

# Seeing the Opportunities in The Big Issues

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*“What if we discover our present way of life is irreconcilable with our vocation to become fully human?”* **Paulo Freire**

*“The world will not be peaceful or safe unless we attend to the poorest places”* **Clare Short, former Minister for Overseas Development. Feb 2002**

**The situation we are in at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** Every day, the big issues present themselves more strongly. They were forced on world attention in the most horrifying form in the tragedy of the 9/11 and its aftermath — not least, the chaos unleashed by the “War on Terror” and effects on people in Afghanistan, Iraqi and more recently Madrid, on businesses and livelihoods. The consequences of Enron, Andersens, World Com and a succession of exposures of large-scale financial malpractice have affected people throughout the world.

These events have been a turning point. There is a crisis of confidence in big business. Maybe globalisation is really “Americanisation” or “Westernisation”, not working in the best interests of ordinary people throughout the world? Perhaps consumerism and the pursuit of economic growth and power are leading us into spiritual poverty. There is growing recognition that Climate Change is the greatest threat we face, far greater than terrorism.

It is now even more obvious that we, and our Planet, are all part of an interconnected living system. We are all members of a global community and what happens in other parts of the world, especially in other cultures and the less economically developed world, affects us. It is dawning on us that we all need to be world citizens if we are to enjoy a sustainable future. Exclusion and desperation lead to violence. Perhaps George Bush and the Neo-Conservatives and the phenomenon of Osama Bin Laden, Al-Qaida and Fundamentalism are reflections of each other. If a living system is not respected, it hits back harshly. If we do not learn willingly, the Universe forces it upon us.

## **Fig 1**

## **The Big Issues**

- global warming and the ecological crisis
- greed and the increasing gap between rich and poor nations and people
- providing every human being, 80% of whom live in developing countries, with the chance of a healthy and fulfilling life
- Despite the fact that slavery is now illegal in every country in the world there are now more slaves than ever - an estimated 27 million. 4 million women and children are trafficked every year; 1 million for prostitution
- the gift and problem of diversity — how to see it as a source of delight, wealth and creativity rather than blind fear, stereotyping, discrimination, exploitation and violent conflict

- creating good, sustainable and successful workplaces contributing to a fair and sustainable world; seeing nature as a model for sustainable work and lives
- the need for companies to be good world citizens as well as profitable
- the power of transnational corporations (TNCs) — a potential force for good or a threat to democracy, health, sustainability and livelihoods, especially those of the poor
- the power and unpredictability of financial markets
- the gap between “clever” strategy makers and people on the ground or most affected and yet not involved
- growing distrust of government, corporations and free market capitalism
- killing ourselves: pollution in all its forms, unhealthy eating and lifestyles, tobacco, alcohol, road accidents (3000 deaths per day), civil war, genocide and war
- the need for integrity, meaning and life balance; uniting mind, heart, body and spirit.

This World is unsustainable.

**Seeing the Opportunities in the Issues.** The key to long term success and sustainability is to see the big issues as opportunities to be grasped – not denied or avoided. Businesses that continuously respond to the big issues, creatively and positively, thrive in the long term. New products and enterprises begin in this way. Business – including government - is and always has been a force for innovation and transformation. Think of the effect on the World of the Thomas Newcomen, who invented the first successful engine in 1712, later developed by James Watt and Richard Trevithick, Henry Ford, Marconi, Boeing, Bill Gates, to name just a few – all of them responding to big issues. Today’s issues are increasingly global, ethical and ecological. In the long run, enlightened self-interest, ethical and sustainable business make good sense. Yet, in the global economy, this is easier said than done. An enlightened CEO walks a tight rope because of global competition and the power and unpredictability of the global financial system.

**Positive News.** It’s exciting that every day, companies, large and small, and individuals take initiatives to improve the situation, find solutions and move things forward. Every day there is positive news (unfortunately bad news gets more attention). We only hear a fraction of it! This is a benign process. Human creativity is endless.

Here are just a few examples.

