

# The Case for Community Leadership

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## Introduction

The attached discussion paper has a curious history.

Some time back, the board of Leadership Victoria was considering the notion that the organization should be focused not just on helping to prepare the new generation of leaders for our community, but also on promoting the idea and necessity of “community leadership” within the community at large.

It was a terrific idea, we all agreed. In order to do it, everyone also agreed, we needed to be able to say with some confidence what community leadership was. There was a sudden silence around the board table — fingernails were never so minutely examined. Strangely, in an organization dedicated to the training of community leaders, no one was able to easily say what community leadership was. In fact, some of us were worried that there might not even be something that could be distinctly labeled as “community leadership.”

To say the least, it was an anomalous situation. We were a capable group made up of people with varied backgrounds. We came from business, from government, from the military, from education, from associations, from the community sector itself. Some of us, perhaps most, were in leadership roles in our working lives. Our collective experience working in the community spanned many long years. Could it be that in our work in Leadership Victoria we were at best working from gut?

On exploring the issue further we were surprised to find that despite the copious research that had been conducted into leadership, and the huge literature, there was little that could guide us on the nature of *community* leadership. And so we initiated a project to develop a working definition for ourselves

The discussion paper that resulted, *The Case for Community Leadership*, is the outcome. It is the result of much pondering, questioning, comment, and re-drafting. Many hands had a part in its development. In the end it provides less a definition of community leadership than a portrait — a picture built up from observation and experience. We are comfortable with that, because we feel that a flexible portrait will be more effective than a rigid definition in stimulating further discussion, exploration and learning. For the paper as we see it is a beginning, not an end. For our own part, most of us on the board find it sufficiently reflective of our own experience of leadership in the community that we will be using it to shape our own work in community leadership training.

We hope you read the paper. We hope you find it interesting and inspiring. Most of all, we hope you find it useful and that you share it with others that may find it useful. All we ask is that in using both Leadership Victoria and the author are acknowledged. And if you have any comments, please don't hesitate to pass them on to us.

Kate Mansell  
President, Leadership Victoria, 2008

## The Case for Community Leadership

Some years back, a book of stories appeared with the catchy title *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. The title is effective — and affecting — because, though “love” is a charged word we all use, and though people will claim to know love when they see or feel it, most struggle to define it. The title is memorable because, with quirky good humour, it touches on a contradictory human truth.

As with love, so with community leadership, and not only because capable community leaders are often passionate and sometimes quirky. Like love, community leadership is much talked about — cited as a solution for daunting community challenges, invoked as the cure for the loss of community cohesion and identity, sought by community boards to rescue organizations adrift. In Canada’s community leadership network, volunteers in twenty-two communities have devoted their time, attention, and labour, probably their money, and no doubt their hearts to building and running community leadership development organizations.

And yet, what we talk about when we talk about community leadership remains elusive. Opinions diverge even among those in community leadership organizations, though a shared anxiety infuses the differing views. At one extreme are those who suspect, echoing Gertrude Stein, that “leadership is leadership is leadership.” The dark secret of the movement, they say, is that its matter is no different from that taught in other programs. A perceived leadership deficit crossing social, political, and economic sectors has spawned a global cottage industry of sorts, with consultants, business schools, specialized institutes, and personal development experts widely offering leadership training. According to this view, what community leadership programs provide simply mirrors the training provided in good leadership programs everywhere.

Those with the opposite view suspect that though community leadership possesses a distinct character, it is a mere junior version of “real” leadership — that being leadership in business. For many people, leadership currently is exemplified by leaders like Jack Welch, Carly Fiorina, Richard Branson, or Steve Jobs — the figuratively broad-shouldered, square-jawed, decisive heroes of the business press. Ubiquitously profiled in popular management literature, business leadership has become for many the paragon of leadership everywhere, overshadowing even political, religious, and military leadership as an aspirational ideal. And according to this view, all that community leadership can ever hope to do, really, is aspire.

