat workers. When Therapist leadership emerged, Controller leadership remained a very important discourse but was less dominant. However, the illustration shows a rising curve recently for Controller leadership reflecting its new popularity in the digital age. New forms of leadership control are now rapidly rising as the digital age produces audit cultures and algorithmic management. Control by numbers (Western, 2019:182) and control by surveillance technologies mean that constant feedback on employee activity now replaces the controlling supervisor. The gig economy is a clear example of algorithmic management control, but higher status professionals also cannot escape the control leadership of surveillance. The most complete culture control comes about when self-surveillance takes place. Increasingly employees work long hours and measure their own workplace performance competing with others. At the same time they measure their non-work lives; measuring steps, screentime, heart rate etc. increasingly surveillance, measurement and control are at the heart of our lives. Controller leadership is vital in all organisations and it remains a dominant discourse today. Organisations need to ensure efficiencies, create safe workplaces, use resources well, develop good systems and processes and make good use of data. Time and resources are ever more important to deliver success. The dangers arise when Controller leadership dominates at the expense of more humane approaches. A further weakness of Controller leadership is the focus on operations and lack of attention paid to the bigger strategic picture and taking a holistic-systemic perspective.

### **The Therapist Leadership Discourse: Happy workers are more productive workers**

Therapist leaders take a humanistic approach to leadership, the focus is motivation rather than control, working closely with individuals and teams. The Therapist discourse, references how therapeutic culture permeates our lives in the west (Rose 1990; Furedi, 2003), expanding its influence beyond the clinic. Therapist leaders are attracted to the underpinning therapeutic ideas, and they work with employees in two

main ways. Firstly, they hold a philosophy of the 'Celebrated-Self' (Western, 2012), believing every person has untapped potential and if each can overcome self-doubts, inhibitions, and psychological limitations, we can fully celebrate our true authentic selves and maximise our potential, thereby becoming more effective and productive workers. Secondly, they often work with the other side of the therapeutic human condition we call the 'Wounded-self' (Western, 2012). This relates to the perception that deep within us we are all injured souls, damaged by childhood or some event and that we crave caring and reparation.

Therapist leadership first developed in the post-world war two period, when the human relations and human potential movement became part of a democratising work movement. This was to counter fears of dictatorial and authoritarian leadership. Therapist leadership became the dominant force in the post 1960s, emerging from the counter-cultural movement that celebrated individualism, emotional expression and privileging the search for happiness. In the workplace, the human relations and human potential movements flourished, with Maslow's self-actualising theories (Maslow, 1968) and other group and individual psychological training becoming mainstream for human resources and leadership training. Today emotional intelligence, psychometrics and leadership coaching are symbolic of the continuing power of therapeutic leadership.

Therapist leaders are very necessary in organisations, they believe in personal and team development, and bring caring, insights and people skills to leadership. They manage conflict well, and they develop loyal followers. Successful Therapist leaders get the best from individuals and teams they lead. Two weaknesses of this approach are firstly, there is lack of focus on strategy and on organisational culture, as they prioritise individuals and team dynamics. Secondly, they can create dependency cultures, focusing on internal dynamics rather than other external factors that impact on the work from outside their sphere of influence.

## The Messiah Leadership Discourse: Charismatic Leaders and Strong Cultures

The Messiah leadership discourse emerged in the early 1980s and became the dominant discourse until around 2000. The Messiah leadership discourse signified a new surge in leadership theory and practice, as transformational leadership became a very popular notion, pushing management into the background. During this period, the compensation of CEOs rose astronomically, reflecting the perception that Messiah leaders could achieve amazing change. It has two important components that separates it from the idea of the great hero leaders of the past. Messiah leadership combines individual, charismatic leadership alongside the drive to create strong organisational cultures that enable 'culture control' to take place. The big idea of Messiah leadership was that employees followed the leader willingly because they had faith in him/her and in the company vision. Employees would be committed, loyal and work hard with less need for supervision or coercion to produce results. At it's best, culture control works positively to produce engaged employees working collectively to deliver the best outcomes. At it's worst, it creates dangerous, conformist and dependent cultures.

The word Messiah is evocative and comes from research analysis of the transformational leadership literature that made great claims for this new form of leadership, using prophetic and often messianic language. Messiah leaders are usually but not always charismatic extroverts, they can also be quiet leaders whose charisma shines through in less obvious ways. These Messiah leaders initially were heralded as creating entrepreneurial and dynamic companies yet they often created highly conformist cultures. Peters and Waterman's (1982) best-selling book, *In Search of Excellence*, described the most successful companies as having 'cult-like' cultures. Perhaps the most prominent example of a Messiah leader was Steve Jobs at Apple whose employees retained inventiveness yet were fiercely identified with Jobs' vision and the Apple brand. Today's Messiah leaders in big companies present a vision to their employees and also to customers, clients, shareholders, and other stakeholders. They often act as a symbolic figurehead for the brand which can influence share prices as well as income streams. Elon Musk is a good example.

The dangers of Messiah leadership are clear. Messiah leaders when working well create strong dynamic cultures that inspire and energise the workforce. These cultures however can slide into becoming mono-cultures, whereby anybody who dissents or offers a different view, is seen as being disloyal and becomes marginalised or pushed out of the company. This creates silenced and compliant organisations and when this happens the company loses creativity and initiative, and mistakes or malpractice are hidden and not corrected. This can lead to catastrophic failures. There are many high profile examples of this; Enron and Theranos in the tech healthcare start-up sector in the US, and the recent collapse of Crypto come to mind.

### **The Eco-Leadership Discourse: Creating spaces for leadership to flourish**

In today's increasingly globalised and networked society, there is an urgent need for new forms of organisation and leadership. We face a common underlying challenge, that is how to adapt in today's extremely fast changing and unpredictable world. Addressing this challenge requires a new form of leadership that I call Eco-leadership (Western, 2019).

The pre-fix 'eco' is used because this form of leadership resonates with our understanding of eco-systems. Eco-leadership is not all about ethics and the environment, it is also about realising that 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations are better understood as interdependent and interconnected eco-systems. This new understanding replaces 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas of organisations as efficiency 'machines' run with clear hierarchies, structures and boundaries.

Today's 'Network Society' (Castells, 2000) undoes the leadership theory of the past century. It refers to how the internet, computers, social media, and globalization are changing the way we work, live and relate to each other. Eco-Leadership addresses not only the digital and technological networks, but also the social and environmental networks and ecosystems that are entangled together. Hierarchies, fixed structures, and static roles are not fit-for-purpose in this new work environment. Eco-leadership focuses on distributing leadership throughout the organisation and across systems.

## **From Vertical Power to Lateral Power**

Today's networked society means that change takes place between connected peers, more than from top-down change led from a hierarchy. This change from vertical power to lateral power has taken politicians, economists, and company leaders by surprise. Very few are adapting fast enough to keep up, and many are getting left behind.

### **Organisations are 'Eco-systems within Eco-systems' (Western, 2019:325)**

Successful leaders today are those that recognise a paradigm shift. Eco-leaders recognise that organisations are like 'eco-systems within eco-systems' (Western, 2019). These are not biological eco-systems like a rainforest, but they act in similar ways. Organisational eco-systems are made up of people, technology, and nature; interconnected networks that are interdependent on each other. These organisational eco-systems operate in the wider context of political, technical, social, and environmental eco-systems that influence all organisations. For far too long many organisations have acted as if they live in a closed system (the banking system for example) without accounting for wider influences that impact on them and also the influences they have on wider society and the environment. We are all inter-connected and interdependent, whether through climate change, technology and the internet, the finance ecosystem or the price of limited natural resources.

## Box 9. The Four Qualities of Eco-Leadership

### The Four Qualities of Eco-Leadership



#### 1. **Connectivity and Interdependence**

Eco-leadership is founded on connectivity, recognizing how the network society has transformed social relations, and it also recognizes our interdependence with each other and the environment. Eco-leadership focuses on internal organizational ecosystems (technical, social and natural) and the external ecosystems of which organizations are a part.

#### 2. **Systemic Ethics**

Eco-leadership is concerned with acting ethically in the human realm *and* protecting the natural environment. Systemic ethics goes beyond company values and individual leader morality, which conveniently turns a blind eye to the wider ethical implications of their businesses, e.g. by ignoring social

inequality, the downstream impacts of pollution and supply chain workers, world poverty and environmental sustainability.

### 3. **Leadership Spirit**

Eco-leadership acknowledges the importance of the human spirit. It extends its values beyond material gain, paying attention to community and friendship, mythos and logos, the unconscious and non-rational, creativity and imagination. It draws upon the beauty and dynamic vitality within human relationships, and between humanity and the natural world.

### 4. **Organizational Belonging**

To belong is to be a part of the whole, it is to participate in the joys and challenges faced by communities. Businesses and corporations, like schools, banks and hospitals, belong to the social fabric of community, and cannot operate as separate bodies. Eco-leaders commit organizations to belong to 'places and spaces', developing strong kinship ties. Place refers to local habitat and community, and space to the virtual and real networks that organizations also inhabit. Organizational belonging means ending a false separation, realizing that company interests and societal interests are interdependent. Organizational belonging is to rethink organizational purpose and meaning.

## **Eco-Leadership practice is guided by three principles:**

- **Social Purpose** – making a positive social difference beyond growth or profit - ensuring all employees/volunteers are engaged in the social purpose; it must be much more than a top-down vision or purpose statement
- **Participative Cultures** – distributing and unleashing leadership everywhere to create participative organizations and teams. Shifting from hierarchical dependency cultures to interdependency cultures of participation.



- **Eco-Mindsets** - developing ecosystemic approaches and thinking. Connecting collaborating across boundaries, pattern recognition, viral change networking approaches, looking spatially, strategically and inter-connectively

When applying Eco-Leadership to the humanitarian sector, these three principles will guide the leadership formation processes.