Sustainability is at the heart of Interface, a world wide company producing floor coverings, fabrics, speciality chemicals and interior architectural products. In Sept 2003, Waitrose recently introduced “*Locally Produced*” – a new range to encourage local producers and reduce food miles. Now (2004), they have formed partnerships with small family producers of good quality bananas in the Caribbean. Eddie Stobart, Britain’s largest independent road haulier, brought in a nutritionist to advise his 1,200 drivers on how to eat healthily and reduce the risk of heart disease. Patricia Wheway, whose 5 year old son has food intolerances, wrote to Tesco’s Chief Executive, Sir Terry Leahy. The result was a project that has launched a “Free From” range of 100 products. B&Q thrive through sustainable DIY products and ethical and sustainable sourcing. MacDonalDs have modified their offering to include healthier meals. Organisations that respond to the big issues thrive, sometimes survive against the odds: the Co-op Bank attributes its prosperity, despite intense competition, to its ethical and green credentials. Ethical food purchases in supermarkets are increasing by a staggering 24% per year. In November 2002, Co-op Supermarkets announced that they are switching all their own brand chocolate to Fair Trade which gives growers a much better deal. Recently the Co-operative Insurance Society announced plans to clad Manchester’s 28 story building in enough solar panels to power 75

houses and provide power for the building's 4000 occupants. Solarcentury and JCDecaux are supplying Leicester City Council with 750 solar illuminated bus shelters. Once installed the streetsmart™ shelters will offset over six tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, helping maintain Leicester City Council's reputation as Britain's first Environment City. Back in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Edward Johns, saw the opportunity in the issue of cholera and typhoid in cities and started a successful business (that still survives with a different name) manufacturing "johns" as some call the WC.

Ford, along with other major motor manufacturers, is developing cleaner engines. "In 25 years, fuel cells could be the predominant way of powering cars", says Bill Ford. By 2050, it is predicted, most of the planet's electricity will come from four renewable sources: water, wind, sun and hydrogen. Many of these can provide cheap power on a small local scale, particularly good for developing countries. Wind power is the world's fastest growing energy source. Germany is exploiting these opportunities like no other country.

Here is an outstanding example of "*Seeing the Opportunities in the Big Issues*". In USA, an alliance of labour, environmental, civil rights, business, and political leaders in the United States have laid out a vision for a "New Apollo Project" to create 3.3 million new jobs and achieve energy independence in 10 years. It aims to unify the country behind a 10-year program of strategic investment for clean energy technology and new infrastructure. It has received support from 17 of America's largest labour unions as well as a broad cross section of the environmental movement, including the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Greenpeace.

Dr. Ray Perryman, a corporate economist advising the project says "If economists agree on anything it's that inventing new technologies and creating whole new industries is what America does best. We are a creative economy, not a commodity economy". The New Apollo Project would keep us on the cutting edge of manufacturing emerging technologies and secure our long-term prosperity." He concludes that the proposed tax credits and investments would create 3.3 million new, high-wage jobs for manufacturing, construction, transportation, high-tech, and public sector workers, while reducing dependence on imported oil and cleaning the air. It would also position the United States to take the lead in fast-growing markets, dramatically reduce the trade deficit, and more than pay for itself in energy savings and returns to the U.S. Treasury.

Every time I visit the United States, I discover more benign initiatives taken by businessmen and women to help create a sustainable, fairer, healthier, more ethical world, tackle poverty and provide more people with opportunities. California and Brazil provide examples of interesting initiatives.

**New forms of corporation are slowly emerging.** Examples of organisations responding to the desire for real "ownership" are employee owned Tower Colliery, the last deep mine in South Wales, and St Luke's advertising agency. Sunderland Home Care Associates is a successful and rapidly growing employee owned and managed company employing 80 people with an £8m turnover. Another employee owned company, Eaga Partnership, former Quango provides energy efficiency services, with a £700m turnover, and employs 2000 people. John Lewis Partnership and Scott Bader are outstanding and much earlier examples. The UK's Employee Ownership Index provided by Equity Incentives [www.equityincentives.co.uk](http://www.equityincentives.co.uk) finds that EO companies outperform all the major indices over the long term. There are far more examples in USA. Railtrack not only has a new name, Network Rail, but it has transmuted into a new form of not for profit corporation, without shares, dividends or investors. This may be a precursor in the

emergence of new forms of company. Current proposals include the Public Interest Corporation and the Trustee Enterprise. Job Ownership [www.jobownership.co.uk](http://www.jobownership.co.uk) provides advice and information.

