



**THE
VITAL
LEADER**

**SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

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INSPIRING GREATER IMPACT

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INSPIRING GREATER IMPACT

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INTRODUCTION...

THE VITAL LEADER IS WHAT SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY IS GOING TO BE ALL ABOUT.

After helping numerous leaders to increase their capabilities over several decades, we are convinced that even the most successful ones will need to develop a new approach and a revised skill set in the years ahead.

If you are a leader or aspire to gain that position, aiming to be a Vital Leader will help you to get to grips with becoming a leader who is not only successful but sustainable. That is, someone whose leadership lasts, a person whose leadership accumulates respect, authority and impact.

No one knows with total precision what makes a Vital Leader. The requirements can only emerge after the event, since we only know leadership when we see it. We judge by events, not by assertions or descriptions.

By vital, we mean leadership that is both essential for organisations and in the alternative sense of being adaptable, vibrant, energised.

That is, people whose vision, inspiration, and powers of execution, promote humanity, meaning and vitality in the work place, and beyond.

WHAT LEADERS MUST DELIVER

THE WORLD IS FULL OF LEADERS. THEY GROW AROUND US LIKE WEEDS, YET WE ARE ABSURDLY SHORT OF HEALTHY ONES.

Vast numbers of people complain of feeling alienated, disengaged and spiritually unrewarded by their work, and their leaders have created that environment.

This is morally repugnant, highly wasteful and expensive. So it seems to be the right time to talk of a crisis of leadership, particularly in large organisations.

Is it really surprising that the more we experience a shortage of genuine leaders, the more it dominates the media, takes up corporate agendas and becomes the subject of think tank papers, conferences and countless other forms of communication?

However, our starting point for **The Vital Leader** is *not* a shortage of leaders. What matters more is the universal hunger for **humanity, meaning and vitality in the workplace.**

The widespread absence of these three crucial elements helps to explain the poor performance of many individuals, organisations and, we suggest, even entire nations. It also speaks volumes for the failure of leadership.

Unless you are a truly exceptional leader, you will almost certainly be struggling to keep up with how best to lead. Most top executives change their cars, computers or mobile phones more frequently than they do their style of leadership.

Too many of these executives still yearn for the comfort of hierarchy and the familiar reassurance of being in command and control – of being able to say, “I tell you what to do and you do it.”

Numerous surveys show that executives put leadership right at the top of the list when they are asked what firms must do to succeed in the future. Despite this, the investment put into developing better leaders continues to be woefully short and, as a result, lacks sufficient impact.¹

THE ESSENTIALS

THE VITAL LEADER HAS TWO CORE SKILLS OR CAPABILITIES – INDIVIDUALITY AND INSIGHT.

These are the Foundations of strong leadership and the building blocks that will support the Vital Leader's Actions.

These, along with five other **Capabilities**, are essential and produce sustainable leadership, regardless of a person's location, industry or the type of business / organisation they work for.

With the world in constant and rapid transition, “stuff” keeps happening. Faced with new technologies, demographic shifts, consumption trends and other social forces, leaders must be able to manage uncertainty and be adept at handling the big five C's: **Consensus, Connection, Collaboration, Communication** and **Completion.**

We want to change how you think about leadership. You can read more about **The Vital Leader** in our full-length book – perversely titled ‘**Leading the Way**’ by our publishers at www.maynardleigh.co.uk/publications.php

Or you can read the free e-version at – <http://tinyurl.com/o5ap6vn>

THE 5 C'S

CONSENSUS

CONNECTION

COLLABORATION

COMMUNICATION

COMPLETION

WHY VITAL LEADERSHIP?

EVERYWHERE, RED WARNING LIGHTS ARE FLASHING ABOUT A FAILURE OF LEADERS TO UNDERSTAND CHANGE AND HOW TO MANAGE IT WELL.

For example, when a study asked about 4000 leaders why senior leaders failed, the three main reasons given were: communication, interpersonal skills and execution or completion – one of the five C's we listed previously.²

Newcomers and market forces regularly upset the hopes of the best chief executives money can buy and many companies are facing poor levels of staff engagement and trust, as well as costly absenteeism and a dispiriting lack of diversity, almost regardless of their location.

