

LEADERSHIP

An interview with Nancy J. Adler, PhD

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Background

Nancy J. Adler is the S. Bronfman Chair in Management at McGill University in Montreal. She is a leading authority on global leadership and cross-cultural management and consults to corporations and government organizations internationally. She is also a renowned visual artist, and uses the arts to explore new approaches to management and leadership. Dr Adler has authored more than 125 articles, produced the films *A Portable Life*, *Reinventing Our Legacy* and *Leading Beautifully*, and published ten books and edited volumes, including *From Boston to Beijing: Managing with a Worldview* (Adler, 2002), *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Adler and Gundersen, 2008), *Women in Management Worldwide* (Adler and Izraeli, 1988), *Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy* (Adler and Izraeli, 1994), and *Leadership Insight* (Adler, 2010b). She has served on many boards, including the Board of Governors of the American Society for Training and Development, the Canadian Social Science Advisory Committee to UNESCO, the Strategic Grants Committee of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Society for Human Resource Management's International Institute. She has held leadership positions in the Academy of International Business, the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research, and the Academy of Management. Dr Adler has received many honors and awards, including McGill University's first Distinguished Teaching Award in Management (and received it a second time), ASTD's International Leadership Award, SIETAR's Outstanding Senior Interculturalist Award, the Academy of Management's outstanding article award, and the Sage Award for scholarly contributions to management. She was selected as a national 3M Teaching Fellow and elected to the Fellows of the Academy of International Business and the Academy of Management Fellows, inducted into the Royal Society of Canada, and honored with the Prix du Quebec.

Summary

Dr Nancy Adler is a leading authority on global leadership and cross-cultural management, a renowned artist, and a consultant to global companies and multinational organizations and leaders from around the world. She uses the concepts of artistry and beauty to help leaders and managers to "lead beautifully"—to see the beauty in everyday, often ugly, situations and to create new possibilities while simultaneously achieving financial, social, and human benefits. Dr Adler shares her mother's experiences as a child in Austria, both before and after the Nazis invaded, and discusses the influences it has had on her as a woman, leader, and scholar. In addition, she reflects on how the insights she has gained from her mother's life story can affect the theory and

praxis of leadership. She describes why leaders and scholars need to understand how courage, compassion, and civility impact global society and the global economy, and why that cannot be accomplished without understanding cross-cultural dynamics, including multinational relationship-networks and the role of high-context cultures. Ultimately, according to Dr Adler, we each need to ask the questions that we care most about and pursue them passionately, for the benefit of the world's peoples and the planet itself.

Interview

You have done groundbreaking work to reframe and even challenge the traditional systems and mind-sets of global management and leadership in order to create a better, more vibrant, equitable, and sustainable society. Let's start by talking about your scholarship in creativity, beauty, and your work in the arts. What does it mean to "lead beautifully?"

For each person, the concept of leading beautifully is distinct and yet for everyone it is a very positive approach. For me, leading beautifully means to envision great possibilities, even when other people believe that such possibilities are unimportant or that it is the wrong time to suggest them. Leading beautifully means envisioning great possibilities, even when others view you as naïve or stupid for having suggested them. Leading beautifully involves creating environments in which people can create and hold onto the best of their dreams, the best of their hopes, and the best of their aspirations. Leading beautifully means never "satisficing"; never going along with what is merely easily doable. Leading beautifully isn't based on simply following the herd and doing what everyone else is doing or believes to be doable; it has nothing to do with what all too many people label and accept as OK because they see it as normal or average. Leading beautifully, as a concept and as a process, is more important now than it has ever been, because if we allow ourselves to be satisfied with simply doing what everyone else considers to be "normal," neither the planet nor humanity will survive.

Why is beauty so important?

Similar to most people, it's easy for me to be horrified by much of what I see in the world – by the ugliness in the world. It is not difficult to see the ugliness. The challenge is to see the beauty hidden within the very real ugliness. Luckily, I began to more easily notice the hidden beauty when I started to paint. Increasingly, as I painted, I realized that what I was trying to do with my art was to reflect a form of beauty back into the world – even though I got clobbered by my more established artist friends because, as they repeatedly informed me, in contemporary art, beauty is "out."

