

# Mapping Effective Covid-19 Engagement: Four Responses to the Challenge

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Here and now, during the third decade of the Twenty First Century, we are all facing profound challenges associated with the COVID-19 virus. This is both a personal and collective challenge. I propose that there is a particularly important point to make regarding how we are responding to these challenges—and even more fundamentally the challenges we face in the future when faced with the inevitable future pandemic occurrences. *No one set of responses is best.* Agility is required of a great (or at least effective) leader. Furthermore, the strategies they formulate in collaboration with those whom they serve must constantly be monitored and adjusted. Agility and flexibility are required because the current virus and future viruses are themselves ever shifting.

We must be flexible in sometimes engaging our own wisdom and the wisdom of other people. This requires the generation and use of valid and useful information. At other times, we must be courageous and forceful in our addressing the virus challenge—and must support and help guide those who are at the forefront of our sustained struggle against the virus. A third approach must also be available to us and others in our community and global society. We need compelling visions of what our community and society should be like as the virus exits (at some point in the future). Only with a shared vision of our desired future can we be clear about the key question to be asked during this COVID-19 era: *how do we preserve and improve our society?*

There is a fourth requirement: at times we must bring together wisdom, courage and vision—so that we might move forward personally and collectively under the guidance of a coherent and integrated map of virus-engagement. Virus-related leadership and virus-responsive public policies requires the capacity to shift styles of leadership and strategic directions in ways that are contingent on the dynamic and complex nature of the virus. I offer a brief description of these maps of leadership and strategy. I begin with the map of wisdom—which is what I will be referring to as the Golden Yellow response.

## **A Map of Wisdom: The Golden Yellow Response**

I begin with the leadership style and virus-response strategy that focuses on wisdom. This is a style and strategy that emphasizes the collection and analysis of valid and useful information. The thoughtful and thorough assessment of the virus and all responses to the virus is of great value, given that the COVID-19 virus is highly elusive, and its spread involves complex and often unpredictable processes. We must stop and reflect on these complex and unpredictable processes so that we get our response “right.” There should be no unanticipated outcomes or misuse of the scarce and often expensive resources needed to confront the virus.

We call this a *Golden Yellow* response because it resembles the nature and function of the sun—providing illumination and light (often from a considerable distance). Illumination and light are required when we sit back for a moment to learn more about the crisis we are facing and when we take a considered stance in formulating appropriate public policy (Bergquist, 2020). In standing at a distance, we must ask a critical question: *what do we know to be valid and useful regarding the COVID-19 virus?* To answer this question, we must engage slow thinking (Kahneman, 2013) and embrace a systems-based mode of analysis (Meadows, 2008). As Jay Forrester, the founder of system dynamics, often advocated: “don’t just do something, stand there!” This illuminating analysis might lead us to “inconvenient” truths that shake up our comfortable assumptions about the nature of the virus and the best ways in which to confront COVID-19—the alternative being either pushing our resources in the wrong direction or moving forward without any clear direction at all.

### **Wise/Golden Yellow Leadership**

A person is assigned golden yellow leadership in a family, clan, group or organization because this person is assumed to have (or is provided) more experience and education than anyone else or because this person possesses some fundamental and distinctive knowledge. This person is considered *Wise* either because their competency is inherited or because it has been taught to them (usually resulting from this person’s inherited wealth or exhibition of great promise as a young person).

Alexander the Great is certainly one of the vivid personifications of this *Wise* mode of leadership. Alexander was “born into greatness.” Alexander’s father had been king of Macedonia and, even more importantly, Alexander displayed great potential as a young man—physically and

intellectually. Alexander was the only pupil of one a legendary teacher: Aristotle. Thus, at a young age, Alexander was identified as a wise leader. While most wise leaders don't arrive at their leadership position until accumulating many years of experience and expertise, Alexander was able to assume a leadership role, based on wisdom, at a very early age, in large part because of not only his inheritance (father was king) and his early display of competence, but also his credentials as a pupil of Aristotle.

We find that this accumulation of prestigious credentials is found not only in the ancient world of Alexander, but also in contemporary society. Men (and more recently women) who have graduated from such American universities as Harvard, Yale or Stanford are assumed to be not only prepared for leadership but also, in some way, deserving of leadership. They have studied hard in high school (supposedly), which enabled them to be selected to a highly competitive college or university. Many of them have gone on to earn an advanced degree for one of these prestigious institutions. In the face of our COVID-19 virus challenge, wisdom-based leadership is assigned to physicians and health care researchers (especially epidemiologists) from high status universities and institutes. Even more importantly, these wise leaders must be able to stand and illuminate at a Golden Yellow distance—without outside agendas or personal bias.

In recent months, we see this assignment of legitimacy not only to governmental, university and research institute “experts” but also “renegade” physicians who offer a radically different perspectives on the COVID-19 virus. We might readily assume that they must have something important to say if they are wearing a white coat or show us their diploma. We might even devalue the perspectives and advice offered by those with the most experience. Whether justified or not, we might reverse the usually bias in favor of experience as a source of wisdom. It may end up that we don't want to accept information provided by a battle-weary veteran. They are likely to be biased given their too-close and often distorted and irrational (post-traumatic) perspective -- though they might actually possess better first-hand knowledge than either the Golden Yellow analyst standing at a distance or the renegade physician who definitely comes to the deliberations with an agenda.

This latter point is important and timely. Does the assessment of Wisdom get upturned under conditions of stress? Under normal (non-stressed) conditions, we might tend to value not just the experiences and expertise of those with credentials, but the “everyday” and “off-the-shelf” experiences of a man or woman who is not formally educated or does not have much direct

experience. We can turn with interest and respect to the “down to earth” wisdom of a humorist like Will Rogers or the medicinal recommendations of a South American herbalist. We can be very “democratic” and open-minded in our valuing of this person: he or she may attain this status as a result of some “native” intelligence or unique experience in the field. What kind of experience seems to be important when things are going well? We tend to value both breadth and depth of experience. We look for wisdom in not just the specialist, but also someone who has “seen it all”—meaning that he or she has not remained in one place for many years, doing only one thing repeatedly. Twenty years of experience is not always assigned much validity if this person has learned everything in one year and simply repetitively enacted this year of experience for twenty years. What does all of this mean: there are many different ways to assign credibility to the wisdom being offered by many different people.

Then along comes the virus. We tend to regress under these stressful conditions and become much more authoritarian (and less democratic and open-minded) in our assessment of Wisdom. We want to see the diploma from a prestigious institution or at least the white coat. No risk-taking is allowed. Nothing can go wrong. We need formal assurance that this person or institution is to be believed. There can be only one sun and its glow places everything else in a shadow. Conversely, we don’t trust the sun and look instead to the shadow—devoting full attention and commitment to the renegade perspective—especially if this perspective is informally ostracized or even legally forbidden. It is either/or rather than both/and when it comes to the assessment of wisdom during a time of crisis.

### **Wise/Golden Yellow Strategies**

Strategies are critically needed during the COVID-19 era that yield collective wisdom in a community and help us build a comprehensive and useful map of the virus’s reality as a dynamic system. This map is needed if members of the community are to understand and appreciate a world of COVID-19 that is becoming increasingly complex, unpredictable and turbulent. In such a world, multiple interpretations can be offered regarding the nature, cause and course of the virus. Each of these interpretations may in some important way be considered valid. We must seek to understand and honor the diverse perspectives and resulting interpretations—this is part of the process of Wise appreciation.

