



CITIZEN POWER

Re-imagining what it means to be a Citizen
in a time of rupture

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Something fundamental needs to shift. I feel it — and I suspect you do too. We are in a metacrisis — institutions of all kinds are stuck, under huge pressure, some are faltering and others collapsing.¹ There is no assured brighter future. We've looked to leaders for solutions: political leaders, experts, 'saviours' — and found them wanting, and been left disappointed, even cynical. More of the same is possible, a downwards doom loop. This moment calls us to reclaim our power as 'citizens' and to re-imagine what it means to be a citizen in a time of rupture.

By 'citizen', I mean our shared responsibility as members and co-creators of: a family, community in the place we call home, our democracy and our shared living world. The seed pattern of a different way of being a citizen is already present. This paper describes the patterns leading to our current stuckness and the way we might create a different future *together*.

The roots of our predicament go back a long time. We are at the end of "*a four-hundred-year-old age rattling in its deathbed as another age struggles to be born*".² Radical business leader, Dee Hock, the founder of Visa, named three key questions 20 years ago:

- *Why are institutions everywhere, whether political, commercial or social, increasingly unable to manage their affairs?*
- *Why are individuals everywhere increasingly in conflict with and alienated from the institutions of which they are part?*
- *Why are society and the biosphere increasingly in disarray?*

Yet here we are 20 years later asking the same questions. T.S. Eliot named our challenge well: "*humankind cannot bear very much reality.*"³

The future, if we are to create a liveable future, lies in a profound shift of mind and heart. The ancient Greeks had a word for this: metanoia. This is nothing less than a re-imagining of what it means to be human, and what it means to be a citizen.

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Have you noticed how the language of citizen is becoming more commonplace? It is happening across the world, from re-imagining ‘relational public services’⁴ in the UK, to citizens successfully resisting the actions of ICE in Minneapolis through a new way of ‘neighboring’; to the way citizens everywhere quietly sustain and repair the shared fabric we call community.

Being a citizen is more than a legal status or our eligibility to vote in elections, foundational though these two elements are. ‘Citizen’ is multi-dimensional and speaks to our belonging at every level of the system.

These levels of belonging are like rings in a tree trunk. These are not separate rings but nested realities — we inhabit all of them at once, even as we tend to notice only some.

Like a tree, citizenship is a nested, living system:

- 🌀 Citizen as a member of a **family**.
- 🌀 Citizen as a member of a **community**: a physical **place** such as a neighbourhood, village, town, city or an online community of shared interest.⁵
- 🌀 Citizen as a participant in a **democracy**^{6 7} and **co-creator of the common good**.^{8 9}
- 🌀 Citizen as a member of our **planetary home**, which **includes our more-than-human kin and the living world**¹⁰ of which we are part.¹¹
- 🌀 Citizen as a member of a **sacred world and universe**¹²: the recognition that our belonging is held within a much larger **spiritual or sacred reality**.^{13 14}



This understanding of Citizen is a disruptor to the familiar story we tell ourselves about who we are and where power resides in the systems of which we are a part.

Our attention invariably has focused on the power and responsibility of Top leaders¹⁵ — politicians and CEOs — to bring about the changes. We gave up our agency and power and waited for Top leaders, of one kind or another, to fix things and invariably we were disappointed. It's been easy for the rest of us to feel powerless: they were the cause and we were the effect.¹⁶

In this repeating failure loop, we failed to see what Barry Oshry calls the '*terrible dance of power*'¹⁷ and how we, largely unawarely, played our part in perpetuating this cycle of power and powerlessness. This love (and hate) of Top leaders has limited our capacity to create an alternate future.

In fact, when we pause and look more closely at the world of Top leaders, we discover an uncomfortable truth that "*no established political or industrial player has the will or power, within the established rules, to ensure the changes that are necessary*"¹⁸... *If a respectable member of the political or industrial elite proposes such changes, they would not remain respectable for very long.*"¹⁹

The issues we face — the climate and nature crisis, massive economic inequality, increasing polarisation, an epidemic of loneliness, distrust of our politicians... — are complex²⁰, interlocking issues²¹ and require the engagement of all of us.²² The combination of complex issues and breakdown in trust in public and private institutions and government has set up a "self-reinforcing democratic doom loop".²³

Facing reality involves seeing how entangled and enmeshed we are in the systems we say we want to change. We are implicated.²⁴ We need to face the breadth and depth of the challenge before proceeding otherwise we risk giving up at the first barrier we encounter. We need to recognise the size of the cloth we have to reweave together.

