

# Bridging Leadership: A Framework for Democratic Leadership Capacity-Building

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## INTRODUCTION

In his book *Democracy: All that Matters*, Steven Beller cautioned readers that “If we just scratch the surface a little in the established democracies, the complacency that prevails there soon appears unwarranted.”<sup>1</sup> Asia, as in other parts of the world, is seeing creeping autocratisation. This reveals how fragile our democracies are and how our democratic labels may just be a disguise. Everyone, especially the young political leaders, has a great role to play in ensuring that the essence of democracy is possessed and experienced by all generations. Any capacity-building programme that promotes democracy in Asia will benefit from infusing in its training a leadership approach that is appropriate to nurturing democratic values and to ensuring that societal results guaranteed by democratic governance are achieved. In pursuit of a leadership model which is responsive to current realities, this paper examines a perceived weakness in democratic governance and suggests a contemporary leadership paradigm for social transformation through multi-stakeholder engagement. This leadership model has been widely utilised by non-government organisations, the academe, people’s organisations and government agencies.

## LEADERSHIP FOR A DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

People are increasingly becoming unconvinced about the ability of democratic governments to act effectively. Among several reasons for this are: unqualified

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<sup>1</sup> Beller claims that complacency (not giving much thought to democratic institutions by which their lives are governed) seems to be a prevailing attitude among people living in democracies. Beller, Steven. 2013. *Democracy: All that matters*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

leaders, uninformed voters, short-termism<sup>2</sup>, public dissatisfaction with politics and perceived inability to influence political processes, and elites and interest groups distorting democratic institutions.<sup>3</sup> After examining data on autocratisation in the world since the 1900s culled from the Varieties of Democracy Project, scholars say that a third wave of autocratisation is happening. However, they say panic is not warranted as the proportion of democratic countries globally is still near an all-time high. Democratic breakdown is still a risk though and this occurs now not as an abrupt event but as a gradual regression under a legal facade.<sup>4</sup>

Democracy has been said to be a *more-or-less* rather than an *either/or* affair. A spectral feature of democracy is raised where countries or states function more or less democratically along these dimensions: breadth, depth, range, and control.<sup>5</sup> Oscillations in these dimensions influence the procedural part of democracy: rule of law, electoral accountability, inter-institutional accountability, political participation, and political competition. These processes shape the substance, content and outcome of democracy which are freedom, equality and responsiveness. Political liberalisation and democratisation have ushered in the advancement and deepening of many procedural dimensions of democracy in the Asia-Pacific but have been remarkably less successful in securing adequate implementation of these procedures.<sup>6</sup> Social justice indeed results not only from the presence of institutional forms (democratic rules and regulations), but also from effective practice.<sup>7</sup> In places where there is perceived successful implementation of the democratic procedures, the people lament that they do not experience its outcome. There is a promise overload and a performance deficit with the political parties in Asia.<sup>8</sup> This observation is critical as the outcomes of democracy are important to the youth. In the Asian Barometer Survey on East Asia and Southeast Asia, it was observed that the youth

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<sup>2</sup> Moyo, Dambisa. 2018. "Why Democracy Doesn't Deliver" *Foreign Policy*, 26 April. Accessed 8 April 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/26/why-democracy-doesnt-deliver/>.

<sup>3</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Dressel, Bjorn, and Pelizzo, Riccardo. 2016. "The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings" *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>4</sup> Lührmann, Anna and Lindberg, Staffan. 2019. "A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?" *Democratization*. Accessed 1 June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Crocker, David. 2008. *Ethics in global development: Agency, capability and deliberative democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Dressel, Bjorn, and Pelizzo, Riccardo. 2016. "The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings" *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>7</sup> Sen, Amartya. 2000. *Development as freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Shastri, Sandeep. 2020. Understanding Political Ideology, Political Parties and Party Systems in Asia. KASYP Program Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 17-21 February 2020.

tend to value the outcomes of political systems (good governance, social equity) a bit more than they do the basic normative principles (norms and procedures, freedom and liberty).<sup>9</sup> When the democratic outcome is not felt, public confidence and trust in the procedure (political accountability and participation) drop. An analysis of the quality of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region in 2016 has also brought up the issue of emptied democracies: governments that retain the formal aspects of democracy but not its substance.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that overcoming democratic deficits requires strong political leadership from the branches of the government and the collective political will of the citizens.<sup>11</sup> Experiences from the past also affirm that democratic declines can be upturned by focusing on a more microscopic approach or on local initiatives – a strategy that has been shown to be effective at promoting political reform.<sup>12</sup> Shaping the leader’s agency to work for genuine democracy is a starting point. By investing in micro political leadership and the mobilisation of the people, stronger ripples can be formed to blunt waves of autocratisation.