Both views reflect anxiety about the competitiveness of community leadership programs. How can we compete, asks the one group, if our product is undifferentiated? How can we compete, asks the other, if our product is, if not exactly second-rate, then certainly second-tier? And should we exist at all, consuming scarce charitable resources, if leadership is generic and good training available from many sources?

These concerns are in part rooted in the chronic insecurities of the community sector as organizational poor cousins. Nonetheless they reflect a question worth answering: *What are we talking about when we talk about community leadership?*

In this paper, we will try to show two things. First, that community leadership is a distinct leadership discipline. It is not, however, a discipline differentiated by a particular repertoire of behavioural or self-management skills — in this regard, it is much like any other form of leadership. Rather, it is strongly differentiated by the way that particular challenges in

community organizations and in our communities at large draw on fundamental leadership skills for their solution.

Second, we will try to show that community leadership is not just a watered-down version of “real” leadership, as exemplified by leadership in business. Quite the opposite. Business and community make different demand on leaders, and elicit a different emphasis in the exercise of leadership skills. However, we will see that leadership skills learned in the community are highly complementary to those learned in business, and vice versa.

In our discussion we will focus on four sets of leadership practices critical for communities:

- finding and managing “passionate consensus” among the committed
- social entrepreneurship
- articulating a vision of public good, and
- enabling collaboration

Again, these practices are critical not because community leadership is a species of leadership different from business or military leadership, but because they are what is demanded of leadership in general by the nature of community organizations and by the nature of the challenges facing the communities in which they work.

### **About Community Organizations**

The story begins, as stories must, with people, and in particular the kind of people we find in community organizations everywhere.

Communities themselves, of course, comprise more than just community organizations. In communities at large, businesses, government, churches, the police, the military, schools, hospitals, cultural and ethnic groups, and a host of semi-governmental organizations and agencies, as well as interested individuals, work with community organizations in a complex web of missions, systems, and people to address urgent community issues. But it is in community organizations that we can see the features of community leadership most sharply delineated. The particular leadership practices elicited in community organizations are for the most part identical to those demanded by challenges in the community at large. Community organizations show us community leadership at work in microcosm.

In *Managing the Non-Profit Corporation: Principles and Practices*, published in 1990, Peter Drucker predicted that the next great innovations in management practice and theory would come not from the corporate world, but from the non-profit world — the world of community organizations. He argued that these innovations would derive from the nature of community organizations themselves. Following Drucker, we believe that the distinctive qualities of leadership in the community sector derive from the essential nature of community organizations, and the nature of community engagement. By “community organizations” we mean the myriad, mostly charitable groups that provide health, emergency, social, cultural, and recreational services in communities everywhere; that run museums, schools, churches, hospitals, and community health clinics; that represent and advocate for the disenfranchised; that maintain shelters for the homeless, the battered, and the addicted; that promote the arts and education; that protect the environment and build hiking trails, clean up river valleys, band birds, and run land trusts; that undertake international development; that provide care for the developmentally, physically, and emotionally damaged; that gather medicines, clothing, and machinery for the third world’s poor; and so on and so on.

In its responsiveness, the non-profit system works well. The community sector abhors inaction the way nature abhors a vacuum, and for almost any issue that is in any sense remediable people have come forward to create organizations to get on with the job. Sometimes these community groups grow up to become major national and international organizations with significant clout and profile. But most often, in their many, many tens of thousands, they remain small, local, and intensely focused on issues that resonate in their own communities.

The intense focus is no accident. It is a consequence of the legislation and regulations under whose auspices community organizations are created. Here in British Columbia, the establishing legislation for non-profits is called the *Society Act*. Like the equivalent legislation in jurisdictions across North America, it contains a curious mix of relaxed and stringent requirements. On the one hand, it makes setting up a society disarmingly easy: state your purpose, gather a few members and directors, hold the necessary meetings, maintain the necessary records and accounts, and you are pretty much there. In this regard, the legislation acts as a mechanism for practical participatory democracy that allows people to vote directly, with their voluntary engagement, for the kind of society they want. It's remarkable, really, how much in our society gets done by community organizations. Implicitly, the legislation recognizes that in regard to communities, government is a coarse tool that cannot and should not try to do everything. If you feel strongly about something and if you share your conviction with others, then at your own discretion you can organize to make it happen.

