



Becoming Better Leaders: *Applied Insights into Inner and Outer Transformation*

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Abstract: This paper examines how leaders can become more masterful, capable, and ethically grounded by integrating inner development with systemic transformation. Drawing on behavioural science, developmental psychology, biopsychology, neohumanist philosophy, and real-world leadership stories, it argues that many leadership failures stem less from skill deficits than from unexamined habits, fear-based responses, and organisational structures that reward reactivity over reflection. The paper explores five core capacities—emotional mastery, shadow integration, cognitive flexibility, healthy boundaries, and the ability to work consciously with fear and trust—and demonstrates how these inner shifts directly influence team culture and performance. It then examines how system design, governance models, and organisational narratives can either reinforce ego-protective behaviour or support cooperation, participation, and shared stewardship. Through applied insights and practical examples, the paper shows how everyday choices by leaders can reshape both inner landscapes and outer systems, contributing to more humane, resilient, and future-ready organisations.

AI Assistance Disclosure: Parts of this essay were developed with the assistance of generative AI (ChatGPT). I used AI to help develop and refine structure, clarify ideas, summarise, check for coherence, and strengthen paraphrasing. All interpretations, arguments, and editorial decisions are my own.

1 - Introduction

Across the planet, people sense a need to shift how we lead and organise. Multiple global crises have ineffective leadership as contributory factors. It's not that we lack intelligence or resources. Rather, we are trying to navigate 21st-century complexity with mindsets and systems shaped by an earlier phase of human development. One built on competition, group loyalty, and a narrower sense of responsibility than today's demands require.

Futurist Sohail Inayatullah poses a powerful societal question:

“Can we make the transition from teenagerhood, with its clans and aggression, to adulthood: a Gaian system?”

The metaphor resonates because many people feel that our collective habits still echo that adolescent phase: reactive, tribal, status-driven.



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These behaviours once helped groups survive. They rewarded loyalty, identity, and protection. But as challenges become more interdependent and global, these earlier patterns no longer serve us well. We see these dynamics not only in geopolitics but also inside our workplaces and institutions.

Even committed leaders can find themselves pulled toward ego-centred decision-making: defending positions, protecting “their” team, proving their worth, or reacting from fear rather than trust and clarity. Not because they are selfish, but because the systems around them subtly reward these behaviours. They favour speed over reflection, certainty over curiosity, control over collaboration. As Sinclair (2007) notes, contemporary leadership cultures often exhaust or distort the people within them. And even if the world’s most destructive leaders disappeared tomorrow, the systems beneath them would still produce more like them.

In my work, I see how these collective patterns shape personal behaviour. A leader who sleeps only a few hours a night unintentionally normalises exhaustion. A founder holding tightly to their project unintentionally suppresses others’ growth. Leaders with generous intentions may set boundaries too softly and, without meaning to, enable toxic behaviour.

These are not flaws of character but signs of people doing their best within patterns, internal and external, shaped by earlier conditions. Today, those conditions have changed. As a result, leadership requires a **dual transformation**:

Can we make the transition from teenagerhood, with its clans and aggression, to adulthood: a Gaian system? ”

- **Inner transformation**: maturing beyond ego, developing emotional balance, integrating one’s dark side (shadow), cultivating healthy boundaries, and thinking in more systemic and flexible ways.

- **Outer transformation**: reshaping systems so they reward participation, cooperation, shared purpose, and planetary responsibility. What Inayatullah calls a “Gaian polity.”

P.R. Sarkar’s (1967) concept of the sadvipra speaks directly to this dual challenge. The sadvipra represents a leader who embodies emotional mastery, ethical clarity and the courage to reshape systems that no longer serve the collective good. Crucially, this leadership is not heroic or individualistic; it emerges from wholeness and is expressed through service.

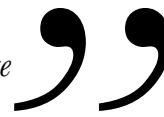
We are seeing early expressions of this shift. Cooperative governance models, community-owned energy projects, and decentralised networks that distribute power more fairly suggest that a more expansive sense of “we” is emerging.