This appreciation requires, in turn, that we step back a bit to reflect slowly and systematically on these diverse perspectives. In another essay (Bergquist, 2020) I identify one way in which we might step back and reflect on often conflicting COVID-19 policies through use of a tool called polarity management (Johnson, 1996). The Golden sun shines brightly when this tool is engaged.

Wise, Golden Yellow guidance is also ascendant when we identify and honor the many resources that exist in our communities and societies to meet the multiple challenges inherent in the COVID-19 world. The Golden Yellow strategy enables us to survey at a distance the appropriate, available resources that are needed in the mobilization of talents to confront the threatening virus. There are many sources of wisdom in a community regarding the virus. The people possessing this wisdom want to be recognized and appreciated for the skills, knowledge and expertise they bring to the virus challenge—whether their wisdom involves knowing how to administer a medication or how to sew a protective mask.

### **The Challenges of Wise/Golden Yellow Leadership and Strategies**

If we conceive of our current pandemic as a long-term war, then we not only need the warriors (Ruby Red) and those who can point to the compelling reasons to achieve victory (Azure Blue), we also need those who can count our storage of ammunition and design a recruitment plan to ensure we have the necessary soldiers (Golden Yellow). As we have recently experienced in the United States, we need (and currently do not have) an effective supply chain for getting protective and treatment supplies to those who need them. We look to the Engineering Corp in the USA to plan for and build makeshift hospitals as much as we need the physicians and nurses to work in these facilities. While often unheralded, thoughtful data collectors and planners (such as those providing supply chain expertise and those leading the Engineering Corp) are as much key to victory in this war as those engaging a more Red or Blue strategy.

The strategies of wisdom will not be easily engaged during this time of COVID-19. As already noted, under stress we tend to regress. We want to honor the wisdom only of our formal leaders and those with impeccable credentials. We yearn for the day when leaders were truly wise (whether this day actually existed we will never know) and hope that we can find wisdom in our current leaders as we face the COVID-19 challenge and in our future leaders who will be confronting future pandemics. Given this regressive pull, it is critical that we retain appreciation

for the most important source of Wisdom and Golden Yellow illumination in our lives. This source is to be found within our own mind and soul.

Ultimately, the foundation of appreciation comes with the honoring our own wisdom. If we fail to trust our own judgement, then we will have a hard time trusting the judgement of other people—especially our formally appointed leaders. The best way in which to build trust in our own Wisdom is to create and test this Wisdom in community. As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) have noted, there is an important source of wisdom to be constructed in the collaborative dialogue in which members of a community might engage. By sharing our wisdom with that to be found among those who offer alternative perspectives and come to the dialogue with differing expertise, we can create a collective wisdom that will be of as much value and prove to be as valid as that offered by the wisest of formal leaders and the most knowledgeable researcher or scholar.

### **A Map of Courage: The Ruby Red Response**

I turn now to leadership and virus-response strategies that focuses on courage. This is a response style that emphasizes a direct and immediate attack on the virus. This active engagement with the virus is of great value, given that the COVID-19 virus is impacting all societies right now and its spread is leading to many deaths and the collapse of many economies. There is no time to lose. We must act decisively and collectively to reduce and eventually eliminate this invading enemy. This is not an occasion to stop and reflect on the complex and unpredictable processes so that we get our response “right.” We might get it right—but too late. The damage will have already been done, and we will be able to take little pride in our inaction.

We call this a Ruby Red response because it resembles the nature and function of a glowing fire—providing immediate energy. As with a burning fire, resources are being consumed to generate energy. In the present case, this energy is being generated on behalf of the war being waged against the virus. There is no room for time-wasting pondering or data collection. The feeble light of illumination (Golden Yellow) is not sufficient to defeat the powerful viral enemy. We need to the intensity of a Ruby Red fire to burn and destroy the pandemic enemy. Heat and action are required—not just knowledge and light.

Analysis-paralysis is unacceptable when a powerful and persistent enemy such as the COVID-19 virus is invading our communities. Careful consideration is ultimately not compassionate if it delays the work to be done (Bergquist, 2020). This is a matter of close, intimate engagement with

the enemy. We must think fast (Kahneman, 2013) and learn immediately from our actions. As the noted social psychologist, Kurt Lewin and his associates (Lippitt, Watson and Westley, 1958), have noted we learn about a system by giving it a kick (initiating a change). The active practitioner, as exemplified by Lewin in his own life and work (Marrow, 1969) embraces a learning-in-action model.

Lewin was a precursor to the current school of organizational learning that was founded by Chris Argyris and Don Schon—and extended by Peter Senge (1990) and his colleagues. This school focuses on our capacity and skill in learning from our mistakes—and there will be many mistakes when addressing the complex and changing character of the virus. It is not a matter of making no mistakes (for mistakes are inevitable). It is a matter of not repeatedly making the same mistake. We must learn from our mistakes and move on with increasing knowledge and capacity to address a multi-tiered challenge such as posed by the COVID-19 virus.

### **Courageous/Ruby Red Leadership**

This second leadership style, with its focuses on courage, is assigned when the family, clan, group organization, community or society is confronting a major challenge. The enemy is very strong (not easily conquered) and quite menacing (serious in its intention to be victorious or at least, in the case of the virus, indifferent to human welfare). Someone is assigned a leadership role not only because they have demonstrated experience as a skillful tactician and strategist against this enemy (or a similar enemy in the past), but also because they are brave and willing to risk their own welfare (even life) in order to defeat the enemy. We see this exceptional form of leadership among those who are providing health care services to infected patients and those serving the most vulnerable (in senior living facilities, prisons and mental institutions). It is also to be found among those who are volunteering to be human guinea pigs. They are injected with the virus and given a trial medication to see if it ameliorates the virus' impact. We witness bravery and muted courage in a less dramatic (though equally as important) manner among those checking groceries at our nearby supermarket, dispensing prescriptions at our local drug store, or delivering products to our home.

I previously mentioned that Alexander the Great is a vivid personification of the Golden Yellow map of leadership. I propose that he also exemplifies the second Ruby Red map—in an equally dramatic fashion. He was truly a bigger-than-life “courageous” leader. He used much of the

wisdom he had acquired as a student of Aristotle and much of his credibility as the son of Phillip of Macedonia to wage war against many enemies throughout the Mideast and Asia.

Alexander apparently was physically quite impressive—as are many courageous leaders. Research has shown that male public leaders tend to be taller than non-leaders (George Washington being an excellent example) and they are usually physically stronger or more skillful than other people. The original qualifications of the prestigious Rhodes scholarship illustrate this focus. Recipients of the highly competitive Rhodes scholarship were always male (until recently) and they had to be not only academically gifted but also active in competitive sports.

Women in a leadership role also tend to be healthier (at least regarding their physical appearance) and are often considered “beautiful” by contemporary standards. While women as leaders might not always emulate *Wonder Woman*, they are often expected to be somewhat forceful in their appearance and style of leadership. We want our women as leaders to be assertive (defying the traditional female stereotype) though not too assertive. This is a fine line for the Ruby Red woman to walk—a little bit of Ruby Red can be considered substantial (and sometimes threatening) when engaged by women in a leadership role.