On the other hand, once a society is created for a stated purpose and, in most cases, gets charitable status, the legislation holds it to that purpose through stringent duties imposed on its directors. Societies are disallowed by law from applying their resources to any but their stated purposes, and their directors are in breach of their duty if they do not comply.

These are unlike the requirements imposed on business corporations. Corporations function more as general-purpose vehicles for economic activity. They can be set up, for example, to produce industrial-strength, left-handed flange widgets, but if the directors and management believe that strategically and economically it makes more sense to run a chain of health spas specializing in cucumber facials, then, assuming it is feasible, they are free to do so. In principle, their investors may show them the door if they do not take every reasonable opportunity to pursue available profits. Legally speaking, corporations are free to enter new businesses; strategically speaking, they sometimes must. For the most part, non-profits are not and do not. Business corporations are general-purpose vehicles; community organizations are special-purpose.

### **Finding Passionate Consensus**

As a result, the first and perhaps most important distinguishing feature of community leadership is skill in finding and managing consensus under conditions of strongly emotional intrinsic motivation — in finding *passionate consensus*, as it were. Charities in general and community organizations in particular exert a vigorous selective bias for concern, commitment, and passion in the people that become involved with them. Almost by definition, the people connected with a community organization — volunteers, managers, employees, donors, supporters of all kinds — will feel strongly about its stated purpose; many will have a personal, professional, or familial connection with the issues and will bring to the organization robust views on what is to be done and how, though among themselves they are as likely to disagree in this regard as intensely as they are to be committed to the issue in general.

From the start, therefore, the character of those led in communities determines the character of leadership. Anyone who has spent much time in and around community groups will know how significantly the quality of the experience derives from the engagement with the issues of the people involved. Commitment runs through community organizations like a hot, red line. At their very worst, these collections of the committed are single-issue, disputatious nests of “conflict-driven chatter.” More often, and at their best when well led, they are micro-communities of shared but varied concern strongly focused by effective leadership on a single passionate consensus for action.

This is different than the core human challenge of leadership in business. In business, the problem for leaders is to produce a degree of emotional engagement with practical matters that are for the most part not inspiring in and of themselves; in community organizations, it is to find a consensus on practical matters among people with diverse perspectives who are already engaged emotionally and probably highly opinionated. So it is that “leading without power,” as Max De Pree calls it in the title of his book on the subject, finds its natural context in community organizations, and by extension, as we shall see, in communities. Community leaders must have highly developed skills in finding consensus among their vociferously opinionated equals — in listening, in empathizing, in finding a plausible shared basis for action, in engagingly articulating an inclusive, accommodating vision, in brokering tradeoffs among views strongly held. In communities and community organizations, we find servant leadership at its purest, because the basis of individual participation is emotional, not practical.

To be sure, in business we sometimes find an emotionally charged and motivating context. Startups, highly entrepreneurial small firms, or teams committed to special projects provide many examples of business initiatives that can elicit intense emotional engagement. But these examples are so much the exception to the rule in business (or in government, for that matter, or large institutions and organizations generally) that they get pointedly written about both in the academic management literature and in popular business books, like Tracy Kidder’s classic on the matter, *Soul of a New Machine*. What is remarkable because much sought after and exceptional in business organizations is simply business as usual in community organizations.

### **Fostering Social Entrepreneurship**

Another distinguishing characteristic of community leadership is that it is entrepreneurial. Again this is a trait sharply delineated in community organizations, which derives from another of their typical characteristics — their poverty.

The laudatory phrase “ordinary people doing extraordinary things” is often applied to community organizations. It is apt in many ways, but perhaps we should take it less as praise for what community groups accomplish than for the fact that they accomplish anything at all, given their generally limited resources. Many smaller community organizations are no more than the loss of a grant or two away from financial disaster much of the time, and depend on overworked rosters of volunteers and highly capable but poorly paid staff to squeak by. We hear at times of the big-dollar fundraising conducted by universities, hospitals, and other large charities — the massive endowments, the eight-figure gifts, the gala black-tie events, and the deluxe lotteries. But these are not the norm in the vast majority of community groups. Most are lean, live hand to mouth, and are likely to stay that way.