This paper explores how we cultivate this kind of leadership in practical, grounded ways. Drawing on real stories, behavioural and cognitive theory, biopsychology, and neohumanist philosophy, it lays out a path for moving beyond old patterns - within ourselves and within our systems - so that we can respond to this moment with wisdom, capacity, and a deeper sense of shared humanity.

2 - Why Leaders Really Fail: Ego, Ego-Systems, And The Inner Landscape

When leaders fail, the surface explanations are familiar: poor strategy, weak communication, lack of skill, bad culture fit. Beneath these lies something more universal: leaders often lack support to examine the beliefs and habits that keep them stuck (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

*Emotional mastery begins by noticing
internal cues. The tight jaw, fast speech, urge
to interrupt - before they spill outward.*



Building on Goleman's (1998) work on emotional intelligence, we can understand leaders as arriving in their roles with long-established habits, coping mechanisms, and assumptions that were shaped well before they carried formal responsibility for others. These patterns once kept them safe but can become obstacles when leading diverse teams in fast-changing environments.

Tools like The Leadership Circle (Anderson & Adams, 2016), Safe2Great (Bowman, 2023), and the Human Synergistics circumplex (Cooke & Lafferty, 1987) give language to these patterns. They show how leaders oscillate between task and relational modes and how fear-based behaviours — control, perfectionism, appeasement, compliance — often overshadow trust-based ones. These instruments reveal not just behaviours but the beliefs behind them:

- A controlling leader may truly believe things will fall apart without constant oversight.
- A conflict-avoidant leader may fear losing relationships if they voice difficult truths.
- A critical leader may rely on judgement to shield themselves from vulnerability.

These are not marks of malice; they are expressions of biopsychology — the interplay between body, mind, and environment — well described by Siegel's (2010) work on interpersonal neurobiology. Under pressure, humans default to fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Whilst useful for survival, these responses are poor leadership strategies in environments where clarity, trust, and collaboration are essential.

The surrounding system amplifies these tendencies. Building on Edmondson's (2019) work, many organisations reward visible effort over reflective practice, certainty over curiosity, and individual performance over collective intelligence. Fear-based behaviours often appear decisive and urgent, so those leaders rise quickly. More thoughtful approaches can seem slow within cultures that equate speed with strength. Bowman (2023) shows that pressure to act quickly in unsafe environments leads to reactivity disguised as productivity.

This creates what Scharmer & Kaufer (2013) call an ego-system: a culture shaped by self-protection, identity defence, and competition. Even leaders who value empathy and cooperation may find those qualities risky when the system rewards the opposite.

In practice:

- **Controlling leaders** over-function in cultures that admire heroic effort.
- **Protecting leaders** rely on criticism or distance in cultures that prize intellectual superiority.
- **Complying leaders** avoid conflict in cultures that reward harmony over honesty.

The individual's narrative and the system's expectations reinforce each other, producing predictable fear-based dynamics (Bowman, 2023).

When leaders shift from self-protection to growth, the effects are immediate. Understanding different behavioural “languages” reduces misinterpretation (Erikson, 2019). Emotional regulation clarifies communication (Goleman, 1998). Shadow integration reduces reactivity and increases integrity (Jung, 1959). Trust creates psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019). Safety enables learning and performance.

These shifts point to a deeper truth: enlightened leadership begins with the development of the inner leader.

3 - Developing The Inner Leader: The Skills And States That Shape Leadership

If inherited patterns shape the limits of leadership, the inner journey becomes essential. Leadership is not simply a set of competencies, it is a reflection of one's inner architecture; the emotional, psychological, and cognitive foundations that determine how a person responds under pressure, engages with others, and interprets complexity. When leaders learn to develop these deeper layers, they move from reactive habits to more grounded, creative, and service-oriented leadership (Anderson & Adams, 2016).



"In an increasingly complex world, leaders discover that willpower and experience are not enough; they also need the ability to think in more flexible, spacious ways."

The inner leader develops through interconnected capacities such as:

- emotional mastery,
- shadow integration,
- cognitive flexibility,
- conscious work with fear and trust, and
- developing healthy boundaries.

