BRIDGING DIFFERENCES AND BUILDING COLLABORATION: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

A CONCEPT PAPER

JUNE 2002

Steven D. Pierce
Director
Bridging Leadership
The Synergos Institute
9 East 69th Street
New York, NY 10021 USA
Tel: 212-517-4900
Fax: 212-517-4815
synergos@synergos.org
www.synergos.org

Executive Summary

Bridging Leadership, is an approach to leadership characterized by the *capacity to initiate and sustain a collaborative process designed to achieve meaningful social change through the collective action of multiple and diverse stakeholders*. A leadership style uniquely suited to confront the many challenges facing today's societies, Bridging Leadership stands in contrast to many Western models of leadership, which today are often dominated by the field of management. In today's world, a new type of leadership is needed to confront extreme poverty, social injustice, devastating and often-violent conflict, severe environmental degradation and widespread disease such as HIV-AIDS. To achieve sustainable results in these and other areas, the combined efforts of many actors—from business, community organizations and government—are required to come up with innovative ideas, new types of resources and the will to work together. Bridging Leadership provides a model or an approach for doing just that.

To make real progress on these issues, society must learn to get past the acrimony, mistrust, prejudice and the many divides that separate us, and establish trust and new types of relationships that make going forward together both possible and practical. By building upon the intellectual foundations of transformative leadership in the field of leadership studies and drawing liberally from the concept of collaboration from the field of development, Bridging Leadership offers an alternative approach that looks at the role of citizens within a partnership framework. Because it is based on the value of inclusion Bridging Leadership easily incorporates traditional leadership ideas and practices. The bridging method offers insights into a process that begins with convening and relationship building, through the development of consensus, all the way to action. It is an attempt to add a holistic focus by considering the needs and potential impact of leadership at the level of the individual, the organization and society.

The Role of Leadership in the Social Change Process

Not long ago in the town of Nejapa, some 17 kilometers north of the Salvadoran capital of San Salvador, members of the community and several invited guests gathered in a community center to celebrate the signing of a cooperative agreement to establish a critically-needed local development fund supported by the Coca Cola company, a U.S.-based donor, the municipal government and a local non-governmental organization. What is particularly remarkable about this momentous occasion is that the principals acknowledged that only a few short years earlier, they would have been aiming bullets and grenades at each other, rather than handshakes and heart-felt "abrazos" or hugs. Ernesto Barrientos, General Manager of of Embotelladora Salvadoreña, S.A. (Embosalva) and René Canjura, mayor of the municipality of Nejapa, once sworn enemies, are now partners on a first-name basis in the management of the *Local Development Fund for Nejapa*. Neither man hesitates to show the respect and admiration he has for the other and the cooperative spirit that joins them is reverberating throughout this community of 30,000.[1]

What made this improbable initiative possible? How did formerly avowed adversaries manage to cross the many divides that separate them to join together as partners? And, more importantly, can this example of collaboration between unlikely allies be replicated to any meaningful degree throughout the world?

These are complex questions with few easy or obvious answers. Of course, many contextual and institutional factors combined to make this collaborative initiative a reality—a huge effort on the part of many key actors to bring the violent civil war to an end; an understanding and flexible donor organization, willing to risk its resources and reputation on this unprecedented undertaking; a progressive policy on social investment on the part of a major corporation; and the vision and tenacity of at least two non-governmental organizations, to name but a few. But what is equally clear is that without

---

[1] For a detailed description of the Nejapa case, see David Valenzuela, "From Conflict to Cooperation: Local Development in Nejapa", Grassroots Development Journal of the Inter-American Foundation, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1999.

the leadership of Barrientos and Canjura, the *Local Development Fund for Nejapa* would not be a reality today.

