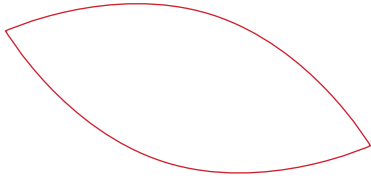


HUMANITY • FUTURE POSSIBILITIES • ENGAGEMENT  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE • INNOVATION • WHOLENESS

*Petra Kuenkel, Jade Buddenberg, Andrew Aitken, Helena Wagener*



# ***EMPOWERING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS***

*HOW WE CAN TAP INTO THE POTENTIAL  
OF A PASSIONATE GENERATION*



**COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP** STUDIES - VOLUME 3



## **IMPRINT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volume 3 of our *Collective Leadership Series* is dedicated to the leadership perspective and potential of young professionals. Often described as Generation Y or Millennials, they not only are the leaders of tomorrow, but also hold the key for sustainable development today. They are passionate about change, offer ideas for innovation, and have the skills needed for collective action. However, if we want to tap into their potential, the way we think about leadership will fundamentally need to change. *How can we empower young professionals to navigate sustainability challenges such as complexity, interdependence, and uncertainty?*

The **Young Leaders for Sustainability programme (YLS)**, a project of the **Collective Leadership Institute**, has empowered 80 young professionals since YLS launched 5 years ago. These young leaders all brought their own diverse backgrounds, as well as specific sustainability projects and missions, into the programme. Findings from interviews with the YLS Alumni illustrate that young professionals, grappling with multidimensional challenges, are best supported when we foster their collaborative inventiveness; encourage them to implement change at all levels of global society; and equip them with the tools and methodologies needed to best navigate complexity.

Sadly, a willingness to invest in young professionals as sustainability change agents is rarely on organisational agendas. Therefore in this volume of our *Collective Leadership Series* we take the untapped potential of young professionals as our starting point. Furthermore, this volume unearths the reasons why young professionals hold a great potential for change at both an organisational and global level and why they are already ushering in a future approach to leadership, especially when given the space to contribute more holistically.

**Section 1** digs into the complex contexts in which young professionals lead and asks the question:

*What would change if we tapped deeper into the potential of young professionals as change agents?*

**Section 2** looks at a contradiction between the growing global sustainability crisis and the lack of sustainable organisational responses, especially with regards to utilising young professionals.

**Section 3** describes the Collective Leadership Institute's contribution towards empowering young professionals through the **Young Leaders for Sustainability programme (YLS)**. We discuss how the programme is designed around the Collective Leadership approach and how this empowers young professionals as well as equips them with the necessary skills to navigate complex changes.

**Section 4** looks at the results of our study into the Young Leaders for Sustainability programme. It lays out the six most common challenges of Young Leaders as well as the skills they identified as crucial to overcome these challenges.

In our conclusion we propose that the **HOW** of leadership needs to be reconnected to the **WHAT FOR** and the **WHERE TO**. When we strengthen the much-needed link between leadership development and sustainability, we tap into the potential of a passionate generation and equip them to change the story of the future.



# 1. THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

The world is changing. National sovereignty is fading; digitalisation and urbanisation are radically changing our lives; and mounting environmental degradation is challenging our assumptions about economic growth patterns. Furthermore, the increasing social divide puts pressure not only on governments but also on the corporate world. As a result, organisations are becoming aware of the need to adapt to the fast changing context of globalised markets. Many pioneers, such as Unilever<sup>1</sup> and the Government of Bhutan,<sup>2</sup> are already in the midst of great transformation. Organisations choose different paths in how to bring about change – many hire consultants, restructure their employee-base, or conduct extensive value-chain analysis in order to move towards more sustainable ways of operating. The road to sustainability in an ever-changing world becomes increasingly complex.

Moreover, many organisations are still in the process of redeveloping their leadership approaches as part of their strategy to adapt to the rapidly changing context of globalised markets, where national sovereignty is fading, digitalisation and urbanisation are fundamentally altering lifestyles, environmental and social pressures are mounting and complexity is increasing. Yet, although, many businesses are committed to developing the leadership needed to guide them into the future, but many overlook the possibilities young professionals could offer with regards to a global shift in consciousness, in culture and in organisational systems.

The following example from a large consulting firm well illustrates this point:

*The strategist and top management of a global consulting company recognised the need for more diversity, cultural change and sustainability practices within their firm. As a result, they employed a young professional to act as a CSR manager. Yet, although she was expected*

*to bring about some of the changes, she did not get the top-level attention and support she needed in order to shift seasoned managers and partners out of their established comfort zone. Not surprisingly, after many exhausting attempts to initiate change, and inspire a cultural shift, which included a responsibility for the planet, the young manager gave up and quit her job.*

Stories like this may appear to be isolated examples, yet they are exemplary of a generation who, rather than complying with the status quo and climbing the loyalty ladder, is passionate about shifting cultures, mind-sets, purposes, business models, and global responsibilities.

- What if the consulting firm recognised that utilising this young professional's powerful ambition was the missing link with regards to creating their desired cultural transformation?
- What if they identified more like her in their ranks and brought them together in a peer network, which offered mutual support?
- What if top-level management not only listened to suggestions from these young professionals on how to do things differently but also offered them leadership capacity building, in *their preferred* approach?
- What if these change agents were equipped with tools, which enabled them to not only, bring about change in collaboration but also to engage even the most settled and seasoned managers?
- What far-reaching effects could young professionals have if they are strengthened in their self-esteem and self-efficacy?

Sadly, the willingness to invest in young professionals as sustainability change agents is rarely on organisational agendas. Therefore, this volume of our *Collective Leadership Series* takes the untapped potential of young professionals as the starting point.

<sup>1</sup> Hensmans et al., 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Krantz, 2014.

It attempts to unearth why young professionals hold a potential that both the world and most organisations need. Moreover, we investigate how, when it comes to the future of leadership, young professionals may already be one step ahead of older generations, especially when given the space to contribute more holistically.

### 1.1 THE WORLD YOUNG PROFESSIONALS FIND THEMSELVES IN

Although many companies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to incorporate sustainability into more traditional solely market driven approaches, their organisational strategies are often challenged by the highly complex and uncertain nature of these new demands.