While leadership that builds on wisdom usually comes with a prestigious education, we are more likely to find that courageous leaders receive training that prepares them to fight against the enemy. It is much harder to defeat an enemy with a carefully worded argument than to win the war with a well-fought battle. The knowledge needed to be effective as a tactician or strategist can be taught and there are specific planning tools and procedures that are available through management training programs. However, courage cannot be taught, just as wisdom is not readily acquired.

There are ways, nevertheless, in which the Ruby Red leader can prepare ahead of time for battle—especially given that most of the battles being fought in contemporary organizations and communities do not require the wielding of a sword. We do find that the courageous leader has been taught something about tactical and strategic planning as an MBA or MPA student or as a participant in management development programs within their organization or community. Leadership training and policy formulation geared toward Ruby Red action is flourishing at centers such as the Kennedy Institute of Politics at Harvard University and (on the other American coast and with a quite different political agenda) at Stanford University’s Hoover

Institution. It is not enough, in other words, for a warrior to be courageous. The Ruby Red warrior must also be cunning.

What about the less “distinguished” warriors at our supermarkets and pharmacies? They have received some training and are (perhaps) motivated by the mission and spirit of the organization in which they are employed. What about the courage of those sanitizing our offices and those delivering food and essential produces to our stores and homes? These men and women are living in the shadows of our communities—with little attention being given to their services or their welfare.

Are these women and men in the community shadows somehow more courageous than the rest of us or are they just doing their job? Perhaps it is a simple matter of economics. They need a job to support their family and have decided (or often are forced to decide) that the risk is worth the economic payoff (however meager). Their courage and loyalty might be housed not in the organization that has employed them, but in their commitment to the welfare of their family. This may often be at the heart of their sacrifice – and their courage. And this commitment is just as admirable as Ruby Red actions taken by the fabled Alexander the Great.

### **Courageous/Ruby Red Strategies**

The key to wholehearted acceptance of and sustained support for a courageous leader (whether distinguished or unacknowledged) resides in the formulation of a Courageous/Ruby Red strategy. The first phase of this strategy requires the identification of an enemy that is both powerful and persistent. A key question is posed: *What triggers the sense of “enemy”?* At one level the answer to this question is obvious: someone or some group is an enemy if it is threatening—if its intentions are not honorable, if it is capable of posing a threat, and if this threat is detectable to the enemy’s opponent.

At a neuropsychological level, we can say that an enemy is threatening if it triggers a strong reaction from our Amygdala (a small neuro-structure located in our mid-brain that is often identified as the seat of our emotions). Many years ago, Charles Osgood (1957) proposed that humans tend to categorize almost everything into three binary categories: (1) good or bad, (2) active or passive, and (3) strong or weak. Using a factor-analysis-based tool called the Semantic Differential, Osgood made a persuasive case for the impact of these three categories on the ways in which we structure our world. Given the more recent research on the role played by the

Amygdala, perhaps it is this mid-brain neurological structure that does the categorizing of everything into these three categories. Something is viewed as threatening if it is bad (not interested in our welfare), if it is active and if it is strong.

These might also be the criteria we use (via the Amygdala) in identifying an enemy. The enemy is someone or something that is bad (evil, ill-intentioned, aligned against us) and is also strong and active. While another organization or nation can be in opposition to us, it will probably not be very threatening if it is weak or if it is inactive. A weak enemy can readily be defeated. A passive enemy remains non-threatening as long as it is itself not provoked.

By contrast, I propose that the COVID-19 virus meets all three of the Amygdala-triggering criteria. In certain ways, the virus is a “perfect” enemy. It is certainly indifferent to our welfare. By all measures the virus is an evil force that is intent on invading and killing us (or at least living for an extended period of time inside and at the expense of our body). We are now fully aware that COVID-19 is very powerful and very active. We have certainly identified a “worthy” enemy—and can only hope that future actions on our part will make the virus weaker and less active.

There is more to the story about the COVID\_19 virus being a worthy enemy. The story gets more complex. In some ways, the virus is not a perfect enemy. It is a very private foe. There are no battle fields or armaments. Rather, there are bedpans and pills. Illness and potential death are intimate and often isolating experiences. Pain and sickness are not heroic. They are burdens to bear. They are agonies to be endured and shared, ultimately, with no one else. This may be the reason why major virus infections in the past (such as the Spanish Flu) have received little long-term attention. No monuments have been erected to honor those who died from the Spanish flu (even though this pandemic took more lives than were taken by World War I and World War II combined). Very few novels, paintings or musical compositions have been prepared regarding this pandemic of 1918. The First World War got the headlines and the history – not the flu.

The second phase of the Courageous/Ruby Red strategy addresses a second key question: *If an enemy is identified, what do we do about it?* Once again, the neurosciences offer an important clue. Most neurosciences for many years have suggested that human beings (like other primates) tend to react in one of three ways to threat—and the Amygdala helps to prepare the body for these three responses, through activation of the arousal/stress system. The first response is fight. Here

is where the Courageous/Ruby Red leader obviously enters the picture. We mount an attack against the enemy and are led by the courageous leader.

The second response is flight. While the courageous leader would not initially seem to play an appropriate role regarding this second response, we find that courageous leaders often do play an important (if somewhat indirect) role in assisting another person, group or even entire society to escape from a very powerful enemy. At the global scale we see the emergence of great leaders who have led their tribe into exile. Moses comes immediately to mind, as do the leaders of many Native American tribes who were driven into exile.

In addressing our contemporary pandemic challenge, some “out-of-the box” flight leaders have envisioned an escape to Mars (or at least moving to a different region of the globe). In somewhat less dramatic fashion, opportunistic realtors have marketed homes with major acreage or promote the advantage of living in less populated parts of one’s current country. Other opportunists are hustling a vacation plan that enables us to “get away from it all!” for at least a week or two (though often this means risking infection by traveling and staying in facilities that are not adequately protected).

There is yet another way, however, where flight leadership comes to the fore. Filmmakers produce movies of distraction during period of social unrest, while comediennes find a way to make light of the challenges that a society faces. It is not irrelevant that many filmmakers and humorists come from a background of discrimination and poverty. They know how to flee from a powerful enemy (racial bias or economic distress) and apply these flight strategies in their work as cultural leaders in a highly stressed society. We find this form of flight in the current release and promotion of escapist movies and multi-session dramas situated in another era or an exotic location. With our stay-at-home compliance in place, we can fully saturate ourselves with this flight into fantasy. No reality (turn off the news) and a whole lot of unreality. And we should not forget the desired flight to sports and other forms of entertainment that are offered alive and in person—diversions that are currently not readily available.

The third response is freeze. It has only recently been given sufficient attention—and it is closely related to the dynamics operating for many of us when we confront the challenge of COVID-19. As several neurobiologists and anthropologists have noted, a human being living on the African savanna will rarely be successful in fighting against a ferocious opponent (Sapolski, 1998).

Furthermore, as a guide in a South African game park once told me, very few animals are slower than the human being. Hence, humans don't stand much of a chance if they try to run away from their enemy. It is even more challenging in the contemporary world of COVID-19, for there is nowhere to run and hide. The enemy is everywhere and movement in every direction leads us toward the threat and away from safety.

