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# **LEADERS**

for  
a new beginning

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## **LEADERS FOR A NEW BEGINNING**

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# Introduction

We are **Marina, Justine, Jane, and Eszter**.

We are four women with diverse origin, age and background. Our paths crossed in 2020 and after a spirited discussion, we came up with the idea about this book. We believe we need leaders of new kind, people with inspiration, devotion and ideas that will help the humanity to build a better tomorrow. Therefore, we set out on a journey to explore, to research and present you with a group of individuals who set the contours of the next generation leaders and can be a great example to all of us.

I, **Marina**, started this book as an individual protest. I did not agree with some of the surrounding us realities (absenteeism, prejudices, short-termism, inequalities and injustice) and I could not stand it anymore.

I could not accept the adjustment, the compromise and the passivity of current elites. People who keep prolonging and projecting these realities while bargaining with their hearts, minds and wasting our future.

For me, this was not a result of an intellectual observation. I took it personally. But a rebellion is nothing without an alternative.

The universe challenged me by sending me a phrase... to become the title of this book. "Leaders for a new beginning" was born in meditation in the early days of the spring Covid-19 (C19) lockdown. It came as an intimate sharing, a whisper of what "might be."

A challenge I couldn't respond by myself but share with my soulmate and partner Justine Toms to start this journey together.

I, **Justine**, cherish sharing ideas and working together with creative, intelligent and positive people. On the other hand I like to challenge myself and the invite to work on this project was a big challenge to me. And I love to discover new things, to know more about inspiring people – this moves me ahead and make me feel more confident in the better future.

So, I had this three reasons and the last bonus was the lockdown, so I had more time to read, research, go deeper into the project, share time every day writing and every week talking with the lovely ladies from the team.

I hope I and we did manage to show everyone, no matter the domain, the level, the skills, the race, the gender, the age, the nationality – every single

one can lead. Just they have to be brave enough and honest to himself, to the others and to the future.

To be part of this journey blessed me with new friendship, great time reading, writing and sharing, big emotion and discovering more about myself and the magic of our world. Joy of life.

I, **Jane**, a development worker and woman leader in an international organization has admired the focused leadership by women in Bulgaria and in different spheres – academia, politics, industry, services and even in international affairs. I was curious and wanted to be among such women. I saw my participation in this book as a chance to share my experience and to tell the world that the leadership qualities of the future have been already depicted by leaders of our time and can lead us into a new beginning. This may not be easy, and together we have acknowledged that strong and swirling eddies exists in this stream and may tend to take us back down or confuse us – but with sustainable leadership we will swim through!

I, **Eszter**, have the honor to be the author of the illustrations in this book. I believe that what we pay attention to in our lives increases and multiplies. Therefore, we have to choose consciously where and to what we turn our attention to.

Leaders for a New Beginning is a beautiful reminder that strong and bright examples are all around us, that we have multiple springs which we inspire from and draw constructive ideas. Also that we ourselves have the power to awake and live actively the qualities we value and admire, and which make the real difference in our lives.

Leaders for a New Beginning is not just a project pointing to the bright examples outside of us, but a reminder of our ability and responsibility to contribute to the world with our “small things” made “with great love.”

\* \* \*

On the long and wavy road of its history, humanity has come across many milestones that shifted the course of its journey. Yet, little that we expected the 20th year of the new millennium would mark another turning point for our civilisation. A quite unusual one. Facing the invisible enemy of the coronavirus, humankind stood up in difficult perplexity – to do more, by doing less. For the first time in a very long period, we had to put the brakes on the wild spinning of our daily life. To stop and breathe slowly, to read, to sleep, to play with the kids for more than 15 minutes, to watch all the movies we wanted. And, of

course, to think. The lockdown, the lack of opportunity to travel, pursued us to stay much longer with ourselves and listen to our own voice – who we are and what we cherish, what do we need or not need any more. It was the opportunity to review our values and recognise the people who share them. Additionally, we witnessed a wave of innovations and technologies penetrating our lives in a way we could easily experiment as never before and reimagine our daily rhythm and routine. This review could easily help us to look for our own values and recognize the people who share them. In addition, we witnessed a wave of innovations and technologies penetrating into our lives in a way we could easily experiment as never before and reimagine our daily rhythm and routine.