For example, in his 'Letter on sustainability', Jeff Immelt, Chairman and CEO of General Electric describes the world as "volatile and complicated"<sup>3</sup>, while Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, uses the term VUCA to describe the world – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.<sup>4</sup> Company sustainability reports, such as General Electric's Citizenship Report<sup>5</sup>; Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan<sup>6</sup>; Walmart's Global Responsibility Report<sup>7</sup>; Nike's Corporate Responsibility Report<sup>8</sup>; and Johnson & Johnson's Healthy Future plan<sup>9</sup>, further highlight complex social and environmental challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, rising costs of energy, insufficient food security, lack of adequate healthcare, human rights violations, increasing levels of poverty and shifts in global demographics.

Companies attempting to find sustainable ways of addressing rapid and incremental social-environmental

changes are in turn affected by the mounting complexity of the regulatory and policy environments within which sustainability initiatives and standards are implemented.

Today, regulatory frameworks and policies are increasingly developed by a widely diverse group of global stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the formulation of both global and local regulatory frameworks and policies unfolds across an increasing fragmentation of institutional landscapes such as the decentralisation of governments, the growth of public-private partnerships, and the increasing influence of non-governmental organisations and knowledge-based experts on policy processes across different political levels<sup>11</sup>. Frameworks and policies therefore illustrate the social and institutional complexities of conducting business within the global sustainability arena. Companies not only need to meet conflicting international and local regulations and policies with regards to business practices, they also need to make sure that their products do not inadvertently transgress such policies and frameworks. In addition, sustainability agents within the private sector also need to ensure that their own internal sustainability accountabilities and standards are met.

Young professionals working within these contexts often find themselves in a highly regulated, yet volatile world displaying the typical features of sustainability challenges – **complexity, interdependence and urgency**.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2 COMPLEXITY BECOMES THE NORM

In such a complex and volatile world – fostering economic development, addressing climate change,

<sup>3</sup> Immelt, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Polman, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> General Electric, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Unilever, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Walmart, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Nike, Inc., 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson & Johnson, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Kuenkel et al., 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Duit et al., 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Kuenkel and Schaefer, 2013.



ensuring food security, meeting health challenges, enhancing good governance, improving natural resource management, or ensuring responsible supply chain management – can only be achieved through successful collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders and institutions, all with different interests, viewpoints and skillsets.

Despite a lack of the expertise and training, young professionals are often tasked to drive or coordinate complex projects. As a result, they find themselves on an organisational roller coaster and at the same time a global learning journey. These challenges are by no means limited to the corporate world: the public and NGO sectors are equally affected by this trend. Young people are often placed in leadership roles, not only because of a growing number of retirements across sectors,<sup>13 14</sup> but also as a result of their advanced technological skills and impressive ‘paper qualifications’<sup>15</sup>. In all three sectors, young professionals are tasked to deal with stakeholder collaboration, coordinate citizens’ consultation and improve relationship management – despite their lack of the expertise and training in the field of for multi-stakeholder collaboration. They often work on complex projects that require the integration of different stakeholders and are subsequently held responsible for preparing and coordinating meetings, dealing with conflicts as they occur and keeping unhappy stakeholders on board. This means that young professionals need to develop new skillsets much earlier in their careers in order to deal with these complex environments.

*“So what you need is leaders who are able to take this complexity and distil it in simplicity, and are actually able to drive that to action. That’s a skill that you have to learn.”*

*Paul Polman, CEO Unilever<sup>16</sup>*

However, turning such challenges of complexity into opportunities requires more than the set of management practices formally taught in first level leader programmes found in most companies or public sector organisations. It requires patience, passion, listening skills and the confidence that staying in a collaborative field will lead to a long-term better outcome for all, even if the return on investment is difficult to identify in the short-term. It requires learning how to drive change without being in a position of power.

#### **Box 1: Complexity on the road to sustainability**

One example of the mounting complexity of stakeholder relations in shifting operations towards sustainability are **voluntary standards** that ensure sustainable supply chains.

Some notable examples include the “application of General Electric’s global labour rights standards, within its supply chain in challenging environments like China”<sup>17</sup>; Nike’s ‘Apparel Environmental Design Tool’<sup>18</sup> which measures environmental performance across the full life-cycle of an apparel product, including impacts from “input materials, manufacturing, packaging, transportation, use, and end-of-life”; Marks and Spencer’s Plan A, which offers their employees and those who work in their supply chain “a way of working that delivers social, environmental and economic benefit”<sup>19</sup>; and Walmart’s Sustainability Index which uses training, continuous audits and high supplier standards as a way to ensure a more responsible supply chain<sup>20</sup>. In addition, large commodity corporations such as Nestle, Douwe Egberts, Mondelez and Tchibo have become members of the Common Code for the Coffee Community, a mainstream entry-level sustainability standard for green coffee.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Timmer et al., 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Tan, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Teck and Hennessy, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Confino, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> General Electric, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Henderson et al., 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Marks and Spencer, Plan A Report, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Walmart, 2013 Global Responsibility Report, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Kuenkel and Aitken, 2015.



Most companies mention a mounting complexity in their sustainability reports. GE's report states that "there are challenges to how and where we conduct business today, and those challenges vary by region, culture, and population. Our sphere of influence is complex and dynamic."<sup>22</sup>; Marks and Spencer acknowledges that they "can never have enough standards to cover every social and environmental issue, every interaction between them, every country and community in which they occur"; and Walmart recognises that it is "a tough but critical

challenge – for us and others". Lastly, although the goal for Nike's Index was to create predictive metrics, which would work uniformly across Nike's varied footwear, "trying to compare the impact of each shoe while taking size differences into account was a slow and complicated process."<sup>23</sup>

Determining all crucial sustainability issues along the supply chain is a demanding ambition given the high complexity of supplier networks that have evolved with globalisation.



<sup>22</sup> General Electric, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Henderson et al., 2008.