Freeze becomes the only alternative. If we can just hide behind a tree or stand absolutely still, then maybe we won't be detected by the enemy. If we make no choices under a condition of pandemic complexity (where there are contradictions everywhere), then we need not encounter another enemy. Unfortunately, freeze is damaging to our body and mind. Neurotransmitters and hormones are triggered when we are frightened. These chemicals are needed for us to engage in fight or flight. They are the fuel for our bodily fire—we glow Ruby Red and are suddenly wired for action. Yet, in choosing to freeze, we decide that the best action is inaction. As a result of this freezing response, our body is boiling over but unable to dissipate the energy. The fire is burning inside us. The energy it generates has no outlet. It remains bottled up and becomes a destructive force. We end up with ulcers, hypertension and other stress-related illnesses. We might not be infected by the virus, but are still suffering from major ailments (which, in turn, leave us more vulnerable to the virus).

Our Courageous Ruby Red leader need not play much of a role when freeze is the chosen response. Furthermore, this person is likely to experience the stress associated with inaction in a very personal manner. Our courageous leader probably will be even more stressed by the inaction than will other members of the group, organization, community or society—given expectations that the courageous leader will take action. Even if this leader is living in the shadows as a janitor or bus driver, they are likely at some level to feel responsible for the welfare of the people they serve. The office must still be cleaned and disinfected. The bus driver must still pick up and deliver riders. No one can go on strike. We can ask for protective masks and testing—but must still serve the public even if unprotected and unsure of our health status.

Thus, while freeze may be the most common reaction to powerful and highly active enemies, it is least aligned with the assumptions about Courageous Red Ruby leadership—leaving many citizens with a pervasive sense of profound disappointment in the “cowardly” inaction of their formal leaders (and themselves). Who is to blame? When do we turn from the virus to a new enemy—such as our public leaders or those cleaning our office space? Even if the public servants

are unacknowledged for their provision of courageous service every day, they will become quite visible and become a source of intense criticism if they choose to freeze and not risk their life (or the life of other family members) by going to work. With courageous leadership and strategies comes the need to find an enemy (or multiple enemies if the threat and stress continues unabated).

### **The Challenges of Courageous Leadership and Strategies**

Just as the challenge of a wisdom-based form of leadership can be summed up in two phrases words (succession planning and appreciation), so Ruby Red leadership based on courage can be summed up with two phrases: *powerful enemy and decisive action*. We must retain (and never defeat) the enemy. We can win a specific battle, but not win too decisively so that the war comes to an end. If we lose our enemy then we no longer need a courageous leader. We put the distinguished fight or flight leader out to pasture. We go back to taking for granted the services being provided by the janitor or bus driver. The story that gains traction the Internet is now once again about a scandalous affair or corrupt politician.

The shift in attention can drive any of us mad if we are inclined toward action and courage—or at least can drive us to anger. This, in turn, can lead us to the search for a new enemy. In the case of COVID-19 this can lead us to find and punish the “source” of and deliverers of the virus. Racism can run amuck. The scandal might now center on the misuse of virus-related funds or the corruption of a politician might focus on the way this person voted in a legislative body. When the old enemy is no longer threatening us, then considerable (and often polarizing and heated) discussion is likely to occur regarding who or what is now the enemy. A courageous formal leader who played a key role in defeating the enemy of their organization, community or nation is likely to be anxious about their own future role

Uncertainly regarding the new enemy is even more complex. There usually can't be multiple enemies (unless they are perceived as being part of a unified coalition), nor can the enemy be identified in some vague terms. Thus, at the present time, the COVID-19 virus must be given our sole attention. We must set aside related issues such as climate change and poverty. What will happen after the virus becomes less threatening in our world? How will this transition be handled in various societies and globally? In addition, members of the organization, community or nation must focus on the tactical and strategic plans that will be engaged when confronting the new

enemy. Thus, the phases I have already identified become very important: powerful enemy and decisive action

First, the challenge of a powerful enemy. As I have already noted, the formal leader who is honored and respected for his or her courage needs a viable enemy. One of the great challenges for this type of leader emerges when the enemy has been defeated. If there is no longer an enemy, then why do we need a courageous leader? We can point to Winston Churchill as a notable example of this decline in collective support for courageous leadership. While most historians agree that Churchill was a disagreeable chap, he is widely acknowledged to be a man of extraordinary courage during war time. His speeches and actions during World War II may have been critical in the failure of Nazi Germany to invade Great Britain. Yet, soon after the end of the war, Churchill was out of office. When he came back into office in the early 1950s the British Empire was in decline. While England during the 1950s was engaged in battles in many parts of the world (including the Mau-Mau rebellion in Africa, the war in Malaya and the Korean War), none of these wars involved England's defense of its own homeland.

As a result, Churchill was not very successful as Prime Minister. He was the prince of War not the Prince of Peace (nor the Prince of Wars in distant lands). What about the role played by the loss of enemy in contemporary nations? If the COVID-19 virus ceases to be a direct menace then where would a courageous leader look for a new enemy? This Ruby Red leader could point to members of the opposing political party, immigrant populations or those from "other" religions or cultural traditions. Courageous Ruby Red leadership in a post-COVID-19 society could be quite challenging if a new enemy is not readily identified and fought. This, in turn, means that we need to be vigilant during this post-COVID-19 period to ensure that a new enemy isn't invented that is founded on xenophobia or social class suppression.

What about the role of courage on a smaller plain—in a group or organization? I would propose that the same challenge exists. The enemy must be strong and menacing. This enemy might be a competitor, in which case a win-lose mentality is likely to be prevalent. If there is no clear external enemy, then an organization or community can turn to internal enemies. There are many candidates inside organizations: management, unions, sales, finance, or stockholders (to name a few). While the COVID-19 challenge seems initially to be external of any particular group or organization, it can soon become quite internal: When do we go back to work? If we must downsize because of reduced sales or revenues resulting from the virus, then who do we lay off

and what are our priorities? Enemies can easily be invented during this period of stress and uncertainty.

Alternatively, the enemy can be identified in a more nuanced manner. The “enemy” can be poor quality of product or service. It can be poor management, inequitable labor policies, or ill-informed decision-making processes. If this latter, more nuanced perspective is embraced by a group or organization, then the enemy is likely to remain viable for many years—given that we can always find ignorance, injustice and poor group process in an organization. The virus might actually be of benefit in highlighting and demonstrating the need to address this more nuanced (and constructive) definition of the organization’s “enemy.” Is a comparable process possible at a national level, with a new level of thought and dialogue being directed to a review and reinvention of governmental policies? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if such a review were possible (Bergquist, 2020)?

The second kind of challenge being faced by the courageous leader concerns decisiveness. It is very tempting to freeze when facing complexity, unpredictability and turbulence—such as seems to be the case with COVID-19. We are particularly inclined to freeze when there are contradictions swirling all around us—as there are in the polarizing pull between virus-related social distancing and so-called herd immunization policies (Bergquist, 2020). One is inclined to simply keep one’s balance when navigating the turbulent waters of contemporary societies. This often means vacillating between several polarized policies (Johnson, 1996).