Barrientos and Canjura brought to bear a unique style of leadership that the Synergos Institute has termed ***Bridging Leadership***. This style of leadership is particularly appropriate when a collaborative approach to solving complex social problems is required. ***Bridging*** is a method for harnessing and coordinating the energy, interests and resources of multiple and diverse actors/stakeholders in a way that builds relationship capital and trust, thereby maximizing each actor's comparative advantage and making sustainable social change possible. And because bridging leadership is founded upon shared values, common understanding and mutual purposes, the approach is particularly useful to fostering inter-sectoral collaboration between business, civil society and government. Each sector has its own unique organizing culture, professional/technical language, norms and definitions of success. Each sector also has a perception of the other two that is frequently based on negative stereotypes, which tend to block mutual understanding and impede collective action. In order to bridge these sectors, the skills of *bridging leaders*--transcending differences by translating diverse organizational cultures and languages, making obvious overlapping strategic interests and interdependencies, stressing comparative advantages and building relationships—are essential.

But before providing a detailed description of ***Bridging Leadership*** and the apparent common characteristics of bridging leaders, I will outline the conceptual and intellectual roots of this potential shift in paradigms. This task calls for beginning with a definition of leadership, which will then be expanded to include the concept of *bridging*.

Recent Thought on Leadership

Leadership has long been a topic of interest to scholars and practitioners alike. During the twentieth century, many varying definitions of leadership were advanced. According

to one eminent scholar, in the "boom" period for leadership studies that was the decade of the 80's, these definitions seem to fall roughly into six distinguishable categories:[2]

1. **Leadership is the process of getting followers to comply with the leader's wishes.** The *Great Man/Woman* theories and the recent emphasis on *Charismatic Leadership* are examples of this school of thought. It is a school of thought that received plenty of ammunition from dominant political figures such as Thatcher, Reagan and Gorbachev, as well as from the business leadership model featuring the likes of Lee Iacocca, etc. Leadership, under this definition, is not merely centered on the leader, but embodied by the leader him/herself.

2. **Leadership is achieving group/organizational goals.** Under this definition, leadership is equated with the leader's ability to motivate a group of followers into reaching specific organizational goals and objectives. This category places a premium on group facilitation, human relations and interpersonal skills. It also lends itself to a focus on style and situational contexts, thus opening the way to the trait leadership and situational leadership approaches. Moreover, the concept of effectiveness is introduced in the sense that failure to achieve goals reflects negatively on the leader's abilities.

3. **Leadership is defined as influence.** Influence is the concept most commonly associated with leadership. Most scholars draw a distinction between non-coercive influence and coerced compliance and focus on the non-coercive type. As in the previous two, this definition emphasizes the leader's capacity to exert will and employ various influence tools to get followers to behave in a certain way.

4. **Leadership as the sum of the leader's traits.** Though this concept has enjoyed certain popularity for over 100 years, it became particularly prominent during the

---

[2] For a complete and comprehensive discussion of trends in leadership studies, see Joseph C. Rost's seminal work, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Westport, Praeger Press, (1991).

80s. Fueled by the many recent books emphasizing leadership-as-excellence, trait leadership was, and remains, the source of some of the most popular publications on leadership.

5. **Leadership is equivalent to "management".** Far and away the most dominant school of thought, the leadership as management approach, as the term suggests, focuses almost entirely on managers. This essentially relegates leadership role to those with authority or position. Leadership becomes the "exercise of authority" and the "influence attempt a superior makes towards his subordinates", either individually or as a group.

   While several disciplines have advanced study in leadership—education, behavioral psychology and political science, to name a few—business administration is far and away the leader in research and thought production on leadership. Even a cursory perusal of the nearest bookstore would indicate that scholars and practitioners of the management sciences produce the greatest number of publications with leadership in the title. In fact, it dwarfs the combined number from all other fields. Thus, leadership is most often defined as management and good leadership as excellence in management. This should hardly surprise, given the dominance of business and industry in the twentieth century. Rost calls this approach the "industrial school of leadership".[3]

6. **Leadership as transformation.** Transformational leadership is central to the concept of *bridging*. The definitions range from leadership oriented towards social vision and change to transforming organizations to achieve higher levels of productivity and excellence. Most invoke the willful act of one person (the "leader") to construct the social world for others (the "followers").