The costs are there for all to see: weak or non-existent innovation, limited creative thinking, poor individual performances and employees unwilling to speak up about ethical and compliance issues.

Whenever leadership experts gather to discuss their pet subject, the issue of trust soon surfaces as a major cause of leadership failure.³

For example, The Centre for Creative Leadership estimates that four out of five new CEOs lose the trust of their backers and fail in the first 18 months,⁴ and in ambitious Indian companies, the pace of CEO turnover provides an unnerving world benchmark. The average tenure of MDs in the Indian technology and consumer sectors is now a mere one to three years – hardly time to discover all the exits.⁵

The demise of CEOs attracts little sympathy. Even so, we should be concerned about the sheer waste of talent. Not only are perfectly competent executives stumbling at the final hurdle, others are positively dysfunctional.

Some, like Fred “The Shred” Goodwin at RBS, cause serious damage to their respective organisations. When a Time Warner CEO lost his job in 2011 after only five months, the company diplomatically explained that his “leadership style and approach did not mesh with the company’s”.⁶ This was company speak for “this person was doing us more harm than good”.

More of the same of this kind of leadership is almost certainly not what most 21st Century organisations will need. They will instead require people who are able to make sense of ever-increasing complexity, are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, and can manage risk with courage and confidence.

These qualities were far less important in the previous century, when it came to selecting future leaders.

If you are already a leader, or want to be one, the **‘Vital Leader’** is for you. Equally important, we want to connect with those of you who spend a significant portion of your time on talent management. You are the unsung heroes, the professionals who often fight an uphill battle to persuade your organisations to invest in new leadership development that looks different to how it did in the past.

“

The tragedy of life is that we understand it backwards - but we have to live it forwards.

Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher

”

VITAL CONTEXT – HOW LEADERSHIP IS CHANGING

ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY OPERATE ARE 21ST CENTURY ORGANISATION MIGHT LOOK LIKE KEEP EMERGING.

CONSTANTLY CHANGING AND NEW NOTIONS ABOUT WHAT A SUCCESSFUL

To make sense of leadership we must first consider the leader as a person and then their context.

We expect the boundaries between work and personal activities to become increasingly blurred over the next decade. It is assumed that we will become 24/7 mobile, with high levels of Connectivity – one of our Big Five C's. This alone has huge implications for anyone attempting to lead as it will require the adoption of flexible, agile working and flatter hierarchies to allow the pace of change to accelerate.

We also expect yet more virtual work communities to develop, perhaps even operating out of different countries — posing challenges of both collaboration, consensus and communication. Intellectual response to these changes is not enough. Awareness must translate into how you, or those people you develop, actually lead.

20th Century Firm	21st Century Firm
Vertically integrated	Horizontally networked
Top-down leadership	Distributing responsibility
Building the ultimate product	Continuous improvement
Gaining efficiency	Scale learning
Hoarding information/ building IP	Sharing information
Experts	Learning new skills
Lone hero	High performance teams
Security	Transparency
Pushing to change	Pulling towards change
Goal centric	Talent centric
Risk averse	Risk tolerant
Building systems	Building relationships
Getting everything clear	Good enough vision
Being sure	Accepting paradox
Seeking simplicity	Accepting complexity
Ignoring pessimists	Shadow side
Big bang solutions	Linking simple systems
Leveraging size	Leveraging learning
Technologically aware	Technology pervasive
Demographically aware	Diversity rules
Networking	Connected
Instructing	Collaborating

Source: Expanded from *Leveraging the Talent-Driven Organization*, Richard Adler Rapporteur The Aspen Institute, 2010, reproduced by permission.

We can no longer view an organisation as a machine, as we could in the last century. The machine metaphor meant that executives relied almost exclusively on knowledge, such as facts, metrics, objective analysis and formal planning, as a sure guide to action. Now firms are better treated as living and breathing organisms that are unpredictable and multi-faceted. To lead them, explicit knowledge is not enough.