## 2. ENGAGING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

### Box 2: Young professionals profiling

Most of the young professionals found in the private, public and NGO sectors are currently considered to belong to “Generation Y”. Although there are differences in opinion on the birth boundaries of this generation, their date of birth seem to fall somewhere between 1977 and 2002. The Generation Y population is estimated to fall between 70 and 90 million individuals in the United States<sup>26</sup>, outnumbering the other generations. Similarly, the generation best represented in the Singapore Civil Service, is Generation Y, making up 35 per cent of the workforce.<sup>27</sup> In Europe, generation Y was represented by 104.6 million in 2010 and is projected to grow up to 105.9 million by 2020.<sup>28</sup> Globally, by 2025, generation Yers, are projected to make up 75 per cent of the global workforce.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, it is important for those wanting to lead their businesses into a more sustainable future to better understand the role that this generation can play in the leadership of the future.

An increasing debate exists with regards to the critical shortage of skilled leaders needed, not only to make governments and firms more efficient, but also to drive the change towards sustainability, according to the new Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>24</sup> In the near future not only the world, but also the sustainability arena, will be led by a generation of Young Professionals who grew up with abundant choices, the possibility to instantly connect to a global community and a sceptical attitude towards the structures, systems, and organisations

which brought us to the critical levels of social and environmental degradation we now face.

Rather than follow in the footsteps of the generations before them, a new generation of young professionals wants to define their own terms when facing the complex leadership challenges ahead.<sup>25</sup> Although young professionals are not often perceived as revolutionaries they are in the process of shifting consciousness, re-defining culture and re-inventing organisations. As they challenge the status quo, some move quietly and some overtly.

### 2.1 RESERVATIONS TOWARDS LEADERSHIP ROLES

Despite being seen as a generation who expects to progress swiftly up the ladder of success, young professionals are often hesitant to take up traditional leadership roles. This could be due to a perception that leadership is an unappreciated and arduous position, while at the same time the current ‘image’ of a leader is often linked to ‘being the boss’ or to the need to manage staff. In addition, leaders are often perceived as having an unhealthy work-life balance<sup>30</sup>.

*For example, Sara, “a Learning and Development employee in the financial industry”, identifies the position of a leader with an expectation to work long hours: “Many of my colleagues in senior leadership positions seem to wear their long work hours as a ‘badge of honour.’ Even if they’re not physically in the building, they are constantly connected via their technology. I get emails at all hours of the night and day from some of these leaders.”<sup>31</sup> When asked if she believes her firm would have the same expectations of her in a leadership positions she responded affirmatively.*

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Publications, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Kuenkel et al., 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Brown et al., 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Tan, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Colliers International, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Deloitte, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Tan, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, 2014.

Moreover, leadership “has an image problem”, with many young leaders moving away from the image of the hero-leader towards one where leadership is a collaborative process.<sup>32</sup> “A survey of over 300 young sustainability professionals, recently conducted by IISD, supports this finding. When asked to identify those who they might consider to be sustainability leaders, only 11 ‘marquee’ names (such as Al Gore, Ray Anderson and Wangari Maathai) came up. Leadership was highlighted as a team endeavour rather than purely an individual pursuit.”<sup>33</sup>

To entice young professionals back towards leadership we therefore need to listen to concerns about the out-dated hero-leader image with their unhealthy life-work balance and ‘lone ranger’ attitude. We could address these concerns by finding a leadership models based on the collaboration young professionals thrive on and by attaching leadership to the possibility of making a difference through creating a more sustainable world.

## 2.2 A GLOBAL CITIZEN IDENTITY

Young professionals identify themselves as being global citizens, live in an interconnected world and are accustomed to communicating over long distances. In addition, many have travelled and feel connected to other young professionals from different nationalities. They are also culturally and ethnically the most diverse generation in history.

As a result of feeling more secure in rapidly shifting social and cultural settings young professionals are often more open to innovation, strategic thinking and risk taking. They are also focused on delivering quick results. “At no point in their lives have Generation Y members been without access to information from around the world. Thus, their worlds are surprisingly integrated and, in many

ways, Gen Yers cannot comprehend an environment that is not global.”<sup>34</sup> An ability to combine global interconnectedness with technological confidence makes young professionals vital to communication and networking endeavours. “As the ‘connectors’ – the wires for internal and external knowledge flows – they have the ability to apply technology to create social capital and create new communities of influence as they embark on their careers.”<sup>35</sup> This ability to live in a global world, with its daily complex media and networking requirements, equips young leaders to work with the equally complex and interconnected challenges linked to most sustainability issues.

## 2.3 DRIVEN BY MEANING

As the first generation that grew up in a globalised interconnected world, young professionals are also increasingly searching for ‘meaningful’ work. They prefer to work for “socially responsible, ethically driven organisations that allow the ‘whole self’ to be brought to work”.<sup>36</sup> They also want their work to have in integrity, allowing them to align their purpose, values and the relationships and activities they pursue in life with their careers. Accordingly, meaningful work is listed highest on their list of priorities when choosing a career.<sup>37 38</sup> This can refer either to work in areas such as education, poverty, the environment and health, or to working for a company that makes a meaningful contribution to addressing these issues. A study by the Strategic Planning and Consumer Insights division of the AMP Agency reports that across a survey of 1800 participants: “61% of Generation Y feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world; 83% will trust a company more if it’s socially and environmentally responsible; 79% want to work for a company that cares about how it impacts and

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Timmer et al., 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Teck and Hennessy, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Timmer et al., 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Tan, 2012.



contributes to society, 64% say their company's social/environmental activities make them feel loyal to that company; and 56% would refuse to work for an irresponsible corporation.”<sup>39</sup>

Therefore when recruiting young leaders – be it in the private, public or NGO sector – organisations need to be aware of their need for meaning and thus align organisational objectives with the sense of purpose of their future leaders. Numerous studies show that young people are increasingly looking for jobs that “make a difference” as well as contribute to social progress. For example The Millennial Impact Project asked over 1,500 young professionals who said that in job interviews, the companies that were involved in working for cause won them over compared to others.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.4 COMPETITION IS NOT ATTRACTIVE

What is clear across all studies is that young professionals find cooperation self-evident, love creativity and want self-determination. Furthermore, many young professionals perceive the future as something that can only be partially planned for. They love to participate and enjoy engaging with others. Competition is often not an attractive proposition, as they prefer to collectively work towards future possibilities and feel like part of a “tribe” – or rather as part of many tribes and many communities. Not only do they want to test new approaches and do things differently, they are also passionate when engaging with themes and prospects which will have a positive impact. At the same time, they want to be themselves, express the way they feel without adjusting either their appearance or way of thinking in order to conform to the established norm. Strong value is also attached to a sense of community, one which respects differences, yet offers identification without compliance or strict rules.