   Bridging Leadership shares conceptual elements with transformational leadership in that it is normative, i.e., it is a leadership approach employed to address

---

[3] Rost, pp. 91-95.

problems or conflict requiring significant social change and seeks real, positive
transformation in the lives of marginalized or disadvantaged populations.

With few exceptions, each one of these definitional schools of leadership and the
resulting theories and hypotheses spawned by each one, focuses on some type of
influence relationship between leader and followers. Moreover, the "industrial school" of
leadership, which essentially holds that leadership is good management, profoundly
influences each group of definitions. So ubiquitous is its influence that it is not hard to
conclude with Rost that *leadership as good management* is the leadership paradigm of
the twentieth century.[4]

The industrial paradigm of leadership is clearly inadequate to the task of addressing the
world's critical concerns such as poverty, social injustice, all manner of conflict, etc.
Real life rarely mirrors the corporate environment and real life problems cannot be
isolated and manipulated with the same degree of internal control available within
corporations. Because of the diverse and crosscutting nature and severity of today's
major social problems, a new leadership paradigm is required.

Bridging Leadership, the Synergos Institute's response to this new paradigmatic need,
begins with Rost's definition, which builds on the work of noted transformationalists:

> *Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend*
> *real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.*[5]

The four essential elements of this definition are critical and necessary, though not
sufficient, to the definition of bridging leadership. First, leadership is a **relationship**
based on influence that is **multidirectional** and **noncoercive.** Second, the people in the
relationship are leaders and followers; most likely multiples of both and in which the
followers are **active and influence leaders.** Rost notes that this relationship is inherently

---

[4] Ibid, p.94.
[5] Ibid, p. 102.

unequal "because the influence patterns are unequal". *Bridging Leadership* does not necessarily subscribe to that premise. Rather, it is patterned more closely to the Bantu concept of *ubuntu* or recognition of the other(s).[6] In bridging situations, position and authority are checked at the door. Furthermore, *Bridging Leadership* does not recognize "followership" in the same way evoked here; all people involved in *bridging* are involved in leadership. The *bridging leader* is distinguished, in part, from other leaders and followers by his *bridging* or *collaborative* behavior.

Third, the notion of **real intended change** is central. There is an a priori, purposeful and specific change desired by all parties. The change is intended to **transform** a particular social problem. Multiple changes may be pursued simultaneously. Lastly, if not from the outset, then certainly over the course of the bridging activities, **mutual purposes** are developed, which may lead to a common cause or vision. Again, this happens within the confines of a **noncoercive influence relationship**.

While Rost's definition of leadership goes a long way towards describing the essential elements of *Bridging Leadership*, like other students of leadership, he leaves out or ignores the defining characteristic of this potential new paradigm: the collectivity or collaborative framework, i.e., the interrelationship of people within and across groups and organizations banding together in pursuit of real intended changes that reflect their common purposes. *Bridging Leadership*, therefore, is not defined by the relationship between leader and followers, but by the interaction between people within and across groups/organizations joined together in collective action.

In sum, the bridging definition of leadership builds on that of Rost and other transformationalists by adding the dimension of community collaboration:

> ***Bridging Leadership is an influence relationship among people within and across groups, organizations and communities who agree to work together and intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.***

---

[6] Among the Bantu peoples of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi the concept of ubuntu holds that a person is a person (human being) only in relation to other people. Specifically, a person is a person because of other people.

Bridging Leadership Defined

Bridging Leadership adds an emphasis on community collaboration to the study of leadership. However, to fully understand this approach, we must acknowledge the set of principles upon which it is founded and delve much deeper into the concept of collaboration for social change to further distinguish *Bridging Leadership* from other leadership approaches.