### **Eco-Leaders look two ways:**

- **Internally** the organisation is experienced as an ecosystem: an inter-connected web of activity. Eco-leadership means to influence and nurture the ecosystem, to unleash leadership everywhere, to see patterns and to make connections that can produce positive change.
- **Externally** Eco-Leaders look at the social, technological and environmental ecosystems in which their organisations exist. They look at political, civic, societal, cultural, business, economic, technological and environmental influences- seeking to find new resources, to see patterns, to be aware of disruptions.

Unless today's leaders recognise the networks of connections and our interdependencies, they are working in the wrong paradigm. Whether solving environmental or migrant challenges, financial service or manufacturing challenges, running healthcare and education systems, or whether working in a family business, leaders need to understand how to navigate the ecosystems that impact on their work. Eco-leadership is vital if we are to meet the social, political environmental and economic challenges and opportunities in today's networked society.

## 3.2 Applying the Discourses to the Ages of Humanitarianism

Humanitarian leadership in the past three ages, draws on the first three leadership discourses, Controller, Therapist and Messiah, all which emerged from and perpetuated modernity mindsets. The Eco-Leadership discourse as a new and emergent discourse is absent until 2019.

Our work is to seed Eco-Leadership within the humanitarian sector in order to address the challenges of the Precarious-Interdependent Age.

The three leadership discourses appear in different ways across the four ages. The balance between Controller, Therapist and Messiah leadership has been fluid, and changes depending on the age and also each particular context. The three ages were identified by Barnett (2013) and the Eco-Mutualist Humanitarian age is identified by Dr Western.

**Table 3: Leadership and the Ages of Humanitarianism**

Leadership	1800-1945	1945-1989	1989-2022	2019 - P.I. AGE
	Imperial Humanitarianism	Neo-Humanitarianism	Liberal Humanitarianism	Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism
Controller	Colonial Control	Paternalistic Control	Audit Control 'Control by Numbers'	Resource & Data Control
Therapist	Compassionate Leadership	Democratic-Caring Leadership	Therapy Culture Leadership	Re-enchanting Leadership
Messiah	Salvationist Vision	Globalising Vision	Equality Vision	Eco-Mutualist Vision
Eco-Leadership	N/A	N/A	N/A	Unleashing leadership and eco-mindsets

### Age 1. 1800-1945 Imperial Humanitarian Leadership

Early humanitarianism was strongly led by Messiah and Controller leadership, as charismatic founders of aid organisations worked within imperial and colonial cultures, unapologetically imposing their compassionate, and at times authoritarian-compassionate will on the world. Each organisation has fabled narratives of founding Messiah leaders with a vision for a better world, Henry Dunant founder of the Red Cross and Eglantyne Jebb founder of Save the Children for example. Heroic individuals, some with charismatic power have always been strong in the sector, both globally and locally, and indeed some heroism is necessary. Messiah leadership with strong visions

and individual agency should not be dismissed too lightly. What is more problematic is how Messiah leadership inserts a 'salvation' culture which creates hero saviours and victim recipients. Messiah leadership, particularly when partnered with Controller leadership, creates dependency cultures within organisations and denies the agency of recipient communities. Salvation aid remains problematic, and there remains criticisms of 'white saviour' humanitarianism today. Therapist leadership was always a strong element on the ground from the beginning. Humanitarianism is after all about the relief of suffering, so attracts caring, compassionate and empathetic people-oriented leaders i.e. Therapist leaders.

## **Age 2. 1945-1989 Neo-Humanitarian Leadership**

In the post war period, Controller leadership remained strong though was exercised in a less authoritarian manner. The internationalisation and growth of humanitarianism created more centralised, and therefore a softer-Controller leadership approach became embedded.

Therapist leadership was part of a wider democratising post-war movement in the west, where people demanded a better world, and democratic governments feared dictators from left and right, so encouraged a shift away from Messiah and Controller leadership. The 1960s produced the counter-culture and expressivism, and individual agency became a dominant norm. The leading discourses in this age was a Therapist-Controller mix that produced compassionate-paternalistic leadership in the humanitarian sector.

Messiah leadership remained present but not dominant. It focused on a globalising humanitarian vision, aiming to grow and expand aid to meet expanding humanitarian demands by developing more international co-ordinated responses. The vision was of a post-war globalised humanitarian order. An unspoken part of this vision was for humanitarian and technocratic governance, to provide new nations that had freed themselves from the domination of Empire, with 'neutral' and democratic support. Whilst great humanitarian gains were made and millions of lives saved, the paternalistic vision has been much criticised in recent years.

### **Age 3. 1989-2022 Liberal Humanitarian Leadership**

In the Liberal age, Controller leadership returned with vengeance, not through direct authoritarian leadership but through audit control, techno-surveillance and 'Control by numbers' (Western 2019:179). Efficiency drives, reducing duplication, internationalisation, target and audit cultures, created a new wave of management by results approaches, taken from the neo-liberal economics of the corporate sector and underpinned by Controller leadership.

Therapist leadership took a turn towards a rampant individualism and identity politics, that translated to a greater focus on human rights issues. Gender rights, anti-colonialism and protectionism became part of an expansive focus for big aid. In-house humanitarian leadership absorbed the external social influences, and Therapist leaders tried to learn new people skills to manage greater sensitivities to emotions and identities, alongside managing everyday performance and task.

Messiah leadership focused on the vision of greater equality for all, as the human rights agenda became mainstream. However, there is a lack of a Messiah leadership vision today, as leaders face overwhelm and express their stuckness. There is a clear realisation that things need to urgently change, but there is a lack of vision as to what to do next.

## Box 10. Lack of Leadership Direction

### Lack of Leadership Direction

The fundamental lack we aim to address in this project is the gap between the critiques of the current state of humanitarianism, and the lack of leadership direction. The INGO's Leadership Survey Report, identified that many CEOs felt a 'stuckness' unsure of how to meet the huge demands they faced in the present, and how to deliver a different future ([INGOs and the Long Humanitarian Century](#)). John Mitchell (2021) from ALNAP reported a similar stuckness, writing that a feeling of 'functioning inertia' in the humanitarian system held back the changes that are needed. He goes on to say "Humanitarian history tells us that the system is not good at instigating its own changes"

The humanitarian sector is not alone when facing the challenges of creating future-fit organisations. Like many leaders in different sectors, their training, political reality, ideological framing, organisational experience and ways-of-being a leader have all been forged in the crucible of modernity with no experience outside of this. The field of leadership training, coaching and organisational development are very stuck in a modernist 20<sup>th</sup> century ways of thinking. Despite the sprinkling of new rhetoric such as adaptive and systemic leadership, or a move towards CSR (Michael, 2003) the majority of leaders and organizations remain stuck within 20<sup>th</sup> century ideologies and practices.

## Age 4. 2019 to now: Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism

### The future of Humanitarian Leadership

Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism requires all four discourses of leadership, but with Eco-Leadership as the guiding north star. Within the aid sector Eco-Leadership will oversee which leadership discourses are required or lacking in each particular context. It acts as a meta-discourse, overseeing the ecosystems to support the correct balance of leadership discourses. At the same time Eco-Leadership always provides an internal and external ecosystemic viewpoint, and a particular culture of engagement.

**Messiah Leadership** for the Precarious-Interdependent age is paradoxical. Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism seeks to distribute leadership widely and advocates for collective leadership which undermines the idea of a Messiah leader setting out visions. However, the paradox is that to attain radical change in the sector, there needs to be individuals and collective groups who take up 'Autonomist Leadership' (Western, 2014) and who at the same time collectively hold a vision of Eco-Mutualism as a way to seed and lead the change in the sector. In a book chapter entitled the 'Eco-Leadership Paradox' (Western 2018), I write of the paradox whereby the Eco-Leadership aim is to produce collective in a distributed form, yet to achieve this demands an Eco-Leadership vision, to create the narrative and seed the ideas. What helps here is to take a more fluid view of leadership, seeing it as ephemeral rather than fixed. Leadership is fluid and moves between individuals and collectives. We are all leaders and followers whatever our position in organisations. We need enough but not too much Messiah leadership that can deliver a vision, yet this comes not only from a single charismatic individual, but from a collectivist 'thinking-with' leadership approach.

**Controller leadership** remains necessary, but it must be balanced by Therapist and Eco-Leadership in order to prevent the potential for authoritarianism, and dehumanising bureaucracy and control. Resources and finances need close controls, humanitarianism requires the best data analysis and good Controller leadership provides efficient systems and processes. Controller leadership has an important but not dominant place. Technology and data are going to be increasingly important in

delivering focused and timely aid, direct digital payments, predicting famines, preventing duplication all need good Controller leadership input. The question is how Controller leadership is used alongside other leadership approaches, not whether it is useful.

**Therapist leadership** will continue to be very relevant and a humanising influence. Whatever leadership approach is taken, the human element is vital to ensure relational and power dynamics don't undermine the delivery of aid and this requires Therapist leadership skills and approaches. Also to lead motivated teams requires attention to our psychological and emotional wellbeing, particularly when working with trauma.

In each age Therapist leadership shows up differently. The urgent leadership demand today is to mobilise agency within individuals, teams and to re-enchant and bring back an energy to a sector disenchanted by centralisation, regulation and bureaucracy. Therapist leaders are often popular but they can produce dependency followership if they take up an overly 'caring role'. A mature, dynamic and energised Therapist leadership is required to mobilise agency for the coming age; alongside the capacity to work with suffering.

**Eco-Leadership** will become the most powerful leadership discourse present in the humanitarian sector. The Eco-Mutualist Humanitarian approach emerged from Eco-Leadership thinking, practice and experience. Internally in the sector Eco-Leadership approaches and methods will drive change through creating 'Ecosystems of Development'. Eco-Leaders appreciate diverse leadership approaches and ensure the right balance of leadership takes place in their organisational ecosystems. They draw on Controller, Messiah and Therapist approaches, whilst always maintaining and ecosystemic overview. Externally Eco-Leaders scan the technological, environmental and social ecosystems, looking for disruptions, opportunities and challenges and always for lack, to reflect on what is missing and unknown which can lead to innovations and break throughs. The qualities of Eco-Leadership for the P.I Age include focusing on: connectivity, interdependencies, engaging leadership from the edge as



well as the centre, distributing leadership to ensure organisations and teams are engaged and participative, and always leading with ethics and social purpose in mind.

