Creative Leadership for the World

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How I became who I am

Born in the mid-1960s, I grew up in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps in a (at the time) traditional rural environment. Tractors and agricultural machinery were already used in farming, although some neighbours still mowed their meadows with scythes or used horses to transport goods.

These people have become role models for me: Today I mow the meadow in the garden with a scythe. Scything is a multifaceted experience: It gives you a sense of achievement as you use your own physical strength and skill to complete the task. At the same time, it humbles you by showing you the limits of your own abilities. Would I be able to experience the same if I were sitting in an air-conditioned tractor cab listening to radio music on noise-cancelling headphones?

I think of the proud, smiling face of the driver of a giant harvester I once met while trekking in the Norwegian forests, felling trees every minute and clearing entire mountain sides in a matter of days. Obviously it was the mastery of the machine and the resulting output that made him proud and happy, not the connection with his own body and living environment.

In the early 1980s, I saw with my own eyes how the trees in the nearby forests were dying en masse. These wonderful forests had meant a lot to me since my childhood, and so I felt directly threatened by their dying. I just couldn't help but get involved in environmental politics.

Since then, standing up for the living world with people has been the driving force in my life. Not that my life has been straightforward as a result. But little by little, the quiet call has given rise to a clear vision and a determined mission: as the wilderness guide and nature mentor I am today, I bring people into contact with outer and inner nature, to help them find and fulfil their current purpose for this world.

A look back: How the crisis is deepening

In the decade I was born, smog pollution in cities was reduced by building taller industrial chimneys. As a result, the smog has actually cleared, city dwellers could breathe a sigh of relief - and industry could continue to increase production. However, the problem of air pollution has not been solved, but rather taken to a new level: Instead of the urban population, the forests across the country began to fall ill.

So the dying of the forest coincided with the years of my political awakening as a young adult. Now, flue gas desulphurisation was meant to solve the new problem. This saved the forests for the time being, although they never really recovered. And once again, production could be further increased.

In the four decades since, emissions into the atmosphere have again increased dramatically as a result of continued economic growth. Once again, a new level of damage has been reached, which is even more worrying: The atmosphere and oceans are warming, polar ice caps and glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, coastlines are moving inland, permafrost is

thawing, forests are becoming steppes and steppes are turning into deserts. All these processes are accelerating, exacerbating species extinction and degrading or endangering the lives of millions of people.

The current debate on solutions is once again dominated by technical concepts. And the cost of this is already being felt: a progressive fragmentation of the landscape through an unprecedented number of interventions in previously unspoilt nature for new hydroelectric plants, wind farms on land and at sea, mines for the exploitation of minerals, monocultures for the production of e-fuels, etc.

A look at these three moments of crisis reveals a pattern: As economic growth continues, technological solutions alone will only shift and intensify crises to more complex and threatening levels. As time goes on, the limits of planet Earth are being exceeded in more and more areas and on an increasing scale.

Outlook: What lies ahead

It is certain that we (and many other life forms) will have to cope with generally more difficult and, above all, permanently less predictable living conditions. After all, even if the broad trends have proven to go in one direction, specific events remain unpredictable, as the increase in extreme weather events alone shows.

What we have taken to be the dead stock of this world since the dawn of modernity is thus developing an uncontrollable life of its own. The objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement may be necessary to mitigate the climate crisis. However, they are by no means sufficient to master the complex and dynamic nature of the crisis.

Mastery is an inappropriate term here anyway, because for too long we have been lulled into the illusion that we can control the world. It's time to accept our own limitations and start to fit in with the world around us. It is not our efforts to control the emerging chaos according to our will that will help us, but our ability and skill to adapt to it.

For me, this means embarking on a deep and open journey of transformation, in which the transition to zero emission technologies will be one moment among many. Technological change can only make a truly sustainable contribution to solving the crises if we go beyond the capitalist imperative of increase and develop a post-growth economy in line with the ideas outlined in, for example, the *Earth4All Initiative*. A comprehensive technological and economic transformation in an increasingly unstable world will undoubtedly require a change in political and administrative institutions. For example, in his book *Reinventing Organisations*, Frederic Laloux proposes a new vision of companies and institutions as living systems. Driven by the collective intelligence of their members, they would evolve in a decentralised, self-directed way, and thus be able to act proactively in a complex and dynamic environment.

This panorama shows that we cannot simply continue to reproduce what already exists, as we are used to. Moreover, it shows in what extent we have to break with the familiar and reinvent our concerns from the perspective of the future.

Where to begin?

The good news is that there are billions of people behind the crisis. People in insignificant or influential positions who, consciously or unconsciously, make decisions to do one thing and not another. In fact, I see the attitude to the world with which we make choices as the determining factor in our ability or inability to navigate the chaos in our own interest and in the interest of all life.

From what 'inner place', on what assumptions and for what motives do we make our decisions? Are they thoughtless reflexes of previous imprints? Do they reproduce the standards set? Are they based on a rational consideration of selected facts? Do they emerge from a holistic insight into their complex context? Or do these decisions come from the depths of our being in resonance with the outside? And where would these various drivers take us?

Even well-informed people act with apathy in the face of the crisis, which is often lamented with bewilderment. I see the reason for this in our inadequate *modus operandi*. Otto Scharmer, in *Theory U*, describes how we can transform 'the inner place from which we act into a space of possibilities that urge to manifest'. Leadership today is 'essentially about the ability to facilitate this mindshift'. In his *8 Shields Model*, my long-time mentor Jon Young encourages us to develop a set of archetypal qualities within ourselves. These 'attributes of connection' are also aimed at our creative leadership in relation to the living world. And in Active Hope, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone show how to use this potential to serve the world. In all of these approaches, I am always touched by how we can be better role models, leading the way and taking others with us.

An education initiative for change

The qualities that help us make this shift of mind and make decisions from this other 'inner place' need to be nurtured. Creating a culture in which these leadership qualities can flourish is the mission of a new education initiative. I see this as the key to transforming our societies in an intergenerational perspective to navigate the crisis.

I therefore propose that a new culture of connectedness, not only with nature but with the living world, including human affairs, should be the guiding star of our further journey.

We should not be content with perceiving the world as an alien object that we can instrumentalise and exploit in order to continue working uninspired towards our (and others') demise. With Hartmut Rosa, I propose that we seek resonance with the world in order to reconstitute ourselves and the world in an ongoing dialogue. By exploring the questions 'What do I need (what do we need)?' and 'What does the world need?' we can make resonant connections that can create something truly new that serves everyone.

What are we waiting for?