Much of contemporary art attempts to shock people, to be in-your-face, to wake-up viewers by disgusting them. However, in the last few years, beauty is beginning to return to the art world. My focus on beauty didn't come from going to art school and learning what art was supposed to be. I didn't spend time learning what beauty was or was not. I'm very glad I started painting as an adult and not while I was still a teenager, because I don't think as a teenager I would have had the inner strength to say, "I'm going to do exactly what I want to do. And if it doesn't fit others' perceptions of what is in, so be it: it won't fit." I was drawn to beauty at a time when most art critics still disparaged it; but the art world's critique didn't change what I saw and, more importantly, what I chose to paint.

In addition to my art leading me back to beauty, I was influenced by Professor David Cooperrider, who is a friend, and by a number of my other colleagues who introduced me to the concept of positive deviance. I suddenly realized that finding beauty in the world is exactly the same as what my colleagues had described as positive deviance! One strategy for improving the world is to find small moments of beauty, and then to discover ways to create an epidemic of the beauty you've discovered. For me, I need to be able to keep my eyes open to what is going on in the world (much of which is ugly) and, at the same time, find the incidences of naturally occurring beauty.

Leading beautifully has to do with people attempting to become the best leaders they can be. When I wrote the article "The Arts & Leadership: Now That We Can Do Anything, What Will We Do?", I thought that leading beautifully meant having the courage to see reality as it is. I believed that leaders needed to realistically see and to talk about the ugliness in the world that we are not usually willing to discuss. After working more as an artist, I realized it was equally important to have the courage to see the *beauty* in the world – especially the *moments* of beauty in our everyday life that often remain hidden right before our eyes. That was when I wrote the article, "Leading Beautifully." It is also when I created the "Leadership Insight" journal [Adler, 2010b] with 27 of my paintings; the journal explicitly invites managers to lead beautifully.

How does your work on beauty and leading beautifully intersect with your message of "daring to care?"

Leading beautifully starts with having the courage to open your eyes to current reality, and also having the courage to envision the future that we desire. Unless a person passionately cares about the world, the planet, humanity, and those particular situations that are most important to them, they will never exhibit sufficient courage to lead beautifully. Courage always comes from acting in a way that's consistent with one's deepest values and priorities. No one will exhibit courage to achieve something they don't profoundly believe in. I'm not going to risk my life for something that I don't care very much about.

So understanding what one believes in is fundamental?

Yes, absolutely! However, I see beauty and having the courage to care as distinct. You can profoundly care about something, but then not exhibit the courage to support your beliefs. That's one of the most significant differences between reflecting and acting – between thinking and leading.

How can scholars and teachers ignite others' ability to see beauty and develop leaders who can lead beautifully?

At the end of my "Leading Beautifully" article, I describe the moment when I first realized that my real role as a teacher is to "out people's humanity." Unlike traditional teaching – that focuses primarily on course content – I see my role as a teacher as helping people to remove the layers of illusion of what they think society, their country, and their profession are and what they think is being required of them. Thus, my real role is to act as a mirror. Although they often try to hide their deepest feelings and beliefs, especially in highly competitive professional settings, the people I've had the chance to work with care passionately. Who they really are far transcends the stereotype

of managers and MBAs as greedy, selfish beings. Deep down, they know that they want to contribute to society and their profession. They want to make contributions that their great grandchildren will be proud of.

I teach a seminar, Global Leadership: Redefining Success, which helps future business leaders realize that a healthy, prosperous, and sustainable world depends on the evolution of great organizations – which, in turn, requires great leadership. The participants are all experienced managers. This past August, during the opening session, one manager said that he had decided to get an MBA because he was doing extremely well in his company and knew he was going to become the managing director. Beyond needing to acquire additional skills and knowledge, he revealed that he realized that he would have to give up some of his values to make it to the top. The very clear meaning in what he shared with his new colleagues was that he was *willing* to give up some of his core values in order to succeed – which, given how shocking and politically incorrect it is to say such things, was a fairly gutsy admission to make on the first day of the new MBA program!