### 3.3 Eco-Leadership Formation Delivering Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism

This report makes the case for Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism. In the sector and beyond there is clear recognition that urgent change has to happen. Some voices from the sector speak out:

**INGOs AT A TURNING POINT:** Executive Summary of INGO Leadership Report 2021:

For more than a century now INGOs have played a vital humanitarian role, delivering emergency relief and longer-term development assistance. Many have grown into powerful, complex, international organisations with global reach.

But there is a widespread feeling within the INGO community that this is a period of transition, when INGOs need urgently to find new ways of working in the face of rapid change. A time to reassess their roles, with questions being raised about their legitimacy, their core identities, their income streams, their relationships with donors and the people they help: in short, their relevance in a fast-changing world. <sup>19</sup>

Anna Gawel writes on Devex Newswire 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022,

Global development has had an impressive run. Over the last few decades, it transformed from a vague idealist pastime into a full-fledged, multibillion-dollar industry that has made serious gains on issues such as poverty. There was global solidarity, lots of money, and high hopes. Then came 2022, when many of those

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<sup>19</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ingos-long-humanitarian-century-leadership-survey-report-what-leaders-international-ngos-think-about-challenges-they-face-and-future-aid-and-development-sector>

hopes came crashing down. Now, the development community is waiting to see if 2023 ushers in a new era that renders the heydays of yesteryear obsolete.

In the Precarious-Interdependent Age, there will be an ongoing 'process of crisis'. The task is not to repeat 20<sup>th</sup> century patterns, but to re-imagine a new age of humanitarianism which means changing core identities, cultures, ways-of-being and ways-of-thinking as humanitarians.

This change is beginning to happen and signs of a new language of Eco-Leadership are beginning to take hold:

**Hugo Slim writes:**

A new generation of humanitarians should see themselves as subtle spiders weaving a web of humanitarian networks, instead of heroic leaders commanding operations directly from on high. (Slim, 2022)

**Amruta Byatnal Senior Editor at Devex writes:**

So when do we become equals? When will that mindset shift? We refuse to use the word localization; we call it ecosystem development.

**Thomas Lay from Save the Children, writes:**

We have reached the end of the Era of Liberal Humanitarianism.... There is provocation to current leaders to be bold and pivot from current managerialist approaches to a zeitgeist leadership position of eco-systemic leadership. (Lay, 2022)

We also know through our engagement with the sector, that mutualism is very much desired.

This open letter from Polish NGOs helping Ukrainian refugees was sent to INGOs. Its first point highlights the need and desire for a mutualist approach. They write:

## Open letter from Polish NGO's write:

### *No implementing partners - just partners:*

Language is important, how we talk about each other, how we define and name ourselves shows how we want to build partnerships. The wording: "implementing partners" is somewhat paternalistic. We don't want to be in a place where we just implement your vision.

Our appeal is not just to change the term, but to change the approach. Please, stop implementing. Start (and continue) listening. Co-design, co-create your strategies and approaches with local experts. You bring a wealth of relevant experience and perspectives to the field. You are important and welcome. Just please remember that you are only here for a moment. Respect our knowledge, our perspective and our needs - we have been working in this field for years and we are here to stay. <sup>20</sup>

There is a clear recognition that radical new leadership and ecosystem-mutualist approaches are required. A gap exists between the desire for change and a clear direction and practice to lead this change.

Drawing on extensive research, theory, leadership development, organisational development, coaching and leadership practices across diverse organisations internationally, Eco-Leadership Formation can provide a clear way forward.

### **Overview of Eco-Leadership Formation**

Eco-Leadership formation is a re-thinking of leadership development. We believe that becoming a leader and developing leadership are both formation processes, that too often get reduced to skills or competency training. Individuals and collectives develop leadership capacity through their lived experiences. Therefore, to improve, develop

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<sup>20</sup> <https://konsorcjum.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Open-letter-to-international-donors.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1aBPVMRwI4VQemmTrsFUgFM0Kvrj6202oXgr21h8KfEYR5puIKGH3rBys>

and generate leaders and leadership, we should focus on lived 'leadership formation' experiences, rather than focusing on skills training for individual leaders.

We are formed by our 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1991) through our social experiences and by the places and spaces we inhabit. Leaders are formed by their personal experiences, the normative practices and the contexts in which they work. Leadership formation, has been inspired by my experiences of working in diverse fields and more recently by a particular experience of staying in a monastery, which reawakened me to the intense reality that our experiences form us, and our environments shape and inspire us, or limit us." (Western, 2019:339)

## Box 11. Ten Principles of Eco-Leadership Formation

### Ten Principles of Eco-Leadership Formation

1. Leadership and followership are fluid and interchangeable, not fixed roles.
2. Leadership is everywhere, not just at the top. Distributing leadership and enabling leading from the edge, is part of our formation process.
3. Leaders learn more from each other than from expert trainers.
4. Leaders are formed by both personal experience *and* cultural experience.
5. Distributing containment is essential to enable distributed leadership.
6. Leadership formation requires a generative and generous culture.
7. Both formal and informal leadership development activities are necessary.
8. Connecting people, technology and the environment is vital - don't focus just on people alone.

9. Leadership is a dispersed phenomenon, it does not reside only in individuals.

10. Conceptually understanding Eco-Leadership. Eco-Leadership theory emerged from experience and practice. A conceptual understanding is required to inspire, drive and sustain Eco-leadership. Challenges and resistances always occur when going through deep cultural change - having conceptual anchors keeps the process on track.

Eco-Leadership formation is a holistic approach that works in multi-dimensional ways, utilizing current best practice such as mentoring and peer-to-peer learning in communities-of-practice. It emphasizes informal, self-directed, practice-focused and networked approaches, believing that learning from experience has greater formative powers than classroom or formally taught techniques.

Leadership formation aligns leadership development with organizational development, utilizing the Eco-Leadership discourse to generate and distribute leadership, rather than focusing on behavioural leadership approaches with a small group of elite leaders. (Western, 2019: 339)

Leadership exists all around us, but so much of it goes unnoticed, or is undervalued and uncherished. This at the expense of organizational success and greater social wellbeing. It takes the right conditions to nurture hidden leadership potential, and the formation task is to create and support those conditions. The leadership potential within each individual, and the collective leadership within an organization, both need discovering, nurturing and sustaining.

Eco-Leadership formation processes reveal many manifestations of leadership that are currently hidden. Leadership formation is not something that can be prescribed universally or outside of a local context. Leaders and leadership are formed locally and specifically.

An Eco-Leadership formation process works at individual, team, organisation and socio-cultural levels. There is no generic or universal set of solutions.

When an organisation works to deliver Eco-Leadership formation, the focus is on formal and informal learning, development and experience.

1. *Personal Eco-Leadership formation process*: identify a mentor or coach to help support, identify and nurture their specific personal developmental needs
2. *Team Eco-Leadership formation process*: team works with a coach or peer mentor to identifying team strengths, gaps and challenges as part of the formation process.
3. *Organization Eco-Leadership formation process*: leaders throughout the organisation work together to co-create ecosystems of development, and identify other formation spaces for leadership to emerge and flourish.
4. *Sector Eco-Leadership formation process*: takes place emergently as new language, practices and cultures spread rhizomatically. New ways of thinking and practicing Eco-leadership seep into systems and cultures becoming normative and commonplace. This we already see happening. When ideas and practices resonate with a lived experience, Eco-Leadership ideas begin to go viral.

Eco-leadership formation takes place across whole ecosystems. Ecosystem mapping and analysis is undertaken to co-create and reflect on the ecosystems of development required to create change.

### **Eco-systems of Development**

At the heart of Eco-Leadership Formation in the humanitarian sector will be Eco-systems of Development. These are containing spaces, thinking and working spaces that enable leadership and leaders to form, for emotions to be processed and turned into thinking, and for thinking to be turned into action.

Eco-systems of Development will be formal and informal spaces. Peer mentoring, supervision, process consulting, coaching individuals and teams, network online meetings, webinars and theory seminars, communities of practice, discussions over lunch, reading groups and formal management meetings are all potential spaces where Ecosystems of Development exist.

## Box 12. Ecosystems of Development

### Ecosystems of Development

#### An innovative leadership development process

Creating spaces for leadership to flourish, rather than training individuals to be leaders: Ecosystems of development are ‘containing spaces’, mutually created by diverse actors, within the entanglements of humanitarian ecosystems. This is the opposite of a top-down change process, or a flagship leadership training programme for hi-potential elites. We believe everybody has unique leadership potential, and creating spaces that enables and enhances leadership potential to become realised is the objective.

Eco-Leadership teaches that deep and sustainable change comes through embodying practices, and cannot be coercive or instilled from above. Ecosystems of development are spaces that are created, to nurture and enable new leadership and new leaders to be formed, and new leadership produces new ideas and diverse practices that change the way aid is delivered.

Diverse and marginalised voices are heard in these spaces and reflective and critical thinking become normative practices. Change and culture shifts in our networked and interdependent ecosystems can be fast. When humanitarians engage in

'ecosystems of development' using different language, thinking and practices, metaphors will change from the machine to the ecosystem, and from paternalism to mutualism, for a new cultural order to be embraced.

Change becomes viral when ideas and practices inspire and motivate, also when they provide conceptual and practical 'ways of being' that address the challenges faced.

Ecosystems of development are the spaces that enable this process to happen through dialogue, collaboration, sharing, challenging, partnerships and committed engagement.

Ecosystems of development are mutualist spaces, that mobilise and harness the talents of the collective.