In its role of influencing young Asian leaders to foster democratic leadership, the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) will benefit from a strong leadership framework that supports democracy and reliably produces the desired outcomes. A fitting model is an approach that embraces the immense diversity in Asia and induces partnerships out of divides. The Bridging Leadership approach is suggested as an input to the KASYP curriculum.

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP: ROOTS AND APPROACH

Synergos, a global non-government organisation, initiated the Bridging Leadership programme in 1999 with partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Synergos founder and chair Peggy Dulany contended then that there was a dearth in leadership literature and research on leadership models that bridge divides. The programme was developed in response to what she sensed as the emerging global

<sup>9</sup> UNDP. 2014. Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia Exploring political attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey.

<sup>10</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Bjorn Dressel, and Riccardo Pelizzo. 2016. “The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings” *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos, Clarita R., Dennis M. Lalata, Dianne C. Despi, and Portia R. Carlos. 2010. *Democratic deficits in the Philippines: What is to be done?* Manila: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2019. “Saving Asia’s Democracies.” *The Diplomat*, 10 July 10. Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/saving-asias-democracies/>.

environment – “more complex yet interdependent – full of conflicts and potential conflicts coming from inequities in structures and systems.”<sup>13</sup> To date, Synergos has had engagements in more than 15 countries.

Bridging Leadership (BL) is a style of leadership practised by both individuals and organisations that is effective in building trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders to address systemic challenges.<sup>14</sup> It is characterised by the capacity to engender trust and maximise the potential and contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them to unite, overcome divides and converge in transformative partnership especially in addressing social inequities. This leadership approach entails inner work for self-awareness and personal or organisational mastery, analytical skills to understand complex social issues, and openness to collaboration as a norm.

Diverging from conventional notions on leadership, Bridging Leadership subscribes to shared power and collective problem-solving. The leader is reliably more of a facilitator, enabler, convener, and co-owner of the problem, processes, and solution.

**Figure 1. Roles of the Bridging Leader.**



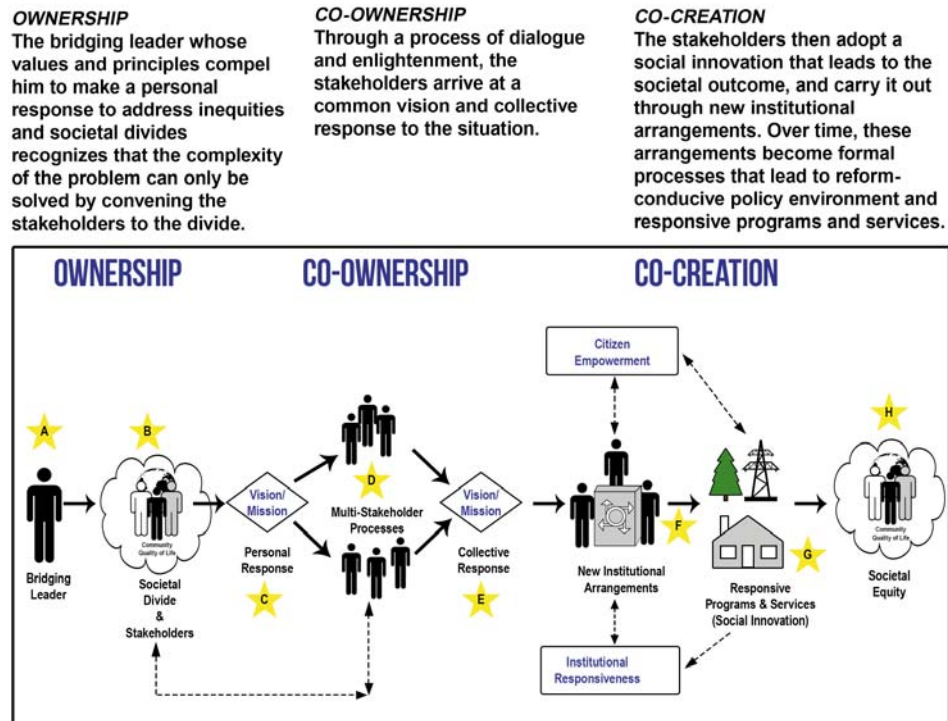
Reference: Dulany, Peggy. 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Garilao, Ernesto. 2007. “Bridging Leadership at Synergos: Experience and Learnings.” <https://www.synergos.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/bridging-leadership-at-synergos.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.synergos.org/about/approach>. Accessed 1 June 2020.

