



<https://greatcitizensmovement.org/>

Great Citizens Declaration

GCD

Formulated on 15-05-22

Prof. Dr. M.C. Schippers



“Remember, each one of us has the power to change the world.”
- Yoko Ono

Moving from hierarchy to more bottom-up synergy

The year 2020 has been marked by a centralization in governmental decision-making regarding health. Governmental decision making has expanded rapidly in response to the Covid-19 crisis. Many freedoms have been taken away under the justification of a major health threat, and mandates have been applied in many places¹. Governments worldwide have responded in ways by abusing power and undermining the very systems that were in place to ensure accountability and to protect public health and well-being. A Freedom House report stated that democracy in 80 countries was at stake or had disappeared altogether since the beginning of the crisis in 2020 (see <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown>). The report concluded that the response to the Covid-19 crisis exacerbated a 14-year long trend of declining freedom, and in 2020 the number of free countries were the lowest in 15 years. Besides that, we notice that historically dangerous trends such as scapegoating and excluding groups of people have become ‘normalized’ recently. Even if the crisis enters a more endemic phase, as seems to be the case in many countries, we see a threat that governments will not readily give up powers they gained during the last few years, and this may pose a more enduring threat to democracy at large.

In that sense 2020 can be seen as a turning point in history. Co-occurring with the current crisis is a progressive ideology of a small group of people, who see the crisis as an opportunity to alter the course of history and establish their utopia. However, the question is if this is a utopia that is good for humankind, or only for a small group of people. Generally speaking, top down ‘one size fits all’ decisions are detrimental to people’s mental well-being. Hence, this form of decision-making creates challenges for the general population. For instance, half of the world’s working populations were affected financially by the lockdowns, creating massive ripple effects (Schippers, 2020). While most people thrive when they can set their own goals in life and make their own decisions, this was in a large part taken away. Especially people working in certain sectors that were closed during massive and worldwide lockdowns. People who saw their life’s work disappear and were not allowed to visit loved ones or attend the burial of loved ones have been most affected. Also, students that saw their schools closed were affected in many ways. Inequalities increased due to the fact that more vulnerable populations such as ethnic minorities were affected even more (for a review see Schippers 2020). At the same time, a large meta-analysis concluded that while lockdowns and measures had little or no effect on the spread of the virus, the economic and social costs are immeasurable (<https://ideas.repec.org/p/ris/jhisae/0200.html>).

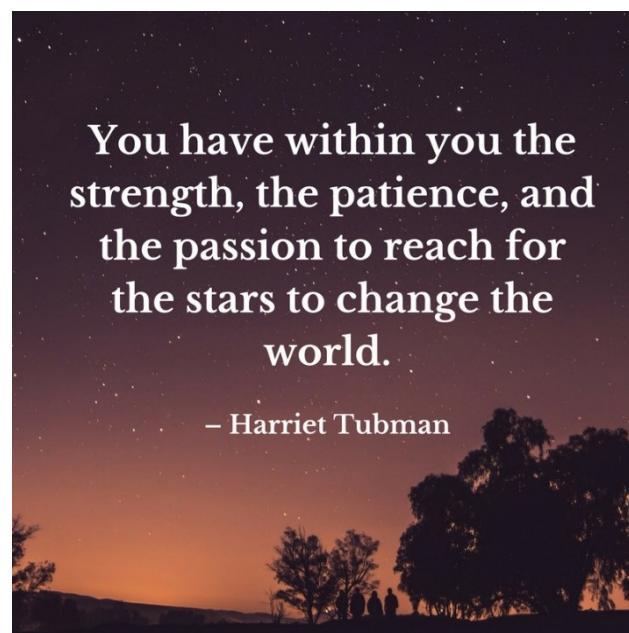
History and aim

Changes in constitutional rights have been achieved after hectic periods in history, often after a long wartime when countries try to shed the dominance of other countries or warlords. For instance, after a hectic period in the history of men, the Spanish war, the Dutch “[Akte van](#)