Courageous Ruby Red leaders must take action rather than freeze. They must move forward rather than simply find balance—lingering on each side of the polarized policy long enough to determine the appropriate action to be taken on behalf of this policy (Bergquist, 2020). Just as the Wise Golden Yellow leader must help other members of the organization, community or society to appreciate the multiple perspectives that can be taken in viewing and analyzing the multi-tiered and dynamic challenges of something like the COVID-19 virus, so the Courageous Golden Yellow leader must enable her organization, community or society to take action and find an appropriate path—despite the fact that multiple directions can be taken. There are many forks in the road; however, in each instance, a decision must be made about the fork in the road to be taken. This resides at the heart of Ruby Red’s challenge: being decisiveness in the midst of polarity and contradiction.

## A Map of Vision: The Azure Blue Response

The third leadership and virus-response map focuses on vision. This is a response style that emphasizes the formulation of a thoughtful yet motivating vision of what it would mean to win the war with the virus: *How would we know if the virus is truly contained?* The answer to this question will be elusive. It depends on the specific region of the world that is being considered. It also depends on the level of tolerable risk: how many deaths will be “acceptable” if we are to open up and revitalize the economy in our country or in the world? What are the tradeoffs between lives and livelihoods? There is also the matter of what we collectively desire regarding our world (or at least our community or country) after the virus has been contained or all (or most) people have been either self-immunized or protected with an injection. What is the envisioned state of the post-virus society? Do we want there to be any major changes – and toward what end do we direct these changes?

These questions must be answered, and priorities must be set. Difficult decisions must be made. Who will be sitting at the table where these difficult decisions are to be made? The Azure Blue map is critical as a guide for the effective engagement with these questions and the accompanying decision-making processes. While there is no time to lose and we must act decisively and collectively to reduce and eventually eliminate this invading enemy, we must also recognize that action without direction and purpose is often more dangerous than inaction: “Ready fire, aim” is all too often the strategy being engaged during times of crisis. Damage can be inflicted if we don’t know the direction in which we are aiming our weapon. The wrong person or institution gets shot or the bullet travels without effect into empty space. Without vision, we will be able to take little pride in our actions.

We call this an Azure Blue map because it resembles the nature and function of sky—encouraging us to look up and out rather than down and in. We envision and are inspired by the sky-blue vista and select (prioritize) resources on behalf of this vista. This is a time for an articulate and inspiring sense of present opportunities and future possibilities. There must be room and time for pondering the future. This reflection upward and outward (Azure Blue) is needed to determine where we direct the light of illumination (Golden Yellow) on the complex and dynamic nature of the current pandemic. In facing the challenge of COVID-19, we need a clear sense of direction that enables us to direct the heat and action (Ruby Red).

## **Visionary/Azure Blue Leadership**

The third leadership style focuses on vision. A person is assigned this third form of leadership because they can provide a vision of the future that is persuasive and motivating. This person is assigned a formal Azure Blue leadership role not only because they are articulate and persuasive, but also because the people they are leading “hunger” for a dream or image of an alternative reality. This is a reality that will either help them build a game plan for getting out of the current reality (a variation on the Golden Yellow strategy) or will enable them to be distracted from their current reality (a variation on the Ruby Red strategy of flight).

I mentioned that Alexander the Great is a vivid personification of leadership in both of the previous descriptions of leadership and strategy. I propose that he also exemplifies the third Azure Blue style. He was truly a “visionary” and coupled this vision with the wisdom he had acquired as a student of Aristotle and as the son of Phillip of Macedonia, along with the courage and competence he displayed as a great warrior. His vision was to conquer and “civilize” the Mideast and Asia. Like many of his fellow-citizens in the Grecian world, Alexander was apparently quite arrogant about the “advanced” state of Greece (when compared to the rest of the world) and quite patronizing with regard to his “responsibility” to make the rest of the world more like Greece.

As is the case with many contemporary leaders in the Western World, Alexander offered a vision that was quite biased and xenophobic: “we are the best and will bring all other people, even if by force, to our state of advancement.” Visions are not always beneficial to the world—this is part of the irony of vision. We can easily move beyond Alexander to find a horrific example of vision gone made. Hitler offers a prime example of a visionary leader who was articulate and compelling in offering his people a vision of genocide and world dominance. As we face the challenges inherent in the current pandemic crisis, we must be vigilant regarding the emergence of a similar vision that is inhumane and divisive.

While formal Golden Yellow leadership that builds on wisdom usually comes with a prestigious education, and courageous Ruby Red leaders receive training that prepares them to fight against the enemy, the visionary Azure Blue leader is someone who may not have much of an education or much training. Rather, this leader is in the right place at the right time to offer a vision of the future. In fact, the visionary leader often comes to leadership with minimal preparation. Their

compelling vision often comes with a story of personal triumph over adversity and discrimination. Such a vision is certainly available in our virus-ravaged world. Perhaps we will find that a compelling image is offered by a healthcare worker who has sacrificed on behalf of their patients or by a scientist or political leader who offers the “inconvenient truth” on behalf of a greater long-term good for our global society.

Visionary leaders like Abraham Lincoln often were born in poverty and were self-taught. We can also point to visionary leaders such as Susan B. Anthony (and other Seneca Falls advocates for women’s rights) and Martin Luther King (and other civil rights leaders of the 1960s). They grew up in a world that discriminated against them (or at least against other people “of their kind”). Visionary leaders such as Frederick Douglass have offered even more compelling story of being born into slavery and escaping to freedom. A saintly figure such as Mother Teresa offers a narrative of coming from poverty so that she might return to those who are poor, for “blessed are the poor.”

Visionary Azure Blue stories often contain moments of personal doubt and spiritual despair. We see this in the inspiring stories of Martin Luther and Joan-of-Arc. Visionary stories may contain elements not only of doubt and despair, but also of wisdom (combining Golden Yellow and Azure Blue leadership) or courage (combining Ruby Red and Azure Blue leadership). Visionary leaders convey stories of sacrifice, tribulation, and triumph—having parted the Red Sea or dwelled in the desert so that they might enter a land of milk and honey. Ironically, in many instances they have led their people to a land of milk and honey, but have not been able to enter this land themselves (Moses, Lincoln, Gandhi, John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King).

This is a key point in understanding the complex and often contradictory dynamics of Azure Blue leadership: the vision can never be realized (just as ironically the enemy can never be defeated if Ruby Red leadership is to be sustained and the followers can never become too wise if Golden Yellow leadership is to prevail). One way to be certain that the vision remains intact is to kill the visionary leader (figuratively or literally). We can sustain the vision of a new Camelot because John Kennedy never had a chance to enact his dream. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech continues to be compelling in part because he was not alive to realize this dream.

There is also complexity and contradiction in the challenge faced by a contemporary Azure Blue leader in recognizing and even supporting two or more visions that are compelling though

contradictory. How might contradictory visions be embraced without the visionary leader appearing to be hypocritical or confused? Can there be both a guardianship of past traditions and future reform? Is there a COVID-19 world in which a commitment to fiscal responsibility can be successfully coupled with a commitment to serving the underserved? How do we bring together these concerns in both the short-term and the long-term?

We find that for many people the prospect of widespread COVID-19 disruption and death has elevated their own spiritual quest for meaning and purpose in life (and sometimes their concerns about an after-life). How do we incorporate these concerns with a more secular concern about the economy and health care? How do we blend this new-found spirituality and our long-standing practical secularism with a commitment in many of our communities to a specific sacred perspective? Even more immediately, how can a leader speak about the need for restraint in opening the marketplace to save human lives, while also trying to stimulate the economy to save jobs. This is the profound – and perhaps insurmountable—challenge of contradiction that faces the visionary Azure Blue leader and this leader’s followers.