## 2.5 CONTRIBUTING TO TRANSFORMATIVE SHIFTS

Many young professionals prefer working for organisations that place sustainability high on their agenda and as a result the sustainability sector is one of the most popular among young professionals. Moreover, all over the world, young professionals are eager to contribute to a positive future and are looking for new ways to actively engage that future. “In a 2007 study by IISD of the key leadership skills for sustainability, ‘Capacity for Innovation’ emerged as the top skill. For 51 per cent of the young people interviewed, capacity for innovation was one of their top three values.” However, while they represent a great force towards societal progress and sustainable development, they also need consistent support in order to positively channel their energies with regards to driving innovative and collaborative change. Lastly, as a result of their early exposure to technology and social media platforms, many young professionals have an intrinsic capacity to build on connectivity and to collaborate with stakeholders; to adapt to volatile markets; to innovate effectively across countries despite complex environments; and to understand different cultural contexts in order to make the most out of a diverse workforce.

*How can we best guide this new generation of young professionals, and future leaders, towards applying their talents and ideals to lastingly meet challenges of uncertainty, complexity and sustainability?*



<sup>39</sup> Cone Communications, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> The Millennial Impact Report by the Case Foundation.

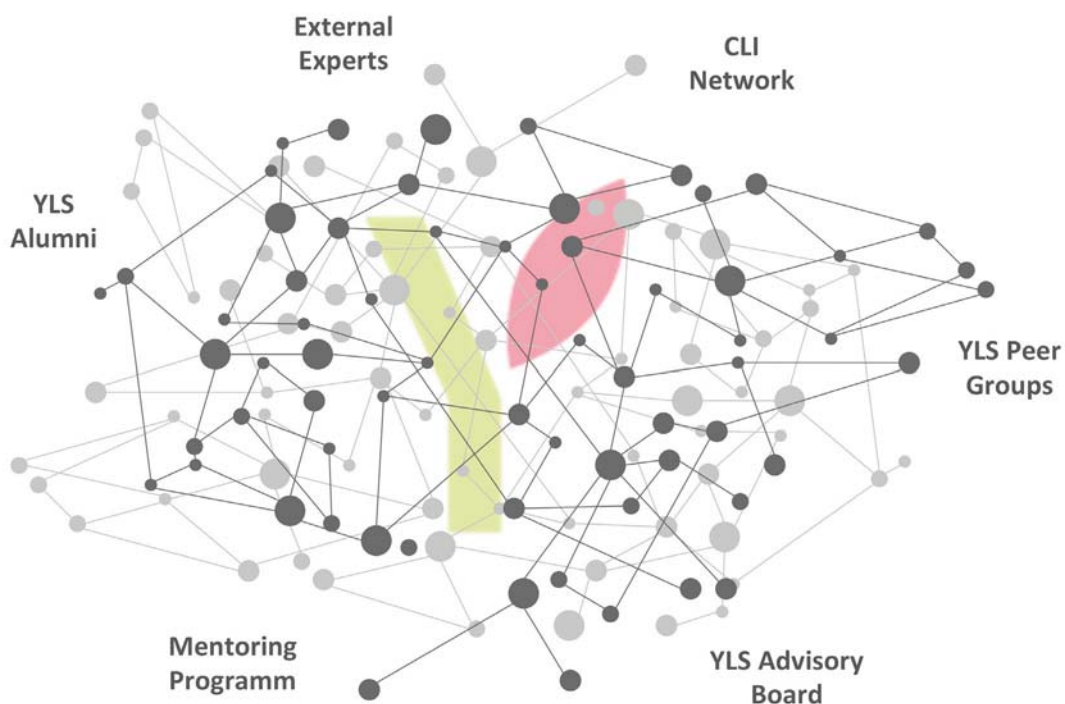
### 3. BUILDING THE CAPACITY TO DRIVE POSITIVE CHANGE

Since 2005, the Collective Leadership Institute's mission has been to build competence for sustainability through empowering leaders to drive collaborative change in multi-actor settings, thus enabling organisations to collectively navigate complex challenges and lead towards a sustainable future. Building competence for sustainability has mostly been facilitated through our international educational programmes, which, by the end of 2015, will have reached over 2.000 people in over 100 countries. However, in 2007, we recognised that we have not yet reached one of the most important target groups – **young professionals who started their careers in order to make a difference**. We therefore asked ourselves:

- How can we empower young professionals to **navigate sustainability challenges** within their organisational environments such as complexity, interdependence, uncertainty and urgency?
- How can we **leverage their unique potential** to lead for a better future as described in the sections above?
- How can we respond to the potential of young professionals while supporting their aspiration for a **new leadership paradigm**?

What emerged was the “**Young Leaders for Sustainability (YLS)**” programme that equips young professionals, across all sectors, with a unique set of skills, enabling them to build on connectivity;

The Young Leaders for Sustainability (YLS) Network



effectively collaborate with diverse stakeholders; adapt impact strategies to suit volatile environments; and lead us into the future while also staying true to their own values, aspirations, and using innovative approaches. The programme, which started with a pilot in 2008, was redesigned in 2011. Since then it has been continuously adapted and improved based on the target group's feedback. It brings together up to 20 participants per year that have already gained early working experience in contexts where they are confronted with many of the challenges mentioned above. Currently, YLS connects participants from across sectors and industries to an increasing network, consisting of the programme's participants, alumni, mentors, speakers and advisory board members as well as a growing community of individuals and organisations facing similar leadership challenges and asking similar questions. YLS Alumni come from across Germany and Switzerland and have diverse

institutional backgrounds. They work in national/ state ministries, regional or local administrations, large corporations, small and medium sized businesses, international organisations, consultancies or NGOs. They are social and natural scientists, lawyers, doctors, social workers, economists, activists and tasked with a wide range of sustainability related management issues, requiring change in multi-actor settings. Through the participation in the programme, they also gain insight into other disciplines and other points of view. The cross-sector and interdisciplinary composition of the YLS programme makes it a very unique learning experience for young professionals as well as a forum for professional exchange, personal growth and networking. While they learn the art of leading collectively they also start to build a network of change agents across business, government and civil society.