¹ Note that the following text is in part based on <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/science/articles/saving-democracy-from-pandemic>

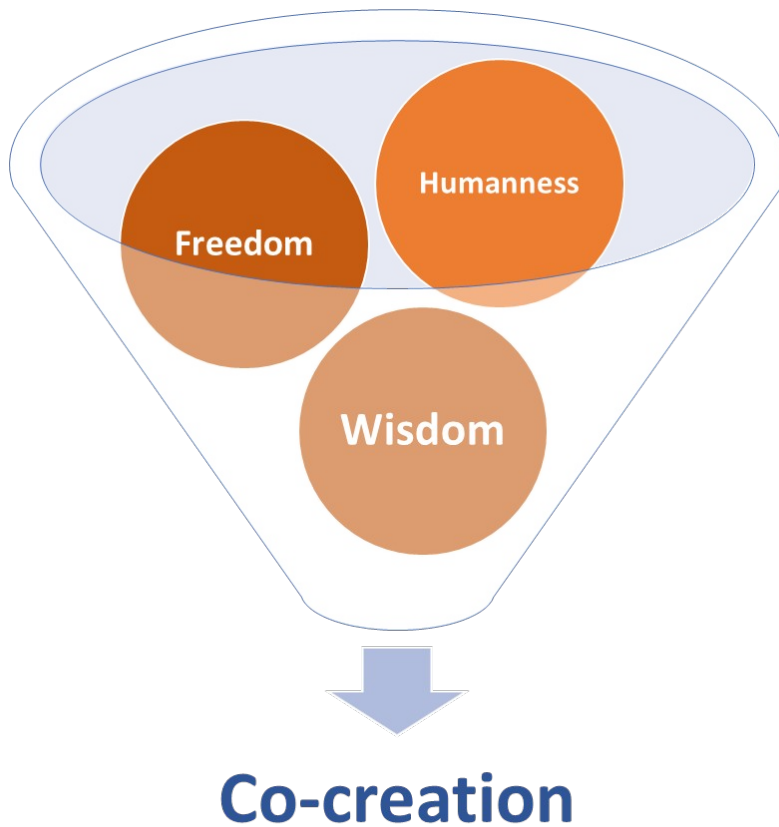
Verlatinghe” (Act of Abjuration) was written and was signed on 26 July 1581 in The Hague. The declaration of independence, as a first step towards the forming of the United States of America, is argued to be in part based on this Act. The Act stated among others that if a ruler (e.g., a king) was unfair to its people and instead behaved in an abusive way, this ruler should be replaced. It even stated that in that case the people even have a duty to do so. In ancient times, ‘ostracism’ was an Athenian democratic procedure in which any citizen could be expelled from Athens for a period of ten years. This usually happened when someone had become a threat to the state or deemed to be or have become a tyrant.

We think that in times of great need, a new declaration is needed. As we have seen in the last years, governments have not acted in the best interest of people (e.g., Schippers, 2020; Ioannidis, et. al. 2021). Therefore, we think a new declaration is needed, hence this “**Great Citizens Declaration**”. This declaration is aimed as a plea for psychological, physical and spiritual well-being human kind.



Core values of the Great Citizens Declaration

The three core values are: Freedom, Humanness and wisdom. If these are in place, a process of co-creation could be used to make sure we can start a process of co-creation, in which these values are leading.



Thus:

- Pro-humanity
- Pro-freedom
- Pro-science
- Pro-critical thinking
- Pro-health, well-being and safety
- Pro government transparency
- Pro-accountability
- Pro- wellbeing for future generations

The current crisis shows that it is relatively straightforward to take core human values of equality and freedom away and replace them with values such as safety and enforced medical procedures, as long as this has the appearance of being for the greater good. We think that humans are capable of making our own decisions. These decisions are made ideally respecting all life on earth as well as respecting earth itself, as threats for humans (many of them generated by humans themselves) escalate. We should continue to do everything in our power to pursue happiness, but should also make sure that this will not damage other people's happiness or harm eventually all of us. The overall goal should be to foster the physical, mental and spiritual health of citizens, make sure that social interactions are smooth, rather than repressive, authoritarian, violent, or punishing. Positive reinforcement of behavior may achieve more than punishment, humiliation or retaliation.