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Why include the sacred as a dimension of citizenship?

According to the Pew Research Centre (2025), around 76% of the global population identifies with a formal religious tradition. Among the remaining 24% who identify as religiously unaffiliated, many nonetheless hold spiritual beliefs or engage in spiritual practices.²⁵ Questions of meaning, purpose and the sacred are live and important for the vast majority of the world and this needs to be reflected in our exploration of citizenship.

I think of spirituality as the core of our humanity — “the perennial human search for the sacred, for meaning and purpose and the seeking of answers to the fundamental questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I live?”²⁶ Defined in this way, spirituality names a fundamental dimension of citizenship, and these questions matter to all of us. They are, at their heart, questions about what it means to live a good life.

Simply put, given the complexity of the issues we face and their urgency, we have little chance of finding our way unless we engage this core of our humanity.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues: “*Public culture needs something religion-like... something passionate and idealistic if human emotions are to sustain projects aimed at lofty goals... Mere respect is not enough to hold citizens together when they must make sacrifices of self-interest.*”²⁷ Economists Robert & Edward Skidelsky ask: “*Could a society devoid of the religious impulse stir itself to pursuit of the common good? We doubt it.*”²⁸

Spiritual and religious questions are largely absent from policy discussions of citizenship in the UK and wider Europe. The dominant culture of free market consumer ideology has colonised much of our public language, making the sacred feel unfamiliar or even controversial. That absence is itself part of the problem. Reclaiming citizen space means reclaiming the full range of what it means to be human.

Activating citizen space is not a panacea.

Human beings, and therefore human systems, have a tragic element – a predictable, repeating nature and a tendency to get caught in patterns which are self-limiting, stressful and destructive.^{29 30 31} And at the same time, human beings are capable of great creativity, generosity and compassion and we rightly also marvel at the wonder of the accomplishments of human systems.

And so, in the Citizen context, there are two possibilities. The familiar story where we and others get stuck, having created the same old story again, ending up feeling powerless and alienated from others. And there is also the largely unrealised power of Citizen space.

The table below sets out the conditions of Citizen space, the predictable behavioural responses, the resulting familiar disempowering experience and ‘the Stand’ – the latent power - that is available to us when we act with greater awareness, insight and courage.

	CITIZEN
<p>Conditions – the characteristics and primary forces operating in Citizen space.</p>	<p>Search for a good life, Unmet needs, Disconnection</p> <p>At the heart of the Citizen space is something we all know deep down. People want to build a good life — for themselves, their families, and the communities that matter to them. This is not a new impulse. The search for a good life takes a thousand different forms. What we think of as a good life is shaped by the stories we’re told, the systems we live in, and the experiences we’ve had. But the search itself is universal.</p> <p>We humans all have basic physical needs – food, shelter, safety. And we have deeper needs too: for belonging, for recognition, for a sense that our identity and community are valued and have a future. These needs are universal – shared across every human being, however different our circumstances, however opposed our strategies for meeting them. When these needs go unmet — when people feel unseen, disregarded or left behind by the systems and institutions that were supposed to serve them — then the conditions are set for what follows. We live in a time of rupture and breakdown.</p> <p>What once worked — in institutions, in politics – is failing visibly. We live in the gap between the old that is dying and the new that is struggling to be born.³² Unmet needs, individually and collectively, are a defining condition of our time.</p> <p>Disconnection. Individualism is the dominant story of our age in the West and has profoundly shaped how we understand ourselves and the world. It tells us that we humans are separate, independent selves — that the good life is something we pursue alone, or at best in competition with others. This is not a personal failing. It is a systemic condition: we are disconnected from one another and from the living world of which we are part. In this story, we stand alone.</p> <p>And standing alone, with unmet needs and no shared means of addressing them, we become vulnerable to the predictable responses that follow.</p>