These show up in everyday conversations, decisions, conflicts, and stresses. They determine whether a leader contributes in a masterful way or unconsciously reproduces old patterns.

3.1 Emotional Mastery and Regulation: Staying Steady in a World Designed to Unsettle Us

Under pressure, leaders often revert to familiar safety strategies: overworking, taking control, avoiding conflict, smoothing things over, or pushing for premature closure. These are biopsychological reflexes; fight, flight, freeze or faint responses (Siegel, 2010). They help us cope but rarely help us lead.

Many leaders struggle not because they lack intelligence, but because they have never been taught how to regulate their nervous system, work with stress, or understand the emotional dynamics of the team they lead (Goleman, 1998; Siegel, 2010).

Unregulated emotional patterns in leadership often show up in everyday moments. A manager becomes defensive when a colleague offers feedback

in a team meeting, shutting down the conversation. A leader interprets a different point of view in a strategy session as a personal attack, digging in their heels on their original position. During periods of uncertainty, some leaders tighten their grip on every decision, burning themselves out by reviewing minor details late into the night. Others withdraw when conflict arises, skipping difficult one-to-one conversations and hoping issues will resolve themselves. In the short term, this can keep the peace; over time, it erodes trust and clarity.

These behaviours ripple outward. When a leader is anxious, the team becomes cautious. When a leader is trying to appease, conflict is suppressed. When a leader is volatile, collaboration collapses.

Emotional mastery begins by noticing internal cues. The tight jaw, fast speech, urge to interrupt - before they spill outward. Practices include:

- pausing before replying to a difficult message
- asking one clarifying question instead of reacting defensively
- saying "I need a moment to think"
- entering tense meetings with steadiness
- responding to disagreement with curiosity

This is the quiet work that underpins all other leadership skills. Without emotional steadiness, even the best strategies collapse into reactivity. With it, leaders become a calming force in the system, creating enough safety for others to think clearly,

take risks, and be honest. This reflects one dimension of the *sadvipra*: someone who can remain centred, compassionate, and principled even when circumstances are turbulent; not detached, but not swept away.

3.2 Shadow Integration: Turning Blind Spots into Strengths

Every leader carries a shadow. The aspects of themselves they deny, repress, or judge. These shadows often include the parts of ourselves we have been taught are unacceptable: anger, ambition, vulnerability, inadequacy, need for recognition. When unexamined, the shadow leaks out in distorted and defensive ways (Jung, 1959): micromanagement, cynicism, superiority, people-pleasing, perfectionism, or passive aggression.

Shadow work is not about pathology. It is about honesty. It asks leaders to confront the very human fears and insecurities that drive their behaviour: fear of failure, of being exposed, of losing relevance, of not belonging.

When leaders avoid their shadow, they:

- overreact to behaviour in others that mirrors their own fears
- justify harmful actions as “necessary”
- become attached to identity rather than purpose
- blame others for problems rooted in their own unexamined patterns

When they integrate it, they:

- become less reactive
- can hear feedback without collapsing or attacking
- show humility, which builds trust
- can access a broader range of emotional and behavioural responses

Sometimes this is as simple as a leader admitting they don’t know all the answers and discovering the team respects them more, not less. Or recognising their tendency to over-function because they fear being unneeded; once acknowledged with self-acceptance and self-compassion, the pattern softens.

Neohumanism echoes this by recognising the full spectrum of human expression. Not dividing the self into “good” and “bad,” but cultivating wholeness in service of the collective.

3.3 Cognitive Flexibility: Expanding the Mind’s Capacity for Complexity

As the world becomes more complex, leaders discover that willpower and experience are not enough. They also need the ability to think in more flexible, spacious ways. Developmental theorists such as Kegan (1994), Torbert and Rooke (2005), and Cook-Greuter (2000) have shown that adults can continue to develop deeper levels of meaning-making throughout life. This growth allows leaders to hold ambiguity, interpret patterns, and make decisions that consider wider circles of impact.

Theo Dawson’s work at Lectica makes this practical (Dawson, 2020–2021). Rather than treating cognitive development as abstract,

she identifies specific thinking skills that help people operate well in Volatile Uncertain Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environments: recognising assumptions, integrating multiple viewpoints, reasoning from principles, unpacking decision making, and constructing meaning in different contexts. These are learnable capacities that grow with deliberate practice.