The preparation of this book happened in the still ongoing mist of the pandemic within uncertainty that it has brought. Just like everyone else, we were affected and puzzled by all these changes. Therefore, we decided to try and search for ground-breaking ideas that will inspire us and help us to rethink our place and purpose. We looked around in the hope of finding new leaders to guide us in this Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world and help us adjust to the new normal.

The result of our quest brought to life this book. We have found examples of greatness in everyday life, empowering stories of overcoming all odds and heroism from the neighbour street. And we learned that if we choose the right leaders, we will move in the right direction and to a better future.

### **So, what is our next move?**

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly set the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a blueprint to scale and achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The United Nations calls the next 10 years a Decade of Action (2020–2030)<sup>1</sup> and urges people to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations, so we may be able to achieve the best we hope for – sustainable development of the people, planet and prosperity. Such movement requires effective leadership, the participation of the business sector and the involvement of us all.

Creating this book is our contribution to this journey. We gathered the elements of political, economic, social and universal processes of transformation to put together the puzzle of what we believe will be a healthier, more regenerative and solidarity society. Additionally, we examined some of the most

recent leadership theories. We dived deep into the characteristics of some extraordinary individuals who have vision, courage and compassion to transform their organizations and communities. They helped us to identify three emerging theories which explain how our leaders manage change and improve situations faced by society, corporations, countries and the environment.

These theories are the Sapiient leadership theory, recently announced by Stanford University (USA), the sustainable leadership theory, presented by the Cambridge Institute for Sustainable Leadership (UK), and the meta-leadership theory, of the Harvard university (USA). Our fieldwork also proved that among others, there are seven key characteristics which make a difference and bring order in the disordered world of today. They include value orientation, emotional intelligence, inclusive style, system thinking, inspiring vision, long-term perspective and innovative approach. Obviously, they are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive and can be explored further opening opportunities for other writings.

### **Who do we send our message to?**

We wrote this book for all higher executives who look for self-actualization and are shifting their mind-set and practices according to the new context of reality. It is also for the ones who are still to become leaders and work hard to cultivate the necessary characteristics in their behaviour. Additionally, we believe the edition will be useful for experts in human capital management who mould the leaders of the future – like teachers, human resource managers, mentors and personal coaches.

But most of all, this book is dedicated to everyone who is looking for reality check and personal growth. We hope by reading it, you will have a better understanding of the ongoing processes, a solid base to differentiate the fake actions within the foggy promises and consciously insist on higher performance. We would like to assist you in finding the aspiration and the correct role models to follow, while encouraging you to make your voice heard too.

### **Where this book will take you?**

We start the journey by exploring the current challenges in front of humanity. We look at the material issues the society and leaders are facing in order to



manage them. We will define the strong features and the talents of various people who make it possible to find solutions to complex challenges. Also, we will acknowledge the attributes of leaders who bring humanism, resilience and sustainability. We hope these examples will help you to recognize and cultivate the characteristics of value orientation, emotional intelligence and inclusive style, system thinking, inspiring vision and long-term perspective within yourself.

Like in each piece of writing, this book also has its limitations. We could not share the stories of all the amazing people we reviewed during our sustainable leaders' research. There are so many more. However, we can assure you that our selection includes a variety of people with outstanding achievements from all walks of life. The world is changing, and it needs leaders who can also evolve with it. Still, we cannot rely only on our leaders to make the change. Yes, they can show us the way, but it is up to us to walk this road. It's about our values, justice, inclusion, democracy and openness to determine what is next. And the leaders are only part of it.