<p>Predictable Reflex Response — common, habitual response activated by the conditions of the Citizen space</p>	<p>Consume passively, outsource responsibility, blame others</p> <p>Consume passively — the dominant story says: “<i>You are a consumer. The good life is something you buy. Solutions come from experts.</i>”³³ In this story, we stop seeing ourselves and each other as citizens. Instead, we are cast as atomised individuals: separate, disconnected, and competing with others. Citizenship becomes hollowed out and is reduced to choice, complaint and compliance...</p> <p>Outsource responsibility — we reflexively look <i>up or outward</i> to meet our needs: to experts, institutions, influencers or ‘saviours’ with easy answers. Standing alone and in the face of issues which feel too big, too complex, too difficult, we fall into spectating rather than participating.³⁴</p> <p>Blame others — Fear in the face of rupture and breakdown is understandable. And fear is flammable and can easily be ignited into blame and the scapegoating of others, the groups whom we think, or populist leaders tell us, are the cause of our problems.</p> <p>These responses are not due to an indelible aspect of human nature. They are the reflex responses that reflect that the culture we inhabit, the stories we are told and retell, where the most available ‘scripts’ are consumer, client or critic. We try to buy the good life, we look upward or outward to systems, experts³⁵ or leaders to fix what’s not working, and when that fails, we blame.</p>
<p>Familiar Disempowering Experience — a lived experience that feels like reality but isn’t inevitable</p>	<p>Powerless</p> <p>When we disconnect from each other, it creates a vicious cycle. We start to feel isolated — powerless to change anything — unsure that our voice matters and we lose belief in our capacity to influence what’s happening around us. As a result, we rely more and more on systems to meet needs and solve problems — waiting for experts , institutions, or ‘leaders’ to act, rather than turning to each other.³⁶</p> <p>As we focus our frustration and anger on others, our differences harden into polarisations and ‘us vs them’³⁷. There can be a feeling of solidarity and strength as we unite with others against them.</p> <p>Yet the complex problems we all face are likely to persist, or re-emerge in a new form, as scapegoating makes things worse and short-term fixes fail. In this sense we can still end up feeling powerless.</p>

Stand

— a freely chosen commitment to realise the latent power of Citizen space

Be a Citizen who connects with others, builds a good life and strengthens the common good

The starting point is a shift in perspective: seeing ourselves—and others—as citizens. We reclaim our agency, moving from spectators to co-creators. We choose to live in a different story rejecting the narrative that nothing else is possible.

Strengthening the common good means turning “the good life” from a private purchase into a shared practice — citizens co-creating collective well-being within reach. By the common good we mean citizens reclaiming the power to act and producing what we care most about — *together*.

Creating citizen space takes imagination, because it asks us to live by a different story. It involves convening and hosting spaces where we can experience the best of the human spirit³⁸.

It also means choosing a different pace. As Bayo Akomolafe says: “The times are urgent. Let us slow down.”³⁹ Otherwise, we risk creating more of the same: slowing down helps us notice the habits we’re repeating.

The cloth is rewoven when people’s needs and people’s gifts are brought back into relation; not as charity from the capable to the needy but as mutual contribution in a shared life.

And it often means starting small, where we are: committing to local, ongoing experiments that carry different values and different logics. As we practice citizenship together, agency grows, relationships deepen, we mobilise people power and the good life becomes something we build — *together*.

We create the conditions for co-creation, not dependency⁴⁰. Our focus is relational. We restore broken or weakened ties — between individuals, communities, institutions, and the living world around us. We connect people to one another. To shared purpose. To the places they inhabit. To the things they care deeply about.

We remind ourselves and systems that agency and creativity live in all parts of the whole and that people already carry gifts and capacities — waiting to be seen, invited, and valued.

Facing reality involves seeing how entangled and enmeshed we are in the systems we say we want to change.

The essence of Citizen context is relational. Citizen can be thought of as a practice done with others — Citizen-ing⁴¹. Citizenship is not something we acquire, it is something we co-become⁴².

The words from poet David Whyte ring true: “*Start close in, don’t take the second step or the third, start with the first thing close in, the step you don’t want to take*”. And then we expand outwards, like the rings of a tree as we widen the worlds in which we experience and express our citizenship.

