

consensus rather than disagreement.¹⁰² By 2018, twenty-six cases had been deliberated through vTaiwan, 80 percent of which led to government action,¹⁰³ highlighting technology's potential to foster deliberation and consensus, not just sow discord and polarization. Innovations like these open the door to what could be a new model of democracy for the twenty-first century.¹⁰⁴

The remedies to excessive power concentration are clear: power sharing and accountability. The failure to share power and hold the powerful accountable opens the door to abuse and tyranny, be it in organizations or in society at large. The only way to counter this failure is for all of us to realize that it is our collective responsibility to keep power in check. To do so, we first need to understand power and how it works. That is why the fundamentals of power are so important. We also need to use our collective power to safeguard and improve the institutions that ensure power sharing and accountability in organizations and in society. For that collective power to thrive, in turn, we need to choose our leaders wisely, and look for those determined to invest society's resources in the development of all of us—no matter who we are and what social groups we belong to—as free thinkers and civic-minded members of society. Only then will we have the moral character and democratic competencies to exercise our civic muscles. And when a politician or a tycoon undermines our democratic institutions, we will see through the demagoguery and the propaganda, recognize the threat, and fight back to protect our individual rights and freedoms in our daily lives.

Conclusion

It's Up to Us

Imagine the world is a blank slate. You have been chosen to distribute society's rights and power. You will participate in this new society, but you have no idea who you will be. Not your social position or your innate abilities. Not your gender, your race, nor your nationality. You are behind what is called a "veil of ignorance." You could be a farmer, a physician, or unemployed. Young or old, rich or poor, male, female, or nonbinary, highly educated or not, disabled or not. Would you design a democracy or an autocracy? Provide universal access to health care or limit such access to those who can afford to pay? Guarantee a quality education for every child or exclude many? This thought experiment, posed by the political philosopher John Rawls, raises critical questions about the just distribution of power. Through the veil of ignorance, the experiment forces us to consider everyone's well-being and access to opportunities without being biased by our own social status—which is why Rawls believed it would lead to fairer societies.¹

Philosophers have been debating what constitutes a just distribution of power for millennia,² and many people are tempted to think that the philosopher's study is precisely where the topic belongs. In fact, the opposite is true: The distribution of power affects each and every one of us personally. There are always things we can do to change the distribution of power in a given situation. As we have shown you, it comes down to the fundamentals of power: If you can figure out what the other party needs and wants, and find ways to give them access to these valued resources, you can change the balance of power. How we choose to use this knowledge, in our families, at our workplaces and in society, is up to us, as individuals and collectively.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD POWER

Before you can build your own power, you need to understand who currently holds it, and why. Assessing these dynamics so that you can map them with ever more accuracy is always within your reach. We can all observe the environment we're seeking to influence; and knowing that everyone harbors a deep need for safety and self-esteem, you can gain insight into how the people around you are satisfying these needs in different but predictable ways: through the material accumulation of riches and status, or through psychological feelings of achievement, of being loved and belonging, of autonomy of choice, and of moral character. You can also solicit the observations of others: asking questions of your network to better understand what is valued in your environment, and then expanding your network to include people who

can give you a different perspective as well as access to the people who control those valued resources.

Once your power map is as clear as possible, you're ready to decide which of the four strategies for shifting the balance of power you will choose: attraction, offering resources the other party values; withdrawal, decreasing your interest in what the other party has to offer; consolidation, reducing the other party's alternatives to you; and expansion, increasing your alternatives to the other party.

You are also in charge of your own relationship with power. The steps you need to take to map power and the strategies you can use to rebalance it are the same, whether you intend to use power to pursue evil ends or just purposes. Power itself is not dirty; the potential to misuse it lies within all of us, depending on what we want power for, and how we acquire and use it. You decide whether to embark on a developmental journey toward empathy and humility; whether to equip yourself to put to good use—and not abuse—the power you gain through your mastery of the fundamentals of power and power mapping.

Through the work and life experiences you expose yourself to, the books you read, the media you consume, the practice of self-reflection, you can see the world as a web of interdependencies, such that our power is someone else's dependence, and our actions have consequences beyond our immediate environment. We are in it together, and none of us forever. This knowledge gives you bulletproof criteria to assess who deserves to be entrusted with power: not those who give you the illusion of safety and self-esteem by projecting an air of strength, but those who have shown

empathy and humility, along with competence and commitment to pursue a higher purpose. These are your criteria to apply if you choose.