The aim is to engage mutually and relationally; practicing 'thinking-with' others, and acting 'with-others', and by doing so embedding Eco-Leadership cultures in the sector.

Eco-Leadership is a theory and practice that is tried and tested internationally, across sectors. It encourages differences to emerge, enabling culturally specific and innovative and effective humanitarian aid to be co-produced.

Eco-Leadership formation supports diverse and unique humanitarian ways of taking up leadership and leading change.

### **Composting and Weaving**

The Eco-Leadership Institute runs many courses and webinars, where participants are encouraged to compost and weave their thoughts and experiences. Reflection is a cognitive act, composting is a bodily act. The unconscious works in the body, our creativity arises within us. Composting is to allow the body, mind and soul to break down what has been experienced and learnt, and to produce new nutrients from this process that will feed new thinking, and enrich existing thoughts. Composting means



moving the body, it is not a static process. We all find our own ways of producing rich compost.

Weaving plenaries and gathering are when we apply symposiums to think-with each other, to weave the individual and group products of our composting, into collective materials we can use.

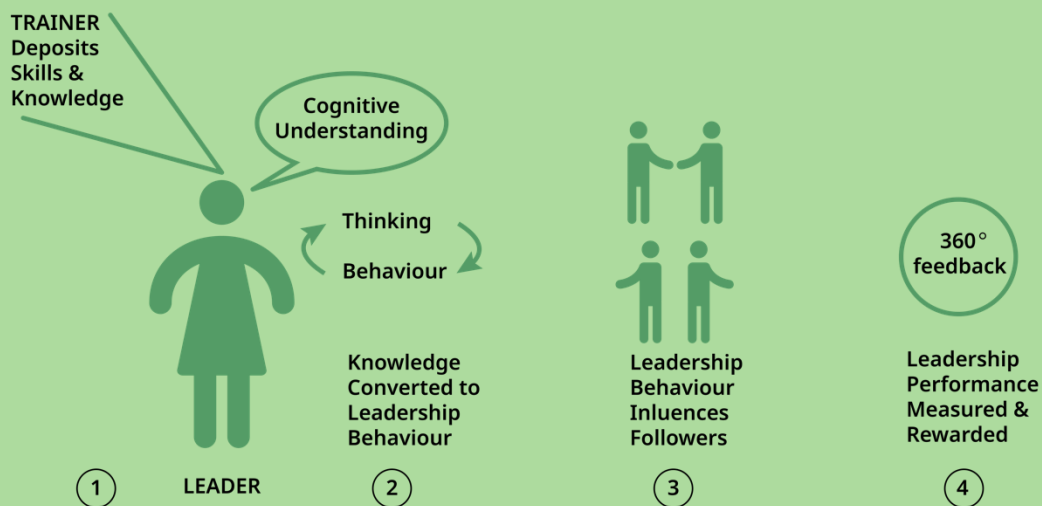
The very act of creating an Eco-Leadership Formation process, is in parallel unleashing new Eco-Leadership cultures and practices. By thinking about how to develop, form and practice Eco-Leadership, demands eco-mindsets and ecosystemic approaches.

Traditional Leadership development is contrasted with Eco-Leadership Formation in the illustrations in Box 13 below.

## Box 13. Traditional Leadership Development

### 1. Traditional Leadership Development - Individual behaviourist approaches

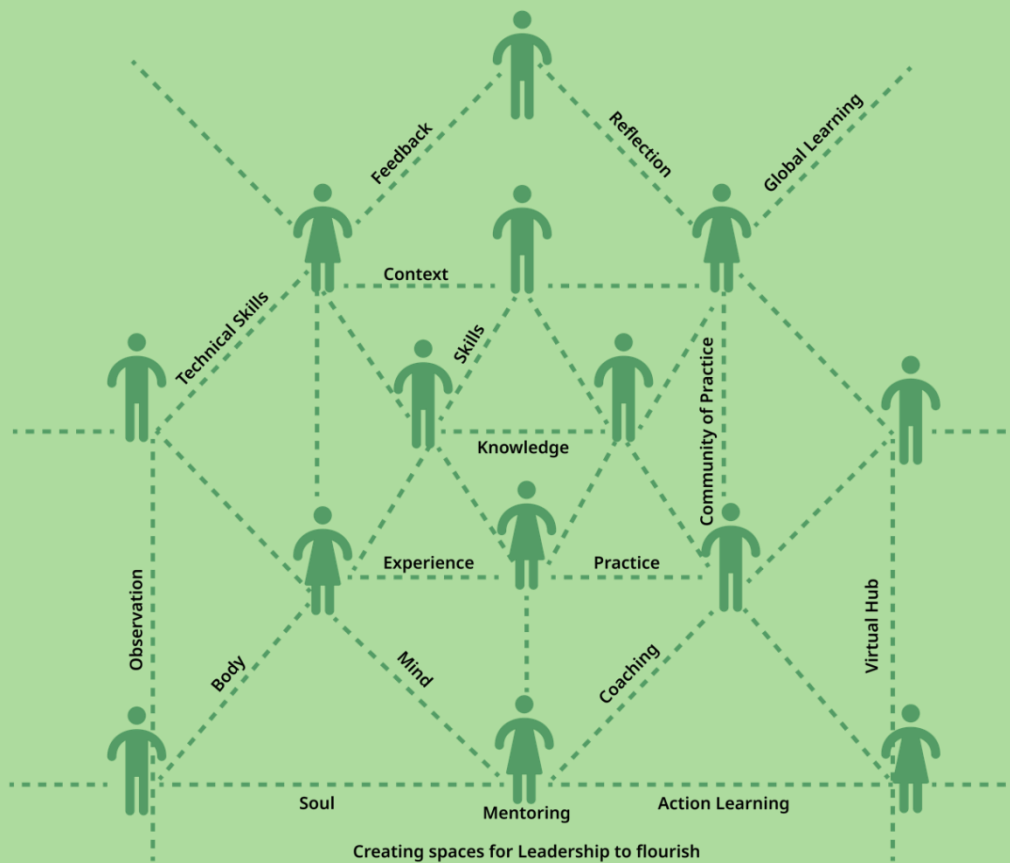
Traditional leadership development takes an individualistic behavioural approach, it identifies particular competencies and skills, focuses on behaviours and performance. These approaches are highly problematic, and have delivered little success (Bolden & Gosling, 2006)



## 2. Eco-Leadership Formation.

Creating spaces for leadership to flourish and emerge in a dynamic network of experiences. Informal leadership learning takes place between peers alongside formal leadership development practices such as training courses, coaching and mentoring. Communities of practice are important, as are creating networks of practice where leaders can collectively develop Eco-Leadership approaches.

Illustrations from *Leadership: a critical text, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* (Western, 2019)



## Eco-Leadership Formation

- Takes a collective, pluralist and adaptive approach, creating networks and ecosystems of development.
- Leadership formation is planned and designed with the mutual engagement of those partaking in the leadership formation processes.
- Beyond Individualism: Formation is planned with informal leadership, collective leadership and hidden leadership in mind. Leadership is conceptualised as fluid and both enacted by individuals and also by collective actors. When focusing on individual leaders, leadership is understood as always in relation to others and the wider ecosystem.
- In any formation process we ask how others will benefit from the leadership formation experience, how are knowledge and best practices going to be transferred?
- Eco-Leadership Formation is holistic, going beyond behaviourism and performance. Leadership is an embodied, emotional, cognitive, soulful and relational practice.
- Delivering Eco-Leadership approaches to the humanitarian sector will be a process of deep and broad engagement. All formation processes are specifically tailored and mutually designed to ensure maximum engagement. There are many examples of Eco-leadership processes that have been tried and tested, and we can draw on this existing experience and the methods and approaches to ensure we can make big impacts in the sector, focusing initially on Ukraine. Box 14 below shows some of the existing Eco-Leadership Formation processes the Eco-Leadership Institute has successfully utilised.

## Box 14. Eco-Leadership Formation processes

<p><b>Experiential group Learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The eco-leadership exchange – A leadership exchange process where leaders are matched in pairs and visit each other to observe peer-mentor and learn from practice</li> <li>• The Leadership Game – an experiential leading simulation event for 50-100 people</li> <li>• Eco-Leadership COP – Communities of Practice</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leadership development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eco-Leadership training Course A leadership programme, with theory, leadership practice and group experience, utilising the A-N frame system</li> <li>• BANC IT! – A coach led leadership programme</li> <li>• The Psychodynamics of Leadership – Drawing on psychoanalysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ecosystems of development and organisational development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eco-Leadership Supervision</li> <li>• Eco-Leadership Consultancy</li> <li>• Eco-system and Network Mapping</li> <li>• Composing and Weaving – Webinar Series</li> </ul>
<p><b>Coaching</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundations of Coaching Eco-Leaders</li> <li>• Analytica Network Advanced Coach Training</li> <li>• Coaching Analytical Network Coaching System</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching a technology – coaching for organisational development</li> <li>• Certificate in Coaching to Debrief the Hidden Leadership Questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>Workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eco-leadership Webinar series</li> <li>• Working with Paradox</li> <li>• Four leadership Discourses</li> <li>• Beneath the surface psycho-social</li> </ul>
<b>Research approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hidden leadership profiling tool</li> <li>• Action-research. All our programmes, coaching and leadership activities are processes and utilised as sites for action-research</li> <li>• Evaluations and observations</li> </ul>
<b>Conceptual development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edgy Ideas podcast – resources for eco-leadership</li> <li>• Thought leadership events</li> <li>• Eco-leadership publications</li> </ul>

## To summarise

Eco-Leadership maintains that leaders do not become leaders through training but are formed through diverse experiences. Learning from practice, learning from others and learning from experience are all part of a leader's formation process. Moreover, focusing on individual leader skills and competencies, is a very westernised approach and misses out the greater potential of developing 'leadership' in a more collective way. Leadership formation is a process that creates spaces to enable leadership potential to emerge and flourish. 'LEDGE' refers to leadership from the edge. The edge is the place where social movements activate the rest of society, and in organisations is where change is first noticed and where change begins. This approach undoes the entrapment of the top-down, hierarchical approach that creates dependent and controlling cultures.