We recognise the depth of the work: enmeshed as we are within the systems we want to change, entranced by the dominant narratives, and yet also with the human possibility of re-imagining what it means to be a Citizen.

This is not starry-eyed optimism. We recognise the conditions of the Citizen space and the potency of the forces of separation, disconnection and othering that impact us. And we act together, with awareness, insight and the three Hs — humility, humour and hope — remembering that hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.

Citizen space does not replace institutions, services or politics. It reminds us that none of them can flourish for long if citizens are reduced to consumers and spectators. The work is to reclaim agency, rebuild relationship, and strengthen the common good in the places where we live.

And the next step begins as soon as we see ourselves and others as Citizens. What is that next step for you?

“Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart... Try to love the questions themselves... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them — and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke

John Watters, *Living Leadership*, June 2026

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Appendix 1: Relational Systems Framework

For readers who want to explore how Citizen space sits within a broader relational systems framework, the appendix below sets this out.

One of the most useful things I've encountered in working with human systems is a simple insight: most of what we experience as personal or interpersonal conflict is actually systemic. We often mistake systemic issues for personal problems (believing that the causes are personal or interpersonal) or situational ones (believing that the causes are related to our unique, specific circumstances). Oshry's framework reminds us that the major issues are rarely just personal or situational, they're systemic.

Barry Oshry's Organic Systems Framework (OSF) gave me a language for that insight — a simple, robust map of the relational contexts that shape how people think, feel and act in human systems.⁴³ I've worked with this framework for over 25 years and introduced it to Europe. It has been a central frame in my organisational consulting practice and my understanding of leadership.

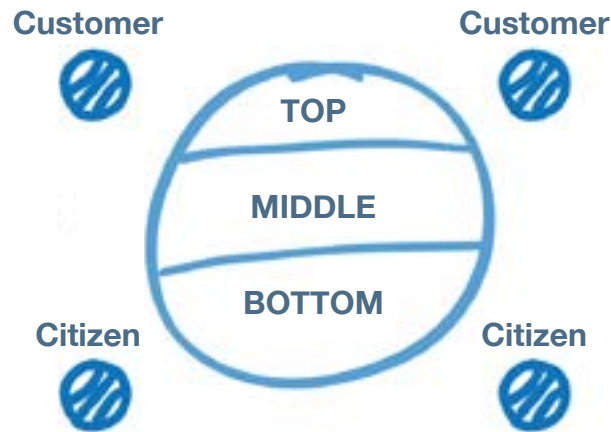
In this appendix, I am connecting Citizen space (a rich and deep field explored in the main section of this paper) with Barry Oshry's Organic Systems Framework. The addition of Citizen space offers a more complete and richer understanding of the pattern of interactions across human systems. To avoid confusion with Oshry's original work, I have called the enlarged framework, the Relational Systems Framework.

In human systems we move between multiple relational spaces — or contexts — in the course of a single day. We are invariably blind to the context that we and others are in and the impacts of those contexts on our relationships.

Context matters because it shapes our experience of ourselves, others and how we perceive our system and other systems. Context shapes how we think, feel and act, often without us noticing.

Each context has a predictable condition which describes the characteristics of that space, the primary forces at play. Here's a simple metaphor to illuminate what we mean by condition.⁴⁴ If you stand barefoot in a puddle, your feet get wet — it doesn't matter if you're a kind person or a cruel person, hopeful or cynical. It isn't about your personality or your temperament. It's not about you. The condition of your feet is wet. Likewise, if you step into a systemic space, certain forces predictably play out. It's not personal. It's systemic.

The diagram below sketches out the four original spaces of Top, Middle, Bottom, Customer referenced in Oshry's original work and the additional context of Citizen.



The world is of course more complex than just these five contexts, nevertheless this simple framework has a remarkable power to illuminate the way human systems become stuck and also highlight the latent power and possibility that lies waiting to be realised in every human system.

This expanded relational systems framework offers a dynamic relational map that enables you to navigate with more awareness, choice, and impact across the multiple different contexts you move between in the course of a single day.

