Part 5
Preparing for New Realities
Wishing someone to live in times of change can be a curse, or a blessing, depending on which part of the world you come from, and which cultures influence your belief system the most. In Africa, we find that the duality of new found democracy and ongoing tribal and colonialist identities are causing tensions. In post-Soviet Azerbaijan, the youth are having to simultaneously deal with the pull of their old identities as well as the changes that the consequences of war brings, while trying to forge new identities at the same time. In Europe, many of the accession countries to the EU are finding it difficult to define their new identities that accompany transfer of sovereignty. In China, young and old, rural and urban are all experiencing different forces on their identities. In the USA, disparate parts of the nation seek clarity between living out certain values against its position as the greatest immigrant nation on the planet. And, in our supposed modern world, many women still find themselves oppressed within a male consciousness, and women themselves consciously but mainly unconsciously find themselves party to the perpetuation of such oppression. Such change, may not be at the same pace over similar periods, but has been with human kind since the year dot. And as humankind has experienced over the ages, the new generation’s perception of who they are, and who they should be, in all parts of the world, will, in turn, shape the future of these regions and individual countries. The new generation are the ones who, with an appreciation for functional wisdom from the past (as opposed to learning and copying dysfunctional wisdom) are going to bring a very special meaning to the notion of citizenship, because they are the ones who are building these new regions and countries.

Researchers are discovering the extent to which xenophobia can be easily – even arbitrarily – turned on. Apparently, in just hours, we can be conditioned to fear or discriminate against those who differ from us – even by characteristics as superficial as eye colour or height. Traditional social identity groups have to unlearn and unthink their earlier socialised and internalised mental programming and patterns of behavior, build up new mental programs, learn new behaviors, as well as develop new coping mechanisms to adapt to their
new and still-changing environments – a type of “cultural intelligence” is needed, both “self-cultural intelligence” and “other-cultural intelligence,” and a lack of which results in xenophobic, even racist, overtures. Even ideas we believe are just common sense, can have deep xenophobic underpinnings. Philomena Essed, in her chapter Leadership in Question: Talking Diversity, Walking Homogeneity in the Dutch Police Force, highlights the ingrained way in which people get to perceive things, consciously and unconsciously, and she makes valid points in highlighting the difference between tolerance and inclusiveness (the former being a sophisticated form of discrimination). The drive to completely and quickly divide the world into “us” and “them” is so powerful that some have postulated that it derives from some deep psychological need.

Our authors draw on the work of the late Tajfel and Turner who devised a theory to explain the psychology behind a range of prejudices and biases. Their theory was based, in part, on the desire to think highly of oneself and therefore to continuously seek out positive self-affirmation. One way to lift oneself is to be part of a distinctive group (like a winning team or been singled out for special treatment), and another is to play up the qualities of one's own group (“in group”) in a positive light and denigrate others through negative affirmation of those who are not like you or your group (“out-groups”). Kurt April and Amanda April, in their article (Responsible Leadership Ethics) on the moral challenges for leaders in a diverse Europe, raise concern regarding the positivists’ claim to have separated out scientific fact from human values – the important benchmark upon which social and leadership action should be measured – and reinforced the now taken-for-granted contingency of existence in which men and women increasingly find their lives manipulated in systematic market oppression and placed outside of their control, in favor of the status quo. Difference, they argue, is indeed, not appreciated, as, organizationally, we find more and more sophisticated ways to continue cloning people in favor of the dominant social group and as Essed asserts, shame at work is used to manipulate people into feelings of lower self-esteem. There is therefore a call for a new focus on diversity through the lenses of intention, shame, identity and power relations.

In many ways, organizations today are standing at a similar threshold to that which framed the practice of Western expansion. Learning underpins the ability to prepare for new realities and is fundamentally consciousness-based, and therefore needs to be viewed as a social process that takes place in the interaction between people, for instance in various communities of survival, communities of interest, communities of practice, communities of spirit, or more generally and exclusively in terms of the so-called social-constructionist view. Engendered curiosity and subsequent learning that takes place, and are influenced through working life and at the workplace, originates in the historicity of technical, organizational and path-dependent social conditions in which the employees are functionally involved. The authors in this section
of the book challenge the readers to live consciously in the transformational social realm, and in so doing, continue to reach out for information and perspectives that are relevant and can make them more effective for their own individual purposes, for their organizational purposes, and even for their country. To the extent that they don’t, they assume knowledge is unnecessary, that they know all they need to know, or that what they don’t know won’t hurt them.

Sadly though, the old ways of doing things, even the ones that have brought many successes up to now, may be the very stumbling blocks for forging ahead and leading to new success. The challenge for us therefore is to live consciously, purposefully, with a sense of expectancy – and parallel that with helping others to live consciously too – an almost spiritual requirement. It is Lovemore Mbigi who, in his article Spirit of African Leadership: A Comparative African Perspective, reminds us that we are subjective by nature, and only able to see that which our cultural paradigms allow us to see. He challenges managers to purposefully shift their craft/their art (management) from being a “science of manipulation,” to also being a “science of understanding” – this, he claims, quite necessarily requires of us to move from pure rational approaches to also embracing the spiritual.