In *"Leaders without Borders",* Mark Gerzon states, "Leadership is not only about what we do; it is about who we are. It is a metaphor for how we are trying to change ourselves as well as change the world around us."[7] Leadership, then, is more than a mere process, it is a relationship that speaks to our very core and reflects our essence. All leadership approaches are grounded in a set of principles or values, either explicitly or implicitly. The core values Gerzon details in his insightful work fit *Bridging Leadership* like a tailor-made suit. He notes that these values are emerging from interwoven trends that reflect a new kind of leadership better suited to respond to global challenges. These trends and values are:

> ➢ Trend: from image to authenticity – Value: **integrity**
> ➢ Trend: from tradition to change – Value: **learning**;
> ➢ Trend: from nation-state to global economy – Value: **inclusion**;
> ➢ Trend: from homogeneity to diversity – Value: **respect**; and
> ➢ Trend: from solo to team – Value: **collaboration**.[8]

Gerzon further contrasts these emerging values with the values upon which command and control type of leadership styles are based, specifically: knowing, exclusion, fear, control and image. In contrast, each one of the emerging values is key to the bridging process precisely because it promotes openness and acceptance and lays the groundwork for a

---

[7] See Mark Gerzon, *Leaders without Borders: Five Principles of Global Leadership and Citizenship,2001, unpublished manuscript.*
[8] Gerzon, pp. 13-57.

relationship based on real understanding and trust. These relationships based on trust and the core values, then, become the building blocks for collaboration. Collaboration, as applied here, is very similar to a concept known in Spanish as *"concertación",* which connotes a process involving *convening* (of all relevant actors), *consensus building* (achieving a common understanding of problems, potential solutions and available resources), and *action*.

The Essential Role of Collaboration in Social Change/Transformation

The optimism that accompanied the end of the Cold War did not last long. Neither did the "end" of global strife between superpowers bring many measurable improvements to the human condition. In fact, we are no longer pining away for the much-anticipated peace dividend. A further irony is that years after this triumph of individualism over the collectivity, we are now realizing the real value of collective action. For example, the concept of "team approach" is gaining acceptance in business faster than any other sector.

The concept of "partnership" has almost become axiomatic within the development community and elsewhere. And like the notion of "participation", this trend is likely to become a mainstay in development thinking and strategy. The needs are simply too great and the available resources too scarce to ever return to the sector-driven approaches of the past. Even those theorists and policy makers that advocate "trade not aid" have come to recognize the essential roles of government and civil society. Indeed, the range of development actors and agencies preaching partnership and collaboration is startling. That there is such widespread agreement on the need for partnership is even more remarkable given the relative early stage of research substantiating the effectiveness of this approach.[9] However, this pervasive conviction seems to be built more on intuition and anecdote, than empirical evidence.

---

[9] There are a few, very notable exceptions. See, for example, Synergos Inst
        L. David Brown
        IAF, UNDP and WB
        Beryl Levinger

Collaboration may not make sense as an approach for addressing every development need, but it is essential when two specific conditions are met, such as: 1) When a particular social problem is so complex that it exceeds the capacity of any one actor to solve it by working in isolation; and 2) when a specific problem issue cuts across the fundamental interests of multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, we have learned that for most development projects and programs to be successful, i.e., for the intended results/benefits to be sustainable, the multiple dimensions of difference that afflict society, e.g., difference between the three sectors of society—business, community (also known as the Third Sector, Civil Society, non-governmental or non-profit) and government must apply its comparative advantage to the initiative.

For example, government offers legal structures, security, revenue collection and distribution and financial and technical resources. Among essential business contributions are management capacity, research and development, execution know-how and financial resources. Civil society, in turn, is the keeper of cultural norms and values, relationship capital, volunteer resources and creativity.[10]

As much as we might all agree that partnerships are needed, we must also recognize that collaboration is not natural to most individuals or organizations. There are real costs involved. In fact the old saying, "if you want something done, do it yourself" still rings true to many. And when we do partner, we frequently look to partner with others who look like us. However, this tendency towards **compatibility** actually limits the potential benefits of the partnership. Effective collaboration places a premium on **complimentarity** over compatibility. After all, at the heart of the rationale for collaboration is the need to enlist the diverse resources and attributes that we lack to address and tackle complex problems.

There are a number of guiding principles that seem to make for effective collaboration:

---

[10] For a useful discussion of sectoral comparative advantages see, Ros Tenyson, *Managing Partnerships: Tools for mobilizing the public sector, business and civil society as partners in development,* The Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, London, 1998.