Taken as a whole, these characteristics amount to what some scientists call Complex Adaptive Systems. Examples of these are often drawn from nature or biology. They include cities, rivers, insect, animal or bird populations and human family units. They are all hard to understand, often unpredictable and are subject to constant change and adaptation.

Modern organisations are therefore more akin to flocks of geese than machines. The lead bird constantly changes, to be replaced by another and another. In an organisation this is sometimes called “distributed leadership”, where just about anyone with the talent and drive can at least temporarily play an important leadership role.

The Vital Leader is therefore anyone who may emerge, perhaps only temporarily, in response to the ever-altering landscape.

MAJOR TRENDS

FIVE MEGA FORCES ARE TRANSFORMING WHAT PAST LEADERS ONCE TOOK FOR GRANTED ABOUT THE NATURE OF WORK:⁷

ACCELERATING GLOBALISATION TECHNOLOGY DEMOGRAPHY SOCIETAL CHANGES CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE SHIFT TO A LOW CARBON ECONOMY

These are long-term transformations on a worldwide scale. Consequently, the successful organisations will be those able to ride the waves of these forces, turning them to their advantage. In doing so, many will radically adapt their cultures, structures, systems and processes to survive the new work environment.

Above all, they will need a new form of leadership. For example, in future successful organisations, diversity of ideas and sources of information will allow just about anyone to emerge from almost anywhere, irrespective of their job title, to provide some kind of leadership, even if it is only temporary. This contrasts with the 20th Century tradition, where only a few people were seen as being able to lead.

Power will instead be more evenly distributed, with less reliance on a single all-powerful top gun.

To lead in such an environment, you can no longer expect to command and give direction by relying on a highly centralised, obedient, hierarchical bureaucracy. Instead, success will depend on winning **consensus** across diverse interests, forming ever-changing alliances, networking and working through collaboration. Rather than relying on authority to get things done, the Vital Leader will depend on their ability to **communicate** and stay **connected**.

To make a positive contribution in such a personally challenging environment, you will need to rely on two fundamental aspects of leadership: your **individuality** and your **insight**. Like a talented stage director, you will be conjuring up the equivalent of a three-act play, without a script, and be relying entirely on the abilities of a cast of characters that will often be sceptical and liable to change from one act to the next.

THE CHARISMA MYTH

WHEN WE STARTED OUR WORK ON LEADERSHIP, WE ASSUMED, LIKE MANY OTHER PEOPLE, THAT ALL SUCCESSFUL LEADERS NEEDED LASHINGS OF CHARISMA.

A charismatic leader is someone who uses their entire self to make a usually positive personal impact on people and, as a result, on the organisation as a whole.

Even today, when people talk about inspirational leaders, they generally mean those who possess a powerful charisma. We see it clearly in publicity seeking individuals, such as Virgin's Richard Branson, the late Steve Jobs of Apple or Herb Kelleher, the plain-talking CEO, whose energy has made the no frills Southwest Airlines the most profitable airline in the business.

Such people make a huge, immediate impact when they enter a room. Their mere presence becomes an "event". Yet there is plenty of evidence, particularly from Jim Collins' seminal work, 'Good to Great', that many successful leaders do not possess remarkable charisma. Inspiring leaders often display humility and determination, rather than flashy grandstanding.

It is more likely that she or he will be full of character, making them distinctive and, as we describe later, highly individual.

“

Charisma becomes the undoing of leaders, making them inflexible and convinced of their own infallibility and unable to change.

Peter Drucker

”

VITAL MEANS VITAL

TO RELY ON A SINGLE HEROIC LEADER MERELY PERPETUATES THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP MENTIONED EARLIER.⁸

In our new world of the Vital Leader, leaders may not always be indispensable.

So how do you stay sustainable and continue to add value? Vital Leaders survive and thrive by embodying both definitions of the word 'vital' – that is, they are *essential* and *spirited*.

“

Vital: Full of life or activity... essential to the existence of a thing or the matter in hand.

”

A Vital Leader is both essential to the organisation and someone who provides energy, inspiration and meaning.

By helping to transform the work environment, the Vital Leader creates high levels of engagement amongst his or her staff and prompts discretionary effort from them, which generates outstanding individual and corporate performance.