What we need to reinstate is: Ethical values, trust, kindness (treating others the way you want to be treated), integrity, forgiveness, gratitude, love, becoming the person you want to be. Many religions state that men is "Imago deity" made in the image and likeness of God, and if God equals love, this means that mankind has a right to be sovereign and with a free will and

decision-making authority. Note that being religious is not a prerequisite to having these values, these are core values that promote the mental and physical health of humankind.

New act

The new Act aims to reinstate important human values and updates it with new insights from psychology. This **Great Citizen’s Declaration (GCD)** takes into account human psychology, and notes that important needs and values of each human being should be met in order to experience well-being and thriving.

Involvement of people

In order to ensure the greatest possible involvement of people worldwide, we also instate a “letters to the future” challenge, where people can write about the ideal society if there are no constraints, and contrast this with the society that will materialize if we do not change anything (<https://greatcitizensmovement.org/letters-to-the-future.html>). This is important to have the possible and willful involvement of as many people as possible. Below, an overview of what we think the current situation is, what the desired situation could be and what is needed to get to this desired situation.

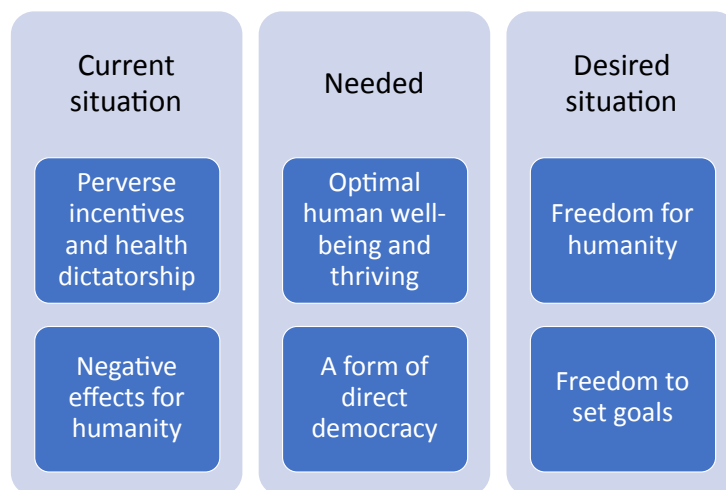


Figure 1: *Current, needed and described situation as described in this declaration*

Needs of people

From ancient times people have wondered what motivates people. Even Greek philosophers like Aristoteles, Socrates and Plato already debated about the motives for human behavior and were interested in what happened in the heads of people. At the end of the 19th century, the science of Psychology came into existence and especially after the first and second World War the science of Psychology was taking off. Lately, the principles of Positive Psychology (PP). PP is aimed at bringing people's attention, expectation and memory away from the negative. For a balanced perspective, focusing on the positive is key. This will help to optimize happiness, well-being, resilience and performance, and will nourish their strengths.