In everyday leadership, cognitive flexibility shows up in small moments:

- In a project review, a leader recognises that two apparently opposing views may both hold part of the truth, and asks, “What else could be true here?”
- In a tense budget discussion, they slow the pace just enough to notice that the disagreement isn’t about money at all, but about status and recognition.
- In a community consultation, they consciously widen their frame to include voices they would not normally seek out, resisting the rush to a quick, tidy answer.

These moments may seem minor, but together they build a habit of thinking that can hold more than one perspective at a time.



SPOT THE LEADER

If all beings possess intrinsic value and our actions should reflect universal welfare, then we must shift from domination to partnership, from extraction to regeneration, from “power over” to “power with” through peer-based processes

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This ability to shift frames - from individual to systemic, from immediate to long-term, from problem to pattern, from narrow to wide - is at the heart of cognitive flexibility. Dawson’s work reinforces that leaders can strengthen these capacities by working with real dilemmas, making their reasoning explicit, and testing assumptions.

Cognitive flexibility creates the space to avoid reacting from fear. This aligns with the *sadvipra*’s ability to rise beyond group interests and consider long-term welfare for all.

3.4 Working With Fear and Trust: The Biopsychology of Cooperation

At the heart of many leadership challenges is a simple question:

Are we operating from fear or trust?

Human beings are wired for both. Fear sharpens our senses and keeps us alive. Trust allows us to collaborate, innovate, and build things bigger than ourselves. Fear narrows attention; trust broadens it (Fredrickson, 2001). Michael Towsey (2010) argues that cooperation is not just a moral ideal but a biopsychological state supported by safety and connection. Cooperative behaviour emerges when people feel safe, expansive, and connected, whereas fear-based environments trigger contraction, defensiveness, and domination. Systems that reward urgency and competition trigger fear; trust requires deliberate cultivation.

Systems that reward urgency, competition, and control tend to pull people into fear-based reactions, even when they value collaboration. Bowman’s Safe2Great model (2023) makes this visible by mapping how fear-based behaviours (controlling, skeptical, complying) create cultures that feel unsafe, even when no one intends them to.

Trust-based cultures don’t emerge simply because we prefer them. They require deliberate leadership. A leader who consistently reacts from fear makes fear contagious. A leader who responds from trust, with clear communication, boundaries, and transparency, makes trust contagious instead.

The shift often happens in small choices:

- sharing information rather than hoarding it
- asking for input instead of pretending to have all the answers
- naming a difficult truth with care, rather than avoiding it
- giving someone room to grow instead of stepping in to rescue
- letting go of control when control is not needed

In George Lakoff’s research on moral worldviews (Lakoff, 2002) he contrasts the “strict father” model — rooted in hierarchy, discipline, and obedience — with the “nurturant parent” model, which emphasises empathy, mutual care, and shared responsibility. Fear tends to pull people toward the strict-father mindset; trust supports the nurturant-parent orientation. In leadership, it is the nurturant (and bounded) model that consistently supports psychological safety, creativity, and cooperation.

We see this shift toward cooperation in governance experiments such as community energy projects, cooperatives, and decentralised networks, where leadership is distributed and participation is valued. These models rely on trust, shared purpose, and transparent decision-making. They show that when systems are designed for cooperation, people rise to meet them.

This is the outer expression of *sadvipra* leadership: structures that reduce fear, strengthen trust, and make it easier for people to act with integrity and courage.

3.5 Healthy Boundaries: Compassion With Backbone

If emotional mastery is about staying steady, and shadow work is about seeing ourselves clearly, then boundaries are where those inner capacities become visible to others. Boundaries are not walls, punishments, or rigid rules. They are clarity, about

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what is okay for us, what is not, and what a situation requires from us.

These patterns are deeply human. Our nervous system's instinct to maintain belonging (Siegel, 2010) often pulls us toward appeasing and absorbing responsibilities that were never ours to carry (Stone, Patton & Heen, 1999).