In the USA, ESOPs (Employee Share Ownership Plans) go far beyond either the state ownership of classic socialism or the Anglo-Saxon model of ownership by stock exchange shareholders or pension, saving and insurance funds. ESOPs in the US cover more than 9 million workers in more than 10,000 firms.

**Social entrepreneurship** is another very encouraging phenomenon. There are many entrepreneurs in Britain today who set up not-for-profit enterprises that run for the benefit of the community, investing the surpluses in further developing the company and the stakeholder interests it stems from.

**The UK Government** has allocated £2m to spend on trails of speed limiters, which would ensure that a vehicle always stays within the speed limit. Under the bonnet or floor of a car a computer carrying a digital map showing all roads in UK. Using a satellite to detect a car's location, a digital display sends a message to the driver that the speed limit is changing and can if necessary apply the brakes so the car cannot exceed the limit. Being developed by Prof of Transport Studies Oliver Carsten at, Leeds University. (Safety First Spring 2003).

The UK Government is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% by 2010 and a 60% reduction by 2050. However, Transport 2000 argues that UK Government and the food industry alike need to face up to the fact that the food system as it stands, with the food miles involved, is unsustainable. Professor David King, Prime Minister's chief scientific adviser, recently called for a ban, like Lombardy's, on new fossil - fuel cars. Ken Livingstone is spearheading a move to ensure that "the vast majority" of new homes in London are powered by solar panels under new proposals which come into force in August 2004. Fuel cell buses made by Mercedes Benz, twice as efficient as petrol or diesel and produce no harmful emissions, have just gone on trial in London (December 2003).

**The shadowside** We have to be realistic and acknowledge the shadow side of all humans - nothing new here: Greed, huge pay packages, unjustified pay-offs, empire building, corruption, tax havens, tax avoidance, huge sums spent on lobbying, white-collar crime, dirty tricks, cover-ups, spin, double talk, conflicts of interest, wide gaps between declared policy and reality etc. Big business is too powerful, exercises too much influence over politicians and national and global institutions. Relationships between politics and business are too cosy and undermine integrity and democracy.

The power of financial markets and TNC's make it difficult for many companies to adopt socially responsible, sustainable policies and survive. The options for democratic governments are limited, if they are to compete successfully in the beauty parade for investment and jobs. The current global free market system is a threat to democracy and global stability. Global institutions need reform, and a new framework of financial regulation is needed (Bunzl, J, 2001; Hertz, N, 2001) and a new bottom line (Rabbi Michael Lerner). We need sceptical and probing media and NGO's. Democratic world and national governments need to restore the balance — unaccountable, unrestrained business, however benign, cannot replace elected government.

**The consequences of failing to respond are dire** Companies and industries that mishandle change or do not behave like corporate citizens, get egg on their faces. They lose their reputation, competitive edge and their best people. They find it difficult to recruit; fail to reap

the harvest of employee passion and creativity; their shares tumble and they lose customers. Almost everyone suffers - the whole world economy was affected by Enron and WorldCom. There is also a growing trend of lawsuits. 8 US families are suing McDonalds because they were not warned of the health risks involved in eating their fast foods. Wal-Mart are coming under increasing pressure because of their allegedly unethical employment policies. There are likely to be far more law suits against food as well as tobacco companies.

Research confirms: “customer satisfaction is related not only to customer service but also whether the company is perceived as honest and whether it is thought to take its responsibilities to society seriously”. The ideal company would be: **trustworthy**, a **good corporate citizen** while also **dynamic** and **innovative**. The same points apply to employee satisfaction.

Leaders need to help all their people be fully aware of the major trends and issues affecting their businesses and involve them in developing and implementing strategies that respond to these opportunities. That brings prosperity to the organisation and benefits society at the same time. Leaders need to encourage the sharing of information about trends and issues; encourage relating throughout the organisation — no “silos”; create widespread awareness in the organisation and do everything possible to unsettle complacency. In the global economy, failure to spot the key trends, defensiveness, denial and resistance will only lead to decline.