YLS Alumni\* by sector



\*Based on 80 YLS Alumni as of June 2015

Table 1: Typical management issues of YLS Alumni

Private sector	Public Sector and Development Cooperation	NGO and Social Entrepreneurship
<p><b>Documenting a company's life-cycle analysis for vegetable oil soap:</b></p> <p>Getting all supply chain stakeholders to understand and contribute to the analysis.</p>	<p><b>Activating an international network of actors to maintain and rehabilitate lakes:</b></p> <p>Invigorating the passion for change among very different actors and building a strong support network.</p>	<p><b>Cultivating and processing sustainably grown citrus fruits in the rural areas of Malawi:</b></p> <p>Creating awareness of far-reaching income opportunities for rural farmers.</p>
<p><b>Introducing sustainable laundry management into the hospitality industry:</b></p> <p>Driving a change in mind-set as well as developing exemplary pilots for sustainability criteria within laundry management.</p>	<p><b>Rescuing migratory species of wild animals in Central Asia:</b></p> <p>Building trust and consensus among a wide range of stakeholders in a highly politicized environment across several countries.</p>	<p><b>Organising a Social entrepreneurship Conference in Berlin:</b></p> <p>Engaging an entire network of social entrepreneurs in order to design a space for creativity and social innovation.</p>
<p><b>Establishing an international youth network in biodiversity:</b></p> <p>Managing the engagement of youth from member countries and guiding it into a high impact declaration at a UN-Conference.</p>	<p><b>Developing meaningful impact investment models:</b></p> <p>Engaging with government bodies and companies in order to find common interests.</p>	<p><b>Sustainable production of stationary supplies (led pencils):</b></p> <p>Increasing value creation within the countries that production materials are sourced from as well as engaging with the entire value chain.</p>
<p><b>Develop a business case for Green IT:</b></p> <p>Engaging internal stakeholders and customers to move towards more sustainable IT solutions.</p>	<p><b>Rooting sustainability values for students enrolled in university business and MBA programmes:</b></p> <p>Building a container for change away from strongly held traditional value systems.</p>	<p><b>Consulting social entrepreneur start-ups:</b></p> <p>Helping social entrepreneurs tackle social issues, engage with target groups and build a viable business.</p>
<p><b>Developing and implementing a company's sustainability strategy:</b></p> <p>Dealing with different generations as well as diverse mind-sets in order to create resonance for change.</p>	<p><b>Creating a government hosted information platform in order to raise the awareness of small and medium sized businesses on the different aspects of sustainability within their businesses:</b></p> <p>Engaging with and understanding the private sector in order to shift them towards more sustainable business practices.</p>	<p><b>Increasing diversity within private and public sector decision making bodies:</b></p> <p>Raising awareness around the issue of cultural diversity not only within organisations, but also within the target groups of visible minorities.</p>
<p><b>Improving the economic and living conditions of rural populations in Malawi through public/private partnerships:</b></p> <p>Creating a resonance with local populations as well as partnering with local and German organisations.</p>	<p><b>Food and nutrition in developing countries:</b></p> <p>Engaging with private sector companies, local governments and communities in order to create a common understanding of the initiative needs to accomplish as well as its desired impact.</p>	<p><b>Creating a platform for artistic and creative exchange in Rio de Janeiro:</b></p> <p>Engaging with civil society actors across three countries and in three languages during a change process.</p>



### 3.1 LEARNING THE ART OF LEADING COLLECTIVELY

The YLS programme consists of four onsite-modules over a period of one year with online exchange in between the modules. During this time it equips young professionals with strategic skills in collective leadership resulting in their increased capacity to navigate complex change in ever-changing environments within multiple actor settings.<sup>41</sup> The 'red thread' throughout the 4-module programme is the **Collective Leadership Compass**, a methodology based on **systems change for sustainability** and derived from 20 years of practice and research in complex

multi-stakeholder settings. The compass is both a diagnostic tool and a process methodology. With its deliberate emphasis on collaboration and collective action for sustainability it is very compatible with the value system of young professionals. It focuses on **invigorating human interaction systems** as core drivers of transition processes, and can be used to assess, plan and enact the collaborative changes required for sustainable development. The compass enables to **navigate complex challenges** by introducing a meta-level guiding structure, which becomes a fractal of the competence and collaboration pattern that needs to emerge for the transition envisaged. The compass strengthens individual leadership

## COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMPASS



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<sup>41</sup> Kuenkel, 2014 (forthcoming 2015).

skills, enhances the leadership capacity of a group of actors, and helps shift systems of collaborating actors towards better co-creation.

While applying the dimensions of the **Collective Leadership Compass**, young professionals are supported as they step into the unknown, go beyond their comfort zones and create new opportunities out of perceived challenges. The methods, conveyed in the programme, practically demonstrate how collective intelligence is able to facilitate fast and efficient problem solving. When participants learn that meaningful engagement with stakeholders is the cornerstone of successful collaboration they are able to turn their current professional challenges into future possibilities. They experience that rather than innovation belonging to a select group of people, it is a competence leaders must harvest for themselves as well as foster in others.

*"YLS provided me with the soft skills that I did not learn in the Corporate World. So I've done 2 other professional qualifications and countless corporate trainings on issues such as Negotiation, Presentation Skills etc, to date there has been no holistic leadership approach to apply in complex change processes. YLS taught me tools that I was able to apply directly to my daily work, both in the office as well as workshops and meetings with other companies. My awareness and approach have changed completely both on the content side as well as concerning process and interpersonal issues, in all areas of my work."*

They also notice that it is the human-to-human connection that makes the world a better place. The connection between contributing to a larger purpose and taking care of each other becomes a fundamental part of their thinking and acting. They build essential skills for agility, including seeing change as inevitable and finding ways to best utilise it. Most importantly, they learn that isolated action needs to be replaced by collective leadership – a paradigm shift in how individuals find

their leadership roles in the spirit of collaborative co-creation and contribution to the common good.