Three processes unfold in operationalising this leadership approach according to the Asian Institute of Management Team Energy Center (AIM TEC) for Bridging Leadership, the pioneer incubator of BL in the Philippines. These processes are ownership, co-ownership and co-creation (Figure 2). AIM has been utilising BL in transforming political, government, military, business, and civil society leaders so as to enable them to effectively address problems on peace, education, health, land conflicts, poverty, and poor local governance, among others.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2. The Bridging Leadership Framework.**



Source: AIM-TEC, 2006.

The Zuellig Family Foundation (ZFF) further explored the leadership competencies in each of the three BL processes. Various leadership concepts have also been incorporated in implementing and putting BL into practice. The ZFF is an institution that has been keen on ameliorating the health conditions of Filipinos. It aims to

<sup>15</sup> Asian Institute of Management Team Energy Center for Bridging Leadership. <https://aim.edu/research-centers/team-energy-center-bridging-leadership>. Accessed 1 June 2020.

spur better health outcomes through its Health Change Model. This model capitalises on responsive leadership and governance (through Bridging Leadership) that will drive a robust local health system defined by effective services and heightened community participation. For the past eleven years, the Foundation has grown BL as a leadership practice in the public health system of the Philippines. More than 3,300 health and government leaders (referred to as BL fellows after completing a programme) from the village level to national departments have been trained by the ZFF.<sup>16</sup> Concepts and lessons from the AIM and the ZFF are the main bases for this discussion.

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP: PROCESS AND COMPETENCIES

### Ownership

In the ownership phase, a bridging leader is compelled to initiate a personal response to a societal challenge. Internally, this response reflects the leader's values and principles and externally, there is the recognition that multiple stakeholders have to be convened relative to the challenge.

The ZFF tracks the progress of its leadership fellows in three ownership competencies: modeling personal mastery, thinking strategically on inequities, and problem-solving and decision-making on challenges.

A vital foundation in this BL process is modeling personal mastery. The leader is expected to be self-directed and motivated. Integrity is paramount as the leader is aware of and consistently nurtures personal and organisational core values. This deep loyalty to core values allows the leader to muster the courage to act in the right way even in ambiguous and difficult situations. A personal vision embodies one's purpose, which is attained through the manifestation of democratic values.

Ownership of self speaks of authenticity. It is about exemplifying a deepened self-awareness, practising values and constantly being aligned with and guided by an avowed mission. Bridging leaders are perceived as authentic. Authentic leaders are those "guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, and by qualities of the mind and who genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership driven by purpose, meaning, and values".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ZFF. 2018. Annual and Sustainability Report.

<sup>17</sup> George, Bill. 2003. *Authentic leadership rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value*. Jossey-Bass.

Ownership also entails owning (being accountable for) and truly understanding the challenge. The leaders should be able to think strategically about the challenge or the social inequities and manifest strategic agility. The leaders who construe challenges not in a myopic view but as events embedded in a system show these competencies. They employ the Theory U, an awareness-based method for changing systems that capitalises on inner knowing to co-sense and co-shape preferred realities.<sup>18</sup> Systems thinking allows the leaders to grasp an issue in its overall context, interrelations, and consequences over time. They may then act responsively, focusing on strategic knobs that swiftly diffuse the challenge.

Decision-making based on sufficient analysis of facts is essential in this responsive action. Self-motivation prompts the leaders to a personal response that harnesses their capital (experience, training/education, connections, resources, and values).

Ownership is anchored to the idea of self-leadership: having the developed sense of “who you are, what you can do and where you’re going”.<sup>19</sup> The concept of emotional intelligence is heavily embedded too in the BL ownership modules. Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of superior self-leadership.<sup>20</sup> Business guru Dee Hock’s insight supports this focus when he stated that leaders should invest at least 50 percent of their leadership amperage in self-leadership.