The framework now identifies five relational spaces. The condition of each space is described below:

- **Top** (a space of accountability and complexity);
- **Middle** (a space of tearing where you find yourself between two or more individuals or groups who have differing priorities, goals, needs and demands);
- **Bottom** (a space of vulnerability when you are on the receiving end of a decision made elsewhere which impacts your world in major or minor ways);
- **Customer** (a space of neglect — promises made and promises broken in delivering what you need); and
- **Citizen** (a space of disconnection, the search for a good life pursued alone, with unmet needs).

Example

— A Day in the Life of a Principal of an Educational college:

The example below maps a day in the life of a Headteacher/Principal across the different spaces.

- *The principal starts in **Top** space when addressing an all-staff meeting.*
- *Then, she moves into **Middle** space, caught between two parent governors with competing demands.*
- *Next, in a Zoom meeting with a national network of headteachers, she advocates for lobbying government in response to the shortage of specialist teachers in philosophy, religion, and ethics for 16–18-year-olds. Her contribution is grounded in a deeply held belief: that exploring faith and belief is essential for societal cohesion. In this moment, she’s speaking from **Citizen** space—bringing her personal values and wider societal concern into her professional role.*
- *Later, news of a funding cut from a national agency puts her and her senior executive team in **Bottom** space — vulnerable to decisions made elsewhere.*
- *Then, she makes a request of the Head of Estates about an update on a building project — she’s now in **Customer** space.*
- *And that evening at home, she joins a neighbourhood meeting about tree planting — **Citizen** space.*

The table below sets out the conditions of each space, the predictable responses these conditions activate, the familiar disempowering experience those responses create, and the Stand – the latent power – that becomes possible when we act with greater awareness, insight and courage.

Space	Condition – the characteristics and primary forces operating in this space	Predictable Reflex Response – common, habitual response activated by the conditions of this space	Familiar Disempowering Experience – a lived experience that feels like reality but isn't inevitable	Stand – a freely chosen commitment to realise the latent power of this space
Top	Accountability Complexity	Suck up Responsibility	Burdened	Be a Top who creates responsibility throughout the system
Middle	Tearing – pulled between two or more individuals or groups who have differing priorities, needs and goals	Slide in between others' issues and make them your own	Torn	Be a Middle who maintains my independence of thought and action in service of the system
Bottom	Vulnerability – on the receiving end of decisions and actions that impact your world in major or minor ways	Hold Higher-Ups Responsible	Oppressed	Be a Bottom who is responsible for my condition and for the condition of the whole
Customer	Neglect – promises made and promises broken by the provider	Stands aloof and holds provider responsible for delivery	Righteously Screwed	Be a Customer who works in partnership with the provider
Citizen	Disconnection Search for a good life Unmet needs	Consume passively & outsource responsibility Blame others	Powerless	Be a Citizen who connects with others, builds a good life and strengthens the common good

References and Notes

I want to acknowledge the generous conversations and spirit of exploration from colleagues and friends in the UK, U.S., Ireland, Denmark, Singapore, Aotearoa and Australia who engaged with my early wanderings and encouraged an ongoing action inquiry approach to writing this paper.

¹ Katie Teague, *Living in the Metacrisis with Jonathan Rowson*, Perspectiva, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rTHj1lm3q4>

² Dee Hock, *One From Many: Visa and the Rise of the Chaordic Organization*, Berrett-Koehler, 2005, xvi

³ T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, The Four Quartets, <http://www.davidgorman.com/4quartets/>

⁴ Simon Parker, Becca Dove, Benjamin Taylor, A Hundred Origin Stories – an Unfinished History of Relational Public Services <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/policy-lab/news/2025/dec/hundred-origin-stories-unfinished-history-relational-public-services> Relational public services refer to approaches that place ongoing human relationships — between citizens, communities and service providers — at the centre of how public services are designed and delivered, rather than treating people primarily as clients or consumers.

⁵ Cormac Russell, John McKnight, *The Connected Community: Discovering the Health, Wealth and Power of Neighbourhoods*, Berrett-Koehler, 2022

⁶ Jon Alexander, *DOCE Beats DOGE: The Case for Meaningful Government Transformation Through Citizen Empowerment*, Harvard Kennedy School, 2026

⁷ “We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps quite unawakened... It is a great word, whose history, I suppose remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted. It is, in some sort, younger brother of another great and often used word, nature, whose history also awaits unwritten.” Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 1871.