**Business initiatives are not enough.** A partnership is needed between business, national government, global institutions ,NGOs, academia and citizens. However benign the intentions of a business leader may be, it is almost impossible for a business to survive **and** adopt sustainable and ethical policies when the prime value of free market capitalism and globalisation is maximising profit and share value at the expense of other values such as human needs, democracy, sustainability and human rights. It is a systemic problem and systemic change is required.

Global institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), whose dominant value is promoting free market capitalism, the reach and power of Trans National Corporations (TNCs) and maximising profit and share value need to be replaced. The simple truth is that they are undemocratic and their policies have largely enriched a privileged minority at the expense of the vast majority of human beings. Equally important, they are economically, ecologically and socially unsustainable.

The power and influence of Trans National Corporations (TNCs) need to be controlled and financial markets require regulation. However benign, business works within a system. However benign, business is not democratically accountable.

The benefit of free trade for ordinary people, as opposed to rich elites in poor countries is unproven. Trade rules established by the unaccountable and unrepresentative WTO are not fair. They are heavily biased in favour of the richest countries and TNCs.

The odds are stacked against the Third World. For example, under the GATT rules poor countries are forced to open their markets to imports of heavily subsidised produce from the West, thus ruining poor farmers many of whom are already living on a dollar a day. European Union subsidies are threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers in the developing world. Subsidies encourage overproduction, and the huge surpluses they create are then dumped on to international markets' undercutting and ruining farmers in many of the world's poorest countries. (Oxfam, October 2002). New proposals will open up public services to international companies. The EU is trying to force poor countries to hand over their public utilities, education and health

services to corporations. Maximising international trade undermines local production and increases the pollution from transportation.

Global institutions that are unrepresentative and ignore the interests of ordinary people are storing up trouble. Whilst trade is unfair, we invite a host of come-backs including mass migration of people trying to escape poverty. Governments face protest and declining belief in democracy. The cynicism and power of individual citizens is never to be underestimated. The pressure from consumer buying power, investors and NGOs are major positive forces but governments are too slow to respond.

**The current response of most Business Leaders is essentially defensive.** According to AON's European Risk Management & Insurance Survey 2002-2003, across Europe, after September 11th 2001, business interruption heads the list of risks that pose the greatest threat to business. Loss of reputation is seen as the second biggest.

Barry Coates, former Director of the World Development Movement and now Director of Oxfam New Zealand, described 3 levels of Corporate Social Responsibility demonstrated by companies:

1. **Saving money through ethical practices** (eg recycling, avoiding prosecution)
2. **Ensuring that the company and its products don't get vilified** by taking actions that improve corporate reputation and protect brands.
3. **Acting in a socially and environmentally responsible way because it's the right thing to do.**

Current activity is mostly in level 3.

**Business Leaders need to become activists** Far more important than reputation and business interruption is the threat to our existence from climate change; global conflict in the form of terrorism and war; disease and mass migration. Events since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, demonstrate even more strongly that our world is fragile and highly unpredictable. Business is a powerful potential force for good, but it and society can only thrive in a stable— that means ethical and sustainable — world. It is far from true that most directors and senior managers are cynics, only concerned with profit and share value. Most business leaders are good people, facing complex dilemmas. It is a challenge to survive in the global economy and be enlightened at the same time and yet paradoxically it may be the only sustainable way. The situation is so serious that far more business leaders need to become activists, putting pressure on governments to have a greater sense of urgency about installing sustainable and socially responsible global frameworks.

The dilemma arises at the third level because the costs of behaving in environmentally and socially responsible ways may soon start to impact the bottom line - the company then gets punished by the market.

A comprehensive agenda for reform might include:

1. **Increase Public Awareness and understanding how the system is not working**, the damage this is causing and the future threat to human beings and the planet.
2. **Government sets and communicates the strategic priorities** that will have the biggest effect in combating climate change and other damage to the Earth.
3. **Reform and democratise global institutions** such as the UN, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Bank and IMF. Focus on fair, not free, trade and the promotion of human welfare.
4. **Explore alternatives to the debt-money system** Explore alternative ways of providing low or zero interest finance for public services, infrastructure, environmental projects, small businesses and economic development in poor and developing countries.