LEADERSHIP IS RELATIONAL

VITAL LEADERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ORGANISATIONS FACE AN UNPRECEDENTED TASK.

The job is becoming too demanding and complex for any one individual to accomplish with just a few enthusiastic supporters. It will therefore become a critical skill to be able to engage with a wide variety of people.

Therefore, the Vital Leader will be something of an expert at relationships, for example being skilled at creating consensus and collaboration. This view of leading, in which relationship building becomes a survival skill, is only just starting to penetrate the majority of today's organisations.⁹ But it will almost certainly be important in how future organisations in the 21st Century operate.

Many companies today still rely heavily on task-oriented leaders. There are certainly benefits in both types of leadership. If you are a task-oriented leader, for example, your focus will be highly logical and analytical. You will have a good grasp of how to get the job done by using workplace procedures. This way you ensure everything gets done in a timely and productive manner.

BEING A TASK-ORIENTED LEADER

You are more concerned about finding technical, step-by-step solutions for meeting specific goals than you are with catering to employees.

You are more likely to say, **"What steps can we take to meet our quarterly financial goals?"**, than ask the question: **"How can we build the kind of employee productivity that brings about success within the company?"**

BEING A RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTATED LEADER

You understand the importance of tasks, but also place a tremendous amount of time and focus on meeting the needs of everyone involved in the assignment. This may involve:

- **Creating engagement**
- **Finding ways to inspire**
- **Providing incentives, like bonuses or new work opportunities**
- **Mediating to deal with workplace conflicts**
- **Spending individual time with employees to learn their strengths and weaknesses**
- **Offering above-average financial compensation, or just leading in a personable or encouraging manner.**

In the previous century, much attention was paid to the pure mechanics of leading, which led to the question: "How do I get people to do what I want". In the more demanding environment of the 21st Century, this has become:

“ **How do I find common ground with people and build powerful relationships with them?** ”

Previous personal experience alone does not guarantee success.

To sum up, vital and sustainable leadership requires more emphasis to be placed on relationships than just the pure task to be carried out. Let's call this a "post-industrial model of leadership" – a handy way of looking afresh at what it will take to lead in the future.

This is far from the "me-centric" image that we still tend to retain about leaders.

HUGELY EXPERIENCED PEOPLE SOMETIMES LACK RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Carly Fiorina, one of the most powerful women in corporate America, was forced out of the troubled computer maker by the company's board in 2005. Apart from failing to lead the company to renewed success, she created considerable internal tension and conflict.

Enron's Jeffrey Skilling was unquestionably clever and creative. Yet his misdirected and unprincipled approach to business was not only criminal, but also morally repugnant, and so he became ever more isolated as he went along.

When Jack Griffin, CEO of Time Inc., lost his job in 2011 after only five months, Time Warner explained his "leadership style and approach did not mesh with the company's" and insiders called it a "polarizing management style". They added, "a good leader makes decisions that are inclusive, inspiring, motivating. With Jack, it was a demoralized, estranged group of execs."¹⁰

LEADERSHIP STARTS **HERE!**

VITAL LEADERSHIP RELIES ON A BLEND OF PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS.

The two Foundations on which Vital Leadership rests are:

INDIVIDUALITY

Being yourself, having a distinctive style, being driven by values, demonstrating integrity, vitality and character.

These are the building blocks that will support the actions taken by the Vital Leader. Beyond these foundations, there are five additional core capabilities the Vital Leader will possess or develop.

They are the abilities to: **Initiate, Involve, Inspire, Improvise and Implement**

Each begins with the letter I – which also reflects the personal and individual nature of leadership.

Together, the 7 I's depict the personal development journey a Vital Leader must undertake to produce change.