- Collaboration requires a minimum of core competencies, at both the individual and institutional levels, in order to be effective.

- Learning should be constant as learning organizations are best able to adapt to dynamic conditions and situations.

- Key organizational components, such as leadership, governance and information systems have a high degree of interdependence with similar components in partner organizations.

- Similarly, changes in one partner almost always produce change in the other partner(s). Individuals and organizations exert mutual influence upon each other. Joint planning on a regular basis will help smooth the change process.

- Partnerships are most effective when grounded in the local realities of each partner.

- More important than a common mission and vision is agreement upon desired outcomes and impact.

- The above notwithstanding, each partner must have a working understanding of the organizational culture—the attitudes, structures and distribution of human resources—of the partner(s).

- The stronger each individual partner, the more effective the partnership. Partnerships would do well to include a capacity-building component to increase strategically important competencies.

Of course, there are many different forms collaboration can take. Available models range along a "formality" continuum. From very informal arrangements based largely on the exchange of information, to very structured partnerships formalized by written agreements, pooled resources and limited authority vested in the partnership structure. In general, partnerships vary according to the degree to which the partners share **responsibility, resources and risk**.

In spite of all the attention the development community is now paying to the concept of partnership, relatively little effort and resources have been invested in understanding the role of the person/individual within the partnership. Instead, we tend to talk in

abstractions about *cross-sectoral* partnerships or *inter-institutional* partnerships. This reification of structures, sectors and organizations intensifies as we attribute specific behaviors to entire classification types, complete with stereotypes that illustrate such behavior. Nevertheless, it is clear that neither sectors nor organizations establish and maintain partnerships—people do.

However much we all agree on the importance of government, business and civil society working together, it is still **people**, not **organizations and sectors** that create and sustain partnerships. And it is the individual within the organization and sector that must be prepared with the knowledge and skills to engage in collaborative efforts with people from other organizations and sectors. The concept of *bridging leadership* is built upon this fundamental tenet. Thus, how people behave within a collaborative framework, whether or not they possess the knowledge, skills and resources to operate effectively within and across groups, and how we can increase individual and group capacity to work together are of paramount concern.

Whereas *bridging leadership's* contribution to leadership studies is the introduction of the concept of the group dynamic and collective action, our contribution to the study of collaboration and partnership for development and social change is a focus on the person or individual leader and his/her role within the collaborative framework.

Characteristics of *Bridging Leaders*

Preliminary research conducted by the Synergos Institute and its partner organizations throughout Southeast Asia, Southern Africa and Latin America suggests that some people function especially comfortably and effectively within bridging situations. These *bridging leaders* would appear to share a somewhat common set of characteristics. Furthermore, it would seem that they possess certain knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to forge consensus among diverse stakeholders and use collaboration to address many complex social problems, even when a high degree of conflict is present.

- *Bridging leaders* seem to have very **low ego needs**. They are generally much more interested in bringing about change than garnering the credit for it. This characteristic probably makes this type of leader appear **less threatening** to other leaders.

- *Bridging leaders* are **skilled listeners**. This ability translates into a capacity to understand and **empathize** with other points of view. This, of course, requires that the *bridger* be able to set aside or suspend his/her own interests long enough to really penetrate the interests of the rival or potential partner.

- *Bridging leaders* appear to have a bankable cache of **credibility** within their own groups or sectors. Not only does this enable them to effectively represent their constituencies, but it also allows them a wide degree of latitude in bringing new points of view home in the best possible light. Thus, if a bridging leader is able to develop **trust** and working **relationships** with diverse groups, he/she can connect the relationship to the constituent group.

- *Bridging leaders* tend to have **well-developed networks** and solid reputations beyond their own groups or organizations. These networks comprise valuable **relationship capital** and represent the currency bridgers draw upon to make things happen. This process involves creating and linking chains of trust throughout the community/society.