Most of our heroes extensively use the virtual space to communicate and interact. We followed them on social media and provided you with this information for easier access. We finished our field work on 1 October 2020 and the numbers are actual to that date.

This book is gender-fair and inclusive. However, we have faced language limitations and therefore we use s/he and they for each of the individuals referred.

This story is ours, as much it is yours. The four of us we co-created it with the emotions, the heart and the mind of the people involved in the discussion we organized. We hope it will be a tool that consolidates the thoughts, aspirations and feelings of each one of us, an inspiration to live in a healthier, fairer and solidary society. The time to act has come and we shall not miss the opportunity to grab the chance to change.

Finally, we wish that this book becomes a source of courage, a call to action, a celebration of human spirit and triumph of Life. As it has been and is for us.

**Marina Stefanova**  
**Justine Toms**  
**Jane Muita**  
**Eszter Gombas**

# Context

The current challenges – technological, environmental, health, political, economic and ethical, have to be considered in every way. Many people say C19 is very much like a perfect storm: it collides with other disruptive forces, it is speeding up and amplifying the social and economic changes, humanity will face in the 2020s.

Hans Rosling, a Swedish professor of global health and well-known public speaker, defines five global risks – global pandemic, financial collapse, world war, climate change, and extreme poverty. Individually, each risk promises significant change. Together, they force societies to rethink how they function in almost every area.

To these five, Yuval Harari, an Israeli intellectual and historian, also adds the invisible AI hand of algorithms, big data and Internet of things that direct it. The list is not exhaustive, but we believe it is sufficient to make a start.

While exploring the current reality, we broadened the risks by mapping and decided to focus on ten factors, which we consider as the strongest forces colliding with the C19 (figure 1). We know that these are not exhaustive, neither are they mutually exclusive but rather tend to scale in increasing emergency. Let us have a look at how they interact.

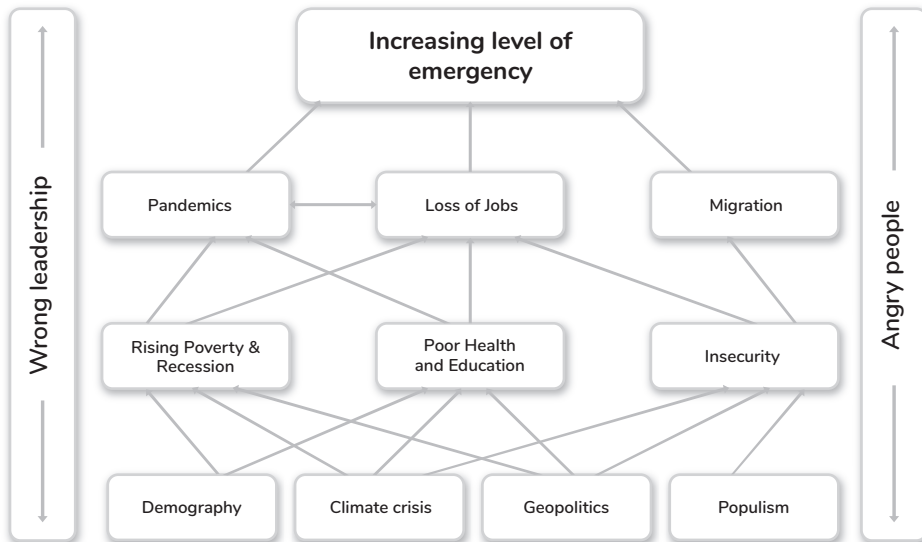


Figure 1. Current risks humankind is facing in 2020

Source: Stefanova, Toms, Muita, 2020<sup>2</sup>

We believe that we witness an increasing level of emergency of the situation, coming from three direct contributors – loss of jobs, migration and currently, a pandemic. However, this is only at the top of the iceberg. There are other contributors such as rising poverty, economic recession, poor health and education, and overall insecurity of people around the globe. Additionally, other circumstances are influencing the complexity of the situation. That includes demographic parameters (raising and ageing population), climate change, geopolitics and populism in politics. Finally, yet importantly is the existing critical direct relation between the majority of people and their elected leaders. If the leaders cannot tackle the current risks, they lack vision, do not consult, seek feedback, or they don't search the roots of the problems, people's anxiety and anger are rising.

