**Unlocking our leadership**

The word “leadership” is tainted. We use it when we want to rant or complain. When we are disappointed as we are about so many things, from schools to hospitals to the economy the conflict or the climate, we blame someone, often someone far away, as in "Obama is in the back seat again, not driving this" or "Brown is bitter and defeated" or "It’s the fault of Thatcher” or in a corporate example “Now Tony Hayward wants his life back!". In effect, it is totally down to them, we are being let down by a certain leader or by the lack of “leadership” in general. We have no part to play.

But when we are so cynical, unhappy and demanding, are we not really asking how can we trust you? And if we look at this a little more closely, the evidence says we are less willing to trust our leaders, be they MPs, police, or the new gods of Apple or Google. So we demand proper controls and accountability to remove the risk, and remove the necessity to trust a so-called leader, or to trust anyone at all.

Or have we now painted ourselves into a corner: wanting “leadership” then tying their hands and still expecting them magically to dissolve our defences and make us trust them? We may be making the leadership impossible to give or receive.

It’s fair to conclude that we will not make progress on this topic that runs to the heart of all our lives, until we start to question more deeply, redefining how we can play alongside each other, and alongside our leaders, to make progress possible.

If we are to have some breakthroughs here, we will not build them out of theory and books, we will build them from experience and what works for us in reality. Our lives are filled with experiences of being led and of leading, many of them tense, negative but a few of them joyful. As we remember some of them, we can learn more from one another about what works, and we can go beyond these experiences, and reach towards new levels of practice.

But we begin by building a shared context for our journey – reminding ourselves of some things we have in common. So often our common ground is invisible, and we focus first on differences. Now let’s flip that as we set the scene and begin to ask ourselves some provocative questions about our leadership.

What can you possibly have in common with six billion other people?

Quite a lot! Wherever we were born, each of us after some kind of fumblings and some time in the dark, was pushed and pulled from a woman's belly, often screaming, to draw breath under a bright sun, or a night sky radiant with stars, then dropped onto a rock we call planet earth, that is teaming with life.

You and a new generation of small people is drawn playfully into a pattern of giving and taking that carries us along somehow, in a series of life-giving exchanges, that served up a swirl of pain and pleasure, fear and love. These forged our characters as we grew gradually into adulthood. We all depended on others to give us water, food, clothing, shelter, education, love and much more. Alone we are weak, cut us and we all bleed, but with a little help from others around us we become strong, more capable and confident.

Despite a feeling that we are different in countless ways from one another, we have always been and we remain highly interconnected and interdependent on others who enable us to survive and to thrive.

Starting as hunters in a small region of Africa we spread out into the world beyond, settled in villages becoming farmers, and later in cities we saw the rise of great civilisations producing wealth, knowledge, finery of all descriptions. We took to the seas in search of riches in far off lands. We fought wars over land and religion, and we built empires.

200 years ago the industrial revolution changed everything pulling people from farms into factories. New and cheaper products made life better for some while many continued suffering in war, slavery, starvation, and all kinds of harshness.

We are told the 20th century was the bloodiest of them all with its two “world wars”. Then the founding of the United Nations promised "never again". As globally we realised our human rights and our inter-dependence, empires shrunk, borders opened to travel, information, trade, investment and new technology, and everything changed again: we became much more connected and not a little over-whelmed.

Now so connected as we are through news media, football, cheap travel, and the internet, new flows are also giving rise to mass migration, terrorism, economic crisis, climate change, barbaric violence, and a sense of old history repeating.

We are entitled to ask how have we jointly created a world that is not as we want to be? And what can be our role in making this slightly different and better?

Today the business of living is not as it was for our parents: their ideas and beliefs seem less relevant. Since we live and work with others whose parents taught them something different, we encounter baffling differences and choices.

We could start with some challenges we have in common such as youth unemployment, or the enlarged elderly populations, climate change or conflict.

But our responses to the challenges cover quite a range from a pull towards peaceful co-existence, to the false promises of overly simple, extreme answers.

Like us you may have observed leaders who are narrow in their view: they stir up emotions in a small following for a short time, but the larger “us” they depend on will never trust them, so they fall back fear and force, and ultimately they fail.

There is a great “sharing world” movement amongst young people towards a greater openness, creativity and collaboration, and a new awareness of how we are all part of a larger system that, as long as people will share will be infinitely creative, and on the whole self-organising. Each of us is constantly influencing and being influenced, bringing optimism that intelligent collective action can arise from all that open information producing a shared point of view.

Today there are many “open source” operating with a fundamentally different view of leadership: of who the leaders are, what leaders do, whether you need managers at all, and how the company has its influence in the world. It is a creative community connected by its values to the outside world, and everyone inside is a leader in the sense that their action or inaction ultimately affects everyone else.

If this is what we have in common, if this is happening in our world, then let’s ask some pointed questions:

What can we take from the “sharing world” view of the younger generation?

What can we learn from the "open source" companies about the new leadership that is unlocking the leadership in everyone?

From Middleground we ask, is there a kind of "leadership" available in all of us?

How can I help you unlock your leadership?

How can we each help each other unlock theirs?

Here and back at home, back at work…

How can we co-create, co-influence, co-govern and co-lead?

The answers do not all exist: it is for us to find and create them. We have to find ways to go beyond our parents’ wisdom and practice: to learn from one another, adapt, co-influence, co-create and co-govern with people from all different parts of the globe.

At some point in our lives we begin to ask ourselves what are we here for, and what do we want to do with our ourselves and our lives. Our children may arrive before as parents we have figured out answers to our basic questions like why, what is our purpose, who are we, what do we stand for, how do we operate.

I am going to give you 7 fundamental questions now to begin to inform our leadership work over the next 3 days. You will have one minute to write down your answers on p x of the workbook.

This is called your Soul Profile.