A week later, at the close of Global Leadership, in a session entitled “Harvesting the Learning” focusing on what the participants had learned during the seminar, the same man spoke up. This time he reflected, “Now I understand. Yes, I’m going to become the managing director of my company, but I’m going to do it *because* of my values, not *in spite* of them.” I wanted to run over and hug him! It was one of those perfect moments. I hadn’t *put* different values *inside* him; I had simply acted as a mirror. He came to this profound realization by himself. All the theories, conversations, dialogues, readings, reflections, and everything else that had been a part of the seminar had simply acted as a mirror. The very personal learning that he had harvested from the seminar was that he could *rejoin* with who he really is and could therefore erase his false belief about himself: the belief that to become a successful executive, he would have to become someone other than himself. Needless to say, the courage he exhibited in publicly sharing his realization acted as a very powerful mirror supporting the learning of each of the other managers in the room.

And you did it in a way that wasn’t lecturing him and telling him that he had to be a good person or adopt “good values” in his work. You created the space for him to discover who he really was, by himself

Right. I don’t think the other way works. You can’t lecture or, worse yet, embarrass someone into acting from principles (even from their own principles)!

It’s going to backfire

Exactly. You can’t coerce people into goodness: and you certainly can’t lecture them into authenticity. People are *psychologically* too well-defended. People don’t change unless it makes sense to them, on their own terms.

In your article “I Am My Mother’s Daughter,” you openly write about your mother, her experiences as a child in Austria, both before and after the Nazis invaded, and the impact of her experiences on your life as a leader, woman, and scholar. Could you give us the background on what it was like to write this powerful article?

I somehow knew that that story “needed to be born”; I knew I needed to write it. Initially, I wrote about my mother’s story for a plenary speech I had been invited to give for

a conference on early childhood influences on leadership at Claremont Graduate University – a topic I feared I knew nothing about. Yet when I sat down in front of my computer, it was as if someone was dictating the words to me. The stories my mother had told me, and how they have influenced me, just seemed to come together, often in ways I had never quite understood before. I literally felt like I was sitting at my computer looking over my hands watching to see what I would write next. I have had that experience when I'm painting. It's actually very much a part of my artistic process. As an artist, I simply need to show up in the studio and then get very quiet – very still – to let whatever painting wants to be born, get born. But, prior to writing "I Am My Mother's Daughter," that had never happened with a speech or article.

At Claremont, I presented "I Am My Mother's Daughter" to about 300 people with my mother sitting in the center of the audience. To make the moment more special, Harvard Professor Howard Gardner, who is one of my heroes and had spoken right before me, was sitting right next to my mother. Strangely, rather than being nervous about publicly telling such a personal story, the same thing occurred as had happened when I was writing the story; it just flowed. Once again, the story wanted to be born, this time out loud to a live audience. I closed the talk by introducing my mother. Every person in the room rose, giving her a standing ovation. My mother and her story ignited a cascade of audience members' own most – personal stories, each important and profound in its own way.

The speech eventually tumbled out into an article, which sent the story further out into the world. It was not by coincidence that I chose to publish "I Am My Mother's Daughter" in the *European Journal of International Management*, as I felt that it was meant to be born (published), as my mother had been born, in Europe. The editor, Vlad Vaiman, was terrific. He didn't change a word, including fighting for the article to be left in storytelling voice – and with all the references relegated to unobtrusive endnotes and with pictures added of my Grandmother Martha, my mother, and me (at age three). He didn't allow the publisher to force the article into a more traditional academic format.

How did your mother's story influence you?

In many ways, the whole article is about my mother's life and how it inspired me. One of my mother's biggest influences on me is on how I look out at the world, *globally*. Growing up in my family, it never made sense to me to look at things only locally, or only nationally, or only parochially, or . . . in any form of a narrower worldview. I've always had a sense of the whole world and understood that things happening in one part of the world can affect people everywhere. Today we refer to this as the *butterfly effect*. People say when a butterfly flaps its wings in China, it affects Tasmania, and Latvia, and Botswana; it affects people everywhere. My sense of the world being globally inter-connected, for better and for worse, has been a part of me since I was a little girl.

Another strong influence on me from my mother's life story is my commitment to cross-cultural management. I chose to study cross-cultural management because I knew that we had to learn how to better understand each other, including, or most importantly, how to understand and successfully communicate with people who are very different from us. If we allow ourselves to see each other as "too foreign" – as too different – we begin to view the *other as no longer human*. And the minute that happens,

we sow the seeds of evil; with *awful* consequences that none of us want to imagine, but that are nonetheless very real. Unfortunately, you can see such de-humanization as the precursor to every war, including World War II, which so completely destroyed my mother's childhood and led to the murder of almost all of her family.