Leadership Formation requires a plurality of activities such as communities of practice, coaching, peer-to-peer mentoring, network building, bespoke skills workshops, specific leadership trainings, webinars, bespoke consultancy for organisational development, process consultation, reflective practices, and skills-based training.

## 3.4 Learning from Mutualist Engagement

### Action-Research in the sector

Over a five-month period from September 2022 to January 2023, Dr Simon Western has been engaged in a scoping project, that included the desk-research that has contributed to this report, research and engagement with colleagues from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and Save the Children. He has been engaged in a listening and dialogue process, the aim of which has been to try and discern the essence of the challenges faced and what is required in terms of leadership and organisational development, initially focusing on the Ukrainian context. Group and one on one in-depth conversations and dialogues were held in London and online with Save the Children and Humanitarian Leadership Academy staff and with Juliano Fiori from Alameda. Dr Western has spoken with national and regional Save the Children leaders in East and Southern Africa. A one-day hybrid conference, entitled 'The Meaning of Trauma for the Humanitarian sector' was organised in London with both a face to face and global online global audience from within and external to the sector. In November 2022, a group from Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy accompanied Dr Western on a research visit to Poland to meet NGO and CSOs leaders and teams engaged in supporting Ukrainian refugees. This was followed up by piloting a leadership profiling tool, and Dr Western coached NGO leaders in Poland to debrief the leadership tool, to support them and discover more about the challenges they faced and the development/formation needed.

In addition, at the beginning of 2023 Dr Western accompanied by Samantha Davis, Charlotte Balfour-Poole, and Thomas Lay from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy undertook a visit to Kenya, Zimbabwe and S. Africa to meet Save the Children teams, NGO's and government representatives. The group observed, listened, dialogued, held coaching sessions and small workshops, and shared the early thinking on Eco-Mutualism (African report forthcoming).



### To summarise the action-research activities:

1. *Desk research on humanitarianism* - engaging with leading authors in the field and humanitarian reports
2. *Listening, conversations and dialogues*: online and face to face meeting with humanitarians from Save the Children, the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, NGO and CSOs
3. *A visit to Poland to meet NGOs supporting Ukrainian refugees*
4. *Conference: 'The Meaning of Trauma for the Humanitarian sector'*
5. *The Hidden Leadership Profiling Pilot* - analysis of leadership approaches with follow up coaching
6. *East and Southern Africa visit - Kenya, Zimbabwe and S. Africa*: Listening, dialogue, coaching and workshops

From our mutualist engagement with many frontline humanitarian workers, we have been very encouraged by the positive response to Eco-Mutualism and Eco-Leadership approaches. We often met with early hesitation, where the expectation was to listen to yet another 'top-down' presentation from INGO representatives. However, when we entered into a mutual dialogue, things changed rapidly and energised exchanges took place.

What was most encouraging was the easy identification with ecosystems and mutualist ways of thinking, and Eco-Leadership approaches. Local contexts, field workers and NGOs/CSOs working closely with recipients of aid, were both familiar and practiced at the ways of working suggested in this report. Both the constraints from the centralised, paternalistic approaches, and the possibilities from Eco-Mutualist approaches were recognised. A real desire was expressed to amplify existing good practice, and to organise around a coherent way of working. One that made practical sense to deliver better aid, and that also aligned with their values and reasons for working in the field.

## Summary of key findings

### Polish Visit to NGOs supporting Ukrainian Refugees

The Polish NGOs response to hearing about our work and potential development offers was positive beyond our expectations. What became apparent was the excellent fit between Eco-Leadership methods and social-entrepreneurial leadership.

### Learnings from 'The Meaning of Trauma for the Humanitarian sector' Conference

We identified a lack in the sector which is a deeper engagement with the psycho-social approach. Participants were very engaged in understanding more about the emotional dynamics that are present in individuals, teams and organisations.

### Leadership Profiling Tool - Reflections

The Hidden Leadership Questionnaire was sent to the leaders of various NGO's we visited in Poland. A pilot study was carried on a sample of 11 participants. The results indicate an existence of Eco-Leadership as a dominant preference among participants, followed by Therapist, Messiah and Controller, respectively.

### Results of participants on the four Leadership Discourses of the HLQ

	HLQ Scores			
Participants = 11	Eco-Leadership	Messiah	Therapist	Controller
Percentage	38.50%	21.70%	33%	7.10%

### Representation of overall results on the four Leadership Discourses

*What we learnt:* Eco-Leadership and Therapist Leadership together form 70% of the favoured leadership discourse. This mirrors the leadership skills required to deliver an Eco-Mutualist approach. The follow up coaching sessions revealed a great interest in further Eco-Leadership development opportunities.

## Conclusion from the action-research

Five reflections from this listening and engagement exercise

1. **Eco-Leadership approaches are welcomed within the sector:** They are pragmatic and regenerative, providing a well-thought-out process and vision for delivering change, which energises and motivates.
2. **Eco-Leadership approaches align well** with the grass-root leaders from NGO and CSO leaders we met on the ground.
3. **Psychosocial thinking and practices** will be important to deliver change, these approaches presented in the trauma workshop were very well received.
4. **Critical theory and critical thinking** that translates to humanitarian practices is welcomed. Listening and discussing humanitarian aid with many practitioners revealed that there is a gap between academic critiques of the sector, and applying these critiques in practice. Developing a capacity to critique rather than follow the mainstream discourses is going to be essential to develop leadership that can discern ethical and other complex pathways.
5. **Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism** - We shared early ideas from this report in our visit to Africa, the quotes are from those we met (anonymised for confidentiality).

*“It (Eco-Mutualism) fits well within our values.”*

*“It will help us, it’s a good time to be embracing eco-mutualism. It will heal us.”*

*“We are totally onboard with the distributed leadership model. “We’ve become unstuck. We can’t express how valuable that is. A practical application is the creation of thinking and reflection spaces.”*

## Next Steps

In Poland and in Africa, there is real desire for further engagement, with requests for Eco-leadership coaching, Eco-mapping workshops and Eco-Leadership training programmes.

*The Harare Method:* Save the Children in Harare opted to run a self-managed Eco-Mutualist formation process called the Harare Method. They have selected an Eco-Mutualist champion and we co-created a structure that includes peer-mentoring, Ledge groups (leadership from the edge) supported by us via supervision.

These seeds are signs that there is a real energy for Eco-Mutualist change at the edges, perhaps a tougher task is the work that is required at the centre!

**Appendix 1. offers more details of three events:**

Event 1. Visit to Polish NGOs

Event 2. The Meaning of Trauma in Humanitarian Aid: A One-day Conference

Event 3. Leadership profiling tool pilot study in Polish NGO Community

## **3.5 A Manifesto: Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism**

## Box 15. Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism: A Manifesto

### Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism

#### A Manifesto for a New Age of Humanitarianism

*Re-enchanting humanitarianism for our Precarious-Interdependent Age*

We are entering a new epoch, a Precarious-Interdependent Age emerging from the environmental emergency, the technological revolution and resulting rapid socio-political change.

Humanitarian responses to this increasingly precarious world are hindered by a modernist mindset that organises aid in a centralised, top-down and paternalistic way. This manifesto proclaims that a new age of humanitarian is urgently needed which we call Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism.

#### Guiding Principles for Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism

1. Eco-Mutualism aspires to bring mutual benefit and mutual value to all.
2. Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism is radically decentralized.
3. Eco-Mutualism moves from dependency cultures to interdependency.
4. Eco-Mutualism shifts power from hierarchical control towards horizontal engagement.
5. Aid beneficiaries are not regarded as dependent recipients, but as mutual participants.
6. All participating actors have agency.
7. Leadership from the edge (LEDGE) leads to viral change.

#### Outcomes of Eco-Mutualism

- Humanitarian aid and development are co-produced.
- The 'Eco-Mutualist turn' means that internationalism and centralized position-power are no longer considered the dominant force.
- Building civic society is always a by-product of Eco-Mutualism because

collaborative engagement and participation are the heartbeat of a healthy civic society.

- Eco-Mutualist approaches address multiple crisis and complex aid and development challenges, with ecosystemic, mutualist, collaborative, adaptive and pluralistic responses.

## Eco-Mutualism: A New Direction

The pairing of 'ecosystems and mutualism' brings two powerful concepts together that can guide humanitarianism into a dynamic future. The aim is to unlock the talent, energy and power of collaboration that lies dormant within our humanitarian ecosystems.

**Ecosystem** approaches undo the linear, top-down and centralising behaviours that have plagued humanitarian aid and development. In an ecosystem there is no top or centre. Each individual, organisation, technology and environmental/social context are active participants in a dynamic and interdependent whole. Turning away from the obsession with results-based thinking, ecosystemic approaches open our mindsets to engage with new possibilities, new resources, new knowledge and different ideas. Voices from the margins are encouraged to take leadership, and through connecting to local and global ecosystems can make empowered contributions.

**Mutualism** guides the humanitarian work towards acknowledging mutual agency, recognising that everybody has a part to play. Co-creating mutual/shared value challenges the binary power divide between aid-giver and aid-recipient. Mutual accountability challenges the dependency model of aid, moving towards an interdependency approach where all participants take responsibility and thus experience being engaged citizens.

**Eco-Mutualist** thinking produces more engaged collaborations that utilise the hidden resources in our ecosystems, which create more impactful and sustainable

outcomes. Better results are achieved from a more purposeful, participatory approach that maximises the ecosystemic opportunities. Eco-Mutualism is an emergent, not a prescriptive, approach. It is an unfolding process, where each local context co-produces its particular Eco-Mutualist behaviours.