*"We need a holistic approach, as conveyed through the Collective Leadership Compass during the YLS programme, in order to move leaders into collective action for a greater good. Through this (leadership approach) a bridge for change can be created."*

*Melanie Wilneder, Carbon Disclosure Project, YLS Alumni 2013*

### 3.2 EMPOWERING TO LEAD THE FUTURE

The **Young Leaders for Sustainability** programme focuses on equipping young professionals with leadership skills that combine 'sense-making' in a fast-changing world, navigating complex change and fostering self-efficacy. Over the last few years, we started expanding the content and form of the programme in yearly iterations – based on participants' feedback, advice from mentors, and recommendations from our advisory council. Moreover, it became clear that young professionals, as they grow their impact on the world, travel an **inner path** and an **outer path, both of which** require parallel development. Outer action and inner development need one another and have a reciprocal effect – if one is missing, the other falls short of its potential. As a result the structure of the programme needed to address different skill levels, and had to be iterative in nature across both pathways. Table 2 shows the skills levels addressed.

In addition to the methodologies most often used in high quality leadership development programmes, such as personal and peer reflection, conceptual inputs followed by practical exercises, as well as communication and dialogue skills, our programme works with a 'case clinic' approach. The young professionals advise each other on real time leadership challenges using the tools they learn.

Our iterations in further developing the programme showed that we needed to equip young professionals with skills that would be required in future, no matter if in the corporate world, governments,

**Table 2: Multi-level approach to collective leadership skills**

SKILLS LEVEL	SCALING-UP COLLABORATION SKILLS
Growing personal leadership competence	Strengthening young professionals in their <b>self-efficacy and personal effectiveness</b>
Navigating multi-actor settings	Empowering young professionals to drive <b>collaborative effectiveness</b> and ensure impact of collective action by navigating dynamic change processes successfully
Building communities for change	Engaging change agents in cross-functional and cross-sector <b>networks for systems impact</b>
Creating impact in a complex landscape of actors	Enhancing capacity to address <b>complex challenges</b> jointly among a wide range of actors, increasing system vitality and resilience.

international organisations or civil society organisations. The 'VUCA'<sup>42</sup> world is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous – not only for leaders in the corporate world. Or as a manager from a large international law firm defined it: "We do not know today, what we need to know tomorrow."<sup>43</sup> We needed to equip them for a world, in which the answer to complexity is no longer command and control, but a complex adaptive leadership<sup>44</sup> approach that allows leaders to navigate the unknown and continuously learn; a networked world where feedback loops can accelerate unexpected change and leaders need to operate in networks that can adapt to circumstances more quickly; a world, in which the answer to uncertainty is no longer rigid planning, but a probe and test approach with regular iteration.<sup>45</sup>

*"YLS has inspired me both professionally and personally and greatly expanded my skills and knowledge. The intensive exchange among YLS participants, who all work for the sustainable development of our society, was very inspiring. Many of the techniques I and methods learned at YLS I use today in my workshops and coaching with social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, my notion of leadership has expanded to include the idea of collective leadership."*

*Katrin Ritzerfeld, Social Impact Lab Berlin, YLS Alumni 2012*

<sup>42</sup> Polman, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Personal conversations, Petra Kuenkel, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Obolensky, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Snowden, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> For more information, see our Collective Leadership Series Vol 1 and 2, [www.collectiveleadership.com](http://www.collectiveleadership.com).

Not surprisingly some of these skills requirements match with the aspirations and the value system of this generation:

- Inspiring an attitude of choice and possibilities
- Invigorating the desire for meaning and creating impact in the world
- Using dialogue as a collaborative practice
- Fostering inventiveness and problem-solving beyond one's comfort zone
- Creating communities for change and engaging stakeholders
- Building networks and practicing a culture of mutual support
- Staying alert to global trends and developments and contextualising action in large-scale change systems

The **Collective Leadership Compass**<sup>46</sup> enabled them to take action towards transforming groups of fragmented, mistrustful or competitive actors into functioning collaboration patterns. It helped them to take the invisible into account, ask new questions, design more successful process intervention strategies and guide action.

*"The methods and the underlying concept of collective leadership are not only taught, but we can try them out directly in the group, work on concrete issues and then apply the results in our daily work."*

*Ekaterina Weickmann, Global Nature Fund (GNF), YLS Alumni 2012*

Table 3: How the Young Leaders for Sustainability programme addresses the six dimensions of Collective Leadership