⁸ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 3rd edition, Berrett-Koehler, 2026

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On Care for our Common Home*, 2015, para 156 “The common good is the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment. Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and alienable rights ordered to his or her integral development.” See also Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas, On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, June 2026, para 13 “building a world in which everyone can

flourish requires shared responsibility and courage. No one can single-handedly bear the weight of the challenges the world is facing, just as no one is so weak that they cannot play their part...All are given their own section of the wall: scientists and researchers, entrepreneurs and workers, educators and legislators, civil society, popular movements and faith communities. This is the logic of subsidiarity, which values the cooperation between generations, peoples, disciplines and cultures as the best way for fostering stability, prosperity and peace. We should not be intimidated by tensions or differences because they can become creative forces when guided by shared responsibility”.

¹⁰ “The source of all our problems today comes from the gap between how we think and how nature works.” Gregory Bateson quoted in Dee Hock, *One From Many: Visa and the Rise of the Chaordic Organization*, Berrett-Koehler, 2005, xii

¹¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Knowledge, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*, Penguin Random House, 2013

¹² Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, Random House, 1999, ix Berry describes the shift from a consumer narrative which sees *earth* as a “collection of objects” (resources for human use which only have ‘value’ when exploited and used for human consumption) to a citizen narrative of an “*earth community as a communion of subjects*”, a single earth community made up of human and more-than-human kin, other living beings who also have inherent dignity in their own being and rights.

¹³ No word is adequate to capture the paradoxical nature of this sacred (or spiritual) dimension of life, which is both immanent (here and now) and transcendent (beyond). The language of the ‘sacred’ may seem unfamiliar, even edgy. Perhaps the edginess of the word ‘sacred’ indicates how colonised our language has become by the dominant ‘religion’ and ideology of free market consumer ideology with its hallowed values of: scarcity, speed, scale, certainty, perfection, privatisation, individual rights and autonomous individuals. To be blasphemous is to question these taken-for-granted assumptions, values and core assumptions. For more on the ‘consumer culture’ read: Walter Brueggemann, Peter Block, John McKnight, *Another Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*, John Wiley & Sons, 2016. For an exploration of the sacred read: Iain McGilchrist, Chapter 29, *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmasking of the World*, Volume II, Perspectiva Press, 2022, 1193-1305.

¹⁴ For an understanding of how to host groups to cultivate the conditions which are hospitable to the soul see Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey towards An Undivided Life*, John Wiley & Sons, 20th Anniversary Edition, 2024 and the work of <https://couragerenewal.org/>

¹⁵ “The underexamined problem is that Britain’s economic settlement has been designed around people as passive ‘consumers’ or disempowered workers rather than active

‘citizens’ - that is, complex political and moral agents with community ties and a national identity. By relegating citizens to passive beneficiaries of or contributors to the economy, consecutive governments have operated without the democratic legitimacy to navigate hard economic trade-offs”. Polly Curtis, *The New Deal: How to Repair the Broken Relationship Between State and Citizen*, Demos, June 2026, 10

¹⁶ “We are fascinated with our leaders. We think they are decisive. From a distance, this belief seems almost quaint. We speak endlessly, both in the public conversation and privately, about the rise and fall of leaders. The agenda this sustains is that leaders are cause and all others are effect. That all that counts is what leaders do. That leaders are the leverage point for building a better community. That they are foreground, while citizens, followers, players, anyone else not in a leadership position are background. It is this love of leaders that limits our capacity to create an alternative future. It proposes that the only real accountability in the world is at the top. That they are the only ones worth talking about. The effect of buying into this view of leadership is that it lets citizens off the hook and breeds a culture of dependency and entitlement. It undermines the development of a culture where each is accountable for their community. The attention on the leader declares our innocence. In its own way, it reinforces individualism, putting us in the stance of waiting for the cream to rise, wishing for a great individual to bring light where there is darkness. It is possible to admire and be inspired by great leaders, even bosses, but we need to resist the projection that they can produce a change in the conditions that concern us. Each of us is accountable for our small piece of creating better conditions. When we project that onto a leader, power gets abused and disappointment is inevitable”. Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 3rd edition, 2026, 44

¹⁷ Barry Oshry, *The Terrible Dance of Power*, Power + Systems Inc, 2007, [available for free download](#)