This is merely a preliminary list of the types of attributes associated with *Bridging Leadership.[11]* Further research is needed to validate and confirm initial assumptions and working hypotheses on bridging, as well as additional analysis to build practical insights on collaboration that go beyond the particular and approximate universal best practices.[12]
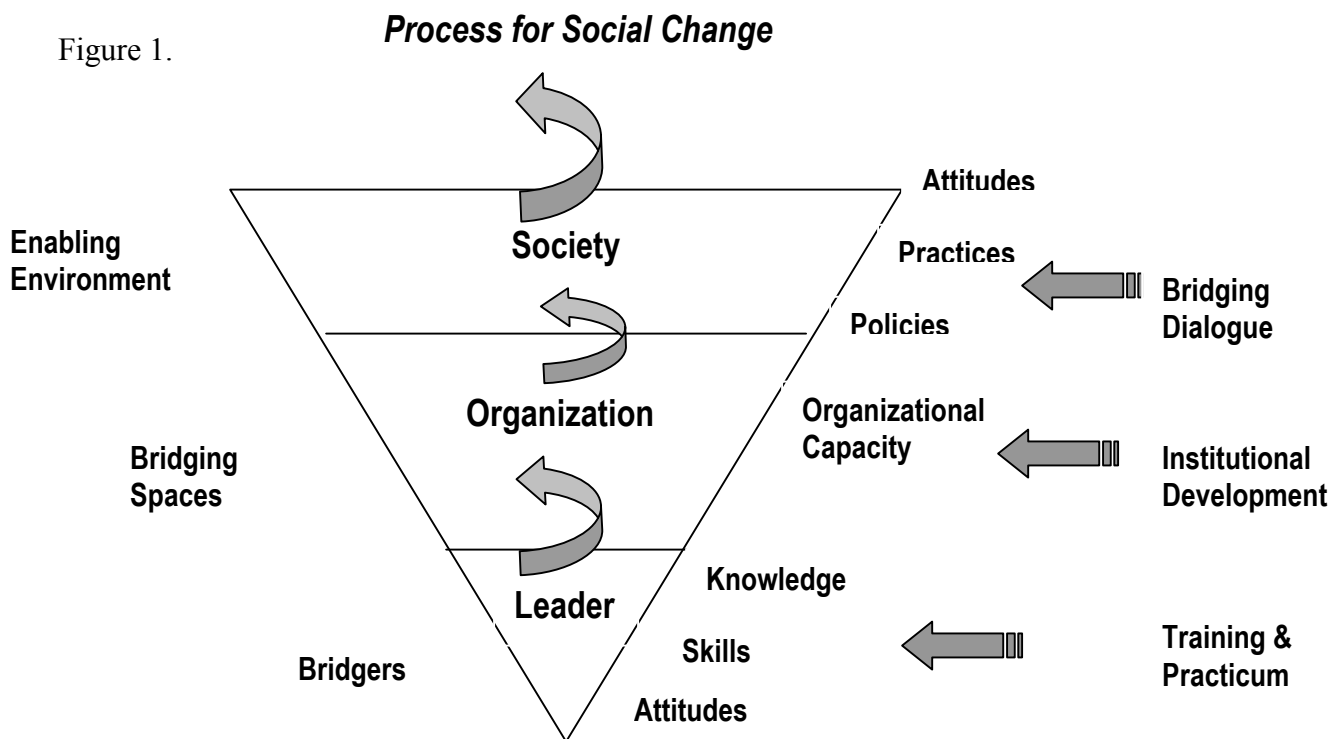
---

[11] For a more comprehensive lists of knowledge, skills and attitudes initially thought to be associated with bridging leaders, see *Bridge Leadership Framework*, a draft paper prepared by the Asian Institute of Management-Center for Development Management and CO-Multiversity, (2001).

[12] The Synergos Institute is partnering with universities and NGOs around the world through a Global Task Force to carry out case study research designed to deepen our understanding of Bridging Leadership and collaboration. Some 30 cases will be ready for analysis in May of 2002.