Brené Brown's research adds a crucial insight: the most compassionate people are also the most boundaried (Brown, 2012; 2015). Without boundaries, empathy collapses into resentment or exhaustion. With boundaries, empathy becomes sustainable because it is grounded in clarity rather than self-sacrifice. For leaders, this reframes boundaries not as barriers to connection, but as the structures that make genuine connection possible.

When boundaries are missing, leaders often experience:

- chronic overwork
- resentment toward the team
- blurred roles and unclear expectations
- difficulty making decisions

Teams feel it as inconsistent expectations, unclear authority, and subtle emotional volatility.

Healthy boundaries, in contrast, create stability. They prevent leaders from collapsing into over-responsibility or withdrawing into avoidance. They make collaboration possible because people know where they stand and what is expected.

In practice, boundaries often sound like:

- “I can support this, but I can't own it.”
- “This decision belongs with you.”
- “Here's what I need to deliver this well.”
- “I'm not available right now; let's schedule it properly.”
- “I care about you, and I need to speak honestly about the impact of this behaviour.”

For leaders developing sadvipra qualities, boundaries are essential. Without them, generosity becomes enabling, empathy becomes exhaustion, and purpose becomes martyrdom. With them, leaders act from integrity rather than fear, and systems become more resilient and less dependent on individual heroics. Organisationally, clear decision-making structures, transparent roles, and shared expectations are systemic forms of boundaries.

System design is never neutral. The structures we create embody our assumptions about value, responsibility, and the purpose of collective life.



3.6 Bringing It All Together: The Practical Arc of Inner Transformation

When leaders practise emotional mastery, shadow integration, boundaries, cognitive flexibility, and conscious work with fear and trust together, the impact is immediate. They:

- speak more clearly
- listen with curiosity
- make fewer assumptions
- avoid unnecessary conflict
- delegate more effectively
- stay calm longer
- build trust faster

This is where the inner work connects directly to neohumanism and to the *sadvipra*: leadership becomes less about ego and performance, and more about service, clarity, and collective uplift.

Above all, these capacities are trainable — not once a year at a retreat, but daily, in conversations, meetings, and moments of stress. Inner transformation becomes real when leaders ask, in ordinary situations:

“What is being asked of me here — fear or mastery?”

Yet personal change alone is insufficient. Systems must evolve too. Sustainable leadership requires transforming both the inner landscape of the leader and the outer landscape of the institution. Only then can leaders move beyond inherited patterns and meet today’s complexity with steadiness and care.

4 - Transforming The Outer System: Cooperation, Governance, And New Models Of Leadership

Inner work is essential, but leaders do not operate in a vacuum. Even the most emotionally mature, self-aware, cognitively flexible person will struggle if the systems around them are built on fear, extraction, and control. To move from “teenagerhood” to a Gaian adulthood (Inayatullah, 2021), we need not only different leaders, but different ways of

organising power, resources, and decision-making.

For much of recent history, leadership has been imagined as something that flows from the top down: a strong figure at the centre, surrounded by layers of hierarchy. This model made sense in stable, predictable environments. But in a complex, interdependent world, it becomes a liability. It centralises risk, slows adaptation, and often disconnects decision-making from those most affected by it. It also feeds ego-centric patterns: the heroic lone leader, the need to appear in control, the reluctance to admit uncertainty (Sinclair, 2007).

Neohumanism invites us to question these assumptions. If all beings possess intrinsic value and our actions should reflect universal welfare (Sarkar, 1982), then we must design systems that embody those values. That means shifting from domination to partnership, from extraction to regeneration, from “power over” to “power with” through peer-based processes (Laloux, 2014).

4.1 From Control to Cooperation

One of the most significant shifts in contemporary governance is the move from control-oriented structures to more cooperative, participatory forms of organisation. This shift is visible in:

- Cooperatives, where ownership and governance are distributed (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015)
- Community energy projects, where citizens and corporations co-invest and co-design (Hicks & Ison, 2018)
- Decentralised networks and Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs), which use transparent protocols to distribute authority (Hassan & De Filippi, 2021)

These models share a common principle: people closest to an issue should have power in shaping it. They are practical experiments in trust-based, participatory governance.