## 4. Conclusion

### **“A watershed moment for the humanitarian sector”**

*“Discovering a new positioning for humanitarianism within a radically altered aid ecosystem cannot be done through radical thinking alone. The reshaping and power-shifting also necessitates far-reaching evolution of humanitarian leadership so that it is willing to challenge and even to rebel against the apparent systemic ‘stuckness’. The good news is this is already happening. Building on years of successful coaching and leadership development initiatives, the HLA has begun working in partnership with the Eco-Leadership Institute, founded by Dr Simon Western. The term ‘Eco-Leadership’ refers to the conceptualisation of organisations as ecosystems and networks, rather than closed systems. Dr Western’s future-facing approach describes Eco-Leadership as a blend of four qualities. Firstly, system ethics – beyond individual morality to acting ethically in the whole human realm. Secondly, it is about recognising connectivity and inter-dependence - we are a networked global society. Thirdly, it is about leadership spirit and celebrating the vitality of human connection. Finally, it is about one’s sense of belonging to the whole – to places and spaces, virtual and real. Such a characterisation of leadership speaks directly to the values-based connectivity that binds humanitarians together and challenges the predominance of competitive and controlling behaviours in the aid sector.”*

Gareth Owen OBE, Humanitarian Director, Save the Children UK

This report sets out a narrative, identifying threads and themes that flow across the ages of humanitarianism. It identifies an outdated mode of operating, which is paternalistic and dominated by modernity’s gaze. The Precarious-Interdependent Age is a paradigm shift in society. The report sets out how the P.I Age demands an urgent response that requires radically changes.



The report moves into an analysis of leadership, before identifying Eco-Leadership as a way to deliver a new age of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism. Ecosystems and mutualism are core conceptual ideas that work as a pairing together.

Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism signifies a break with the past. It disrupts the present entrapment in ways-of-being that are patriarchal and controlling, and creates a pathway towards a different future. A future that embodies generativity and relationality, and aims to re-enchant the sector.

***“It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas”*** (Strathern, 1992)

The report utilises an emerging language, because language matters. The P.I. age requires a new use of language to help unblock stuck ideas and to give life to new emergent thinking. We use words such as ecosystems, mutuality, Eco-Leadership, emergence, inter-dependencies, precarity, networks, Ledge -leading from the edge, inter-relationships, psycho-social, containment, ‘ecosystems of development’, eco-mutualism, re-enchantment, composting and weaving, staying with the trouble.

These words and terms signify a break from the cultures and ideas that entrap the humanitarian sector in ways-of-being and ways-of-thinking today. They are intentionally used to disrupt the norms, to challenge taken-for-granted ways of thinking and to open a more generative space for something new to emerge: something we call an **Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism delivered via Eco-Leadership**.

The future journey is one that demands a conscious shift of our emotional responses and existing power relations to the humanitarian task of working with trauma. The move takes us from the existing compassionate-salvationist power response, to an mutualist-ecosystemic relational response.

## Box 16. An illustration of Salvation Aid to Eco-Mutualist Aid

### From Salvation Aid to Eco-Mutualist Aid

#### *Trauma-Empathy-Compassion-Salvation Aid*

Humanitarian aid over the past 200 years has been delivered through the following process.

Trauma is recognised and evokes an empathetic response, an identification with the suffering other. Compassion is the response, drawing on sympathy and an emotional need to help the suffering other. However, this is also a power-over move, which leads to aid being delivered from a position of salvation, the strong (white) hero helps the weak (othered) victim. The good humanitarian helps the suffering weak other who cannot help themselves. Salvation aid has been modified over time, and is more apologetic today. However, paternalistic aid delivered under modernity's controlling banner enables the ideology of 'white saviours and powerless victims' to continue to haunt the field of humanitarianism. The recent Doctors without borders video highlights this.

'When you see Doctors without borders what do you see?' MSF video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DFemg94ufU>

### Salvation Aid



### Eco-mutualist Aid



### Eco-Mutualist Aid

*Trauma-Empathy-Mutualism- Eco-Mutualist Aid*

Eco-Leadership replaces the Salvation Aid process with an Eco-Mutualist Aid process

Trauma is recognised and evokes an empathetic response, an identification with the suffering other. The next response is mutualism rather than compassion, this is an emotional shift, and a power shift. Mutualism undoes the salvation process, by focusing on partnership, listening and learning from each other, acknowledging shared agency and shared responsibility. The recognition that all parties gain value out of collaborative work completely changes the dynamics from the outset. The humanitarian response becomes a mutualist engagement harnessing the agency of all, including the suffering recipient, local NGOs and CSOs, donors, governance organisations and agencies and citizens working locally, nationally and internationally.

## The humanitarian narrative captured in eight steps

1. ***Precarious-Interdependent Age***. We face a paradigm change as we enter the Precarious-Interdependent Age (P.I.Age) - which demands urgent and radical change.
2. ***Critique of humanitarianism***. The humanitarian sector has grown exponentially, and delivered a huge amount of humanitarian aid, supporting millions of lives. This delivery however has been critiqued as over-centralised, bureaucratic, colonial, patriarchal and Global North dominated.
3. ***Beyond Modernity mindsets***: This report focuses on a practice-based critique, and on forward thinking. It identifies how humanitarianism remains entrapped in 'modernity mindsets'. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is finished, and so should its managerial, controlling, instrumentalist, and closed-system approach to leading organisations be. These over-centralised, paternalistic ways of working are no longer fit-for-purpose.
4. ***Ecosystems and Mutualism*** together provide a symbolic pairing of concepts, that signify a new way of engaging as humanitarians, one that is future fit for the P.I Age.
5. ***The Eco-Mutualist Humanitarian Manifesto***, sets out a vision that can guide an emergent discovery of how to implement a new age humanitarianism. The aim is to re-energise and co-create a 'unity of purpose within a multiplicity of wills', encouraging local and specific diversity and a relational approach to how humanitarianism is enacted and embodied.
6. ***Eco-Leadership Formation*** provides the underlying leadership, coaching and organisational theories, practices and methods that can enable Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism to be co-produced, co-created and mutually delivered.

7. ***Social movements*** offer examples over history how change takes place through LEDGE - 'leadership from the edges'. Likewise, Eco-Mutualist humanitarianism will lead change from the edge, which can produce viral change. The task is not to overthrow the current humanitarian regimes and cultures, but to provide better alternatives that work in parallel and alongside existing structures, inspiring and innovating until they become mainstream.
8. ***Re-enchanting Humanitarianism***. Key to mobilising change is the movement from disenchantment to re-enchantment. Institutions that are too centralised, instrumentalised and machinic create disenchantment. CEO's with power express feeling lonely, alienated and stuck, whilst others feel disempowered, overwhelmed and not listened to. Re-enchanting the sector is key to producing the emotional/libidinal energy needed to lead change. Engaging more mutually, and ecosystemically allows an escape from feeling stuck, opens new spaces allowing new voices and new ideas to be heard and implemented, which in turn re-enchants humanitarians to lead change.

The humanitarian sector is an ecosystem within ecosystems, yet it often feels like a closed system, living in its own bubble, or perhaps more accurately in multiple bubbles, some of which feel very disconnected to each other.

The wider ecosystems; the political, technological, environmental, economic and social entanglements that humanitarians operate within, are all struggling with how to address and adapt to the Precarious-Interdependent age. Eco-Leadership approaches are sought after in business, social, health, education, finance, retail, religious and not-for-profit sectors, as a way to begin a journey to address these challenges.

Each sector faces similar dilemmas and challenges. The environmental crisis provides the best example of governments and organisations struggling with this existential threat, yet still unable to develop radical enough 'ecosystemic and mutualistic' ways of addressing the challenge together. Technological advances in society demand adaptive, networked and ecosystemic mindsets. Societal changes are revealing 'cultures of precarity' and people seek new ways to cope, to adapt and to live well.

The humanitarian sector needs to step up to these challenges, and what is exciting is that it is well placed to do so, for it has worked with precarity and interdependence since the early foundations.

This report aims to seed new thinking, and to offer tried and tested theories and practices that can be emergently co-developed. Each humanitarian context must find its own way to embrace a new age of Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism. Then humanitarianism will become re-enchanted, re-energised, adaptive and impactful.

## 5. Appendices

### Appendix 1. Action-Research of Humanitarian Sector: Review

This section contains short summaries of three events where we took up an action-research stance. Setting mutualism at the heart of these events, we listened, dialogued and presented ideas on Eco-Leadership.

Our aim was to learn as much as we could about people's experiences, with a further focus on their leadership and organizational development needs.

We presented and shared some of our thinking on Eco-Leadership Formation and development approaches, and wanted to test the validation of our approaches.

**Event 1. Visit to Polish NGO's**

**Event 2. The Meaning of Trauma in Humanitarian Aid: A One-day Conference:**

**Event 3. Leadership profiling tool pilot study in Polish NGO Community.**

#### Event 1: Research visit to NGOs in Poland

The Humanitarian Leadership Academy and the Eco-Leadership Institute partnered in visiting NGOS in Poland, supporting Ukrainian refugees.

##### Categories of the organisations visited:

- i) New foundations; NGOs & CSO's, founder-led organisations responding to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

- ii) Existing foundations who adapted their offers to support refugees in Poland and displaced people in Ukraine.
- iii) Independent coaches, consultants, training bodies, supporting the above.

