



*Courageous and Loving Strategic Societal Leadership*

# Societal and Civilizational Leadership Phase One

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July 29, 2015

### SUMMARY

At our best, Albertans have always taken action when we see that truly important work is not being done, is not yet assigned and has no champion. True, we first make sure the need is real. But then, without having to be told or ask permission, we gather a group to commit to and champion the work. And, we get it done, often raising the bar in the process!

The work proposed here – **Societal and Civilizational Leadership: Phase One** – is offered in this spirit.

Our research and work over several decades has led *Foresight Canada* to conclude that *the emerging conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century require that all societies and jurisdictions develop the personal, organizational and whole-of-society capacity to exercise effective societal and civilizational leadership.*

Our working definition of *societal and civilizational leadership* is:

*Effective societal and civilizational leadership is a personal and group capacity of opinion leaders within a society. Specifically, this capacity enables such persons to see, think through and act together on the need for their society to consciously change its root character and trajectory through history while there is still time to do so. Such leadership understands and responds courageously to the threats and opportunities hidden in emerging whole-of-society and civilizational-scale conditions. As such, it focusses on and nurtures appropriate and adaptive whole systems change, transition and transformation at every level from individual, through group and institutional, to societal and civilizational, and at every scale from local to global.*

*Societal and civilizational leadership is a new requirement in history, made necessary by the unique emergent conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As such, this new capacity requires the support of dedicated professionals, appropriate technologies and networked institutional infrastructures.*

As things stand today, it is clear that the development of this new type of leadership is not yet on our agenda in Alberta. Nor, for that matter, is it on the agenda of any significant institution world-wide. As yet, no society or jurisdiction aspires to develop this new leadership capacity. None is in a position to practice it routinely. If the need for this new quality of leadership is as pressing as we see it to be, then the longer its development is delayed, the greater the chances of substantial societal disruption and damage over the next few decades.

However, all is not lost. Some serious, if still widely-scattered, work is already underway. World-wide, there are tens of thousands of professionals who are mapping the emerging conditions that require the development of societal and civilizational leadership. Thousands are probing into this new space. However, nowhere is there a significant supportive and legitimizing institutional infrastructure dedicated to this work. At every scale from local to global, the work is unfocussed and sub-optimized.

This project assumes: (1) We in Alberta need to engage in this work, if only for our own sakes. (2) We are also one of the very few jurisdictions well-positioned to become leaders of this new work. (3) By doing so, we can earn a reputation as a trusted global partner in the search for a truly humane and sustainable future. (4) The benefits of embracing this challenge are substantial, both for us and others.

The Phase One project set out here is merely a first step. It will allow a self-selected group of Albertans to understand and test the need for this new work. By the Project's end, such persons will be in a position to help define (1) the trajectory of the path forward for the development of this work and (2) the set of Phase Two tasks to be undertaken, whether within or beyond their own institutions.

### Introduction

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We note that this definition expands but does not change the core obligation of *strategic leadership*. Such leadership is still focussed on anticipating and responding to the fact of and need for truly strategic systemic changes, transitions and transformations in the organization for which one is taking responsibility. The difference is this: one's obligations as a societal and civilizational leader *expand across all boundaries*. They include whole systems whether they be of the whole-of-society, whole persons, the whole Earth or the whole of time. Further, such leadership acknowledges that whole systems have characteristics, and therefore challenges and potentials, not encountered when we merely see and deal with the parts of a system. It is this thoroughly holistic and dynamic perspective – a perspective without externalities or absolute and timeless truths – that distinguishes societal and civilizational leadership from strategic leadership as we know it today.

It is our claim that the perspectives of societal and civilizational leadership are the only perspectives that enable one to make thorough and reliable sense of the full potential of our situation in history for good and ill and to respond to it wisely and courageously.

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Given the vital importance and the scope of this still-emerging form of leadership, it can be readily seen that such leadership requires the support of a serious transdisciplinary and integral research capability – one that is global in its reach, and able to make reliable sense of the past, present and future. Over the past decade we have search the earth for such an institution. Our search reveals that no such research institution exists anywhere in the world today. This gaping hole in our capacities, as a province and as a species, is both a huge threat and a glorious opportunity.