The upside is that their leadership is required to be entrepreneurial — socially entrepreneurial, that is.

We do not typically apply the term “entrepreneurial” to the community sector. But from a leadership perspective, what business entrepreneurs do and what social entrepreneurs do is similar. Where entrepreneurial business leaders mobilize financial, intellectual, and human capital to innovate and generate a return on investment, entrepreneurial community leaders mobilize financial, intellectual, and human capital to innovate and generate societal impact, to make a difference. The key distinction is that community organizations are very often implicitly entrepreneurial due to chronic resource constraints. The spirit of entrepreneurship that the majority of businesses struggle to instill is for the most part, though most often quietly, a matter of course in community organizations, because they could not succeed at what they do if they did not have entrepreneurial leadership. In some ways working in a community organization is like working in a perpetual business startup, because there is simply no end to need and never enough money to meet it.

What is it that community leaders do in being entrepreneurial?

First, they create a sense of the possible. In business, this comes down to articulating a vision. In community organizations, though they all have them, vision statements seem almost beside the point, given levels of individual commitment. And in many organizations they are rarely referenced as operating tools once drafted. (This is not to say that community leaders do not need to articulate a convincing vision. They do, but not necessarily internally. More on this below.) What good community leaders do that goes beyond the vision statement is create and nurture a sense of the possible in the face of intractable problems by motivating and enabling individual contribution — by showing people how the passion and concern they feel for an issue (the kind of emotion that vision statements in business are meant to engender) can indeed be channeled to make a difference. Entrepreneurial leaders start with shared concern, and from it build and maintain in others the conviction that ordinary people can indeed do extraordinary things.

Second, entrepreneurial leaders in both business and community light the path — that is, they discover and articulate the concrete, practical steps by which the organization can deliver the mission, and they orchestrate the tasks on the way to getting there. In a formal sense this is no more than strategy making, planning, and ongoing project management. But again, strategy takes on nuances when resources are severely constrained and probably uncertain as well. Being strategic in a community organization is often less a matter of adhering to a formal plan than it is of maintaining a supple responsiveness to shifting conditions in order to keep the organization focused on and working towards the strategic objectives. In community organizations, for good community leaders strategic wayfinding is a day-to-day activity, not something that happens once a year at the annual retreat. This is not to say that planning is not of value, but the best community leaders have the ability to use the plan as a guide, instead of a blueprint.

And finally, entrepreneurial community leaders innovate. Relentlessly. Because they must.

In organizations, as in families, chronic poverty is damaging and dispiriting. It limits hope and impairs the sense of possibility. Nevertheless, resource-strapped community organizations again and again surprise us with how much innovative good work they are able to do with so few resources. Their ability to deliver is largely a function of innovative, entrepreneurial leadership. One never quite stops being amazed at finding that some little community group with a tiny budget, a few underpaid employees, and a cheerfully fractious but determined group of volunteers has nevertheless developed a new way to help multiply disabled infants communicate, or created a novel community-based system for the recycling of soft plastics, or built a home-based craft network to market items for sale to raise funds for third world projects, or presented high-quality community theatre, or built a wildly

effective leadership development program, for that matter. Doing more with less is a virtue in business but an absolute necessity in community organizations, and a great source of innovative energy.

Again, when we think of innovation we tend not to think much of the community sector. The images that come to mind are of high-tech companies, of 3M and Apple and Cisco, of teams of geeks fuelled by pizza, coffee, and Twinkies beavering away in corporate skunkworks and labs. But we need to remember that not all innovation is technical, or on a grand scale, or due to genius. Most, in fact, even in business, is not. Community leadership excels at generating the kind of quiet, human-scale social innovations that collectively and inch by inch move the world forward just as surely as the next market-changing piece of software or bioengineering.

### **Articulating a Vision of Public Good**

Thirdly, community leaders articulate a compelling vision of possible achievement — a vision of their particular concerns as public goods.