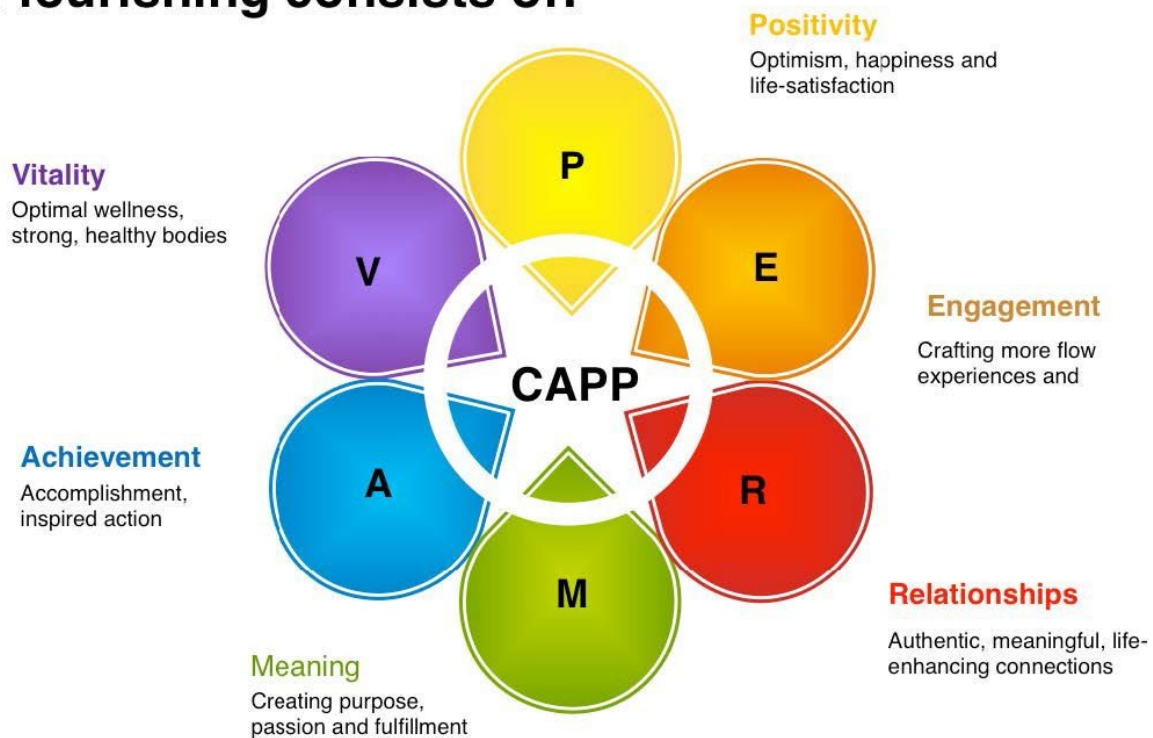
People have important psychological needs to stay healthy and thrive:

These are: Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning in life and accomplishment (PERMA- <https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/>), and interventions and techniques exist to strengthen each of these.



Figure 1: Core building blocks of Positive Psychology

Flourishing consists of:



A top-down system is usually detrimental to those needs, even if done by a “benign dictator”. The best system to use would be a form of direct democracy <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104730> , as this makes sure to incorporate the needs and wishes of many people and at the same time fulfills the basic human need of autonomy.

Human rights

Important: everyone has an equal say and people have a right to self-determination.

To counteract too much concentration of power in a few people, a cap on the accumulation of wealth is needed.

We, human being and citizens of the world declare that we have the following unalienable rights

The right:

- to live
- to pursue purpose, goals and happiness
- to be fairly treated
- to be a free and sovereign person
- to choose freely a religion
- to have the right of freedom of speech

Declaration

We, human beings, citizens of the world, declare that we want:

- To live in peace
- To have self-determination in important aspects of our lives
- Our differences to be dissolved by debate, not via the use of war or violence
- Our governments to serve the interests of the people, and to enhance the psychological, physical and spiritual well-being of all it's citizens.

If these rights are violated

If governments do not ensure safety, freedom and sovereignty of the citizens and do not recognize the people's inalienable rights, and/or start to act like tyrants, the citizens of the world have a right to replace them. Governments should rigorously check each action to see if this is in the common interest. If it is not, such a policy should not be mandated.