¹⁸ “Politicians are conflicted by the fact that their survival depends on the current rules of the game”. Polly Curtis, *The New Deal: How to Repair the Broken Relationship Between State and Citizen*, Demos, June 2026, 13

¹⁹ Rupert Read, Liam Kavanagh, Rosie Bell, *The Climate Majority Project: Setting the Stage for a Mainstream, Urgent Climate Movement*, London Publishing Partnership, 2024

²⁰ Adam Kahane, *Everyday Habits for Transforming Systems: The Catalytic Power of Radical Engagement*, Berrett-Koehler, 2025

²¹ The collective impact of the way we humans live has caused a climate and nature crisis which now threatens our existence as we are on track for a 2°C, possibly 3-4°C rise in average temperatures by the end of the century, conditions that do not support human civilisation – life - as we have known it for the last thousands of years.

<https://www.nebriefing.org/> In November 2025, ten of the UK’s leading experts briefed an

invited audience of over 1,200 politicians and leaders from business, culture, faith, sport and the media. The briefing set out the implications of climate and nature breakdown for health, food systems, national security and the economy.

²² Marvin Weisbord, Sandra Janoff, *Don't Just Do Something, Stand There!: Ten Principles for Leading Meetings That Matter*, Berrett-Koehler, 2007

²³ Polly Curtis, *The New Deal: How to Repair the Broken Relationship Between State and Citizen*, Demos, June 2026, 6

²⁴ Margaret Wheatley, *Who do you Choose to Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*, 2nd edition, Berrett-Koehler, 2023

²⁵ Pew Research Center (2025). *How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020*. Published June 9, 2025. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/>

²⁶ <https://centreforspirituality.org/> “ We understand spirituality as the perennial human search for the sacred, for meaning and purpose and the seeking of answers to the fundamental questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I live?”

²⁷ Nussbaum, M. C. (2003). *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁸ Skidelsky, R., & Skidelsky, E. (2012). *How much is enough?: The love of money and the case for the good life*. London: Penguin

²⁹ Barry Oshry, *Context, Context, Context: How Our Blindness to Context Cripples Even the Smartest Organizations*, Triarchy Press, 2018

³⁰ Barry Oshry, *Leading Systems: Lessons from the Power Lab*, Berrett-Koehler, 1999

³¹ Barry Oshry, *Seeing Systems: Unlocking the Mysteries of Organizational Life*, Berrett-Koehler, 2007

³² Political theorist Antonio Gramsci noted our shifting context as far back as 1930: “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.”

³³ John McKnight, Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Neighborhoods and Families*, Berrett-Koehler, 2010

³⁴ Marshall Ganz, *People Power Change: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*, OUP, 2024,16-24

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- ³⁵ Ivan Illich, *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis, The Expropriation of Health*, Aakar Books, 2021
- ³⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 2017
- ³⁷ Barry Oshry, *Encounters with the “Other”: A History and Possibilities*, Triarchy Press, 2018, 5
- ³⁸ Margaret Wheatley, *Restoring Sanity: Practices to Awaken Generosity, Creativity and Kindness in Ourselves and Our Organizations*, Berrett-Koehler, 2024
- ³⁹ Bayo Akomolafe is a philosopher, writer, activist, professor of psychology, and executive director of the Emergence Network, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/>
- ⁴⁰ Cormac Russell, *Rekindling Democracy: A Professional’s Guide to Working in Citizen Space*, Cascade Books, 2020
- ⁴¹ The term ‘Citizen-ing’ is drawn from the work of Indy Johar, and a working paper on Citizenships, Dark Matter Labs, 13.10.2025
- ⁴² Indy Johar, *Citizenship Beyond the Individual: A Relational Ontology of Civic Being and the Emergence of the Noble Citizen*, Substack, 13 Nov 2025, <https://indyjohar.substack.com/p/citizenship-beyond-the-individual>
- ⁴³ Barry Oshry, *What Lies Beneath*, 2020, [available for free download with permission of the author](#)
- ⁴⁴ The puddle metaphor to describe the ‘condition’ of a space comes from Kevin Purcell, a practitioner in the network associated with the work of systems theorist, Barry Oshry.