We noted above that in community organizations the vision statement is in a way a kind of curious afterthought, given the prior engagement of the people involved. This is not to say, though, that community leaders do not need to articulate a compelling vision. They do, but not necessarily as a tool for internal organizational motivation. Though community organizations start as private initiatives, typically as the undertakings of a few concerned individuals, they grow, prosper, and succeed only on broad public sufferance. Just as businesses need customers, community organizations need supporters. Unless they are committed to remaining very small and self-sustaining, community organizations must necessarily reach out to the public, to government, and to business in order to explain themselves and find the support and resources they need to move their issues forward. And for this their leadership needs to communicate a vision that translates private concern into public good, a vision that enables people at large to understand the way in which a particular issue relates to them.

Community leaders at times do this so well that we come to forget that their issues were ever the sole concern of a small band of zealots. Today, for example, we almost all accept that conservation and environmental protection are necessary, to the point that recently the federal government was able to give the Nature Conservancy of Canada a quarter of a billion dollars in matching funds with only a ripple of attention in the news. But until Rachel Carson wrote about the issues in the 1950s and 1960s and environmental groups formed to take up her call, protecting the environment was of interest only to naturalists and “nature nuts.” Drunk driving was largely viewed as socially acceptable behaviour with occasional unfortunate consequences until Mothers Against Drunk Driving began its campaign. Similarly with tobacco use, or AIDS awareness and services, or breast cancer screening, or accessibility for people with disabilities, or a host of other issues — what began as private concerns came to be understood, through transformative visions crafted by community leaders, as public goods.

The examples cited are all of major social transformation relating to big issues, but they exemplify what leaders in communities and community organizations large and small, national and local, do all the time. If they didn’t do it, community organizations simply would not survive and communities would not be capable of pushing forward to cope with major issues.

### **Enabling Collaboration**

A final area in which community leadership displays a unique emphasis is in developing and managing collaborative enterprise *among* organizations and *across* sectors in the community at large.

We see the process working on a narrow scale in community organizations themselves. It's a rare community board these days that does not list "developing better partnerships" as a strategic priority in the annual planning exercise. Recognition is emerging in the sector that, increasingly, community organizations will be able to reach their goals only if they work with and through other organizations, both other community organizations and organizations in business and government. Collaboration is an imperative.

We noted earlier that community organizations are for the most part special-purpose organizations, focused on single issues. But the big problems besetting communities are increasingly complex and beyond the scope of any single organization or sector focused on its own worthwhile but narrow purposes. Here in Victoria, we have a great example in the current situation with homelessness. We have learned over time that homelessness is the visible manifestation of a host of other interrelated issues, such as drug and alcohol addictions, mental illness, physical and developmental disabilities, family dysfunction, unemployment and lack of training, early school leaving, spousal and child abuse, deteriorating public safety, or poor urban design, to take the obvious examples. We have also learned that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to begin to deal with the phenomenon of homelessness unless the experience, skills, and wisdom of the people and organizations working in all of these areas in the public, private, and non-profit sectors are somehow brought to bear on the problem.

Action on homelessness provides a complicated and highly public example of necessary collaboration. But to one degree or another, community organizations dealing with all sorts of issues are facing similar complexity, as are organizations in government and the private sector at their points of community engagement. As Judith Maxwell points out in *Looking Down the Road: Leadership for Canada's Changing Communities*, a discussion paper prepared for Community Foundations of Canada, "None of these actors...can handle the community challenges on their own. They do not have the depth of leadership or financial resources to carry the ball on their own..." She goes on to prescribe collaborative community action as essential for meeting the many difficult challenges that communities face.

Collaboration is hard. We know from the mixed record of joint ventures in the private sector how difficult it can be to make it work, even when only a pair of partners with shared commercial interests are involved. Apart from the practical management issues involved in making joint operations successful, deeper issues of organizational culture and confidence come into play. It is tough enough working simply in the community sector to establish sufficient mutual confidence among organizations with differing purposes and cultures to make collaboration work. When collaboration works across sectors and brings community organizations into relationships with business and government, the challenges that cultural differences and mixed mandates pose can be daunting.