5. **Regulate financial markets and explore and implement measures such as the Tobin tax.** The Tobin Tax proposes a simple sales taxes on currency trades across borders which would This would discourage short-term currency trades, about 90 percent speculative, but leave long-term productive investments intact.
6. **Close down tax havens** This would open up the secrecy space in which half of global trade flows go through, exposing the massive profit laundering of corporations, money laundering of criminal and terrorist leagues, and tax evasion of private individuals which are crippling states of their capacity to provide health and education for their citizens. The value of assets held offshore, either tax-free or subject to minimal tax, is estimated at €9.2 trillion; over one-third of global GDP.
7. **Regulating global corporations.** Create a new legal charter framework for licensing large corporations. Introduce new accounting principles that would expose the transfer payments and other so called creative accounting as proposed by Richard Murphy ([www.taxjustice.net/all/pdf/FinRep\\_Murphy.pdf](http://www.taxjustice.net/all/pdf/FinRep_Murphy.pdf))
8. **Creating a new legal framework for the duties of company directors** The current perception is that the primary duty of directors is to shareholders — to maximise profit and share value — rather than all stakeholders such as the environment, society as a whole, local community, consumers and employees. Public interest needs to be elevated to be something of fundamental importance. Strengthen the powers of non executive board members to monitor the ethical performance of directors and call them to account

**A new consciousness is emerging** Transformation comes about from increased awareness and a change in consciousness. A new consciousness is emerging.

***"Problems cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created them."* Albert Einstein**

Not only is the importance of global citizenship and greater respect for different cultures gaining ground. In the West, we are beginning to learn from ancient traditions, African, Asian, Native American and Hindu. There is new thinking about organisations and how change needs to be led. The essence of this new thinking is: seeing organisations as complex, self-regulating open systems, living systems, apparently disorderly but, like nature, in fact an orderly chaos. We cannot rely on command and control in this world. Chaos, as part of the process of change, is to be embraced rather than feared.

The essence of the new leader's role is helping transformation take place, enabling it, focusing on core values and purpose. A strong sense of core values and purpose contributes to long-term financial success.

Increasingly important, is understanding and working with cultural difference, another civilising influence.

**Fig 2                      Emerging thinking about organisations**

- open, self-organising living systems
- interconnectedness of everything
- not machines but like nature
- chaos is part of transformation, creation

- complex; unpredictable; ambiguous
- recognition that we are not in control

So .....

- ways forward emerge, often out of chaos
- importance of core purpose and values
- synchronicity; non-linear thinking; intuition; spirit; paradox; dialogue; polarity management; left *and* right brain; yin *and* yang; whole system; whole person; global and personal sustainability

Many people desire greater meaning and balance in their lives. If we are to make wise decisions and lead well in this chaotic, complex, transforming world, we need to accept the importance of uniting body, mind, heart and spirit. If we can achieve that balance, we are more likely to make wise decisions and lead sustainable organisations and lives and create a fairer and sustainable world. In this way, we shall attract and keep the best people in our organisations and fully engage their passion and creativity.

**Our transforming world calls for a new mindset.** New thinking about organisations and how they transform demands a different approach to leadership — leaders who see their role as an enabling one.

Business leaders are more than ever, in recent history at least, aware of the need for corporate citizenship, leaders who see themselves as world citizens. Enlightened self-interest enables companies to survive and prosper against the odds. There is considerable evidence too, that a creating a strong sense of core values and purpose leads to greater long-term financial success (Collins J. and Porras J, 1996).

Servant leadership, an old idea, is gaining ground, [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org). Servant leaders get close to the people they serve, involve them in change and transformation and understand the importance of releasing the human spirit. One of the best exponents of servant leadership is Meg Wheatley (Wheatley, M, 2002).