In community energy initiatives across Europe, for example, residents are engaged from the outset. They co-design the project to protect what’s

important to the community, review trade-offs, vote on decisions, and share in the economic benefits. This shifts the tone from managing community resistance to shared stewardship (Hicks & Ison, 2018). Cooperation becomes a design principle, not an add-on.

4.2 Sharing Power Without Abdicating Responsibility

Leaders often fear that distributing power will create chaos. In practice, mature cooperative systems are usually more structured, not less. They rely on clarity around roles, decision-making processes, conflict resolution, information flow, and shared purpose.

DAO experiments such as Hypha's regenerative governance platform encode these principles structurally — through transparent decision rules, contribution accounting, and modular voting mechanisms (Bennett, 2025). These mechanisms don't eliminate leadership; they distribute it.

This mirrors PROUT and neohumanist approaches to decentralisation: power as stewardship, not ownership (Sarkar, 1961–1990; 1982).

4.3 System Design as a Moral Act

System design is never neutral. The structures we create embody our assumptions about value, responsibility, and the purpose of collective life. A system prioritising quarterly returns will reliably undermine long-term wellbeing. Edmonson (2019) shows that a system that rewards fear-driven performance will consistently produce reactive, exhausted leaders.

In neohumanism, collective arrangements carry ethical consequences (Sarkar, 1982), which positions system design as a moral responsibility. It forces us to ask:

- Who benefits?
- Who is excluded?
- What behaviours are we rewarding?
- What “success” are we optimising for?

Sadvipra leadership becomes systemic here: not simply adapting to flawed structures, but having the insight and courage to redesign them.

4.4 Practical Levers for Systemic Change

System transformation unfolds through concrete actions within a leader's sphere of influence — but these actions must reach beyond structures. As Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) shows,

systems endure because their deeper narratives endure (Inayatullah, 2004). The stories we tell about ourselves determine our direction. Effective change therefore works on multiple layers at once:

- Litany / Behaviour - what is immediately visible. This layer captures observable actions, patterns, and symptoms. The practices people see day-to-day. Such as reimagining meetings through rotating facilitation, structured rounds, or check-ins changes who participates and how thus modelling more inclusive participation.
- System / Structure - Formal processes, roles, and rules. At this layer we shift the machinery of the organisation: how decisions are made, information flows, and power is distributed.
 - **Redesigning decision-making processes** — through multi-stakeholder engagement, participatory budgeting, or involving communities early in project design — distributes power outward and anchors cooperation in the formal system.
 - **Increasing transparency** by sharing financials, trade-off reasoning, and decision criteria also strengthens structural trust, ensuring that people have access to the information needed to act responsibly.
 - **Embedding cooperative structures** such as co-ownership models, contribution accounting, or shared leadership roles, institutionalises collaboration instead of leaving it to personality or goodwill.
- Worldview - What we value; the organising logic of the system. This layer concerns the beliefs that guide what a system considers “good,” “normal,” or “successful.”
 - Aligning incentives with values reshapes what the organisation honours: rewarding stewardship, collaboration, and long-term thinking instead of individual heroics.
- Mythic/Identity Layer - Deep stories, metaphors, and worldviews. At the deepest level, change becomes durable when collective stories shift.
 - Participatory decision-making supports the reframing of leadership from “the leader decides” to “we decide.”
 - Transparent information flow reinforces the shift from “leaders protect people from reality” to “leaders trust us with reality.”
 - Cooperative structures challenge the heroic-leader archetype and enable a story of shared stewardship, relational capacity, and interdependence. From “me” to “we”.

Inner transformation alone is not enough; systems must also evolve toward cooperation, transparency, decentralisation, and shared stewardship.

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Structural changes often fail when the underlying story remains intact. CLA reminds us that transformation accelerates when we consciously rewrite the metaphors driving behaviour — for example, from “fighting fires” to “tending an ecosystem,” from “command” to “care,” from “my team” to “our shared purpose.” When leaders align structures with these deeper narratives, systems move from ego-logic to cooperative logic.