As Maxwell remarks, however, successful examples of collaborative community initiatives are not difficult to find and, given the challenges that communities face, we can expect that collaboration will play an increasingly important role in the activities of a larger number of organizations. Community collaboration is a leadership-driven activity par excellence. Community leaders exhibit two sets of practices that help it happen.

First, as Maxwell points out, they open and sustain dialogue in order to build trust and foster shared, open understanding of complex community issues, both in the community sector, and with business and government as well. This is critical. It is remarkable to see at times how cautious and careful community organizations can suddenly become when they need to reach out to collaborate. Though we may tend to think of the community sector as more open to collaborative opportunities, in truth community organizations can be as tightly inward looking and self-referential as any others, a consequence perhaps of both their purpose-driven nature and their appropriate prudence in protecting their position in tough environments for fundraising and public awareness. The first and only binding duty of leaders in community groups is to their own organization's purposes. When achieving those purposes requires stepping out of the usual frame of reference, and particularly if it means going out of the sector to work jointly with government or business, the trust and openness required can be difficult to muster.

Whether in informal conversations and networking or in more formal processes of discussion and deliberation, community leadership fosters the trusted dialogue that is the first prerequisite of collaborative endeavour. We may denigrate talk as inferior to action, but for collaborative effort to work, much talk is necessary, and not always among people who are willing at the outset. Almost anything good or important that starts at all starts with people sitting around a table talking. Such conversations do not happen by themselves. Capable community leaders take the risk, open the dialogue, and, with charm, persuasion, friendly insistence, and a sense of urgency, help people and organizations find ways to enter willingly into the circle of discussion.

Having established a trusted dialogue, community leaders shape it in order to move the conversation from problematic abstractions to practical possibilities. Two steps are essential in this process. First, community leaders listen acutely to discern and accommodate the interests and issues of the various organizations involved. The purpose in this is to extract from the dialogue the shared interests and possibilities that can ground collaborative effort. Collaboration can never be much more than a fantasy unless all parties to it can proceed with some confidence that the interests of their own organizations — their particular purposes, missions, and values — are being satisfied. Second, community leaders provide convincing models for collaborative action that enable different organizations to begin to work together. They show how what must be done can be done, whether it is a plan for a simple short-term joint project between two community groups or a design for shared governance and management among several groups working together to address a complex issue over the long term.

### **Communities and Community Organizations**

It is in their culmination in collaborative endeavour that we begin to see, as suggested all along, how the practices of leadership in community organizations are congruent with the practices of leadership in communities. That is because the intrinsic contextual forces that shape leadership in community organizations are very similar to the forces that shape leadership in communities.

- Community organizations are in essence collaborative efforts of committed individuals with shared but varied concern united behind a passionate consensus; community initiatives are collaborative efforts of committed individuals and organizations from across sectors with a shared interest in specific social change. In communities, as in community organizations, the challenge for leaders is to build and sustain a consensus for action.

- Social entrepreneurship and innovation are as vital in communities at large as they are in community organizations, and for much the same reason — scarcity of resources. Though there has been improvement in this area, our funding systems are typically poorly designed to support complex, multi-sectoral initiatives that are not easily categorized or labeled. Yet this complexity is characteristic of the kinds of initiatives that will be needed to tackle the tough issues that communities face. Interestingly, it is often innovative community partnerships contrived to solve resource challenges that provide vivid examples of innovative social entrepreneurship at work.
- Ultimately, community organizations ensure their sustainability by articulating a vision that demonstrates the connection between private concern and public good. Likewise, in order for community initiatives to gain traction, a vision must be communicated which shows how a coalition of varied organizational and personal interests in support of a single consensus for action is actually of benefit to the community as a whole.

Again, leadership in both community organizations and communities at large is distinguished less by specific behavioural skills or self-management methods than by the way that the organizational and social context makes specific demands on leaders that elicit particular leadership practices. Leadership in both contexts is so similar that it is perhaps best to view leadership of community organizations as simply one form of community leadership.

