

CASE STUDY

The Paris Agreement and the common good⁴⁹

History

The planet is warming.⁵⁰ The last time the earth's temperature was cooler than the historical worldwide average was 1985.⁵¹ This information is not new. Scientists as early as 1859 predicted our current global warming trend in light of the increased use of fossil fuels in the Industrial Revolution. In fact, modern-day scientists still base their models for climate change on a model first developed in 1896.⁵² Scientific data reveals that the earth has always gone through periods of warming and cooling caused by changes in the tilt of the earth's axis and the shape of its orbit around the sun.⁵³ However, never has the earth experienced such a dramatic rise in temperature in such a short amount of time as we have seen in the last 30 years.⁵⁴ Actually, long-term historical data and our current planetary orbit indicate that the earth should be entering a global cooling period; however, the opposite is happening.⁵⁵ Scientists overwhelmingly agree with studies that support the theory that the earth is warming because of a dramatic increase in fossil fuel consumption creating an overabundance of greenhouse gasses, specifically carbon dioxide – CO₂.⁵⁶ These gasses trap the earth's heat and lead to the phenomenon that we now refer to as global warming. This trend has myriad consequences such as a rise in sea levels, coastal flooding, violent storms, droughts, wildfires, species loss, mass emigration, and disruptions in agricultural production.⁵⁷ Recognizing these threats, various groups around the world have sought to work in collaboration to combat climate change and mitigate its effects.

In 1992 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was formed with the goal of 'preventing dangerous human interference with the climate system' by stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations.⁵⁸ However, because the current rate of climate change is already having negative effects on ecosystems around the planet, the UNFCCC's more pressing goal is to attempt to *limit* the amount of global warming to a manageable level and work toward mitigating its effects. The Paris Agreement (*Accord de Paris*) established in 2015 is the UNFCCC's most recent attempt to achieve this goal.⁵⁹

The Paris Agreement is an arrangement between 197 countries to combat global warming. At the time this chapter went to press, 179 countries had signed on to the accord. The agreement outlines a plan for participating countries to limit their greenhouse gas emissions in an attempt to keep global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial averages – the more specific aim is to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). Although it does not designate a specific date to achieve this goal, the Agreement says that participating countries should seek to meet the goal 'as soon as possible' and reach net-zero emissions by the second half of the twenty-first century.⁶⁰

In sum, the Paris Agreement provides a structured process for governments to address climate change in a way that encourages transparency and flexibility, while still being facilitative rather than punitive in nature. It provides us with an excellent application of

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the ethic of the common good. We will examine the way the Paris Agreement fits the definition of the common good and seeks to reconcile the tension between the primacy of the individual and the primacy of the community. We will apply the concept of the common good to the outcomes of the Paris Agreement and discuss the costs and benefits of its implementation. We will also address the controversies surrounding the common good, and how the leaders and regulators of the Paris Accord have sought to address them. Finally, we will apply the Five Components of Leadership Model to the Paris Agreement to see how its authors addressed each component of the model.

The Paris Agreement and the common good

Let's begin with the fourth sense of the term 'the common good' that we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. As you will recall, this definition focuses upon the ways that human beings relate to each other. It views people as interdependent; as such, they reach their greatest fulfillment in cooperating with others and work towards a goal greater than themselves.⁶¹ Global climate change has the potential to jeopardize the world's food and water supply, increase coastal flooding, destroy natural habitats, spread insect borne illnesses, produce more violent storms, and lead to emigration crises worldwide.⁶² In the truest sense of the word, it is to everyone's advantage to address global climate change and address the effects of global warming.

We can also apply the third use of the term to our case study – that which focuses upon the shared interest in securing common conditions in which individuals are equal and free to pursue their own interests. The Paris Agreement acknowledges this through its formation under the auspices of the United Nations and in its authors' efforts to obtain consent for its specifics and implementation from governments throughout the world. The Agreement itself is an attempt to create a set of equal rights and equal liabilities for all those involved. The Agreement provides a common legal framework that requires all parties to contribute to mitigating climate change and communicate their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Secretariat of the Convention. Unlike previous agreement of its kind, the Paris Agreement is bound by international law. It provides a legal structure for countries to track and report their progress on meeting their Nationally Determined Contribution, which will be reviewed by UN climate experts as well as a global audience. This enhanced transparency provides a mechanism to 'name and shame' those countries that are not making tangible efforts to achieve the agreed upon goal.