At play here is a general working assumption that bridging behavior can be studied and systematically learned from, and that insights gained from this research can then be developed and transferred through carefully designed training programs. In effect, the more people equipped with the bridging knowledge and skills, the greater the likelihood that collaboration will take hold, produce critical synergies and make inroads into solving critical social problems and reducing conflict throughout the world.

But of course, it's not as simple as merely training people to collaborate. People work in organizations and organizations operate within the broader context that is society. Thus, bridging is not just a horizontal exercise; it is a process that begins with the individual leaders, working through groups or organizations, which, in turn, comprise the fabric of society. Figure 1 is a graphic representation illustrating how bridging can spark and carry forward a process of social transformation.

Figure 1.

Process for Social Change

Attitudes

Society

Enabling Environment

Practices

Bridging Dialogue

Policies

Organization

Organizational Capacity

Institutional Development

Bridging Spaces

Knowledge

Leader

Skills

Training & Practicum

Bridgers

Attitudes

At each level a different set of elements are needed to advance the process to the next level and beyond.[13] For example, *bridging leaders* require specific knowledge, skills and attitudes to become effective bridgers. Training and real time practice are the means of acquisition. Organizations, in order to be viewed as *bridging spaces*, must demonstrate certain core competencies such as systems of accountability, capacity to execute mission-related activities, adequate revenue generation, effective management of human resources, constituency responsiveness, and ability to mobilize and utilize information. Institutional strengthening programs can help organizations position themselves as strategic bridging spaces.

Finally, basic conditions must be met within the enabling environment to give bridging a chance to take hold. The seed of collaboration requires fertile ground for it to grow. It is impossible to sustain healthy organizations in a sick environment. A society populated with bridging organizations is necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving sustainable social transformation. Society must offer basic policies, practices and attitudes that encourage collaboration and the accumulation of social capital. As Fukuyama articulated in 1995, "social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in society".[14]

Bridging Leadership attempts to increase society's deposit of social capital by increasing levels of trust in the public space. The principal mechanism for accomplishing this is the *bridging dialogue.*[15] The process of real dialogue can strengthen the enabling environment by establishing basic conditions for building trust and relationships among diverse stakeholders. Once a minimal level of trust exists and the chains of trust are extended across the public spaces, collaboration can begin and real progress made on

---

[13] This model borrows conceptually from the *Grassroots Development Framework*, developed by the Inter-American Foundation.

[14] Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York, The Free Press, 1995.

[15] The concept of *Bridging Dialogue* is rooted in excellent works on dialogue such as those written by Harold H.Saunders, A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. William Ury, Getting to Peace: Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work and in the World, New York: Viking Press, 1999. Daniel Yankelovich, The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

solving complex problems. Over time, collaboration can evolve into what Waddell terms *societal learning* or "a process of changing patterns of interactions within and between diverse organizations and social units to enhance society's capacity to innovate."[16] This capacity to innovate is essential to coming up with sustainable solutions to our most critical problems.

Unfortunately, too many dialogues advance without first laying the critical foundation of trust and relationship. Moreover, dialogue often begins and ends as an exercise of and for elites, never involving other critical stakeholders—the real sustaining power of dialogue and collective action. One of the core tasks of bridging is building relationships the mortar that holds the relationship together is dialogue. Bridging *Leadership* attempts to initiate dialogue involving all the critical stakeholders. Initial activities are designed to develop trust and relationships, building from a foundation of "early, small successes". As Figure 2 indicates, dialogue should involve a wide range of actors at the initial stages. As specific activities begin to take place and progress towards concrete goals is made, the process may become more focused.

Figure 2.