One municipal mayor described his experience of ownership as an exercise of introspection and reflective awareness. Despite his past failures and circumstances, including a futile bid in his first mayoralty attempt, he did not waver from his resolve to serve his community. He succeeded in his next try and was able to lead his municipality for the maximum three terms. He joined the BL programme in his final term and his profound appreciation of the BL framework made him decide to have all employees of the local government unit trained in this leadership approach. With members of the bureaucracy all having a common mindset, wicked problems were confronted with ease and the municipality was recognised in the region for being responsive and innovative.

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<sup>18</sup> Scharmer, C. Otto. 2018. *The essentials of Theory U: Core principles and applications*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

<sup>19</sup> Browning, Michelle. 2018. “Self-leadership: Why It Matters”. *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 9(2): 14-18.

<sup>20</sup> Goleman, Daniel. 2005. *Emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.

## Co-ownership

A bridging leader is humble and acknowledges that being fully committed to addressing a complex challenge with one's values and resources will never be adequate. Leveraging on the wisdom and resources of other stakeholders is compulsory when confronting wicked problems. Co-ownership is about arriving at a collective vision and response through democratic and participatory mechanisms – dialogue and engagement.

The ZFF identified three competencies in this process: leading change, leading multiple stakeholders and coaching and mentoring for results. Leading change is about one's ability to generate commitment among partners and to sustain this for organisational or community reforms. It entails working through resistance through dialogue, valuing everyone's competence as a building block in interventions, and rallying stakeholders to the shared vision.

Multiple stakeholders bring in various perspectives and egos. To effectively realise a collective change agenda, trust and shared accountability in working relationships across the spectrum of partners are important. In leading stakeholders, there are needed inversions or shifts in perspective: from *me* to *we* (personal) and from *ego* to *eco-system* (relational). These suggest that leaders view themselves "through the eyes of others and of the whole."<sup>21</sup> In particular, the voice of the marginalised and those most affected by the challenges should be heard and become part of the "whole" and of the necessary conversations.

Coaching and mentoring are indispensable skills for leaders in supporting a leadership ecosystem that performs or delivers. Coaching is about unravelling the potential of people for them to maximise their own performance.<sup>22</sup> Looking around, disruptive change is the new norm as situations are volatile (much like democracy at present and the threats to it). In such a context, traditional command-and-control management will not thrive as leaders do not possess a monopoly on answers or solutions. Coaching conversations are more appropriate than instructions.<sup>23</sup>

A mentor is said to guide and advise a mentee. There is often a perceived hierarchy of power (more senior, higher position) or information (also wisdom from

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<sup>21</sup> Scharmer, Otto, and Katrin Kaeufer. 2013. *Leading from the emerging future from ego-system to eco-system economies*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

<sup>22</sup> Whitmore, John. 2009. *Coaching for performance GROWing human potential and purpose*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

<sup>23</sup> Ibarra, Herminia and Anne Scoular. 2019. "The Leader as Coach." Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-leader-as-coach>.



experience) between the mentor and the mentee, with the mentor being older and wiser. Coaching, however, may transpire between a manager and his subordinates (in both directions) and also between peers.<sup>24</sup> Evidence on the benefits of coaching and mentoring has been unequivocal: people who are guided by mentors perform better and experience more work-life satisfaction.<sup>25</sup> It has been reported that 70 to 80 percent of people who are coached improve their self-confidence, relationships and work performance while developing their communication and interpersonal skills too.<sup>26</sup> Leadership coaching and mentoring shape the supportive learning environment that nurtures the high performance of stakeholders.

A director of a regional department of health who was a BL fellow demonstrated co-ownership by forming her guiding coalition. The coalition was composed of trusted key people from both senior managers and subordinates of the office and field units. These key people were, for the director, the right people and the right team – individuals with the appropriate skills, the leadership capacity, organisational credibility and social capital<sup>27</sup> to co-own a vision. The members of this support coalition, with whom she regularly met, committed to supporting her goal of better maternal and child health in the region. The guiding team was also trained on BL and on coaching such that they were able to coach and mentor their rank and file and officials of the local government health units.

The director acknowledged that her management approach changed as she practised Bridging Leadership. From being autocratic and intolerant, she became more open to others. Consciously, she practised dialogue and active listening more.

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<sup>24</sup> Zenger, John and Kathleen Stinnett. 2010. *The extraordinary coach How the best leaders help others grow*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>25</sup> Horoszowski, Mark. 2020. "How to Build a Great Relationship with a Mentor." *Harvard Business Review*. 21 January. Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/01/how-to-build-a-great-relationship-with-a-mentor>.