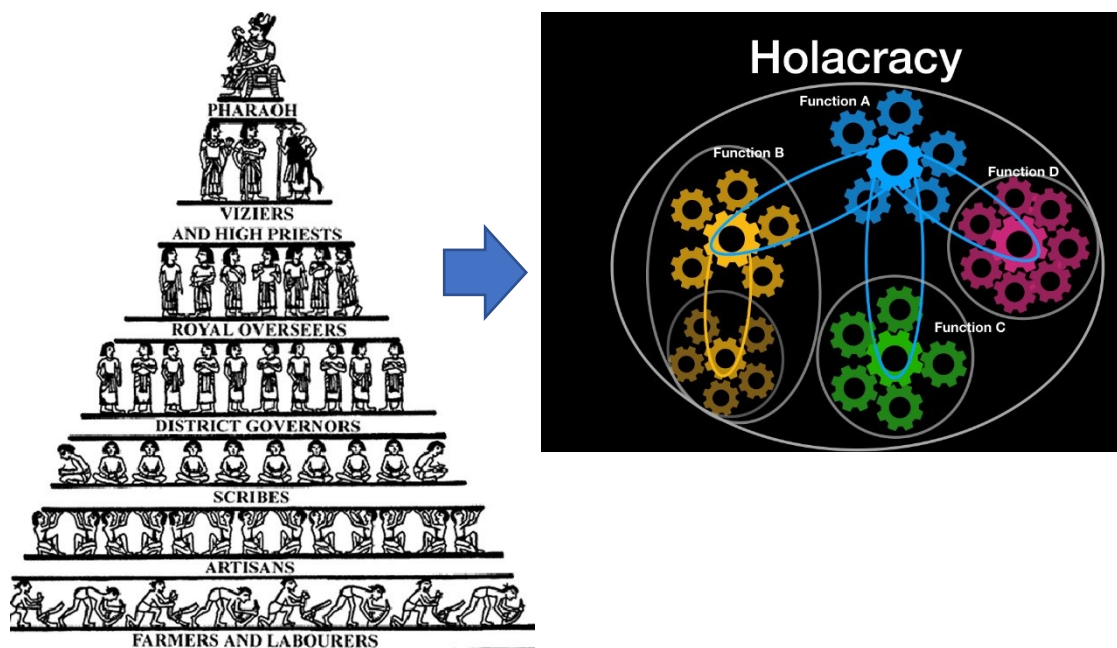
What is needed to achieve this

As we see several things going wrong, we do not expect everyone to totally agree with the below list of things we think should change. We do think that people are very capable to decide for themselves and in smaller groups what is important.

A form of direct democracy

A balancing force is needed in the re-introduction and utilization of direct democracy (Semler, 1989). In its most pure form, the electorate decides on policy initiatives themselves, without legislative representatives making the decisions for them. We think, although this form of democracy differs from the majority of currently established democracies in the world, this may be a major step forward and can prevent the form of decision making with possible disastrous consequences that are not in the best interest of citizens. Citizens in each country decide which form of direct democracy they desire. People should be made aware of evidence-based ways of decision making and also made aware of forms of decision making that optimize both the quality of decision making as well as mental well-being via having a say, and thus fulfill the important need for autonomy.

From pyramid structure to a society and companies organized more in a holacracy fashion.



Holacracy refers to a way of organizing characterized by radical decentralization of authority, distributed decision making and a lack of hierarchy. It has a more circle structure and is similar to the fractal organization. The mission and vision are leading, not the structure of the organization, and self-organization is important. Similarly, in a fractal organization, at all levels members share information iteratively and make decisions collectively.