Collective Leadership Dimension	Aspects	Self-efficacy and personal leadership competence	Driving collaborating in teams and action groups	Navigating complex multi-actor settings
<b>FUTURE POSSIBILITIES</b> 	Future Orientation	Leading from a personal vision	Tools for connecting action groups to joined goals	How to plan stakeholder events that result in joined visioning and agreement on goals
	Empowerment	The courage to think big and inspire others, leading with passion	Creating a sense of ownership in teams, inspiring conversations	Tools for structured listening to stakeholder concerns
	Decisiveness	Setting the focus and monitoring progress	Tools for empowering progress reviews in teams	How to introduce process and result monitoring in multi-actor settings
	Process Quality	Creating resonance for change as a leader	The role of process clarity and reliability in leading change or facilitating teams	How to successfully manage the four phases of stakeholder engagement
<b>ENGAGEMENT</b> 	Connectivity	Building personal networks	Tools for creating team cohesion	How to foster a sense of community among diverse stakeholders
	Collective Action	Creating personal records of accomplishments	How to foster a team spirit for jointly achieved results	How to manage result-orientation among a complex set of actors
	Creativity	Attending to and fostering one's own generative capacity	Tools for creativity in teams	How to invigorate creative solution-finding among groups of diverse and conflicting stakeholders
	Excellence	Developing a spirit of self-mastery	Fostering team-spirit for mastery and client orientation	How and when to bring in inspiring expertise in complex stakeholder processes
<b>INNOVATION</b> 	Agility	How to deal with crises and turn them into opportunities, challenging one's comfort zone, confronting fears	Handling crises, obstacles and uncertainty in teams	How to build a stakeholder system's resilience for overcoming difficulties
	Mindfulness	Attending to the inner journey, meditation, reflection rituals	How to become more attentive to team dynamics	How to unearth the underlying stories behind conflicts of interests, dissonance and blockages to collaboration
	Balance	Creating a personal pattern of regular renewal	How and when to retreat as a team, tools for collective reflection	How to foster collective reflection in multi-actor settings
	Empathy	How to learn to suspend judgement, how to step into the shoes of others, reconciliation with one's own and others' shortcomings	Understanding team difference as productive source of progress	How to create a safe structure for listening to difference, exploring viewpoints and stories in one on one explorative conversations
<b>COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE</b> 	Dialogic Quality	Learning core dialogic practices as prerequisite for unleashing collective intelligence	Cultivating a culture of dialogue in teams	Creating safe dialogic structures in complex change among various stakeholders
	Diversity	The art of setting boundaries, understanding, dealing with difference productively	Taking opposition as intention for correction, tools for processing difference into progress	Ensuring stakeholder diversity in complex change processes, facilitating difficult conversations, fostering different perspectives
	Iterative Learning	Establishing personal review and learning patterns	How to foster continuous improvement processes in teams	Establishing learning mechanisms in complex stakeholder processes
	Contextuality	Creating a personal connection with trends and development	How to connect teams and action groups with a wider context	Understanding how megatrends influence global change, addressing the connection to the larger context in change processes
<b>WHOLENESS</b> 	Mutual support	Learning when and how to ask for support, peer group support	How to create a spirit of mutual support in teams	How to design and facilitate stakeholder settings in a way that fosters a spirit of collective responsibility and support
	Contribution	Identifying one's unique gifts, building on strength, following one's calling	How to orientate a team's attention to a larger purpose	How to (re)connect a complex stakeholder system with the larger purpose



## 4. TURNING ASPIRATIONS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Undisputedly, most young professionals want to contribute to the solutions of tomorrow. This may be based on their stakes in the future being higher than those of older generations, due to a rapidly changing world. “In rich and poor countries alike, it is common to find the best and brightest – young people with an array of options – choosing work that allows them an opportunity for social impact”<sup>47</sup>. Their ambitions for the future, however, often clash with the established systems of the organisations they find themselves in. As a result, there is a growing movement of young social entrepreneurs: Such young professionals decide to create their own organisational structures in order to contribute to a sustainable future.

Young professionals within organisations struggle with the discrepancy between a desire to drive changes and the way in which current leadership mind-sets and organisational structures limit this possibility. Subsequently they are more careful when deciding who to work for, taking careful note of organisational values, culture, strategy and vision in order to see how these match their own aspirations to take responsibility for a sustainable future.

The 80 participants of the five cohorts of the Young Leaders for Sustainability programme are only a tiny representation of the many young professionals who operate in complex and demanding environments, and have an ambition to make a difference in the world. Yet, it may be valid to take them as exemplary because they might well represent the skills, thoughts, doubts and dreams of an entire generation. The management issues that the participants of the Young Leaders for Sustainability programme were tasked with could be seen as representative of the range of leadership challenges that young professionals are confronted with globally.

Over the last 3 years we conducted 30 interviews with participants in order to better understand

their unique leadership challenges as well as how a leadership development programme could best assist them in transforming their challenges into opportunities. Furthermore, we evaluated the feedback we received after each programme module and also at the programme’s end. The following leadership challenges emerged as specific to young professionals.

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 1

#### ***Driving a mind-set of global responsibility within slow changing organisations***

Most young professionals still work in organisations that see sustainability engagement as a side issue while the focus lies on the traditional way of doing business. At the same time, it is the young professionals that are often tasked to bring about change in multi-actor settings. When the resulting conflict between their aspirations and the dominant operations is not attended to, the outcome is one of friction and frustration.

*“As young professionals we are more and more aware of our global responsibility. Climate Change, resource scarcity or human crisis: our generation has to and wants to attend to this in our professional lives also.”*

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 2

#### ***Confronting the existing leadership paradigm mindset***

Change-driven young professionals often find themselves in environments that are dominated by a leadership paradigm, which does not match their value system. They believe that the complex challenges of sustainability require a different approach to leadership. Moreover, the still-prevailing top-down and directive style of decision-making,

<sup>47</sup> Bornstein, 2007.

particularly in the corporate world, discourages their enthusiasm and sense of ownership. They prefer a leadership style with an authentic sense of “walking the talk”, guided by shared values, collective intelligence, joint learning and co-creation. A dissonance between old and new leadership paradigms often plays out in their day to day work.

*“In my view, the ability of people to lead with feedback and inspiration is pivotal. One cannot implement change as an individual alone. Therefore, it is important to be a behavioural role model, to motivate and engage others and thereby initiate collective processes.”*

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 3

#### ***Finding islands of autonomous decision-making***

Young professionals want to live in a new leadership paradigm while simultaneously driving change within the existing structures of their organisations. They prefer flat hierarchies where each team member is appreciated and treated equally. Many strive for a space within the organisation where they can make autonomous decisions – islands within existing structures that allow them to take responsibility in a form that connects with their aspirations.

*“As young professionals we struggle with existing structures. We want to find opportunities to adapt them for long-term sustainable change that reflects the changing times.”*

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 4

#### ***Creating synergies across silos and institutional boundaries***

The leadership challenges young professionals are tasked with often require fresh ideas and collaborative thinking. Tasks are perceived as pieces in a bigger puzzle of global issues and can therefore only be addressed through multi-actor or cross-sector collaboration. Trust-building among actors with

different interests is perceived as the cornerstone of their success. Having to create synergies despite silos and institutional boundaries, is a great challenge for young professionals as it prevents them from fully engaging others with their passion.

*“If you are passionate about an issue and you want to drive it, you need to be able to engage others by including them.”*

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 5

#### ***Work-life balance and matching value systems***

A healthy work-life balance and matching value systems is a growing concern for young professionals. Instead of being measured according to time spent at work, young professionals want their progress to be measured by goals reached. As a result, 9 to 5 schedules are out and flexible work patterns are in. These patterns include new models of combining family and career as well as the ability to personalise rules rather than fitting into the existing. Moreover, young professionals want to humanise their work life and acknowledge that people rather than rules bring about change. They also want to counterbalance the constant availability of the digital age with reflection spaces and collective learning possibilities.