Cross-cultural approaches, at least as I view them, strive to replace the rejection and dehumanization of "the other," including the type of demonization that ultimately leads to war, with active forms of understanding, communication, and respect. Cross-cultural management asks some very fundamental questions: How do I recognize, respect, and act with civility toward people who are different from me, and then, based on their very differences, build better teams, better organizations, better communities, better companies, and a better world? When I started working in cross-cultural management, I introduced managers to the concept of *synergy*, and helped them learn to leverage their-cross-cultural interactions. Simply recognizing differences is not enough. The challenge is to figure out how to achieve *synergy* by leveraging differences. This perspective is quite different from the view that was most prevalent among American management scholars at the time – most of whom were trying to *ignore* the differences, not leverage them. Outside of the United States, managers and scholars- did recognize differences, but few focused on achieving synergy. Within the United States, even those involved in gender-based work tended to emphasize the ways in which male and female managers were similar, not the ways in which they differed. They advocated becoming gender-blind, rather than attempting to create synergy by recognizing and leveraging differences. That bias was so strong that people were often considered unprofessional, unethical, and, at times, illegal, for simply recognizing differences. It was these differences in perspective, and in fundamental paradigms, that Dafna Izraeli and I tried to highlight in our books, *Women in Management Worldwide* and *Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy*.

The problem with the then-dominant American approach was that none of us are culturally blind. Assumed similarity is a conceptual fallacy. We're *not* blind, culturally or otherwise. The question is not: How do you minimize differences (to keep them from becoming a hindrance)? That's the wrong question. The real question is: How do you find ways to leverage differences to create something better (something that would be impossible without the differences). Historically, individuals and societies have repeatedly fought to the death to resolve their differences. My fervent hope is that cross-cultural communications and cross-cultural management will give people more skills to resolve their differences, and even benefit from them, by talking with each other – rather than killing each other.

I remember when I first began conducting research on global women leaders. I had gone to Israel to interview people who had known former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. Her friends and colleagues told me that one of Golda Meir's hopes was that someday war would become like cannibalism – that war would become completely unthinkable for the human race. Yes, we have differences, but solve them without violence. Treat differences as an opportunity, not as a threat.

That would really change things, wouldn't it?

Absolutely! Locally and globally, civilization would change if we simply took *murder*, in all its forms, off the table as a conflict resolution technique; if we refused to use war

as a surrogate negotiation strategy or conflict-resolution tactic – or as any form of cross-cultural management “technique”. *Off the table!*

Why do I so passionately believe this? Why did it shape my thinking from the beginning, and why did I never let go of it? I’m absolutely certain that the answer to that question is rooted in my mother’s story and how she told it to me. That’s also why it became so important to me to tell her story in the article and in my speeches. Let me give you an example. One of the life stories my mother told me was about the Catholic family, the Janns, that risked the lives of every member of their family to hide her (as a child) from the Nazis – as did another Catholic family who risked *their* lives to hide her brother. My mother’s story, at least as told to me, was never a story about us being the good guys, whoever “us” is, and them, the other people, being the bad guys. From my mother’s experience, I learned that good people exist in every community, in every culture, in every race, in every religion – not just in the one group that we label as “our own”.

Another way in which my mother’s life story influenced me is around the importance of being *courageous*. From very early in my family, we were taught that people can, and must, choose to act courageously – that courage is a part of what defines us as human beings. The family that opened the door to let my mother in and to hide her from the Nazis acted courageously, based on their profound values and *lived principles*. The threat to them was very real, as was the courage they exhibited. Everyone knew that the Nazis regularly murdered people who hid Jews, including those who hid young Jewish children.

Your mother’s story demonstrates courage, but so does your action in writing it and in addressing its implications on your own development as a woman, scholar, and leader. This also fits with your message in your “Daring To Care” article and in your speeches, where you encourage people to conduct scholarship on what is most meaningful to them. I don’t feel I have a huge personal story. That said, it is important to me to feel like I am trying to do something that is making a difference, even if it is not yet what most people value or praise.

What other impacts have there been from the article you published about your mother’s story?