Below we deep dive into the specific risks and interrelationships among them.

## **1. Pandemics**

Global diseases and novel viruses are the main topics of conversation for global thinkers nowadays. People should be aware that the coronavirus pandemic is a result of two megatrends.

The first one is related to the destruction of species. The list of endangered species is quite extensive – around 31.000 species are on the UN statistics for biodiversity loss.<sup>3</sup> A major factor for that is the illegal trafficking of various and usually critically endangered ones. While smugglers do not follow any safety protocols, the risk of international spread of viruses due to lack of veterinary control and disease prevention is very high. For example, the current outbreak has been tentatively associated with a seafood market in Wuhan, China, where the sale of wild animals may be the source of zoonotic infection. Some scientists connect with pangolins, small mammals with strong keratin plates over their skin, predominately living in Asia but unfortunately critically endangered.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, their illegal trafficking is widespread as there is a high demand for their scales, because they are used in traditional Chinese medicine.

The other factor has its roots in urban migration. In 2018, 55% of humanity had moved into cities, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050.<sup>5</sup> By 2030, the world is projected to have 43 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants, most of them in developing regions. Sharing a relatively small geographical space, the density of population is a prerequisite

for immediate scale of whatever appears. It also means that many countries start facing challenges in meeting the needs of the growing number of people, including for housing, transportation, energy systems and infrastructure, as well as for employment and basic services such as education and health care. Without ensuring equal access to all, the risk of booming pandemics makes the most vulnerable groups – older people, children, persons with disabilities and migrants to be hit the hardest.

## **2. Loss of jobs**

Even before C19, the United States-based international management consulting firm McKinsey's predicts that 800 million jobs<sup>6</sup> will be disrupted by 2030, while Oxford Economics adds that robots could replace up to 20 million jobs around the world in the same timeframe.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, coronavirus is causing a projected loss of additional 195 million jobs. There is an impressive level of speeding up the trend towards automation. Technical infrastructure is already in place. Mobile networks have nearly universal coverage. In 2019, an estimated 96.5% of the global population were covered by at least a 2G network. Business leaders globally are investing in accelerating automation as they prepare for a post-coronavirus world. While automation in the past was characterised by the efficient use of scientific knowledge (mechanisation of the process), the use of electricity and knowledge from electrical engineering has increasingly moved into the focus of automation technology in recent years. With the inclusion of computer and information technology, automation technology has now reached a point where automation enables the complete digitalisation of production processes. The challenge for societies is how to encourage innovation and automation without causing new divides in society.

## **3. Migration**

People continue to migrate due to resource's scarcity, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and other factors, especially in the developing countries in the earth's low latitudinal band. The global data also shows that displacement caused by conflict and generalized violence remains at a record high. Overall, the estimated number of international migrants in 2019 is 272 million out of a global population of 7.7 billion, or 1 in every 30 people.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, roughly 52% of the global refugee population is under 18 years of age and this is a long-term trend.

Additionally, climate change has and will continue to create a multitude of critical issues that the international community must confront. The number of environmental migrants and displaced people is growing and at the end of 2019, around 5.1 million people in 95 countries and territories were living in displacement as a result of disasters that happened not only in 2019, but also in previous years.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the numbers was predicted to only grow as in 2018, the World Bank estimated that three regions (Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia) will generate 143 million more climate migrants by 2050.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4. Inequality and extreme poverty**

The increasing coronavirus driven economic inequality and poverty could have consequences for years to come. C19 is entrenching a devastating wave of economic inequality, one of the gravest forces of our era. The global economy will contract 3% in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund, a deeper downturn than that seen in the 2008–09 financial crisis. The World Bank is predicting the pandemic will push up the unemployment forcing 40-60 million people (+71 million according to UN) into extreme poverty. It causes the first increase in global poverty in decades.