It is suitable for complex environments and has advantages:

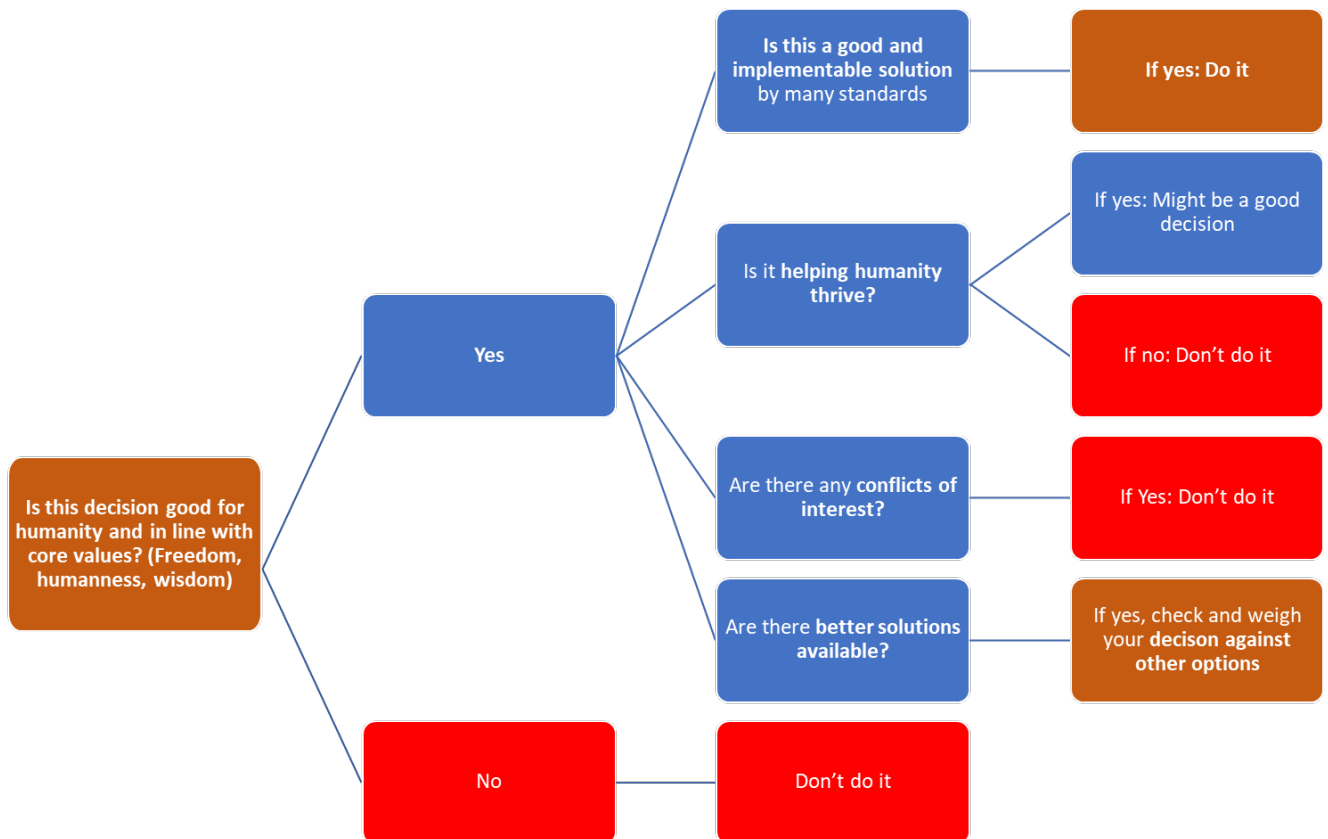
- Transparency
- Using brain power of all people
- Effectiveness
- Agility
- Accountability
- Innovation

Of course, this form of decision making is not a panacea for all problems, but can be used as an alternative for hierarchically organized societies².

² <https://www.holacracy.org/constitution>

Decision support

To ensure that decisions are made in line with the core values, a simple decision support such as depicted below can be used to decide if an action or decision should be implemented.



Getting rid of perverse incentives.

A perverse incentive is an incentive that has unintended and undesirable results that usually is contrary to what the designers intended. Typically, it often incentivizes people for behavior that makes the matter worse instead of better. This current time has shown the unintended side effects of many of these incentives, for instance paying hospitals more for Covid patients than for regular patients may have led to falsely label patients as Covid patients.