4.5 The Biopsychology of Systems

Fear-based systems activate chronic vigilance. People protect their turf, hoard information, or comply without engaging creatively. Trust-based systems, in contrast, broaden attention and enable collaboration (Fredrickson, 2001).

Systems and individuals mirror each other. A fearful leader creates a fearful team. A fearful system creates fearful leaders. The maturity of one reinforces the maturity of the other. This reciprocity is central to sadvipra leadership: changing inner and outer conditions together so that human potential - not fear - becomes the organising principle.

4.6 Seeds of a Gaian Leadership Culture

We can already see early expressions of this shift that allow for collective planning yet fast execution:

- community-owned energy
- participatory budgeting
- regenerative finance models
- platform cooperatives
- decentralised leadership roles
- shared governance experiments in social enterprises

These initiatives are imperfect but promising. They widen the circle of concern and treat leadership as an emergent property of healthy relationships, not individual heroism.

Inayatullah (2021) describes these developments as steps toward a Gaian polity: a form of governance grounded in planetary wellbeing, shared purpose, and long-term stewardship. Sarkar’s (1967, 1982)

vision of the sadvipra aligns with this direction, though in a different vocabulary: a leadership rooted in universalism, balance (prama), ethical clarity, and the commitment to ensure that no group dominates another. Together, they point to a leadership culture that centres prosperity, people, planet, and purpose (Leonhard, n.d.).

5 - Stories Of Transformation: Leaders Becoming Sadvipras In Practice

Theory gives us language, but stories show what change actually looks like. The following short vignettes are adaptations of numerous real leaders into single archetypes. They show how ordinary people - doing their best in complex environments - begin to embody the qualities of sadvipra leadership: steadiness, clarity, courage, and cooperation. None of these shifts were dramatic. Each unfolded through small moments of insight and choice. And each demonstrates how inner transformation can ripple outward into healthier systems.

5.1 The Exhausted Leader Who Was Exhausting Everyone Else

One leader I worked with prided themselves on stamina: late nights, early emails, constant availability, and an unwavering determination to “push through.” They genuinely believed they were modelling commitment; that real leadership meant being the one who could carry the heaviest load.

But their team was silently burning out.

When we explored it together, it became clear the issue wasn’t standards or even workload. It was the heroic leader myth. The belief that being indispensable, self-sacrificing, and endlessly strong was the only valid way to lead. This wasn’t arrogance; it was a story they had inherited and never questioned.

At one point I asked, “If you keep going like this and end up with a heart attack in fifteen years, what good will all this sacrifice have done for anyone?”

That landed. For the first time, they saw that their overwork wasn't noble. It was unsustainable, and it was setting a pattern the team felt compelled to follow.

It required that they step back, take a proper break, and delegate meaningfully, resulting in a team that was calmer, more confident, and more willing to take initiative. Instead of waiting for direction, people were stepping into leadership themselves.

The shift didn't come from wellness programs or better time management. It came from recognising that one person's beliefs about what leadership "should" look like can shape an entire culture.

Once the leader let go of the hero myth and embraced a more grounded form of leadership, urgency gave way to clarity and the team followed suit.

5.2 The Founder Who Had to Let Their "Baby" Grow Up

A founder came to me exhausted and frustrated. Their organisation had doubled in size, but every decision still landed on their desk. "I can't let anything go," they said. "This project is my baby."

When we reframed the metaphor, "What if your baby has become a teenager?" Something clicked. Teenagers don't need constant supervision; they need boundaries, trust, and room to experiment.

Within weeks, the founder began delegating decisions that didn't require their direct involvement. They created a clearer structure, empowered emerging leaders, and stepped back just enough for others to step forward.

Their identity shifted from "protector" to "steward." And as they grew, the organisation grew with them: faster, healthier, and with far less friction.

5.3 The Leader Who Became "Multilingual"

Another leader described ongoing tension with colleagues and family members. "I don't understand why people can't just say what they mean," they said. To them, everyone else seemed irrational or slow.