There are so many ways in which my mother’s life story and the article I wrote about her seem to have taken on a life of their own. For example, about a year after “I Am My Mother’s Daughter” was published, I was invited to chair a session honoring Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire – the Canadian who became the UN Force Commander for the peace-keepers in Rwanda. Dallaire had been invited to give a special guest leadership lecture at McGill University. In 1993 and 1994, Dallaire had fervently attempted to stop the genocide in Rwanda, both with the UN forces on the ground and by passionately lobbying world leaders to intervene. Most of the world’s leaders, including then-US President Bill Clinton, who later said it was the single biggest mistake of his presidency, ignored Dallaire’s pleas to intervene in any way that might have stopped the genocide, or at least limited the number of people who were murdered.

When Dallaire returned to Canada, after having witnessed such atrocities, including the world’s indifference and refusal to intervene, in despair, he tragically, but in many ways understandably, attempted to end his own life. Luckily, his family was able to

save him, and he went on to accept Harvard's invitation to become a leader-in-residence, a position that gave him the time and support he needed to write his story. Dallaire's book was subsequently published as *Shake Hands with the Devil*, and went on to win the Governor General's Award and to be made into a highly regarded film.

After his McGill lecture, Dr Eliane Ubalijoro, a McGill scholar and a prominent Rwandan herself, asked the final question: "Given what you know and what you have seen, how do you go on? How do you maintain hope?" Dallaire's initial response was silence, honoring both the profundity and authenticity of Eliane's question and the reality of having faced absolute evil both on the ground and in the world. Then, quietly, and with the absolute truth that the moment deserved, he responded, "I tried the alternative (alluding to his attempted suicide) and I am never going there again." Then he paused again, and continued: "I know now what I didn't know then: that it will take at least 200 years to achieve any significant goal that is truly worthy of us and worth working toward." So, none of us will ever see the results of even our best efforts. All we can do is keep working toward what we believe is most important in the world.

Dallaire's response will stay with me for the rest of my life. What he was saying was true. Leadership is about *intention* and the *journey*, not about the reward of knowing we have achieved the *outcome* – and that the major challenges facing us and our civilization are much too complex to successfully resolve in any one person's lifetime, no matter how hard we try.

Several months after Dallaire's lecture, Eliane wrote to me, asking if I would consider joining the Advisory Board of Rwandan President Kagame. I declined because I didn't feel I had the time or expertise to take on such a responsibility. I sent her a copy of the article about my mother, as her own mother had died three months prior to Dallaire's speech, and she had shared the very powerful story of how Dallaire had saved her mother's life, and all the good her mother was able to contribute to the world with the extra years that Dallaire and his forces had given to her. Within 24 hours, Eliane wrote back to me saying how profoundly meaningful the article was to her, because it showed that people (such as my mother, and other Jewish survivors of World War II) can transcend a holocaust, and that the survivors of the Rwandan genocide could also go on to reclaim flourishing lives. Both could "choose life". She asked if she could send "I Am My Mother's Daughter" on to President Kagame. As soon as I agreed, she sent it; Kagame found my mother's story so compelling that he immediately sent it on to each of his Rwandan cabinet members and to other senior Rwandan leaders. Why? Because it let him know that there could be flourishing life for his country and his people, even after genocide. "*Choose Life!*"

Never in a million years could I have imagined that my mother's story, once out in the world, would go on to support people in Rwanda who were trying to reclaim their own lives and rebuild their country. Soon after that, among many other projects, Eliane began working on a film, "*From Ashes to Light*," that brings the wisdom of Jewish elders who lived through the holocaust – who were lucky enough to have survived AND who have chosen life – together with Rwandan youth, who, after the carnage of the genocide, no longer had any elders to turn to as they faced the daunting task of "choosing life". There is no question that the story and the article, once again, had taken on a life of their own – a life and a meaning well beyond anything I could have initially imagined when I first sat down at my computer to write the story.

The impact on your life and others has been profound. How do the messages in your "I Am My Mother's Daughter" article connect with your "Daring to Care" article?

"Daring to Care: Scholarship that Supports the Courage of Our Convictions," written with Hans Hansen, a management professor at Texas Tech University, is the most recent article that I've published. As the title suggests, the article invites professors to join an important conversation about having the courage to stand up for their principles – which requires slowing down and thinking about what your principles really are! In the article we ask, "What would you be willing to go to prison for? For any of your research? For any of your publications? For any of your speeches? For anything you teach? What might you be willing to *die* for?"