Today, no leader of any formal organization in any sector is even charged with caring for all of the life within his/her organization or jurisdiction, let alone caring for the whole of life beyond his/her organization/jurisdiction. Nor should any formal leader be given such a charge. To do so under today's conditions would always result in a totalitarian form of government. Such a result is 180 degrees from the direction required by an authentic societal and civilizational leadership.

By necessity then, societal and civilizational leadership is essentially informal. Its primary currency is influence, not power.

Further, such leadership entails significant citizen/employee engagement. All persons who are willing to engage in this new work must be welcomed, encouraged and supported. There are two major reasons for such engagement: (1) Citizens are the only rightful owners of the society as a whole and of its future as a whole. Commitments about the fundamental character and trajectory of their society are theirs to explore, debate and make. (2) Reasonably peaceful, relevant and effective changes in the fundamental character and trajectory of a society cannot be achieved in a command and control manner and must not be sought by stealth.

We note that leadership at this new scope and scale means that such leaders must be aware of the form of civilization his/her society and organization have inherited and takes for granted. She/he must also be deeply knowledgeable about any forces or factors that would erode or change one's inherited form of civilization. Today, such awareness is simply not part of what we now characterize as *leadership development*.

We note that it is critical to distinguish between the following two cases:

- Case 1: Systemic change is happening and/or required in one's own system, be it an organization or jurisdiction. And, changes in one's inherited form of civilization are neither happening nor required. In this case, the essential continuity of one's inherited form of civilization can safely be assumed. For practical purposes, then, it matters not if opinion leaders are even aware that they live according to the patterns of an inherited form of civilization, much less are able to describe the history and character of such patterns. Because the inherited form of civilization is stable, it can safely be ignored.
- Case 2: Systemic change is happening and/or required in one's own system, be it an organization or a jurisdiction. And, one's inherited form of civilization is also experiencing the fact of and/or need for systemic change. In such cases, the essential discontinuity of the inherited form of civilization must be openly acknowledged and taken into account. To do otherwise is to invite disaster. Sadly, in such cases, if leaders are blind to transitions in their inherited form of civilization such disasters will neither be foreseen nor understood. All such participant-observers will be blind to the source

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and nature of the change driving the disasters they are experiencing. If one's inherited form of civilization is changing and/or needs to change, ignorance of this fact is not optional, if one is to survive the experience.

Note that in the second case, if there is no developed capacity for societal *and* civilizational leadership, then every institution in the society will be at risk, regardless of its sector and regardless of how it is led by today's standards. When a society fails for unforeseen and ill-understood reasons, every sector fails with it. None is protected.

Since it is now possible to make reliable sense of the forms of civilization by which we have lived as a species over the last 200,000 years, blindness to this level of our existence must be considered to be willful blindness – a moral as well as an intellectual failing.

If we grant the above perspective, then it is clear that if there is any chance, however slim, that our time may actually be a rare time of transition in our inherited forms of civilization, then, at the very least, we must check to see if this really is the case. More specifically, we must develop sufficient capacity to determine (a) if the perceived threat of civilizational transformation is real, (b) if so, what the implications are for our future, and (c) what actions we must begin to take in the present in order to overcome our blindness to the deepest changes now working within and among us. Only so do we have any hope of shaping a deeply humane and sustainable culture.

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

As of today, we in Foresight Canada think it is becoming increasingly clear that:

- As a species we already have three strikes against us. Strike one: as yet, no society, jurisdiction or major institution in the world has committed itself to developing a serious capacity for the exercise of societal and civilizational leadership. Strike two: as yet, none has a significant research centre dedicated wholly to making reliable and integrated sense of our past, present and future. Strike three: as yet, none has an established, embedded and credible capacity for routinely engaging its people in the vital work of making reliable sense of change at every level and scale and responding to it with wisdom and courage.
- Rather, it is assumed in all societies that the society is in a Case 1 situation. The thought of Case 2 hardly crosses an official mind. The deeply embedded assumptions about the legitimacy and future of one's present form of civilization dominate the most firmly held aspirations of virtually all human societies. Consider that the right of all peoples to maintain their inherited cultural identity is affirmed by UNESCO, the UN system, most national governments and most citizens. Or consider that, to the extent to which groups in OECD countries identify and focus on "truly strategic threats," they do so in the fashion that one would expect in Modern/Industrial cultures – in siloed and piecemeal ways that are dominated by obvious data, endless externalities and a systemic blindness to the reality, complexity and importance of truly human experience. In short, we are still blind to the need for and fact of profound change at the level and scale of our form of civilization.
- Little of the *strategic* work in Canadian or other modern societies threatens to break out of the frames of reference set by the Modern/Industrial form of civilization. Consider

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that neither of the following facts are securely on our minds, much less our civic, business and academic agendas: (a) The fact that we need a truly new paradigm of human civilization. (b) The fact that, everywhere, inherited civilizational frames of reference are slowly becoming incoherent and incredible to those who have inherited them.

Given the above observations, whether we consider groups, major institutions, whole societies, jurisdictions or humans as a species, it appears that we are almost wholly unprepared for the kinds of truly strategic challenges that are entailed in a transition from one form of civilization to another.

- If our time is in fact a rare time of transition in our form of civilization, then we are not only in far more trouble than we now recognize, but we are in a form of trouble that we hardly begin to see, much less grasp securely.
- The number of careful observers and groups of observers who are now saying in print that we face a “civilizational” crisis is growing rapidly, albeit on a very small base. However, by *civilizational* most point to the systemic and global nature of the ecology of issues that are emerging and anticipated. Only a very few point to the real possibility that ours may be a time of transition in all dimensions of our inherited forms of civilization. Fewer still have anything close to an effective working model of civilizational change and transformation to guide either future research or future action.

### **PERSPECTIVES OF PHASE ONE OF THE PROPOSED WORK:**

Phase One rests on and reflects the following perspectives. They arise from our work with Canadians over several decades:

- We do face an emerging *civilizational crisis*, at least in the sense of a global crisis of crises. As Thomas Homer-Dixon has said, “There will be down.” This threat is slowly emerging towards the edges of official recognition. Once it does, societal anxiety and turmoil will increase as a function of the degree to which we are surprised and unprepared.
- To make matters worse and better, ours is also a unique time of profound transformation of every society’s inherited *form of civilization*. All existing forms of civilization are disintegrating in the face of the conditions now emerging on this planet, although at very different rates of speed. Given our near total blindness to changes in our dominant forms of civilization, it is unlikely that this dynamic can be stopped. The up side is that the increasing incoherence that is inherent in this decline, should we survive it, will open space for the growth of a truly new form of human civilization.
- Taken together, these two observations imply that no version of the official futures now commonly assumed and widely professed are likely to materialize over the next couple of generations. This prospect is slowly being digested by many citizens and their leaders. One result is declining confidence in virtually all institutions, their governors and the future.
- It would be tragic if, in the coming years and decades, we focussed so exclusively on either the downside of societal and civilizational change or its avoidance that we missed

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the opportunity of a lifetime – to consciously align and cooperate with the emergence of a new form of civilization and to become a society that embodies the new form.

- While a solid base of institutions committed to understanding these things does not yet exist, there are tens of thousands of able professionals and handfuls of small institutions around the world who are in broad agreement with the understanding reflected in this proposal. One of the major impediments is the utter lack of supportive and professional infrastructure dedicated to identifying such persons/institutions, connecting with them and drawing them together in synergistic ways.
- There are also tens of thousands of citizens in Alberta who would be willing to engage in this work in ways that reflect the best of their personal commitments to a deeply humane and sustainable future. They, too, lack supportive, professional and dedicated infrastructure.