As we discussed earlier, the common good often comes at a price to individual good. How much any one person or group should pay for the common good is always a matter of contention. The current call issued by the Paris Agreement for countries to limit their greenhouse gas emissions seems reasonable to those industrialized countries whose economies have already benefited from cheap oil and the widespread prosperity and progress that it seemed to bring. However, less developed countries might call foul as they are prevented from using these types of resources in building their own prosperity and progress.

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Likewise, there are some countries who disproportionately contribute to the glut of greenhouse gasses or who have historically used far more than their fair share of the earth's energy stores. The four countries that are currently the worst emitters of carbon include: China, the United States, the European Union, and India.⁶³ The United States alone uses about 20 percent of the world's energy resources, despite hosting only about 5 percent of the world's population.⁶⁴ China's use of energy and carbon emissions has skyrocketed in recent years as it has become the 'factory for the world.'⁶⁵ Other Western countries, such as members of the European Union, also use more of the earth's sources and emit more than their fair share of greenhouse gasses. Shouldn't these countries have to more drastically limit the production of these pollutants since they have created a larger portion of the problem? Additionally, it is predicted that poorer countries – such as those in Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia – will ultimately be much more adversely affected by global warming than will wealthy industrialized countries.⁶⁶ Shouldn't wealthier countries that have caused this problem by their vast consumption of energy and release of greenhouse gasses have to assist in relieving the havoc they have wrought on these poorer countries? If justice is foundational to building the common good, shouldn't countries such as this be required to pay a larger portion of the burden in creating the common good for the planet? According to the ethic of the common good, the answer is 'yes,' and the Paris Agreement allows for this.

The Paris Agreement recognizes that developed and developing countries have their own unique circumstances and resources that affect their relationship with the natural world and their ability to address the larger goal while sustaining their economies; thus, more developed countries are expected to take the lead in addressing climate change and assisting lesser developed countries in meeting the overall goal. The Agreement also establishes a collective goal of providing USD 100 billion per year to 2025 and annually thereafter to fund efforts to combat climate change. This amount may increase over time, but it cannot decrease. Developing countries are urged to provide *voluntary* financial support, while more developed countries are required to report twice a year on their financial contributions to this collective goal.

This cost discrepancy leads us to the primary theme that runs throughout conversations about the common good: how does one balance the rights of the individual with the rights of the group? The authors of the Paris Agreement have sought to address this by giving participating parties a variety of options to accomplish the group's goal. Ratifying countries can decide how to best limit their own emissions and set their own goals, but all of the participating countries must report on their efforts to reduce their emissions to the Secretariat of the Convention every five years beginning in 2023. The participating countries must submit their efforts to a third-party expert panel, but the review is designed to be 'facilitative, non-intrusive, non-punitive . . . and respectful of national sovereignty.'⁶⁷ The Agreement also offers a process to help countries to ramp up their efforts, regulations, and plans to meet the goals of the Agreement before it goes into force in 2023. The Agreement also offers guidance on how countries can devise their own Nationally Determined Contributions.

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Participating countries are expected to drastically limit their output of greenhouse gasses, as well as to develop and implement technologies designed to capture and sequester carbon gas emissions. This can be achieved through myriad ways, such as developing and protecting forests, which help to eliminate CO₂ from the atmosphere.⁶⁸ Developed countries could also offer financial incentives to developing countries to reduce emissions through deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). Importantly for developing countries, the Agreement notes that countries should seek to achieve the goal ‘in a manner that does not threaten food production,’ although it does expect the agricultural sector to take the lead in helping achieve the overall goal of the Agreement.⁶⁹ The agreement also allows public and private entities to work together to meet the parties’ Nationally Determined Contribution. Developed and developing countries can also work in tandem by transferring mitigation outcomes internationally, such as emissions trading. Developed countries are expected to provide information, technology, and capacity building support to developing countries, and developing countries are expected to supply information on support needed and how the support they receive will be utilized. Thus, the Agreement allows for a variety of means for participating countries to meet their own goal and contribute to the overall goal of the Agreement. As you can see, the Paris Agreement tries to balance the rights and sovereignty of individual countries with the common good of the planet.

The Paris Agreement is the most comprehensive piece of international legislation of its kind. It is a call for governments around the world to cooperate to address one of the most pressing problems of the twenty-first century. It forces leaders and followers to take collective responsibility for the common good and more fully consider the environmental impact of their actions now and for future generations.