The key to wholehearted acceptance of and sustained support for a visionary Azure Blue leader resides not in telling two different stories on different occasions (often to different audiences) but in telling one story that bridges the gap and provides integration (Bergquist, 2020). The effective Azure Blue leader tells a compelling story from the past that bridges to the future, or (in the case of the COVID-19 crisis) that encompasses both fiscal and social responsibility. It is a sacred story that successfully conveys secular values. It is a story that is both realistic and hopeful. While this story often involves something about the visionary leader’s own life and struggles with complexity and contradiction, it must also resonate with and align with the stories and personal aspirations of those hearing or reading this story. There is a phrase which usually reads: “think globally but act locally.” This same sentiment, slightly revised, can apply to visionary COVID-19 related stories: Make them personal and local, but be sure that they speak to a much larger and diverse constituency.

Given that visionary Azure Blue leadership is dependent on the right place and the right time, it is also important that the vision is articulated at the right time and in the right place. While Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address still appeals to us today, it is profound in large part because it was given at a commemoration ceremony for those soldiers who died during the bloody battle at Gettysburg. Lincoln is literally “consecrating” the ground where these young men were buried.

Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech was similarly given on a particularly auspicious occasion (a major civil rights march on Washington D.C.) and at a very patriotic location (in front of the Lincoln Memorial). The visionary leader must pick the special time and place when offering a visionary statement.

### **Visionary/Azure Blue Strategies**

Where and when does the visionary Azure Blue leader find this special place and time and how does the delivery of this vision enable a broader, widely accepted strategy? This is a critical decision—and one that is particularly appropriate in our time of COVID-19. I propose that there are five primary criteria regarding the nature of an effective statement of vision. These five criteria tell us something about when and where we should offer a vision. I will first briefly identify these criteria and then suggest how these criteria help us identify an appropriate vision.

First, any statement of vision must be created and sustained by an entire social system—not just its leader(s). Collaboration is just as important when formulating a vision, as it is when assembling an army as a courageous Ruby Red leader. Second, the vision statement must be offered within a context of appreciation for past accomplishments and present-day contributions. All too often the visionary Azure Blue leader (especially if new to this role) will ignore or offer a critical perspective on past achievements rather than honoring these achievements and seeking to learn from them. We must always remember that someday (perhaps in the near future), we will be the relics of the past and may be overlooked by the next generation. It is not just the wise Golden Yellow leader who often feels devalued by the next generation—it is also the visionary Azure Blue leader who holds a vision that is now out-of-date and whose accomplishments on behalf of this vision are no longer fully appreciated.

Third, the statement of vision must be coupled with a statement of mission. Whenever an Azure Blue leader creates a vision of the future, it must be coupled with a clear commitment to something that is not about the future, or even exclusively about the present. It must be coupled with an enduring sense of mission. What do we do as a family, clan, organization, community or social system that remains fundamental and unchanged? What do we do that is key to our survival? We must always look toward the future and toward change through the lens of foundations and continuity. What is our “business” and how does our vision for the future relate to this business?

The fourth criterion concerns the relationship between vision and values. How does our vision of the future relate to the fundamental values of our family, clan, organization, community, or social system? What will and what won't we do to realize our dream for the future? Lincoln's statement of gratitude for the sacrifice made at Gettysburg is based on his firm commitment to preservation of the union. Similarly, Martin Luther King not only offered us a dream, he also insisted that this dream be realized through a set of values based on nonviolence. The "ends" (vision) never justify the use of inappropriate or unethical "means" (values).

Fifth, the vision statement should relate to some formally identified sense of purpose: what difference does our family, clan, organization, community, or social system make in the life of people living in this community, country or world? What social purpose are we serving and how does this purpose relate to our vision of the future? Our vision can be self-serving or even profoundly destructive regarding social purpose (as in the case of Hitler's vision). It is important that vision be aligned with a fundamental social purpose.

Thus, while a vision statement will change over time, the mission, values and social purposes tend not to change, or they change very slowly. While the vision is the wind in the sails that propels a vessel, the mission, values and social purposes provide the anchor, keel and rudder that keep the ship properly aligned. Furthermore, even though a compelling vision statement may come out of the mouth of a visionary leader, it ultimately requires collaboration and appreciation that is collective if the vision is to be truly owned by those who must enact this vision. I propose that a vision statement regarding our specific society during the era of COVID-19 must be founded in a collective reaffirmation of sustaining mission, values, and social purposes. Whatever be the nation in which we live, we must be reminded of what makes our specific society special and worth sustaining: ultimately the key COVID-19 question concerns the quality of society that is maintained and that remains in place following the end of this COVID era (Bergquist, 2020).

Two fundamental recommendations for our contemporary COVID-19 leaders can be extracted from these five criteria. First, the vision statement should be offered alongside clearly articulated statements regarding mission, values, and purposes. Preferably, vision, mission, values and purposes should be tightly interwoven and articulated in an organizational, community, national or international charter (such as we find among the founding documents of the United Nations charter) (Bergquist 2003). Modifications in one of these four elements will inevitably impact on the other three.

Second, the vision itself should build on many conversations—the collective sharing of stories (not just the visionary leader’s stories) and the collective identification of moments of “greatness” in the past history and present realities of the organization, community or society. The narratives should, in other words, be appreciative in nature. Though the appreciative narrative we discover and reinforce the distinctive strengths and resources that reside in our communities. Through these narratives we arrive at a collective truth that can guide us into our future (a Golden Yellow strategy). Visions come alive and help guide our collective actions (a Ruby Red strategy) when they are aligned with both of these basic recommendations.

If a compelling Azure Blue vision is generated, then what do we do about it? We must not just applaud the visionary speech-giver. It is not enough to walk away, inspired to do good --for perhaps a day or week. So-called “motivational” speakers provide a welcome respite from the daily grind, but they rarely have long term impact. As was the case with the two other leadership maps, the neurosciences offer an important clue regarding Azure Blue. Research regarding the hormonal system in the human body has pointed for many years to the important role played by adrenaline (critical in Ruby Red Leadership) in providing the energy (fuel for the fire) that is required in fighting or fleeing from the enemy. More recent neuroscience research has identified another important biological process that involves a specific hormone: oxytocin. This specific chemical brings us closer together rather than leading us to fight, flight (or freeze). Oxytocin is a “bonding” agency. It is critical to the production of love and hope in human beings. This hormone surges in women (and even in men) when a child is about to be born. It is the primary physiological ingredient which turns (to use Martin Buber’s phrase) an “I-It” relationship into an “I-Thou” relationship (Buber, 2000).

I propose that oxytocin is also critical to the sustained engagement with a compelling vision. While adrenaline may surge after a stirring (and visionary) speech, it is the bonding power of oxytocin that motivates people to build on a vision through collaboration and community. The neurosciences are complementing the findings from social psychology and political science that organizational leaders of vision must not just excite people, they must also “bond” people to the new vision. Triangulation is required for a vision to be sustained. By this I mean that it is not enough for two or more people to hope and take action together—a third element must be present if this relationship of hope and action is to be sustained. This third element is a shared

vision that is linked to an animating and collective mission, set of values and compelling social purpose.