---
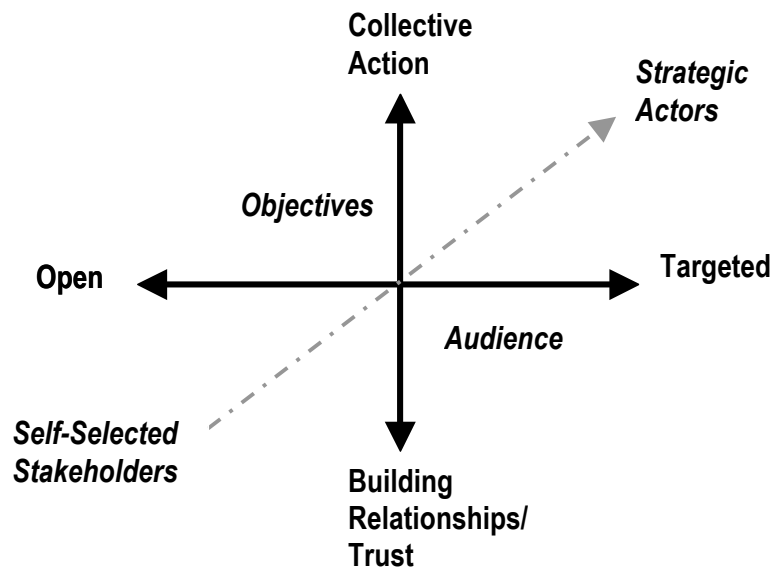
[16] Steve Waddell. "Societal Learning: Creating Big-Systems Change", in The Systems Thinker, Vol. 12, No. 10, Dec/Jan, 2001/2002.

Thus, from a bridging perspective, the initial stage of dialogue involves casting a wide net for potential stakeholders. The essential early objectives involve building relationships and trust. Ideally, this stage would be centered upon small, low-risk activities that allow for immediate successes and for trust to take hold and grow. Over time, the objectives would tend towards more sophisticated types of collective action. As activities intensify and require increasing levels of commitment and investment, the participants would be targeted, in part, based upon potential contributions to the collaboration, in addition to specific interests.

The Divides that Separate Us

One of the most salient effects of the tragic events of September 11 has been to highlight the myriad of ways in which the world is divided. Throughout and across societies it is apparent that the many chasms that separate us—rich and poor, black and white, liberal and conservative, Muslim and Christian, etc.—are deep and, in some cases, appear to be widening. This increased polarization comes at a time when the problems we face as a global community have never been more critical.   Just as apparent is the fact that concrete problems such as growing inequality between rich and poor, environmental degradation, and HIV-AIDs require the combined efforts of business, civil society and government. So far, we have not been up to the task. Meaningful collaboration is, to date, still beyond our reach. A homemaker and community leader in rural Zimbabwe sums up the current state of affairs in the following way:

> Current leadership is leading different sectors apart from each other, let alone from us at the grassroots level. Politics has political leaders. The economy or the business sector has its own leaders. Commercial farmers have leaders. The Church and the religious community have theirs. Academics, researchers, NGO's etc have their own leaders. Each of these sectors has different goals. Others—the politicians—want voters and followers. Business people want to make a profit and they want us as their market and workers. Commercial farmers want us as farm workers and their market. The churches and NGOs want us in their membership and as project holders. All these leaders want us to follow them. As a result of this fragmented leadership the world is growing apart behind them as leaders. Jealousies and tensions grow. Confusion grows, and then conflicts and fights over resources and territories. We are tired of being led apart. We are not

blind, only a blind person needs to be led. There is need for bridging leaders to put up bridges so that the current leaders of various sectors can cross to each other's territories. The gaps between themselves and between them and us are growing each day. Some bridging in leadership may get them talking and hopefully close their differences and bring us peace, cash in our pockets and development to our homes. [Daisy Ncube-Gwanda, Zimbabwe][17]

The concept of *Bridging Leadership* is our way of expressing Daisy's simple, yet eloquent aspiration. On the one hand, it is a contribution to the field of leadership; a partial answer to the paradigmatic search for an alternative to the industrial model. Yet on other, it merely gives form to the quest of civic leaders all across the world who are attempting to transform their societies by looking for the latent synergies in their communities and forging new types of relationships. While the form it takes may vary according to language and culture, what we have in common is the need to work together to solve complex problems and the need for practical, viable tools and strategies to help us along the way.

---

[17] From a discussion paper written for the Synergos Institute by Sithembiso Nyoni entitled, "Bridging Leadership: A Southern Perspective", 2002.