As a particularly vulnerable group in the inequality domain, women and girls are hit even harder in the pandemic. This is due to the fact that globally, three quarters of medical doctors and nursing personnel are female. Women spend three more times than men on unpaid home work. In addition, the closure of school and day-care centres requires women to take care of children and facilitate their home learning.

#### **5. Poor health and education**

Encouraging news is that between 2000 and 2016, HALE (Healthy Life Expectancy) which reflects on the number of years people live in good health increased globally by 8% – from 59 to 63 years.<sup>11</sup> From declining mortality rates to ending epidemics of infectious diseases (tuberculosis, hepatitis B, neglected tropical diseases), the world has made significant forward strides. However we can see that under 5 years old mortality remains a significant problem in Africa, where the rate is more than eight times higher than the European region in 2018.

Despite the reduction in premature mortality from the four major non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases) achieved at the start of this century, this progress has not been sustained. Obesity in particular is on the rise globally and alcohol use is also increasing in some regions. Meanwhile, the decline in tobacco use is slowing.

However, the outbreak of C19 has been the most urgent test of national capacities to respond to a health emergency in more than a century and we witnessed a more compelling need for skilled health personnel, as doctors were hit harder than any other group.

Regarding the overall level of education, coronavirus widens the gap to provide education for all as UNESCO estimates that about 40% of low and lower-middle-income countries have not supported disadvantaged learners during temporary school shutdown.<sup>12</sup> The 2020 report also notes that 258 million children and youth were entirely excluded from education, with poverty as the main obstacle. Other challenging problems continue to be also the inadequately represented minorities in curricula and textbooks, as well as still existing discrimination regarding children with disabilities.

Not only is education still not inclusive but it is also becoming more outdated than ever. The World Economic Forum projects that by 2022 at least 54% of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling to respond to changing work requirements. Young people need to learn rapidly, adapt, practice resiliency and take advantage of entrepreneurial mind-sets, to respond to this reality with the ingenuity to earn an income.<sup>13</sup>

## **6. Insecurity**

Traditional notions of insecurity, shaped largely by the Cold War, were concerned mainly with a state's ability to counter external threats. The present failure to that is to put people at the centre of states' efforts to ensure stability, safety and prosperity. That has caught us unprepared and insecure in connection with today's pressing global threats. As security of humans failed to complement security of state, it did not succeed in protecting human rights, deliver social services, ensure the systems of social protection and preparedness and strengthen human development.

Also, it is imperative to acknowledge how issues related to economy, health, environment, and inequality are intricately interconnected and must be tackled in their full complexity.

## **7. Demography**

The world is ageing. Before the coronavirus, it was predicted that the median age in China would reach 50 years old by 2060. Europe and America would hit this milestone in the 2050's. However, this global demographic mega-trend is on a collision course with C19. The 80-year-olds are dying from coronavirus at five times the average rate. The implications for society and business are severe as older people withstand the worst of the virus and the younger contend with the burden. In 2019, the UN warned that young people are twice likely to be living in extreme poverty than adult workers.

## **8. Climate crisis**

The climate change is inevitable. Although the coronavirus put the climate emergency on the back seat as policy-makers focus on containing the pandemic, the problem is not going away. It continues to aggravate the frequency and severity of natural disasters like hurricanes, droughts, floods and massive wildfires affecting the lives of 39 million of people in 2018. Additionally, 2019 was the second-hottest year on record and global temperatures are projected to rise by up to 3.2°C by 2100. Natural disasters increase poverty as the UN report on 23.6 billion of dollars direct economic losses in 63 countries in 2018.