The “I-Thou” conception that I have already offered provides us with guidance in this matter. According to Martin Buber (a Jewish theologian), the “I-Thou” exists through God’s grace. God is the third element that ensures the power and continuity of Buber’s shared vision. Similarly, the Greek word “agape” refers not just to mankind’s relationship to some deity; it also relates to ways in which we treat and care for other people on behalf of our vision, mission, values and (in particular) our sense of social purpose. Now, in the 21st Century, we have several options. We need not focus on the relationship between humankind and a deity—we can focus instead, as did the Greeks, on ways in which “I-Thou” relationships are sustained and enhanced when these relationships of love (“agape”) are based on a shared higher-order vision. It is under conditions of shared love (such as when a new baby is born) that oxytocin is produced to bind people together and bind people to a society and its vision (as well as its mission, values and purposes).

In sum, this is the key to successful enactment of a vision. It must induce a sense of community and shared commitment. It cannot just be the product of one person’s sense of the future. Agape must be deeply embedded in any vision regarding the COVID-19 virus. During our current challenging era, we must cherish other people (“thou”) rather than treating them as numbers or economic units (“it”). “Thou” leads to mutual caring and consideration of one another’s welfare, whereas “It” requires nothing more than looking after our own short-term, individual interests (which is very tempting in a time of stress and virus-related fear). Without the Thou relationship, we are stranded and unable to move collectively into a desired post-virus future.

### **The Challenges of Visionary Leadership and Strategies**

The organizational, community or national leader who is honored and respected for their capacity to convey a compelling vision of the future needs a viable vision (just as the Ruby Red leader needs an enemy and the Golden Yellow leader needs to possess wisdom). If people are bound together through commitment to a shared vision, then it becomes obvious that two key roles must be played by visionary Azure Blue leaders. They must help keep the vision alive and help prepare a new vision. This usually means not only that the leader periodically reminds other people of the current vision, but also that the leader facilitates a periodic review of and updating of the vision. The Azure Blue leader of vision is in trouble if the vision either is ignored or if the

vision is reached. Thus, there must always be a sense of something undone, of something yet to be done, of something worth doing.

At the present time, we must envision a successful resolution of the COVID-19 crisis as well as begin planning for the post-virus era. Without an unfulfilled vision there is no need for hope or commitment to the cause. If the virus miraculously goes away, then what do we do? We confiscate our future and walk away with nothing new about which to dream. What will become of the epidemiologist and other health care specialists who are now articulating compelling (and hopefully realistic) goals when the COVID-19 virus is eradicated (or at least contained)?

Will we cease listening to them—even though they have important statements to make about post-virus policies and goals? Will legislative bodies set aside important discussions regarding the funding of health care and preparation for future pandemics once COVID-19 fades into the background? Who will step in to articulate a new vision – and will this vision be trivial and short term, or will it be uplifting? Will it elevate or diminish the human spirit and sense of community? Will a shared vision even be possible?

We can point once again to Winston Churchill as a notable example regarding the decline in collective support for Azure Blue leadership and the loss of a sustaining vision. During World War II, Churchill not only exhibited courage, he also articulated a compelling vision regarding the future of England (and all of Europe), that helped to increase the resolve of English citizens to fight against the Nazi regime and against Hitler's equally compelling (though horrifying) vision for a new Europe. When the Germans were defeated, England and Churchill not only lost an enemy, they also lost their compelling vision for the future. Churchill never regained his status as the leader of England, even though he came back into office.

While England (and all of Western Europe) were certainly better off after World War II than they were during the war, there was not a new Europe. The United Nations failed to solve all of the international problems (just as the League of Nations failed to create a unified world after World War I). World War II was not the war-to-end-all-wars (as was proclaimed at the conclusion of World War I). Many writers have documented the existential despair that followed World War II, when people had to return to a life that had not improved, despite the visionary statements of World War II leaders like Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle—even Stalin.

What about the role of vision on a smaller plain—in a group, organization, or community? I propose that the same ironic challenge exists. The vision must remain viable. Organizations are often in crisis when they actually achieve some success and have realized a dream. The following concerns are commonly shared: “What do we do now that we have completed this five-year plan?” “We have obtained this grant and have initiated our new programs, but nothing has really changed. We are still hustling for more funds.” “I got us to this point, but don’t know where to go from here!”

It is critical that a new set of goals be established before the old ones are realized; it is equally as important, however, that achievement of the old goals be honored and celebrated. An organization or community that simply moves from one five-year plan to a second five-year plan is just as vulnerable to exhaustion and disillusionment as an organization that never realizes its dreams (because they have been set too high). We must appreciate the achievement of current goals and must linger for a moment to honor the old dream and vision before moving forward to a new sense of the future.

The old visionary Azure Blue leader faces a major challenge at this point. At times, this dispensable visionary leader must step aside for the new vision—given that they have finished the task and await a period of rest and reflection back on what has been achieved. At other times, old visionary leaders can become the new visionary leader. They find renewed energy and commitment while collaborating with others in the formulation of the new vision.

As in the case of the old, wise Golden Yellow leader and the war-weary Ruby Red warrior who has spent many years battling an ancient foe, visionary Azure Blue leaders and their followers must decide when “enough-is-enough” and when the mantle of leadership must be passed on to the next generation. This is perhaps the most important decision that the formal leader of an organization, community or country can make – whether wise, courageous, or visionary: *When do I move on and how do I help the next generation succeed?*

## **A Map of Collaboration and Integration: The Rainbow Response**

There is a fourth map of leadership and strategy. It integrates the three other maps and leads to a process not only of inter-response integration but also interpersonal and team collaboration. Called the Rainbow Map (because it brings together red, blue, and yellow), this fourth map focuses on interaction. While the three other maps, in their extreme form, lead to isolation and

individual actions, the Rainbow response is about interpersonal collaboration—and the many challenges associated with this collaboration. I will be turning specifically to the COVID-19 challenge in describing this fourth response—for this map can easily become ethereal if it is not grounded in the real world of policy formulation and action.

In presenting this fourth map I pose a key question, as I have done regarding the other three maps: *Can we formulate a set of contingency plans regarding the virus that balances careful consideration (yellow) with caring compassion (blue) and decisive action (red)?* This plan must account for (but should not rely on) the potential of curative or preventative breakthroughs during the coming year or two in confronting the COVID-19 virus. Slow and systemic thinking must be in place regarding the virus for this fourth map to be engaged successfully. It is not an easy path to take and requires that we become rational, caring, engaged and collaborative citizens while being quite anxious and prone to disillusionment when facing the virus.

### **Social Constructive Dialogue**

From the perspective of this fourth map, the best pathway will bring about the integration of compassion, consideration, and engagement—rather than these values and accompanying perspectives being framed as non-reconcilable polarities (Bergquist, 2020). This fourth Rainbow map requires that we must not only slow down our thinking and be both considerate and compassionate, as well as fully engaged in action (rather than remaining frozen). We must collectively engage in constructive, extended conversations about current COVID-19 policies and future policies regarding ongoing pandemic challenges. These conversations must include members of our local community nation who offer diverse perspectives and expertise. Our table must be broadly constituted and filled with open, appreciative deliberations. Ultimately, we must invite an even broader, global community to the table.