Very clearly, we don't ever ask, "What would you be willing to *kill* for?" The only life that's associated with courage is your own. It's not courageous to murder another person.

This is yet another way in which my mother's story influenced me. It is fair to say that I am not the most tolerant person when it comes to accepting people who choose *not* to act based on their principles, including in making the myriad of small decisions that demand our attention every day – choices that don't involve life-and-death situations, but that definitely have consequences. Choices that require everyday acts of courage.

It sounds like you are committed to reflecting on a situation and then making a choice
Yes, as much as I can.

*You have conducted extensive research on the topic of women in management. In your books *Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy* and *Women in Management Worldwide*, you viewed women in management through the lens of the broader societal context, and linked the behaviors of individual women and men with the broader social, economic, political, and cultural forces shaping their opportunities, motivations, and choices. Now it is more than 20 years later. What societal forces impact women in international management roles today?*

In the 1980s, I conducted a series of studies on women expatriate managers and discovered, much to the surprise of most readers, that, on average, women performed better than men. Not primarily because they were *women*, but because they leveraged their visibility and uniqueness across borders. Foreigners, of course, aren't stupid! They knew that if a multinational company was sending women to be expatriate managers in their country, something the companies had never done before, then the women had to be very good – or the companies wouldn't send them. The bottom line was that the women performed terrifically, and the companies acknowledged the success of their first women expatriate managers by sending more and more women abroad.

In the following decade, the 1990s, I studied the women who had become global leaders, the women who had become CEOs of major multinational companies or the president or the prime minister of their country. I chose to focus on what led to success, rather than on the barriers that the less successful women had faced. I studied *who* those highly successful women were, and *how* they succeeded in gaining the number one position in their country or company. In part, this phase of my research was motivated by my sense of foreboding at the seriousness of the world's crises and by the failure of the type of leadership that most men had brought to their roles as global leaders. I naïvely assumed that, perhaps, "because it had been primarily male leaders

who had gotten us into this global mess, women might provide more of the type of leadership that the world so desperately needed." In the course of conducting my research, I soon discovered that, just like men, some of the women leaders were terrific and some were extremely disappointing. Some were principled and some were repugnant. Neither gender has a lock on excellence in global leadership.

One mistake I had initially made was to focus on women versus men as opposed to which people were the best leaders. Another mistake I made was focusing on male versus female leaders, instead of those who had brought the most appropriate balance of masculine and feminine approaches to leadership. In terms of numbers, although women are still severely underrepresented in leadership positions of significant power, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of senior women leaders. Much to the surprise of most people I speak with, the world has already had more than 100 women who have led their country as president or prime minister in the last 50 years.

How do you think that care can impact cross-cultural management?
You mean caring?

Yes, caring behaviors, practices, and strategies. What would it look like if the world brought the value, the ethic, the practice of caring into management? What kind of impact could there be if we brought the courage to care into cross-cultural management? Asking about caring in the context of cross-cultural management is *brilliant*. Within the world, as most cross-cultural experts know, we have cultures that are more relationship-oriented and others that are more task-oriented. Relationship-oriented cultures are based on a level of caring about "the other"—the family, colleagues, neighbors, citizens, humanity, the planet — that most task-oriented cultures, with their emphasis on task (and also often on individualism), often fail to recognize.

What would you consider a relationship-based culture?

It's probably easier to ask that question the other way around, because the two outlier cultures on task-orientation are Germany and the United States, with both also being very high on individualism. Many Anglophone and Germanic cultures follow similar patterns, although often not to the extreme of the United States. In Canada, for example, Francophone Quebec is a much more relationship-oriented culture than is the rest of Canada, which is primarily Anglophone. A core aspect of relationship-cultures is being constantly aware of one's connection to others, and thus constantly caring about others (or at least the subset of "others" that I consider to be like me). In relationship cultures, there tends to be a higher level of felt responsibility. In Japan, for instance, in legal cases, the verdict rarely assigns guilt or innocence wholly to one party; rather, both parties are usually viewed as having some responsibility for the situation — some "guilt." If, for example, I've parked my car at the side of the street and another driver hits it, I'm partially guilty for the accident because if my car had not been parked there — it wouldn't have gotten hit. In relationship cultures, people are constantly aware of and caring about their relationship to their surrounding context — and that context includes the people, the planet, and everything else that surrounds them.