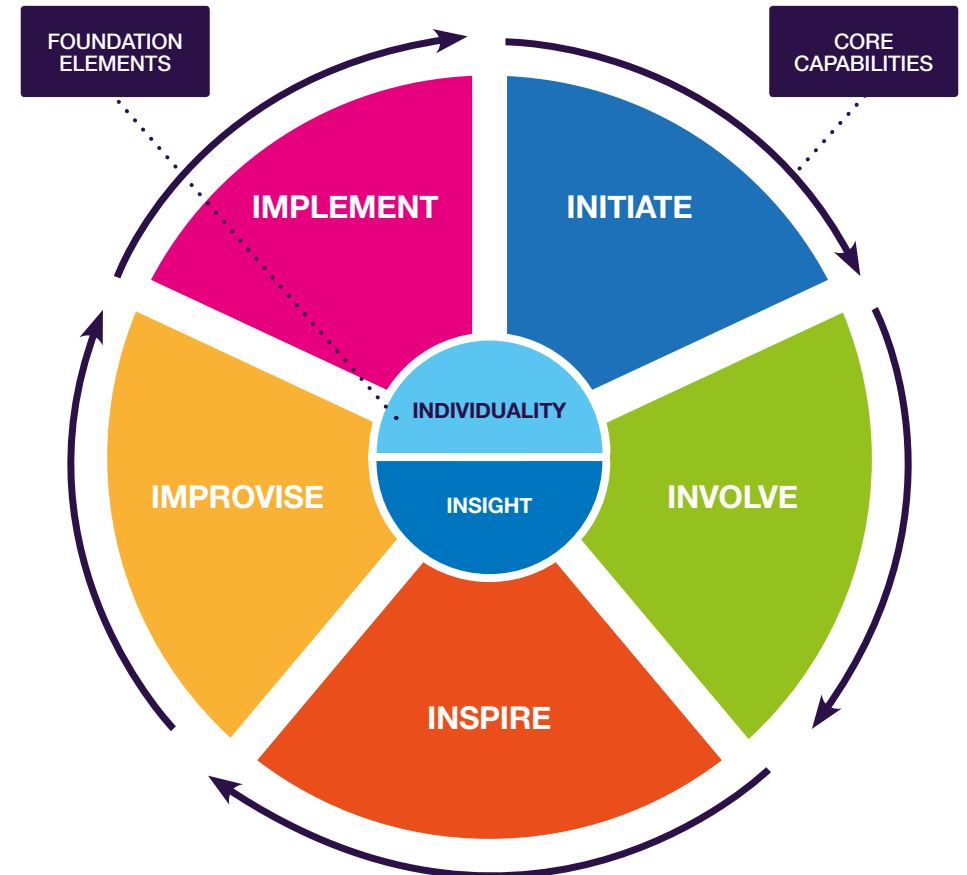
INSIGHT

Self-awareness, understanding others and seeing the situation with clarity, often in new or unexpected ways.

This journey starts with who you are – your **individuality** defines the areas that you are interested in. These will be affected by your values, cares and concerns. You will also need **Insight** to see what's needed around you.

The two Foundations can be nourished and enhanced, not prescribed. In contrast the Core Capabilities are entirely learnable. In both **Leading the Way** and our free online version of **The Vital Leader** we show what these mean in practice.

www.maynardleigh.co.uk



TOMORROW'S ORGANISATION

WE HAVE BEGUN TO DISCERN THE OUTLINES OF WHAT A SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATION MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

These outlines have started to shed some useful light on what it will mean to be a Vital Leader in future.

Although the full picture is still a long way from being precise, we now know enough to guide us in our description of the emerging Vital Leader, and the table below identifies the likely future organisation characteristics that will probably determine what it means to be a leader. These may change in future, however, as nothing lasts forever.

FUTURE ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS WILL DETERMINE WHAT IT MEANS TO A LEADER

Organisation Characteristics	Leadership Requirements					
	Foundations	Capabilities				
		Initiate	Involve	Inspire	Improvise	Implement
Horizontally Networked	*		*	*	*	
Distributed Responsibility	*	*		*		*
Scale Learning	*	*		*	*	*
Share Information	*	*	*			*
Learning New Skills	*		*	*		*
High Performance Teams	*	*	*	*		
Transparency	*	*	*		*	*
Pull Towards Change	*	*	*	*	*	*
Talent Centric	*	*	*	*		*
Risk Tolerant	*	*		*	*	*
Build Relationships	*		*	*	*	
Good Enough Vision	*	*	*	*		*
Paradox	*		*	*	*	
Accept Complexity	*		*	*	*	
Shadow Side	*		*		*	
Link Simple Systems	*	*	*		*	*

Inevitably, there is something intensely personal about Vital Leadership. You must decide for yourself which aspects of being a leader you need to develop, and which you are already good at. Feedback, coaching and other forms of personal development can all play an important role in shedding further light on how your leadership may need to change and grow.