<sup>26</sup> International Coaching Federation. 2009. "Global Coaching Client Study Executive Summary." Accessed 1 June 2020. <http://www.gos-coaching.ch/pdf/2009-ICF%20Global%20survey.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Kotter, John and Dan Cohen. 2002. *The heart of change. Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

## Co-creation

In co-creation, the collective vision of stakeholders results in innovative strategies that engender the desired societal outcome of equity. These innovations address both the technical and adaptive features of the challenge. Technical challenges are those that can be solved by the organisation's existing expertise, structures, procedures, and ways of doing things while adaptive challenges are those that can only be tackled through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.<sup>28</sup> The bridging leader and the stakeholders are accountable for tracking the progress of the interventions and for ensuring that the programmes and services are responsive to the marginalised sectors and are focused on the goal. The new arrangements are espoused and create a new norm for the transformed organisation and the empowered stakeholders.

The ZFF recognises a competency on championing and sustaining social innovations in co-creation. The bridging leader and the stakeholders enhance conventional approaches that work and employ emergent and creative thinking to co-create innovative solutions. These strategies are reviewed and modified as needed with the goal of reducing societal inequities.

An example of a new arrangement that addressed both the technical and adaptive aspects of a challenge was seen in the adaptive work of a municipal mayor in an indigenous peoples' community. Confronted with a high maternal mortality rate of indigenous women during birthing, the mayor and the municipal health officer introduced a policy on facility-based deliveries. Customarily, indigenous women give birth at home, with the assistance of the traditional birth attendant. The mayor and the health officer, as bridging leaders, actively dialogued with the indigenous community's leaders, elders and women to thresh out the best way to address this maternal health inequity. The indigenous leaders agreed to advocate to the women to deliver in health facilities. The mayor and the health officer also approved the appeal by the indigenous peoples for their ritualists to perform some rites in the health facility and for the traditional birth attendants to accompany the women. The doctor, nurse or midwife would still deliver the baby. The mayor authorised arrangements for transportation to the birthing centers especially for those women residing in distant areas. The health officer ensured that the services of the safe motherhood programme were made culturally sensitive. This intercultural

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<sup>28</sup> Heifetz, Ronald, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow. 2009. *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

co-creation was institutionalised in a modified policy and through a well-disseminated programme. From nine maternal deaths in the previous year, this number dropped to zero after just one year of the policy's implementation.<sup>29</sup>

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP FOR RESULTS

Aside from the many public narratives of the fellows on how Bridging Leadership has modified their leadership style to be more democratic and collaborative despite complex societal divides and diverse stakeholders, local empirical studies have supported its impact on social inequities. In an evaluation study of a Bridging Leadership programme for local chief executives and health officers, the course was seen as instrumental in the drastic improvement of the health outcomes in the municipalities. In the study's linear regression modeling, leadership was established to have the biggest influence in the local health system.<sup>30</sup> Governance through bridging leadership was associated with better health financing, capable health human resource, more accessible medicines and technology, adequate health information system and responsive health service delivery. Leadership then was not simply one component among many; it was the key driver in a process that made people experience the collective vision as a reality. This bridge-building approach has been recognised as a tool for social transformation and an initiative with an enormous potential to tackle intractable societal problems.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In combining contemporary and emerging theories on effective agency, engaging diversity, leading participatory change and results-orientation, the Bridging Leadership in practice supports democracy that delivers. The Bridging Leadership experiences have promoted essential elements of democracy: respect for rights especially of victims of social inequities, the freedom of stakeholders to express their opinions and to be heard through dialogues, the opportunity for civic participation that influences government policies and programmes, proactive rule of law for the

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<sup>29</sup> ZFF. 2017. Municipal Leadership and Governance Program Module 2.

<sup>30</sup> Labarda, Meredith. 2019. *Transformative leadership and governance as a development process: Building equitable health systems and Filipino well-being*. Doctor of Social Development Dissertation. University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, L. David. 2015. *Bridge-Building for Social Transformation*. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

common good, transparency and accountability, and the engagement of the pluralistic society to move away from societal divides. From these, the responsiveness of systems was made possible and the procedures and substance of democracy were fulfilled and experienced. The Bridging Leadership process may be a timely and pertinent addition to capacity-building initiatives for enabling democratic politicians.

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