It's interesting, and important, to consider the question of caring through a cross-cultural lens. In addition to looking at the influence of task- versus relationship-oriented cultures, we also need to examine caring through the lens of

high- versus low-context cultures. The United States, for example, is an extremely low-context culture, meaning that Americans are more likely than most people around the world to either not consider context or to minimize its importance. Part of caring requires that we constantly consider our relationship to multiple aspects of our context. In high-context cultures, I am required to care about everything that is within my context. This is evident, for example, even in the most ordinary business meetings. If I am from a high-context culture, it is incumbent on me to know how each person, and their family, is: Is their mother sick? Is their child doing well in school?, etc. In low-context cultures, such knowledge is, at best, considered irrelevant, and at worst, invasive, or illegal.

What are some of the challenges we face in further exploring care research, or research that asks the tough questions?

I think that most of us, most of the time, are going so fast, with the multiple demands that are constantly coming at us from every direction, that we rarely take time to slow down and ask ourselves where we are and where we are going. It has become increasingly important to me to find ways to push the pause button. You can call it reflection, or retreat, or connection with oneself. I try to reflect on a daily basis; when I do, what I often see is that there's a lot going on that no longer makes much sense to me.

Part of writing the article, "When Knowledge Wins: Transcending the Sense and Nonsense of Academic Rankings," with the wonderful Australia-based scholar, Anne-Wil Harzing, was to take a step back to look at academia. In many ways, the dynamics influencing academia have become dysfunctional. Most of academia no longer focuses primarily on contributing to society. Many scholars have reduced their goals to simply trying to publish their work in "A-listed" journals and then attempting to maximize the number of people citing their work. In fact, counting what are referred to as "hits" in A-listed journals and counting citations has now replaced nearly all other assessments of broader impact and significance in most hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions. If academia continues to care only about counting "hits" and citations, in my opinion, it no longer serves its societal purpose and should be closed down.

Writing "When Knowledge Wins" was a huge wake-up call. It's one thing for scholars to study what's going on with others – to investigate what's happening on Wall Street, or in the health care industry, or in Rwanda and the rest of Africa. It's quite another thing to look directly at our own profession and say, "Wait a minute! There's a critically important conversation we need to be having in the academic world, right here, that we are not having".

In light of this being the current academic environment, what are your recommendations to scholars for bringing more care, courage, and hope into their work?

For me, the bottom line is that we have to ask the questions that matter the most to us. We have to address challenges that make a difference to society. At the same time, we have to realize that there are consequences to choosing to do research that is considered "outside the mainstream." Individually, it may mean that you don't get promoted or get turned away from your top choice university, but perhaps that's not the worst thing that can happen. It's uncertain, because you *may* get published in A-listed journals and receive tenure. The point is that you increasingly use your one precious life for the things that matter the most to you and to the world. There is no guarantee, even for people who capitulate to the system (for those who tell themselves and others that

they'll do something more meaningful "later," after they receive tenure, or after they are promoted, or after they receive an offer from a prestigious university).

I believe that the only reason that you would *ever* do anything that lowers your probability of getting published in the top journals or receiving tenure is because you passionately care about the questions you are asking. If you truly believe that what you are studying will make a difference – that it might actually make the world a better place – then it's highly likely that you will not only do superb work, but you will not be deterred by academia's current reward system. Why? Because you won't be conducting your research to get academia's rewards, but rather for a much more important – and ultimately more satisfying – reason.

It's similar to the reasons that people act in a caring way. You don't show care because someone will applaud you for caring. You care because, at some level, it defines who you *are*. It *validates* you. It lets you be who you *are* meant to be as a human being.

Your work has truly traversed many paths, from global leadership, cross-cultural management and leading beautifully to daring to care and academic scholarship, among others. What's next?

This is an interesting question. One of my current projects is going back through all of my art and finding the themes that integrate the various processes, content, and types of expression that I've been using since I started painting. It's a very interesting process. I'm discovering a lot about me as an artist. Now, you're asking me the same question about the themes and my development in my academic work.