Whatever your dreams or aspirations, your personal mission must be to uncover what works for you as a leader. Just because some other leader has found a way to make things happen, it does not mean that this is the way you will also find success. Only through practice will you come to lead instinctively, and practice means being willing to risk failure and even rejection.

IN A NUTSHELL

The world is constantly changing and approaches to leadership must keep up with the times. A new approach is now needed, involving the 7 essential attributes.

HOW VITAL IS YOUR LEADERSHIP?

HOW CLOSE ARE YOU TO BEING A VITAL LEADER? IN WORKING WITH LEADERS, WE OFTEN INVITE THEM TO CONDUCT A 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK PROCESS.

Using this, they rate themselves against the Foundations and Capabilities of Vital Leadership in two stages.

First they do a self-assessment. Next they invite other people who experience their leadership to provide feedback about them, and discover if their leadership is truly vital.

Here are examples of some of the statements :

- I am happy and at ease with being who I am
- I have a distinctive style of leadership that people immediately recognise
- I know what I stand for and what I care about and communicate these strongly
- I am seen as truthful, trustworthy and consistent
- I have lots of energy and a sense of aliveness

You can see the complete set of 33 statements in, '**Leading the Way**'. Here is an example of the sort of information that your profile might produce:



Two tendencies tend to surface when leaders conduct these profile exercises. They either rate themselves rather stronger than their supporters or vice-versa. Where there is a close alignment you can be fairly sure that the leader is using their insight. The most revealing information that is provided from these exercises is the differences that emerge between a leader's self-rating and the rating of their supporters.

If you would like to conduct your own Vital Leadership Profile, using feedback from people who experience your leadership, you can do so by contacting info@maynardleigh.co.uk

CONCLUSION...

THIS BOOKLET SUMS UP WHAT THE VITAL LEADER IS ALL ABOUT.

Our free online e-book and hard copy version, '**Leading the Way**', provide more detail on each of the 7 I's.

Finally, there's a summary at the back of the booklet in the form of a handy "spinner" to help you explore Vital Leadership further.

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ABOUT US

WHAT MAKES US QUALIFIED TO TALK ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND THE CAPABILITIES THAT ARE REQUIRED TO LEAD EFFECTIVELY IN THE FUTURE?

Why do we argue so strongly that Vital Leadership is the key factor that will determine how sustainable leadership can be achieved in the 21st Century?

Firstly, since 1989 we have been helping organisations to develop their leaders. So the subject of unlocking leadership potential has not only been on firmly on our radar, it's dominated it. For example, our company Maynard Leigh Associates continues to work with a wide variety of national and global organisations to develop both their existing and future leaders.

Along the way we have witnessed numerous valiant attempts to develop new leadership behaviour. Many of these have failed or lacked sustainability. The Vital Leader incorporates lessons that are drawn from what we have seen, and from our own practical experience of generating actual sustainable behavioural change.

Secondly, our view of developing and enhancing leadership behaviour reflects our pioneering use of theatre ideas in business. Once, this approach seemed fanciful. Yet many leadership development programmes now include ideas that we introduced back in the late 1980s. As anyone who studies leaders will soon realise, successful ones rely heavily on various techniques and methods that indeed make them "performers" in every sense of the word.

Whatever else changes about the role of leaders in the coming years, we remain convinced that the successful ones will continue to require this capability to perform.

Finally, for a quarter of a century we have jointly led our own company through some tough and troubled commercial times. Like steel tempered in a furnace, this experience has tested us both individually and as an organisation.

Our views on leadership spring from a brutal reality that is often lacking in traditional management books. Frankly, we know from personal experience just how tough a job it is to lead. We continue to evolve our own view of what it will take to succeed as a 21st Century leader, and so **The Vital Leader** is very much a work in progress.

Other Publications



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