### CONCLUSIONS:

Given the above, we in Foresight Canada conclude that:

1. Albertans and the rest of the world need at least one well-funded, professionally-staffed and reliable institution that is dedicated wholly to undertaking, nurturing and giving visibility to the work of developing and exercising societal and civilizational leadership.
2. Why Alberta? Alberta is better positioned than most to engage, develop and lead this work. We meet as many of the criteria for this work as any jurisdiction, and substantially more than most.
3. At the least, knowing what we now know and being who we now are, we are obliged to explore our situation well and deeply enough to see if it is anything at all close to the situation outlined here. If not, we can rest easy knowing we have checked. If so, understanding and responding to our situation is worthy of our highest and utmost commitments and efforts.
4. **The *Societal and Civilizational Leadership: Phase One* project is offered only as a small first step – as a way to test the views expressed here by (a) creating a coherent statement of the nature of and need for societal and civilizational leadership, (b) developing a small group of self-selected opinion leaders who through this project are able to make reliable judgments about the nature of and need for societal and civilizational leadership to shape the civilizational transformation in which we already find ourselves, and (c) enabling these leaders to design the next steps of the project.**

## 2. The Vision of Alberta Served By the Project

What future might emerge if, over the next few years, Albertans become committed to and leaders of societal and civilizational leadership? Imagine Alberta only twenty years hence.

*By 2035, because in 2015 we stepped out and did more than our share, Alberta has become the world's leading, living, learning laboratory for the development of the next form of civilization – one that is truly aligned with and able to meet the emerging requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; one that is wise, prophetic,*

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*visionary, courageous, respectful, secure, prosperous, inclusive, innovative, sustainable, deeply humane and easily moved to both tears and laughter.*

*Albertans and their institutions in every sector are acknowledged as the world's leading pioneers of 21<sup>st</sup> Century ways of living. We are admired around the world for our courageous and explicit commitment to (a) exploring and understanding in a thoroughly integral manner the profoundly changing conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; (b) providing easy access to the reliable knowledge, persons, resources and tools that this work requires; and (c) developing the new and wise ways of living that truly fit with and capitalize on the changing conditions – ways that allow us to sustain success regardless of the conditions we face; ways that, in time, lead to the creation of a global civilization that works for all. The thought that the price of sustainability is transformation at every scale from personal to civilizational, challenges but does not frighten us.*

*We are the partners of choice for companies and organizations in every sector – those who share our commitment to creating a society that embodies and reinforces a truly new civilizational paradigm. We are, in short, the most future-savvy and influential small jurisdiction in the world. The best of the world's best willingly come to live here in order to participate in pioneering a great 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture – a culture so fulfilling that our children and grandchildren have reasons to stay!*

We in Foresight Canada fully understand that Alberta cannot thrive if much of our world is in turmoil. Our focus on Alberta is both a commitment to Alberta and a deliberate global strategy. First, Alberta and all Albertans will be well-served by the development within Alberta of a serious capacity to nurture the practice of societal and civilizational leadership. Second, the world needs at least one jurisdiction that is on a learning journey as a whole society; a journey through a non-trivial transition to a new form of civilization. Third, by doing what comes naturally to us – identifying and working with the best researchers, practitioners and institutions around the world – we will, in The Hon. Joe Clark's phrase, "lead from beside" and earn respect and influence well beyond Alberta.

### 3. Results of Phase One of the Project

By February 29, 2016, Phase One of the project will result in both hard outputs and soft outcomes:

#### **OUTCOMES (Soft Results)**

1. A group of 20 to 50 Albertans are in a position to offer sound judgement on (a) whether or not there is enough substance, novelty and promise in the perspective we characterize as societal and civilizational leadership to pursue the work further, and (b) if so, what steps that should be taken in Phase Two of the work, including how it should be funded and undertaken. We note that no such group exists today.

#### **OUTPUTS (Hard Results)**

2. One or more documents, in paper and PDF formats, set out:

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- a. The nature of societal and civilizational leadership.
  - b. Why such leadership is required now.
  - c. An outline of the major players and potential partners/competitors in this space.
  - d. The mid-to-long-term opportunities and risks of ignoring or undertaking this work in Alberta.
  - e. A recommendation of whether this work should be continued, and if so, in what form and scale.
  - f. A menu of potential next steps – actions which would move the work forward in Phase Two.
3. One or more PowerPoint presentations that summarize the above material for briefings and as a discussion starter.

### **4. Contact Information**

For further information or to discuss this proposal please contact:

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