And the power you cannot build by yourself, you can build through collective action. The truth is that we all, collectively, have a say and a responsibility in shaping tomorrow's distribution of power. Not only because we can join forces to agitate, innovate, and orchestrate change, but also because how power will be distributed ultimately comes down to what we all choose to value and how we decide to regulate control over those valued resources. These collective choices will protect and enhance our freedoms and rights or endanger them.

WHAT WILL WE VALUE?

For most of history we humans interacted directly with the people whose hard work went into making the products we needed. But with the rise of industrialization, as the economy and our roles in it changed, human exchanges shifted from being anchored primarily in relationships and reciprocity to being increasingly distanced and motivated by material gain.³ As the “market” came between us, we learned to think less about the artisan or factory worker's family and economic situation and more about our own cost-benefit analysis. The neo-liberal sense of self-worth, which revolves primarily around the ability to accumulate money, disenfranchises large swaths of the population—the working class, the poor, immigrants, racialized groups, and people with disabilities, among others.⁴

It does not have to be this way. Research suggests that when we feel like winners or losers in a society that evaluates us by “what we have” rather than “what kind of person we are,” our well-being suffers.⁵ In our very human pursuit of self-esteem, we feel most fulfilled when we are valued for multiple aspects of our being, not just a single facet.⁶ And yet, as economic language and assumptions pervade our daily lives, we measure our self-worth based on how self-reliant, financially successful, and on top of the competition we are.⁷

What our times require is nothing short of a major cultural shift—one that will recognize that dimensions other than financial success also matter, both in how we assess our self-worth and in how we assess the behavior of corporations and institutions.⁸ The good news is that younger generations aspire to this shift. So many of the young people we work with around the world care deeply not only about making money, but also about helping to address pressing social and environmental issues in their communities. And yet, those who have undertaken such purposeful initiatives—some recounted in this book—often don't receive the esteem (not to mention the income) their combined competence and altruism would earn them in a less materialistic cultural context.

Operating such a cultural shift at scale will require agitation, innovation, and orchestration efforts. And, as we have seen, many such efforts are already underway, from the young people demanding action to address the climate crisis to organizations like SASB developing new ways of measuring corporate worth. These advances open the door to an era in which the criteria used to make decisions will no longer be exclusively financial. If this shift happens, other resources, such as those

that enhance our ability to protect our planet, fight poverty, and enhance our collective well-being, will also become more highly valued. And this change, in turn, will open the door to a possible redistribution of power. Whether that results in a more just distribution of power will depend, however, on how we regulate control over access to valued resources.

WHO WILL CONTROL THE VALUED RESOURCES?

Power hierarchies can bring stability and safety to our lives and provide ladders to climb that satisfy our need for self-esteem. But as we have shown you, power is easily abused, and we must have the insight, and the courage, to watch for and challenge abuses whenever and wherever they occur. Failing that, we will continue to reproduce the status quo, while further concentrating power in the hands of a few. And, while some among them may understand that it is in their self-interest to share their power and avoid the perils that come with massive power imbalances, many will lack this wisdom. They will do everything they can to protect and grow their power, even if it is to the detriment of others and ultimately themselves.

We can counteract the concentration of power by increasing our collective ability to deliberate, discuss, and decide on the rules of the game in our workplaces and, more broadly, in society. This is where democracy comes into play. Without the ability to participate as equals in democratic systems, we throw away the ability to decide our future together. We surrender to the will of others who are more powerful than we are. In short, we renounce our power. The bottom line is simple: As

we look forward, we must urgently and fervently reclaim our democratic power in our workplaces and in society.

Recall the story of Gyges with which we opened the book. When given the ring that made him invisible, the shepherd used his newly acquired power to kill the king, marry the queen, and gain ever more power. Plato's story is a cautionary tale. If left unchecked in the hands of one or a few individuals, power always risks being used to achieve evil ends. But the way to counter such devious enterprises is not to turn our backs on power. It is to understand, build, and use our power, both individually and as a collective of citizens, to ensure our individual rights and freedoms and to fight unjust power hierarchies. This requires each one of us to recognize that power is everyone's business. Power is for all of us.