We can start by convening a table in our own organization or community. We can think globally, but act locally. Who should be invited to our local table and what virus-related issues do we first address? Then we can move outward to a table situated in a broader venue. At whatever level we convene the table, those who participate must engage in what Ken and Mary Gergen describe as social constructive dialogue (Gergen and Gergen, 2004). This dialogue yields a shared narrative (social construction) filled with both hope and reality—with both consideration and compassion. The social construction of a dominant collective narrative that is valid (consideration), hopeful

(compassion) and pragmatic (action-oriented) requires that we not leave either the policy formulation or the narrative construction to the designated leaders. We should not rely on these leaders to solve the virus problems, for this would be nothing more than regression to an old (and highly authoritarian) reliance on other people to solve our collective problems.

Put simply, we must avoid other people constructing our collective narrative for us about the cause and cure of COVID-19 (and other future pandemics). Instead, we must participate in (and encourage our leaders to join us) in the engagement of a polarity-based analysis of not just the various options available to us in coping with COVID-19, but also the options available to us in addressing future pandemic challenges (Bergquist, 2020).

### **Appreciation: Creating a Compelling Image of the Future**

The core question can now be reframed: *How do we preserve our societies (around the world)?* A second version of the core question can be posed: *What is a compelling image of the future for each of our societies that should emerge from the COVID-19 crisis?* This version of the key question arises from the work of Fred Polak (1973) who proposed many years ago that a viable society must always have in mind (and heart) a compelling image of its own future –a future to which members of the society are willing, in a sustained manner, to commit their energy and talent. Polak pointed to a critical factor in the ongoing existence of any social system (or any living system for that matter). It must have something toward which it is moving or toward which it is growing. Organisms are inherently “auto-telic”—meaning that they are self-purposed. They don’t need anything outside themselves to engage their world actively and in an inquisitive manner. This is the fundamental nature of play, curiosity and inventiveness that is to be found among all mammals. `

Without a sense of direction and future possibilities we dry up and find no reason to face the continuing challenge of survival. There is no longer the need to produce and prepare a new generation of children given that a viable future would not be awaiting them. In the series of Australian movies regarding Mad Max a post-nuclear holocaust world is portrayed that is coming to an end. When no viable future is in sight, then (as we see in these movies) there is no attending to children. They must fend for themselves, for we know they have no personal futures.

A contrasting theme is conveyed in a powerful story about post-nuclear holocaust that Cormac McCarthy (2006) offers in his novel, called *The Road*. The father continues to protect and sacrifice

for his son, even though the world is coming to an end. This extraordinary protagonist somehow finds meaning and purpose – and vision—regarding his son midst despair and death. Perhaps this is the type of leadership that we need in the challenging world of 21st Century terrorism, nihilism, despair—and virus-based anxiety. McCarthy offers us a portrait of leadership that blends courage (Ruby Red) with vision (Azure Blue)—and perhaps in some very deep manner even the qualities of wisdom (Golden Yellow).

For an image of the future to be compelling, it must emulate the integration portrayed by McCarthy’s caring father. The image must be clearly articulated (Azure Blue), based on reality (Golden Yellow) and actionable (Ruby Red). I write elsewhere (Bergquist, 2003) of an appreciative perspective being critical to navigating the complex, unpredictable and turbulent world in which we now live. This perspective is one in which (among other things) we are *leaning into the future*.

This perspective relates directly to Polak’s image of the future. We plan and learn into the future (Scharmer, 2009) by not only leaning from our present position (Golden Yellow) but also leaning toward the position where we want to be in the future (Azure Blue). The leaning, in turn, is setting the stage for action (Ruby Red). We are ready to do more than lean forward. We can now move forward.

An appreciative perspective involves something more. In addition to leaning into the future, appreciation requires *collaboration with other people* (Bergquist, 2003). We first identify (appreciate) and engage the strengths other people bring to the table—whether this is a local table or a table that brings together people from multiple regions or even multiple countries. Building on these identified strengths, we are ready for constructive and powerful collaborative dialogue. As I have often noted in this essay, in building a compelling image of the future, we invite people with multiple perspective to the narrative-constructing and decision-making table. It is in diversity that we find effective strategies for addressing complex issues (such as we find in abundance with the COVID-19 virus) (Page, 2011).

We listen to our learned colleagues who are engaged in epidemiological modeling of the virus’s behavior and the identification of necessary elements. It is critical that we hear and appreciate their “inconvenient truths.” We must respect the way in which multi-tiered data can be processed and interpreted as a dynamic system. The contemporary system dynamics inheritors of Jay

Forrester's and Donella Meadow's wisdom might lend a hand. We should also recognize, however, that the epidemiologists and system modelers do not have all the answers.

Using appreciation as an ongoing operative, we bring many other people to the table—including ethicists, historians, economists, and sociologists. Communication experts are needed who know how to help leaders chat fireside in a considerate and compassion manner (as did Franklyn Roosevelt during World War II) or to speak with candor and courage (as did Winston Churchill during this same war). Perhaps, an invitation should also be extended to a few psychologists and behavioral economists. They do know something about human decision-making (at its best and at its worst). As experts on the dynamics of groups and teams under conditions of intense anxiety, they might help design and facilitate the dialogue occurring at the table.

Together, we can create an image of the future that is both compelling and realistic. This would be an image that is saturated with both consideration and compassion. We hold the opportunity in our hands at a global table to create an image of the future that embraces all societies in our world. We can create this image while addressing the immediate COVID-19 challenge. With this compelling image in place, we might be able to not only preserve our local and global societies, but also enrich them.

## **Concluding Comments**

It is not uncommon for us to live (at the back of our minds and hearts) in a world that may no longer exist—if it ever did. On the one hand, we know that this world doesn't exist in the 21st Century—and certainly not in our era of COVID-19. On the other hand, we envision a world that is filled with men and women of vision, courage and wisdom. We don't differ in this regard from men and women who lived at much earlier times. The Greeks of antiquity, for instance, believed that their myths were the “realities” of a previous time in their history—when Gods acted upon and in the world and when exceptional women and men (called “heroes”) lived in the world. Then one day, according to many Greek writers (such as Homer and Sophocles), this Golden Age came to an end. The Greeks were left, as ordinary men and women, to live ordinary lives and reflect back through myths and ceremonies on this previous world of Gods and Heroes.

It is important—perhaps essential—that we recognize the fact that this same perspective exists in 21st Century life. We must acknowledge, like the Greeks before us, that we yearn for a certain type of leadership—and we often find ourselves disappointed in our leaders. They are, after all, only

human. They are neither Gods nor Heroes. At other times we are profoundly thankful for and appreciative of these leaders—in particular during moments when these leaders are truly heroic as they face and engage (with wisdom, courage and vision) the challenging world of 21st Century complexity, unpredictability, turbulence and contradiction—particularly as manifest in the COVID-19 crisis.

In moments of appreciation, we recognize that there have been times when each of us has been heroic. Golden Yellow, Ruby Red and Azure Blue are to be found in all of us. And there are times and places when we and others around us when each of us has risen to the occasion with a Rainbow of reflection and action. We should keep this appreciative perspective in mind when convening our local organizational or community table or convening a global table. There is no better time than right now for each of us to engage the best of whom we are as we face the challenge of COVID-19. May a Rainbow rise for each of us from the pandemic storm.

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