The coronavirus has shown us how hard it will be to fight the climate crisis, but it also has created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to flatten the climate curve. States and experts do not share the same opinion though. While some argue the reduction in pollution and greenhouse gas emissions due to lockdowns serves as an illustration of what can be achieved, others say concrete plans to take action are being shelved. As of April 2020, only 85 countries – slightly over 40% – reported that they had national disaster risk reduction strategies aligned, to some extent, to the Sendai Framework.<sup>14</sup> Only six of these countries reporting fully aligned national strategies. Additionally, in 2018, 55 countries reported that at least some of their local governments had local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies.

## 9. Geopolitics

Globalisation (commonwealth) is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide. It has accelerated since the 19th century due to advances in transportation and communication technology. The global interactions scaled and caused a growth in international trade and the exchange of ideas and culture. Today we see a fully interconnected world where people share physical and virtual reality.

Coronavirus is unravelling globalisation as we know it. The threat posed by the novel C19 has led to a reassertion of political power over economic demands and global market forces.<sup>15</sup> The world is now facing its worst recession in generations. Even the most advanced and developed countries are struggling to cope with the health, social and economic fallout of the pandemic. Still, the poorest and most disadvantaged countries will inevitably be hit the hardest. Estimates suggest that world trade will plunge by 13 to 32%, the foreign direct investment will decline by up to 40%, and remittances to low- and middle-income countries will fall by 20% in 2020.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the pandemic is politicising movement, immigration and entrenching a bias towards nationalism and self-reliance. It is reshaping world power. As the US has remained passive, China used the crisis as an opportunity to start setting new rules and gain new allies by providing support to Europe. Citizens see a face-off between the ideologies of authoritarianism and democracy. In the short-medium term, no country, in particular neither China nor the United States, will be able to bounce back on its own. In Europe, Germany needs France as much as countries in the south and vice versa. Countries with weak state structures, such as many in Africa in particular, need help from wealthier ones.

The arguments of economists in favour of the free movement of goods, services, capital or people are well known. Under certain conditions, in the medium-long term future, they remain relevant. The most important of these conditions is the strengthening of international collaboration. The more complex interdependence is, the more cooperation and coordination, are necessary.<sup>17</sup>



## 10. Conspiracy theories and populism

From the “pandemic video” to conspiracy theories about 5G causing coronavirus, nearly a third of people polled in a recent survey<sup>18</sup> believe that the virus was manufactured on purpose. However, this isn’t anything new. Back in 2012, 25% also declared that “the financial crisis was secretly orchestrated by a small number of Wall Street bankers to extend the power of the Federal Reserve and further their control of the world’s economy” (Oliver & Wood, 2014)<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, according to an Ipsos survey for *Fleuve Editions* conducted in France in 2014, 20% of respondents believed that the Illuminati are pulling the strings of international economic activity (Longuet, 2014).

The belief in conspiracy theories is defined as an “unverified and relatively implausible claiming that significant events are the result of a secret plot carried out by a preternaturally sinister and powerful group of people.”

On the other hand, pandemic populism is on the rise across the world, a new study warns.<sup>20</sup> It does not and cannot provide a vision about the good society or present a coherent set of ideas. It finds favourable soil to scale in democracies where political elites have become estranged from voters after decades of declining participation in elections, in party membership, and civic activities.

Finally yet importantly, George Floyd’s tragic death at the hands of American policeman who pinned him to the ground with a knee in the back of his neck for over eight minutes, awakened the angry people. This has become more than a tragic death, as it illustrated the pandemic of racism. From global protests to policy changes and the destruction of colonial symbols, communities raised their voices to ask the United States and the world to undo systemic racism. Black Lives Matter became an internationally recognised slogan. It scaled the visibility around the decentralised political and the social movement advocating for non-violent civil disobedience in protest against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against black people. According to the Black Lives Matter Network website<sup>21</sup>, thirteen guiding principles should apply to those who choose to become involved, among them: diversity, globalism, empathy, restorative justice and inter-generationally. These highlighted the ageing of our values and the high demand for a new social contract.