After using a behavioural framework to map communication preferences (such as DISC), the leader experienced what they later described as "learning a new language." Suddenly their colleague's directness made sense. Their partner's need for detail wasn't resistance, it was reassurance. Their team member's quietness wasn't disengagement, it was reflection.

Communication didn't magically become easy, but it became understandable. And with understanding came empathy. And with empathy came trust.

The leader didn't just learn a tool; they learned to interpret difference as information rather than threat. That single shift reduced conflict dramatically and strengthened every relationship around them.

5.4 The Leader of Leaders Who Needed to Zoom Out

A senior leader overseeing multiple projects felt constantly overwhelmed. They were trying to lead the portfolio with the same intensity they once brought to running a single project. Their calendar was overflowing, and so were their expectations of themselves.

In conversation, it became clear that they were stuck in an earlier identity: the hands-on problem-solver. What was needed now was a portfolio mindset. Someone who sets direction, supports capability, and creates the culture for others to lead. Once they recognised this, their role changed almost immediately. They began learning how to delegate operational decisions, convene cross-project learning forums, and shift from "How do I fix this?" to "Who needs to be part of this conversation?"

The result became a system that could finally breathe and a leader who no longer felt like they were drowning.

5.5 The Leader Whose Compassion Became a Liability

Not all leadership struggles come from excess control; some come from excess generosity. One leader was deeply committed to seeing the good in everyone. But this softness made it easy for a charismatic, boundary-testing colleague to undermine the team.

The leader avoided addressing the issue because they didn't want to be harsh or unfair. But the cost of that avoidance was high: morale fell, trust evaporated, and good people began to withdraw.

When the leader finally acknowledged that compassion without boundaries is not compassion, things shifted. They had a difficult conversation with the colleague - firm, calm, and clear - and established new expectations. The team felt the difference immediately.

This wasn't a story about "removing a problem person." It was about the leader reclaiming discernment, a core *sadvipra* quality, and recognising that care sometimes requires courageous action.

What These Stories Reveal

None of these leaders transformed overnight. None became perfect. But each made one essential move: they stepped toward mastery, clarity, and service, and the systems around them shifted in response.

These micro-transformations illustrate a broader truth: the qualities of *sadvipra* leadership grow in the small, ordinary moments where fear can shrink us or mastery can expand us.

They show that enlightened leadership is not abstract philosophy.

- It is behavioural.
- It is embodied.
- It is relational.

And it is entirely within reach.

6. CONCLUSION

Across the world, people sense that our old models of leadership are no longer serving us in the moment. Systems built for a more predictable, competitive, and fragmented era cannot carry us through a time defined by interdependence, complexity, and accelerating change. Yet the seeds of a new leadership culture are already visible: growing through ordinary people, in ordinary situations, choosing more mature, conscious ways of leading.

The stories in this paper suggest that transformation does not begin with grand strategies. It begins with small, human moments where leaders notice their habits, question their assumptions, and choose responses rooted in mastery rather than fear: a leader releasing the "hero myth" so their team can breathe; a founder recognising their organisation has outgrown their hands-on identity; a manager learning to interpret difference as information rather than threat; a compassionate leader discovering that boundaries are an expression of care. When a leader becomes steadier, others relax. When a leader sets boundaries, people feel safer. When a leader delegates meaningfully, leadership becomes shared. Over time, these micro-transformations change what is normal, what is rewarded, and what is possible.

This is the essence of *sadvipra* leadership: mastery expressed in practice, not posture; service expressed through responsibility rather than

sacrifice; clarity expressed through both compassion and courage. It is spacious enough for complexity and grounded enough to act with integrity. Inner transformation alone is not enough; systems must also evolve toward cooperation, transparency, decentralisation, and shared stewardship. As governance experiments around the world show, when structures are designed for trust, participation, and collective wellbeing, people rise to meet them.

We are living in a transitional era. Not fully beyond our adolescent phase, but moving toward a more mature, Gaian adulthood. The *sadvipra* offers a vision of leadership that can guide this transition: rooted in universality, committed to fairness, and capable of transforming both self and system. The path forward is built through everyday choices that widen the circle of concern, strengthen cooperation, and align leadership with the wellbeing of all.

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