*“Most urgent is the compatibility of family for men and women. I am convinced that an extensive offer to work in a flexible way is, at this time, the most important step towards equality.”*

### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 6

#### ***Leading change beyond the “project mentality”***

Many young professionals work is embedded in time-bound projects, be this in the corporate world, development corporations, NGOs or the public sector. However, most of their aspirations go far beyond the accomplishment of a single project.

Hence, they experience a need to connect to deeper questions on how they can contribute to a different world while simultaneously pursuing professional careers. As a result their career paths often shift dramatically. For example, many switch from the fast, sometimes meaningless high performance culture of large consulting firms to the meaning-driven cultures of NGOs.

*"Leaders need to understand that hard/traditional skills as well as soft skills cannot stand in isolation. Only when they work together are they useful."*

Current leaders need to ask themselves how they can best engage with young professionals' unique

leadership and innovation styles. A collaborative approach to leadership not only allows young leaders to fully utilize the power of living in a technologically connected diverse world, but also the ability to respond to their meaning-seeking aspirations.





## 5. THE WAY FORWARD IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

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The world young professionals find themselves in is one that cannot deny the demands of sustainability or avoid the complexity attached to addressing these demands. However, currently most organisational structures are unable to address these complex demands and, as a result, they overwhelmingly fail to empower change-makers who, in turn, are often frustrated by organisational obstacles as well as limited opportunities for action. Complex problems and the lack of “one-size-fits-all solutions” require more leadership from every level of an organisation.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, there appears to be an untapped potential of young professionals, visionaries who want take solutions to the next level through collaborative approaches, networked action and an ability to tap into a collective intelligence. On the other hand, we need to change the way we think about leadership in order to address this untapped potential.

Wanting to contribute towards building a better world might well be one of the most commonly suppressed desires within organisations, and not only amongst young professionals.<sup>49</sup> Both young professionals and many high performing top executives, often experience an undefined, underlying disappointment with the competitiveness of the corporate world; the silo mentality of most public sector institutions; and a lack of acknowledgement with regards to the value of humanness at work. Similarly, they experience an unexpressed deep desire to create more meaning, more connectedness, and more relatedness within the workplace. Therefore, with regards to young professionals and beyond, the link between leadership development and sustainability is becoming more apparent. **The HOW of leadership needs to be remarried with the WHAT FOR and WHERE TO!**

Such integration would not only move our planet in the right direction, but also help to retain the many high-calibre employees who require meaning within their work environment. Furthermore it could encourage many more leaders to do the necessary work of steering organisations toward more sustainable business practices.

If companies and other organisations want to retain executives who desire meaning, as well as recruit young professionals who aspire to meaning, they need to investigate shifting their cultural paradigm toward new forms of career development. Such a development should integrate performance facts and figures with a need for inner well-being as well as the ability to contribute to something larger. **The future of human resource development will be measured according to its ability to address more sustainable action within the world.** Resource development therefore requires parallel development of the young professionals’ inner resourcefulness, reflection, and mindfulness with their ability to lead change in the outer world as a result of improved co-creation. Future-oriented, high quality leadership programmes for young professionals have to take this need into account.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon, Berry, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Kuenkel, 2008.

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## 7. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Petra Kuenkel**, is a Member of the Club of Rome, co-founder and Executive Director of the Collective Leadership Institute, a not-for profit organisation with the aim to build competence for collaboration and collective leadership for sustainability globally. She is a leading strategic advisor to pioneering international multi-stakeholder initiatives that tackle sustainability issues. Based on successful change processes she developed the *Dialogic Change* methodology and the *Collective Leadership Compass*, a guiding tool for navigating change in complex multi-actor settings. She promotes the scaling-up of collaboration skills for change agents from the private sector, public sector and civil society and pioneers approaches that reinvent leadership as a collective competency.



**Jade Buddenberg**, is Senior Project Manager at the Collective Leadership Institute and co-leads the “Young Leaders for Sustainability” programme. She is an accredited member of the faculty and advises clients in stakeholder engagement and partnership initiatives. As the Head of the funded projects portfolio, she partners to leverage the impact in international projects, for example the EU-funded ENTIRE that empowers regional CSO networks in water management of the MENA region. Her background is in environmental governance and international relations with extensive interdisciplinary training in natural resource management, organisational learning, inter-cultural communication and leadership for sustainability. She has gathered international experience in the private, public and civil society sector in the U.A.E, U.K., Japan and Germany.



**Andrew Aitken** joined the Collective Leadership Institute in 2010 and after heading the organisation’s communications activities has moved on to the training faculty. He’s gathered extensive international working experience and carried out numerous trainings on the Collective Leadership Institute’s stakeholder dialogues approach in e.g. South Africa, Congo, Togo, Senegal, Germany and Cambodia. Andrew also co-heads the “Young Leaders for Sustainability” Programme (YLS) described in this study. Andrew is equally active on

Collective Leadership Institute’s process support team where he has carried out process consultancy for cross-sector cooperation, developed monitoring and evaluation tools and facilitated large stakeholder events.

**Helena Wagener** has worked as a computer programmer, artist, analyst, recovery coach, writer, and researcher. She holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Anthropology, Geography and Environmental studies from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and currently divides her time between motherhood, coaching, research, writing and coaching. Her research interests and expertise are in areas of sustainability, food security, environmental policy and addiction and she is passionate about areas of change and transformation, be it in systems, communities or people.

## **8. ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**

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The Collective Leadership Institute is an internationally operating non-profit organisation based in Germany (Potsdam) and South Africa (Cape Town). It was founded 2005 and is an independent initiative supporting stakeholders from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society in creating and implementing collaborative change initiatives for innovative and sustainable solutions to global, local, and societal challenges.

**Our vision is to empower future-oriented people to lead collectively towards a sustainable future.**

We believe in the principle of co-operation and collectively created solutions – across sectors, institutions, nations, and cultures. With our Executive Education, our Integrated Capacity Development, our Community Building, and our Research, we build competence for sustainability – for responsible business, people-oriented public service, and a strong civil society.



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Young Leaders  
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