### **Fig 3                      Leading Change Wisely – Servant Leadership**

- Keep on the agenda: world citizenship, corporate responsibility, sustainability, inclusion, diversity and fairness
- Get the whole system, all stakeholders, into the room — who needs to be there?
- Encourage the full diversity of views - and help people find common ground
- Build, and help others build, an inspiring vision of a desirable (and probable) future for the world, your organisation and yourself based on values and purpose
- See change as a cultural issue ie increase people's and the organisation's capability to transform and learn continuously.
- Help people embrace change, uncertainty, complexity and recognise chaos as part of transformation and creativity
- Share control to regain control
- Lead in a way that enables innovation and creativity, encourages personal responsibility and allows people to work from their passion and energy.
- Live what you believe; model the behaviour you want to see
- Sustain yourself; live in the four rooms each day, even if only to visit each one: mind; heart; body and spirit

Instead of imposing strategies without involving the people and wasting their knowledge and creativity, leaders need to co-create with their workforces. This means develop and implementing strategies with all stakeholders; using whole system, not top down, processes for strategic decision making that “get the whole system into the room” (Marvin W, Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, 1995).

They will help all their people become fully aware of the major trends and issues affecting their businesses; encourage people to share information; and communicate with integrity instead of trying to manage and manipulate information.

Leaders need to release the human spirit in their organisations; engage the whole person: mind, heart, spirit and body, liberate all that unused energy, intelligence and creativity, often blocked by cynicism and a history of being disempowered, encourage people to be who they really are and take personal responsibility.

Leaders need to create a culture that is sustainable and help everyone see change and learning as a way of life, richer and more exciting and lead change in a way that increases people’s capability to transform and learn. Because change comes about through conversation, leaders need to encourage relating throughout the organisation. They need to help people discover that they are able to cope with uncertainty, chaos, complexity, feelings of fear and confusion. That is how transformation takes place. It involves, being open, letting go, and openly learning from mistakes.

We are more likely to find sane ways forward with our complex issues, whether in organisations or in our global society, if leaders **get the whole diverse system into the room** and work as whole people — **uniting mind, heart, body and spirit**. There will be more hope for the future.

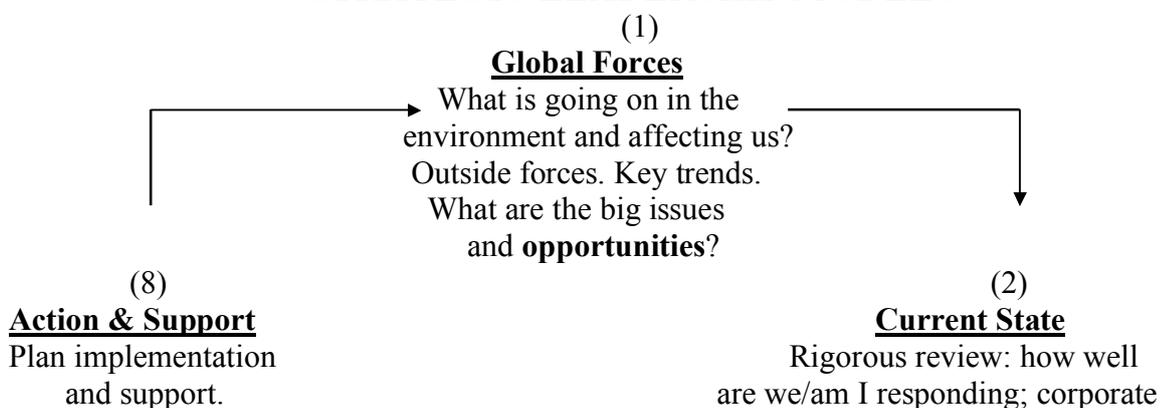
**Using the Strategic Leadership Model**