## 14 Organisations visited between 11-19 Nov. 2022

Organisation	Summary of Work
Salam Lab	Registering refugees, housing, multicultural education Krakow
Ashoka	Networks of social entrepreneurs - mainly non-profit global organisations.
FINE: Fundacja Inicjatyw Nowej Edukacji (Initiatives for New Education Foundation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten for 100 children within 2 weeks of war</li> <li>• Workshops - integration into polish society</li> <li>• Publishing house</li> <li>• Psychological support</li> </ul>
Uniwersytet Dzieci	Children's University, Cracow
Kulawa Warszawa	Disabilities and accessibility
Fundacja Bądź (Be)	Mental health, prevention, stress reduction, Zen peacemakers
Fundacja Kultury Dialogu (Culture of Dialogues)	D&I, LBGTQ+ and avoidance of stigma and polarization in society



Grupa Trop	Coaching and mentoring, training company, e-learnings
Medicin San Frontiers	Doctors without borders
Together Consulting	Coaching and Training Company
Fundacja Nasz Wybor/ Ukrainian House	Founded for Ukrainian Migrants; 1.3 million in Poland before war; Post invasion working with Refugees Scaling up - 130 people staff working
Niezlomna Ukraina	Ukrainian School - set up in 3 cities for Ukrainian Children; Employs Ukrainian Children- offers other services and feeds children -1,500 pupils.
PAH - Polska Akcja Humanitarna	Polish Humanitarian Aid (biggest and only humanitarian Polish NGO)
Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (Club of Intelligencia	Association - 1000 members Youth leadership - scout type -adventure camps - 700 children Civic society and democratic: dignity revolution Ukraine and Belarus

The purpose of the visit was to get first-hand insights and understanding of the challenges and development requirements of the Polish NGOs/CSOs supporting Ukrainian refugees – by listening to Polish NGOs who have responded to the Ukrainian war and the refugee influx, and to the coaches and consultants who support them. The goal was also to engage the Polish NGOs/CSOs and to discuss and share our Eco-leadership and organisational development thinking and discuss what potential support this partnership could offer.

## Eight Key Themes from the visit

### 1. Inspirational and Successful

*"We had to do it, because nobody else would be doing it"*

The organisations have achieved great success in terms of the support they have given to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, and also to support those displaced and suffering under war conditions in Ukraine. The numbers of refugees involved and the challenges faced have been daunting, and yet individuals and community organisations have risen to these enormous challenges.

*Mutual Development Discussion*

- Recognition of success and achievements

***Potential Eco-leadership Developmental Activities***

- Communities of Practices Sharing success stories, best practices, alongside lessons learnt and challenges faced
- Coaching and Peer Mentoring

### 2. Organisational Agility

New start up foundations, and existing NGOs adapted within days and weeks of the war to support the influx of refugees. The agility of individuals to form embryonic organisations and the capacity for existing organisations to pivot from their existing projects to undertake new refugee related projects was exceptional.

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- Recognition and learning from NGOs about agile and speedy response with impact.

### ***Potential Eco-leadership Developmental Activities***

- Supporting leaders and organisations to make them sustainable e.g. Organisational development, coaching, leadership development

## **3. Leadership**

Many leaders had little previous formal organisational leadership experience prior to the foundations they established and led. Their successful bottom-up, grass roots approach reveals Eco-Leadership in action, and aligns closely to the HLA-ELI approach.

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- Leaders showed real interest in Eco-Leadership approaches
- Need thinking space and reflection time, coaching on strategic
- Succession planning: beyond relying on founder-leader charisma
- Leaders felt alone and in need of leadership development

### ***Potential Eco-leadership Developmental Activities***

- Eco-Leadership ideas to be developed

- Distributing leadership throughout their organisations
- An adaptive Eco-Leadership Program - learning how to distribute leadership, influence and navigate networks and ecosystems impactfully.
- Leadership coaching and process consultation - understanding group dynamics, supervision to leadership teams.

#### 4. Organisational Matters

*" Organisational development desired, but not to stifle innovation agility and creativity."*

Nine months after the outbreak of war, the organisations were struggling and under pressure. Their leaders were tired and 'burn-out' was a common term used. A key challenge described by many was to stabilise their organisations.

##### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- INGOs offering support must adopt a mutualist approach - INGOs can learn as much as they can teach -
- Development needs to be contextual

##### ***Potential Eco-leadership Developmental Activities***

- Organisational Development tailored for needs, not imported programmes or off the shelf processes
- Agility and ability to scale up or down, and respond to new crisis is a vital ingredient that requires nurturing.
- Organisational development to insert sustainable approaches able to adapt to the turbulent environments ahead.

## 5. Burnout and Well-being

*"Words such as Isolated and burn out were repeated by local NGOs"*

A common theme discussed was burnout: two main issues. Firstly, founder leaders expressed their own burnout, and concerns about their capacity to keep going and maintain their own well-being. Secondly, the burnout of younger staff who joined with a sprint mentality and now find themselves facing a marathon.

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- Coaching and mentoring support for individuals and teams, utilising well-being responses tailored for individual and organisational requirements.
- Co-creating preventative support before burnout and well-being breakdowns.

### *Potential Eco-leadership Developmental Activities*

- Promoting psychodynamic & systemic approaches in addressing the issue.
- Identifying networks of peer support

## 6. Civic Society

*"Civic society needs are great because unless society holds together then we are lost"*

Nearly all organisations we met had developed a dual agenda and purpose:

- Purpose 1. Support Ukrainian refugees practically in their particular way
- Purpose 2. Building Civic Society

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- Diversity Issues: Society needs to learn how to navigate new diverse society and be prepared for the 'crisis' that will be ongoing (new migrations)
- Youth work to help build civic society going forward

### ***Potential Eco-Leadership Developmental activities***

- Creating dialogue spaces, diversity training and events
- Eco-Leadership approaches and mapping can support this
- Offer inter-organisational learning and development events
- Group Relations Conferences, Open Space Technology
- Process oriented consultancy - to help understand organisational dynamics

## **7. Youth and Gender**

*"Work with youth is futureproofing society"*

Youth and young employees have high motivation and energy but often with little experience. Focusing on young people with education, support and mentoring is vital for the sustainability of the work. A Generational gap - exposes different ways of working and very different expectations of work between generations.

Women leadership *"We were led by our hearts"*

90% of the NGOs we met were led by women due to their empathy-driven responses. Workshops for women in the ecosystem.

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- A youth leadership programme/process would be very welcome
- Specific skills training for young people
- Reverse mentoring projects- young people mentoring their elders (tech, etc.)
- Women's leadership - coaching and mentoring support - network peer support? Women's leadership process (Process consultancy for women)
- Query-engaging men into the sector?
- Generational workshops- understanding across generational boundaries

## **8. Networking - building Ecosystems of Development**

*"support networking between them, so they better understand their closest environment and perhaps share resources"*

There was both a desire and a hesitation in relation to networking events with peers, other organisations. There is an understanding that more work has to be done to understand and engage in the ecosystems of power, of influence and to create ecosystems of development and solidarity.

### *Mutual Development Discussion*

- Support networking that is timely, relevant and feels beneficial
- Peer-sharing networks - review what exists and what is needed

### ***Potential Eco-Leadership Developmental activities***

- Eco-Leadership approaches to support influencing networks and ecosystems- developing eco-mindsets to be effective in this space
- Working in complex networked environments
  - Learning more about the Humanitarian Landscape and Networks- and how to navigate these

## Response to our Eco-Leadership approach

Eco-Leadership Developmental activities discussed included:

1. Creating 'mutual thinking spaces' to identify what support would be most helpful and the next steps to take
2. We offered those we visited an online leadership questionnaire, [www.hiddenleadership.com](http://www.hiddenleadership.com) followed by a 1-1 coaching debrief. This offers an immediate reflection and on their personal leadership. It will also create further data for us to learn about leadership in the Polish NGO sector.
3. Utilize the existing coaching and mentoring capacity as needed.
4. Develop Eco-Leadership Formation approaches that can support self-directed leadership and organisational development.
5. Identifying, working with and developing Polish and Ukrainian speaking coaches and consultants, to support these initiatives.
6. Establish a potential Eco-Leader Formation programme for those in the region

The NGOs response to hearing our work and potential development offers was very positive - beyond our expectations. There was an excellent fit between Eco-Leadership methods and what the leaders we met required i.e.



- Leadership/organisational development and support mutually co-created around practice rather than delivered top-down.
- Long-term support, not one-off training courses
- Focus on real issues faced- working with live challenges and dynamics
- Supporting distributing leadership approaches
- Understanding humanitarian ecosystems and how to influence them

## **Event 2. The Meaning of Trauma in the Humanitarian Sector**

### **One-Day Conference - London November 2022**

The Humanitarian Leadership Academy and the Eco-Leadership Institute jointly sponsored 'The Meaning of Trauma in Humanitarian Aid' - a hybrid one-day conference on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2022.

There were 56 participants who joined us from different INGOs - Tearfund, Save the Children International, CALP Network and CARE International UK, from NHS Foundation Trusts and academic institutions Anglia Ruskin University, University of Botswana, Clinic Risk Unit and National Treasury Management Agency, as well as independent consultants.

Gareth Owen, OBE Humanitarian Director at Save the Children UK, and Dr Simon Western from the Eco-Leadership Institute welcomed conference participants from Poland, Ukraine, Botswana, Finland, Norway, Middle East, India, Mauritius and the UK, before leading a challenging and thought-provoking group exploration of our relationships to emotional and psychological trauma. Rachael Cummings, Global Head of Humanitarian Health, Save the Children International helped participants reflect on real-life complex and conflictual situations and their implications in humanitarian work.

Gareth Owen said, 'We want a future that's better for children; we want to bring about positive change in the world. We have to think and function in the present but the accumulation of unresolved trauma risks keeping us subconsciously locked in the past. The 'moving on' cannot be simply mandated into existence from above, we have to stay with the trouble, work through and process all the trauma first.'

## Moving towards an Eco-Leadership Approach

### *Learning from the conference*

We identified a lack in the sector which is a deeper engagement with the psycho-social approach. Participants were very engaged in understanding more about the psychodynamics and emotional dynamics that are present in teams and organisations. Drawing on Dr Western's work as a family psychotherapist and utilising psychoanalytic insights into organisational dynamics, this issue of trauma and how individuals, teams and organisations react to it was explored.

Greater insights support teams and organisations to be less reactive and defensive and enable a better emotional processing which is vital for a) wellbeing b) good decision making

Understanding systemic issues is crucial to understand how trauma impacts organisations beyond individual PTSD. Some hold trauma on behalf of the rest of the organisation, and trauma creates defences and dysfunctional behaviours within organisations when it is not processed or addressed transparently.