### **Conclusion: The Case for Community Leadership**

To get to this point, we set out to explore two related questions: Is there any difference between community leadership and other forms of leadership? And, is community leadership really nothing more than a weak form of business leadership?

The questions were motivated in part by concern for the competitive positioning of community leadership training programs. Why should such programs exist at all if community leadership is not distinct in any way, and if good leadership development is available elsewhere? They were also motivated by our interest in developing a succinct and compelling definition of community leadership.

In retrospect, though these are good and useful questions to ask, we can see that they are coloured by tacit assumptions that make answering them clearly difficult.

The first of these is the assumption that business leadership is somehow the “exemplary” form of leadership, an assumption that is followed by a train of confidence-eroding suggestions that business leadership is in some undefined sense more basic, more urgent, more comprehensive, more important, more valuable, or more effective than community leadership. Good business leaders are indeed impressive, and there is much to be admired in, and learned from, their examples. But there is no reason for assuming that business leadership is the unique leadership exemplar other than the decades of one-sided attention that it has received from management academics and leadership trainers.

The second silent assumption is more subtle. It is that community leadership must be differentiated by a unique behavioural repertoire or set of leadership self-management tools and techniques. It seems unlikely that this is the case. Indeed, it is fundamentally at odds with research into leadership skills, which has found that effective leadership behaviour and habits are common to various forms of leadership. Community leadership is not distinguished by a unique behavioural repertoire, but by the way fundamental leadership skills are called on by the community context.

A more pointed question to have asked is, how do different organizational and social circumstances make different demands on and elicit different practices from leaders? As noted, it is the character of the led that drives the character of leadership in particular contexts. People act and are motivated differently in the community at large and in community organizations than they do and are in businesses. It is not necessarily the case that the people are different people. More often than not they are the same people in a different situation, both the leaders and others. It is telling in this regard that, very often, community leaders are also business leaders.

We often hear it stated that community organizations ought to become more businesslike, usually meaning that they need to be managed in a more orderly and structured fashion and led with a kind of abrupt decisiveness that some people seem to imagine is typical of business. It's true enough that many community organizations could be managed better. Particularly as community organizations grow and become more complex and highly structured, the genius of business leadership in maintaining large-scale, distributed task focus becomes more relevant, to take just one example. But by the same token we could say that business ought to become more community-like. It is easy to think of situations in which the experience of effective community leaders is directly relevant to challenges faced by business — in the leadership of change, for example, in which the risk of job loss or transformation injects huge emotion into employees' relationships with the organization; or in the leadership of the millennial generation, who, as HR departments are learning, are demanding a healthy dose of meaning in their jobs; or in the leadership of innovation teams or groups of knowledge workers, which are often structured almost as flat coalitions of professional equals; or in brand development based on community values; or in the leadership of community relations, in which businesses aim to engage the public and its concerns. In many ways, the lessons of community leadership are as relevant to business as those of business leadership are to communities.

It is not case then that "leadership is leadership is leadership," but rather that "leaders are leaders are leaders" and that those with the inclination, training, experience, and skills to exercise leadership will probably do so capably, wherever they find themselves — in communities, in business, in government, or in the military, rising to the demands as occasion and context dictate. We should expect therefore that the experience they garner in one sector not only adds to their depth as leaders, but is transferable to any other context in which they have the opportunity to exert their skills. How individual leaders typically draw on the fundamental behavioural skillset to exercise leadership in various situations is what we call their "leadership style." Business leadership and community leadership in this sense are not opposites, or unequally robust. They are complements.

We've described a kind of "virtuous cycle" of core community leadership practices. Community leadership starts with the creation of a passionate consensus for action. Through social entrepreneurship it builds the necessary organizational vehicles and programs. In articulating a vision of public good, it generates the broad support for issues that makes progress possible. In collaborative endeavour, it moves the agenda forward. And no doubt in engaging the public with a vision of innovative, collaborative purpose, it sets the stage for yet another small group of people to sit up, take notice, and decide to act together on a matter of shared concern that they feel is important.

That's what we talk about when we talk about community leadership.