There are several directions that I know will either be a part of the rest of my career or at least a focus in the foreseeable future. First, I know I'm going to continue exploring the ways in which artistically inspired processes – artistic images and artistic ways of thinking – help people to manage and to lead more effectively; how art and artistic processes can better support the kind of leadership that we most need in the world.

The second area I'm starting to research is the transformation occurring in higher education and learning. There's no question to me that the 21st century is the century of learning. And what has become most important is learning *how* to learn, not learning any specific content.

Why? Because the rate of knowledge increase has accelerated so rapidly that any specific content now becomes obsolete almost as fast as you can learn it. Some people predict that before long the world's total knowledge will *double* every year. Any content whatsoever – whether learned in a degree program or in any other setting – will be obsolete by the time a person completes their studies.

In addition to the pace of learning, the other question we need to ask is: How can the *way* we learn support us in creating the type of global community we need not only to survive, but to flourish? We already have global *connectivity*; we are already technologically connected worldwide into a virtual network. But a worldwide network is NOT the same as a global community. What we need to learn how to do is to live as a global *community*. Initial research is warning us about the consequences of living in an increasingly virtual environment. We are experiencing some of the highest levels of loneliness in the world today, especially among the youngest, most connected generation. There is no question that being *virtually* connected does *not* mean that people have satisfying human relationships or that they have a source of meaning in their life.

As part of my interest in the 21st-century's transformation in learning and education, I've become intrigued by MOOCs, do you know what they are?

No

A *MOOC* is a "massively open online course." A couple of Stanford professors launched their first MOOC in 2011; 186,000 people enrolled worldwide in just one course. Many people are excited about MOOCs because they believe- they'll completely transform adult learning and higher education. I agree. At the same time, some of my colleagues and I are watching what's happening even with the best of virtual learning environments and asking, "What happens to the quality and value of *presence* when everyone is online? What happens to relationships? What happens to community? Why do people continue to attend live theatre and live concerts, instead of just watching TV and downloading music to their iPhones?" Our best guess is that people choose to escape the virtual world because, as human beings, we are hard-wired to crave *presence* – the direct, personal engagement and connection with others and with ourselves that is unique to live, in-person experiences.

MOOCs are brilliant, but how do we complement them with presence? We know that we can create strong, profound, loyal, committed relationships among people in an in-person group, including within a classroom. The 21st-century question is: How do we create the same types of profoundly human relationships among people who meet primarily in a virtual environment – including people who learn together with more than 100,000 other people attending the same MOOC? How do we bring technology, relationships, and presence together? And how do we build such relationships among people from differing cultural backgrounds from all around the world. How do we create a global network of people who care about each other? Those are the 21st-century cross-cultural questions we need to be asking, for if not, neither virtual nor actual global society will survive.

Together with several colleagues from around the world, I am currently creating what we're labeling a "Learning Accelerator Studio" (LAS) that will complement a MOOC. We'll be piloting the first LAS in Europe this winter. We're attempting to complement the best virtual learning (the best MOOC) with the best in-person learning (via presence). To design the first LAS, we are drawing heavily on the arts and artistic processes, as artists have known for years how to work with the power of presence.

This research brings together a number of questions for me that are crucial to ask in the 21st century, but, as yet, no one has successfully sorted out, including: How do you create a meaningful global conversation? How do you simultaneously create large networks of relationships that work well across cultures and around the world? How do you bring the best of what we know from the arts into a quasi-virtual environment to support learning? How can you create a profoundly intimate, committed and loyal global community? How can you engage the world in creating and maintaining such global communities? I am not sure where our MOOC-LAS project will go, as it's still very new. I do know that it will be fun, and that we will learn a lot. Hopefully, we will contribute as much as we learn.

Does the MOOC-LAS project draw on everything that I've been doing for my whole career? Yes. Is it brand-new? Yes. Do we know where we're going to come out at the end of it? Absolutely not (Laughter).

So you're in the creative void. You're integrating and moving forward at the same time
Exactly. And it's exciting.

This interview has been condensed and edited.

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To view some of Nancy Adler's art, including a virtual tour of her Montreal exhibition, see www.mcgill.ca/desautels/beyond-business/art-leadership

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