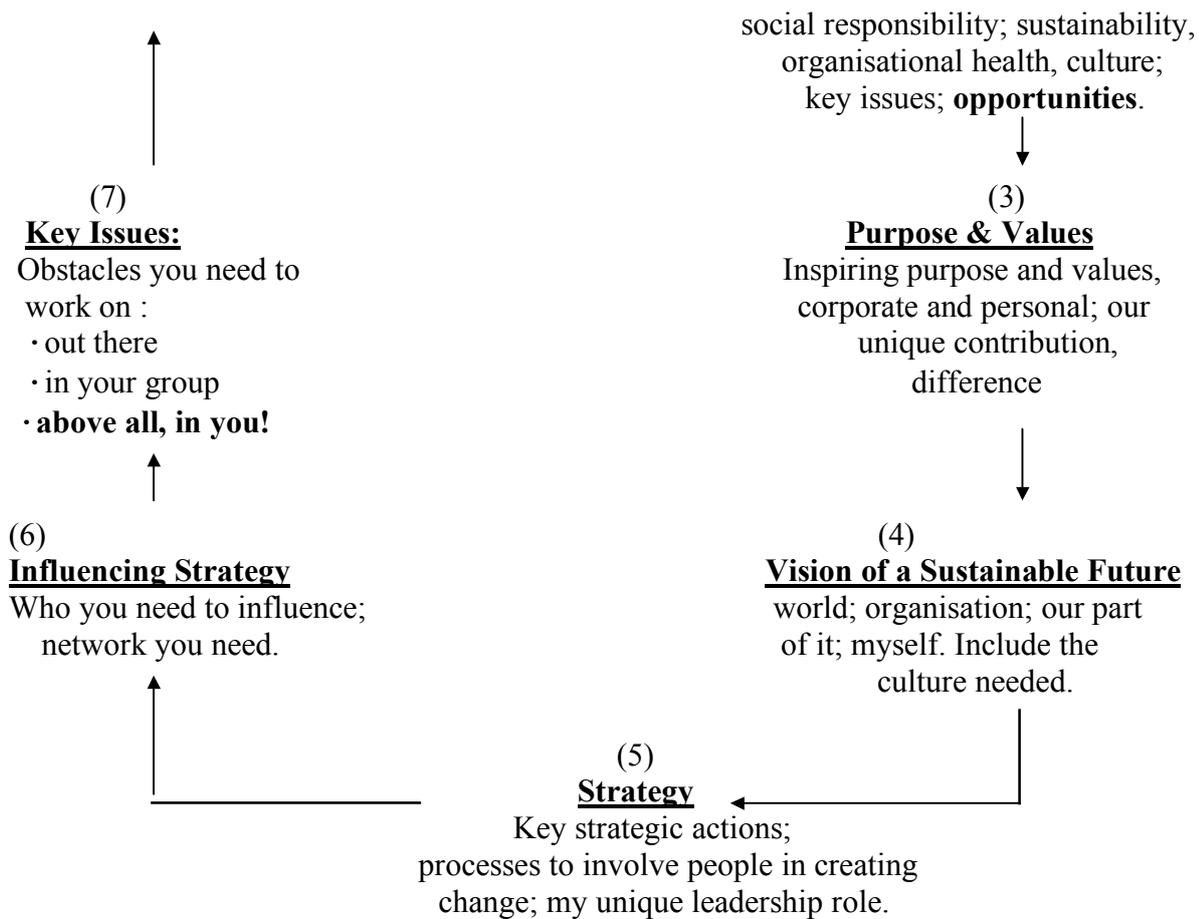
*The right way to do things is not to persuade people you’re right but to challenge them to think it through for themselves. Chomsky*

This is a model I use with directors, managers and others in a wide range of organisations. My assumption is that everyone has a great deal to contribute; they have an amazing capacity to be visionary and change their organisations and the world for the better. Good facilitation can help them get there quicker and with more fun. The Strategic Leadership Model is a powerful aid to this work and can be adapted to a wide range of situations.

People can use this to identify key opportunities and develop new strategies:

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP MODEL©**





A skilled facilitator is needed to take care of the process and provide safety, support and challenge for everyone.

When we create the conditions in which top people and others in an organisation can work together as equals, be themselves, state their truth, look at the whole situation, share their information and opinion without fear, get in touch with what really matters to them, their passion and vision, the results are remarkable.

A venue where people can get in touch with the natural world will help their spirit. This is how we can move forward with the big issues, ensuring the future of our organisations and taking socially responsible action at the same time.

The way human beings learn is messy. We make mistakes all the time. Things transform whatever we do. A lot happens by bumping into each other and relating. We are more like termites than we might like to acknowledge. All of us play a part in this process. It is up to each of us to decide what unique part we want to play, where our energy lies, where our passion will take us and what we will do.

*"Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it."* **Mahatma Gandhi**

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