A cap on wealth

We also note that the balance in the world has shifted toward wealth being accumulated by only a few people and economic inequality has hugely increased in the last year (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_inequality). People with a lot of money can unevenly weigh in on decision making in the world, and thus this can pose a threat to human well-being. We are not stating what the cap should be, but merely state that this should be https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/emre.12457?casa_token=bZPC_7XVLpUAAAAA%3ATCReL1_aE8H_eiCM50SiiOcjNsA9KeXqlCOLJndty83TWLvj5sQ9VN7QmsxU6wTXGRW_YH5dBUySWbo

decided by humanity. If there is a better solution than a cap on wealth accumulation by a small group, the that should be welcomed as well.

Curricula in schools

The aims of school should ideally be to unlock the full potential of each individual instead of trying to pour each student's brilliant individuality into the mold of the existing system. Ways to optimize human health and well-being should preferably be part of curricula in schools all over the world. Not only should this be part of the curriculum, but also evidence-based interventions that have a proven track-record of improving well-being and academic performance, should ideally be part of the curriculum as well. Also, ideally schools and colleges should educate students to become independent thinkers. Importantly, the curriculum should be aimed at teaching pupils and students how to optimize psychological, physical and spiritual well-being, including showing ways of how to find purpose in life (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31920827/>) .

Role of the media and social media

Historically, the media have played a role of telling what is “wrong” in the world and focusing people's attention toward the negative. This opposes the principles of positive psychology. A more balanced reporting is desirable if we value the mental well-being of people. Importantly, it is important that the media play a role in terms of freedom of speech and encouraging debate, rather than be a platform to push “one official narrative”. Social media platforms should also not be used in this way and removing content should be done only in very rare cases, or maybe not at all. This should also should be decided by citizens, rather than by Big Tech

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superintelligence:_Paths,_Dangers,_Strategies

New Technologies

In this era of technology and seeing the developments with regards to superintelligence for instance, the ethical boundaries are constantly under pressure. Some have argued that because of these developments an existential catastrophe is imminent, for instance if machine brains surpass human brains and if this superintelligence replaces humans as the dominant life form on earth. Ethical frameworks should be developed and installed according which new technologies can be assessed, developed and used. Long term, possible harmful consequences on people and individuals, should be taken into account.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superintelligence:_Paths,_Dangers,_Strategies).

These and other possible threats and problems that human kind faces, should be solved in an open source type form of decision-making and solutions could be presented in the form of referenda and via other ways as long as these represent a direct form or democratic and participatory reflection and decision making process, e.g., <https://opensource.com/open-organization/resources/open-decision-framework#:~:text=Open%20decision%20making%20is%20an,inclusive%2C%20and%20customer%2Dcentric.&text=More%20generally%2C%20open%20decisions%20facilitate%20well%2Dfunctioning%20meritocracies>.

Declaration

It is important that in the upcoming time a real effort takes place to move towards a form of direct democracy. This should live up to psychological principles of the science of Positive Psychology principles to (a) assure physical, mental and spiritual health of citizens (b) make sure that social interactions are smooth and (c) Positive reinforcement of behavior.

We, citizens of the world, therefore, solemnly publish and declare that we are free from coercive measures that are evidently not in our best interest. We declare that we are capable of making our own decisions in all areas of life, respecting all life on earth as well as respecting the earth itself. We will do everything in our power to make sure we pursue happiness, but will also make sure that this will not be at a cost of other people's happiness and or will harm the earth or living beings in any way.

Signatures

On May 15, 2022, this declaration was authored and signed in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, by:

Prof. Dr. Michaéla Schippers

Professor of behavior and performance management at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Director of the Erasmus Centre for Study and Career Success, on a personal note.

Sign the declaration

