

LEADERSHIP



From a movement of leaders to a leaderful movement.

We can no longer wait for traditional leadership to act on climate change. For 50 years that has been the gameplan and it has completely failed. We need to act with all speed along multiple paths. Different leaders are beginning to emerge, but to truly tackle the challenges ahead, we need a new type of leadership.



Traditional political leadership has failed the climate movement. In many countries and contexts, there is a sense of disillusionment and disappointment with government's inability to act. In some cases, there is anger that politicians prioritise economic growth and short-term interests over long-term sustainability and the wellbeing of future generations. In this disillusionment and anger, a new type of leadership is slowly emerging. One that is far more equitable and representative.

What we see today are different kinds of people taking on leadership roles. While youth leadership has been in the spotlight thanks to Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future, women – particularly women of colour – have played a significant role in advocating for climate justice. They have brought unique perspectives and experiences to the movement, highlighting the ways in which climate change disproportionately affects marginalised communities and the importance of taking an intersectional approach to addressing the issues.

Indigenous leaders have also emerged, bringing a deep understanding of interconnectedness to the climate movement. They have used their traditional knowledge and practices to advocate for sustainable land use and protection of natural resources.

Both women and indigenous leaders have been at the forefront of grassroots' organising and community-based solutions, working to build resilience and adaptation in their communities. Local community leadership is especially important because they have a deep understanding of how climate change affects people on the ground, reinforced by strong ties and intimate trust with communities.

There are many other community leaders with greater potential to play a role, like leaders of local faith groups, sports clubs and footballers, even small community celebrities. Often, however, they are afraid to speak out because of a risk of perceived hypocrisy. There needs

to be a more systemic approach to mobilising and supporting community leaders across the spectrum.

In the very short term, we need current leaders to change. We need them to step out of their comfort zones and challenge the status quo. This might create a snowball effect and encourage others to do the same. Policy makers and institutional decision makers are in dire need of support since they hold the keys to enabling conditions for change.

We need diversity and serendipity – people paying attention to what happens when you put unexpected things together. Collisions of difference can really make a difference. This implies not only different types of people in leadership roles, but shifting to a new kind of leadership that is bigger than climate as engaged citizens discover pre-political common ground and overcome inertia through education and shared experimentation.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

While Greta Thunberg is the best-known young climate activist, she was not the first. The movement of youth activism has been growing for years, with young people around the world taking on roles of leadership, organising and demanding climate action. However, Thunberg's "fame" paved the way for a new era of youth leaders and their particular style of leadership.

Young leaders have brought a new energy and sense of urgency to the climate movement, and they are unabashedly bold in their calls for action and for transformative solutions. Youth leadership has become much more inclusive and diverse. Young people from different backgrounds and communities are now involved in the climate movement, and their voices are helping to highlight the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalised groups.

LEADERSHIP FROM THE BOTTOM UP

There is a growing sense that national governments are utterly ineffective at fighting climate change. In this gap, local action has emerged. There is tremendous municipal strength in cities around the world, increasing exponentially, with city after city committing to ambitious targets. At the same time, local communities are finding ways to help themselves and help each other, which can be both liberating and empowering.

In these cases, leadership comes from a collective, starting the shift from a movement of leaders to a leaderful movement – not necessarily within the climate movement but working within their own movements. The world needs council members and local representatives, it needs teachers and engaged citizens in everything from local associations to party politics to become community canvases.

EIT Climate-KIC is Europe's leading climate innovation agency and community, supporting places and industries bridge the gap between climate commitments and current reality.

This is one of ten insights derived from a series of conversations hosted by EIT Climate-KIC. Thinkers and practitioners from multiple disciplines discussed emerging trends, challenges, possibilities and implications for climate actions.

"A generational shift has to happen. It is hard to image the kind of change we are talking without articulate individuals who can communicate in different ways."

"The moral arc of the universe is bending towards justice even as we see the last gasps of authoritarianism."

"We need to act with different speeds and different lanes. We are at an emergency point for a leadership-based movement."

"In the fast lane, we must [still] work with obsolete structures and to get four or five leaders of significant portion to step out of their comfort zone...and that can spill over."



TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Organisations that are in the business of building capacities to learn from systems thinking to catalyse transformation can use that ability to build a new type of leadership. How can organisations work deeper into the influencing of business leaders, policy-makers and emerging community leaders, by building the capabilities and mindsets to see the world in systems rather than siloes, and to work with innovation as deep learning from experimentation and place-based engagement.

SUPPORTING A LEADERFUL MOVEMENT

Organisations working on the ground have a unique opportunity to support leadership within and across communities, enabling new kinds of climate leaders to emerge in local contexts. The impact of instant human-to-human communication through digital media often reinforces anger and fragmentation. How could we counteract that, by working with leadership grounded in community groups, better tapped into local challenges and opportunities, crucial to building empathy, trust and collective action.