The afternoon focused on leadership responses in crisis situations drawing on Lacan's three moments: *The moment of the glance*- our first reactions; *the time for understanding*- which is often missed out in a crisis as people resort to controlling behaviours and patterns. Making time for understanding enables listening to local voices and it enables innovative responses, not only repeating patterns from before. *A time for concluding*, is the time we step into taking action, making the best choice possible, whilst acknowledging we don't know everything.

The Eco-Leadership approach when applied to trauma work helps deepen our understanding of ourselves, and to explore our relationships with others and our contexts.

Trauma has ecosystemic impacts beyond the individual. Trauma inhabits organizational cultures and if not processed or contained, will show itself in dysfunctional ways. Some organizational actors hold trauma on behalf of others, which can lead to breakdowns or acting out behaviours in some, and denial and withdrawal in others.

It asks what resources are in the ecosystem, what are the systemic impacts of taking action, and which voices need to be heard which are marginalized.

Developing strategies to effectively navigate complex and interconnected ecosystems is important in aid work. Working from this deep and broad perspective can bring about systemic transformation that mutually engages all.

## **Event 3. Leadership Profiling Questionnaire (HLQ)**

### ***Pilot Study with Polish Community***

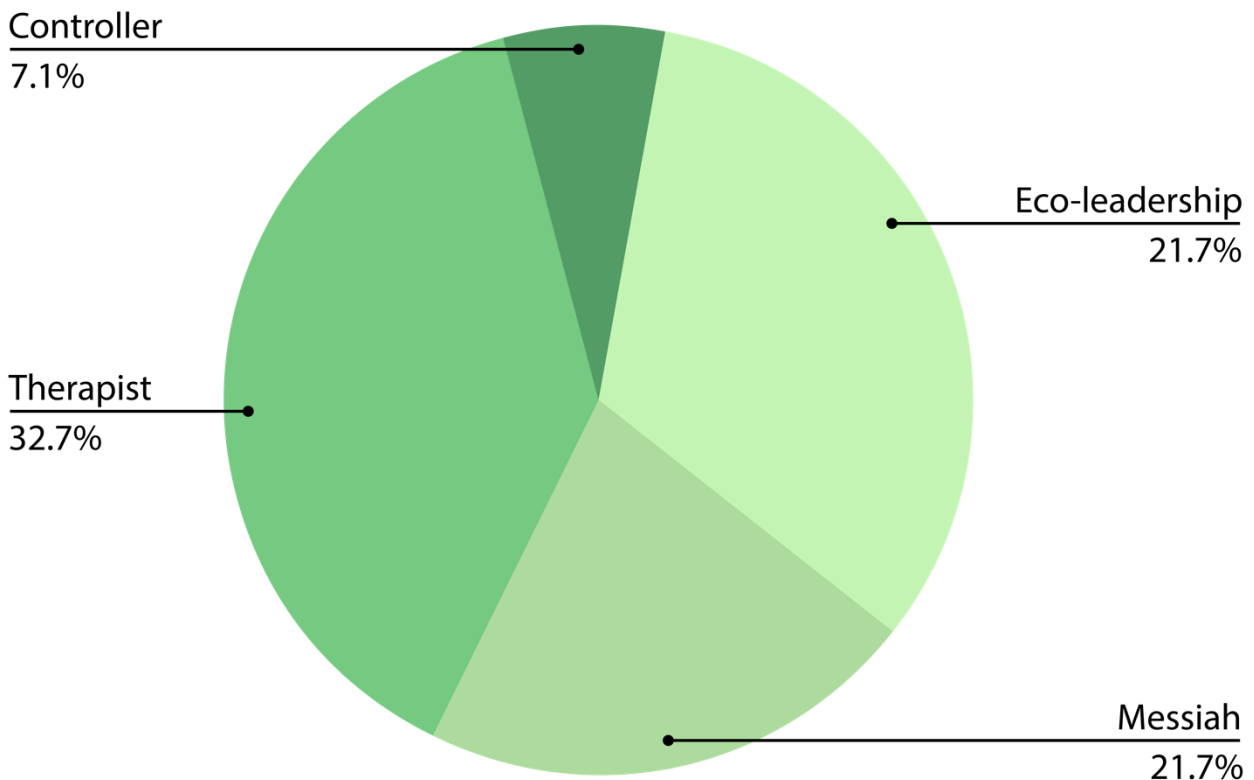
The Hidden Leadership Questionnaire was sent to the leaders of various NGO's we visited in Poland. The questionnaire reveals how an individual perceives leadership, and what can be expected from self and others in leadership and followership roles.

A pilot study was carried on a sample of 11 participants. The results indicate an existence of Eco-Leadership as a dominant preference among participants, followed by Therapist, Messiah and Controller, respectively.

### Results of participants on the four Leadership Discourses of the HLQ

Participants = 11	HLQ Scores			
	Eco-Leadership	Messiah	Therapist	Controller
Percentage	38.50%	21.70%	33%	7.10%

### Representation of overall results on the four Leadership Discourses



Coaching debriefs have been initiated to help participants explore their leadership preferences, develop new insights, make sense of the results in relation to their role and background and develop implications for their work.

Reflecting on results helps participants track where they stand in relation to their desire, where their strengths, challenges and gaps lie. It helps participants think about their eco-system and their role in it.

### **What we learnt**

1. Eco-Leadership is the favoured leadership discourse. This pilot study offered data to support what we heard during our visit, that Eco-Leadership is a favoured leadership discourse in the sector.
2. The pilot showed that Hidden Leadership profiling tool was well received by participating leaders, and will be further used in the sector.

### **Coaching Debriefs**

Feedback received from initial coaching debriefs point to a desire for Eco-Leadership and an element of surprise on recognizing how strong this desire is. The nature of the report and coaching debrief provided personal developmental feedback, that was well received and leaders asked if they could use it with their teams and organisations. The questionnaire also created a different way to think about leadership and followership in their organisations.

The need for an accredited Eco-Leadership Course that was accessible emerged as a desired option in this pilot study.

### **Conclusion: Reflections from the action-research listening exercise**

Core reflections from the three events above, and from the many conversations and dialogues held within the sector over the past five months. Dr Simon Western spoke with national and other NGO leaders from East and Southern Africa, with consultants

working with MSF, with Juliano Fiori from Alameda, and with many leaders within Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

- **Eco-Leadership approaches are welcomed within the sector**, and they are regenerative as they provide a well-thought out and coherent process and vision for delivering change, which energises and motivates.
- **Eco-Leadership approaches align** well with the grass-root leaders from NGO and CSO leaders we met on the ground, who work in adaptive ways. Th
- **Psychosocial thinking and practices** will be important to deliver change and to lead the sector with greater impact, empathy and engagement. Our psycho-social approaches presented in the Trauma workshop were very well received
- **Critical theory led thinking that translates** to humanitarian practices. Listening and discussing humanitarian aid with many practitioners revealed that there is a gap between academic critiques of the sector, and applying these critiques in practice. The capacity to critique rather than follow mainstream discourses, is going to be essential to develop a ‘thinking-leadership’ that can discern ethical and other complex pathways in the midst of crisis and activity.
- **Eco-Mutualist Humanitarianism** identifies the structures and ideologies that keep humanitarians entrapped within Modernity’s gaze. The approach takes the sector beyond existing ways of thinking. Mobilising around the concepts of ecosystems and mutuality undoes mechanistic and paternalistic approaches, and enables Eco-Leadership approaches to flourish and deliver new humanitarian aid approaches for new times.

## Appendix 2 Bio-Note of Report Author

### Dr Simon Western



#### Current Positions

Founder/CEO The Eco-Leadership Institute

CEO of Analytic-Network Coaching Ltd

#### Previous Positions

Past President (ISPSO) the International Society for the Psychoanalytical Study of Organisations

Director of Coaching at Lancaster University Management School

Director of Masters in Organizational Consultancy (psychoanalytic approaches) Tavistock Clinic.

Adjunct Professor University College Dublin

Honorary Professor: Moscow School of Higher Economics

Associate Tavistock Institute

#### Qualifications

PhD Leadership, Lancaster University  
Masters in Organisational Consultancy, Tavistock Clinic

Masters in Counselling, Keele University  
Family Therapist UKCP\*, Counsellor BACP\* State Registered General Nurse and Psychiatric Nurse\*

\* = No-longer practicing

#### A New Age of Humanitarianism

#### Key Attributes

*Thought Leadership:* Key note speaking and author of internationally acclaimed books and papers including: Leadership a Critical Text 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (2019 Sage) Coaching and Mentoring a critical text (Sage 2012) and hosts Edgy Ideas Podcast that draws on critical theory and psycho-social thinking to explore what it means to live a good life and create a good society

*Practice:* Dr Simon Western works strategically with diverse organisations from complex hospital eco-systems to global banks, manufacturing and high tech' companies. Having published his work to international acclaim, he has developed the theoretical insights and practical methodologies that address the needs of 21st century organisations.

Simon is best known for his work on Eco-leadership, and Autonomist leadership, where he applies learning from social movements and other fields to re-think how to distribute leadership in today's network society.

Simon established Lancaster University's executive coaching provision, designing and delivering post-graduate coaching programmes and in-house company programmes. His research based Analytic-Network Coaching System© offers advanced coach training internationally and to leaders who desire coaching skills inhouse. Analytic-Network Advanced Coach training now has an alumni of over 400 certified coaches across the globe.

He currently works with CEO's and snr teams offering leadership coaching and culture change interventions in global organisations. Simon's recent Clients inc: Microsoft Global OD team, Ford Motors, Global OD team international bank, IMD and London Business School, Investec and HSBC bank, NHS Chief Executives UK, CEO of Chemistry SME. Ireland, Leaders in the educational sector and global NGOs.

- In 2021, Simon founded the Eco-Leadership Institute, which is a think tank, a development hub. The aim is to develop Eco-Leadership to deliver system-change.

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