Criticisms of the Paris Agreement

However, the Paris Agreement is not without its detractors. Some suggest that the Agreement is potentially bad for economies that have traditionally benefited from less expensive forms of energy, such as coal. As Ayn Rand would say, there is no common good – good and bad can only be determined by the individual. In this case, governments such as the United States and China, which rely on coal and other fossil fuels and are the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gasses, will have to make significant changes in their infrastructure and preferred sources of energy, costing tax payers a great deal if they are to meet the goal set forth by the Agreement. Oil companies and governments in the Middle East that depend upon the sale of oil are also in jeopardy of decreased profits. Employees ranging from petroleum engineers to coal miners will have to find other work. Governments will have to adopt new standards and regulations. In short, economies and people all over the world will have to adapt to the changes proposed in the Agreement. Hence, there are many who would argue – at least in this case – the common good is not so good for them personally. Yes, there will be large costs associated with the Paris Agreement – at least USD 100 billion a year, and this does not include the hidden costs associated with the private

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sector such as those employees who earn a living in the carbon-based energy industry who may lose their jobs. However, it is to *everybody's* benefit to address global climate change, and those who incur the most costs also stand to reap the benefits.

Another criticism of the Paris Agreement relates to the free rider problem we discussed earlier. The parties signing on to the accord are able to set their own Nationally Determined Contributions. However, the agreement is specifically designed to be 'facilitative, non-intrusive, non-punitive . . . and respectful of national sovereignty.'⁷⁰ In short, there is no formal mechanism to regulate and punish countries who are not holding to the Agreement. Rather, it only offers assistance to governments to help them set their own regulations and guidance on how to set these Nationally Determined Contributions. The United States has even threatened to pull out of the Paris Agreement, although it is one of the biggest emitters of greenhouse gasses.⁷¹ The punishment for such action would be more diplomatic and political rather than financially costly.⁷² Likewise, although the Agreement is bound by the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, smaller countries adversely affected by climate change could claim foul, but they would have no recourse for justice or compensation from larger governments who have caused so much of the problem. Finally, the Agreement does not present a definite timetable for participating governments to meet the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, but rather simply says that the goal should be met 'as soon as possible'; nor does it require any of the signers to specifically 'pledge' or 'commit' to doing so. One critic notes, 'So averse is the agreement to anything that may be seen as too binding that its announcement was delayed at the very last minute as the United States insisted on replacing the word "shall" with "should" in relation to the responsibility of industrialized countries to mitigate the effects of climate change.'⁷³ Hence, the Agreement does open itself up to criticism of the tragedy of the commons and the free rider problem so often levied against those who seek the common good. In this case, one of the biggest emitters of CO₂ – the United States – could potentially benefit from the sacrifices made by other countries. If the United States were to pull out of the Paris Agreement, it would be considered unethical when judged by the standard of the common good.

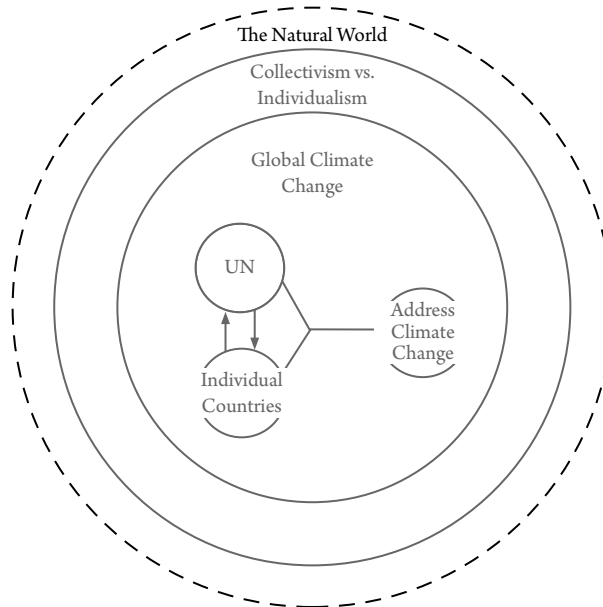
Five component analysis

Finally, we now turn our attention to the way McManus and Perruci's five components of leadership relate to the Paris Agreement.

The Paris Agreement requires the governments of the world to take a grander view of the goal, which is mitigating global warming. This is graphically represented here with the addition of a dotted-circle encompassing the entire model and is labeled as the natural world. A healthy natural world is vital for leadership; it is the most basic context for all human interactions.⁷⁴ In the case of the Paris Agreement, the signing parties still work toward their specific goals of their Nationally Determined Contributions, as well as develop

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Figure 11.3 The Five Components of Leadership Model applied to the Paris Climate Agreement and the common good case study



technology and secure financial support to help them meet these goals, but these are simply a means to an end to achieve the larger goal of mitigating climate change.

As we stated earlier, *how leaders and followers reach the common good is as important as the goal itself*. In the case of the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) worked with a broad coalition of world governments to determine the goal of mitigating climate change and how that goal should be achieved. If the United Nations simply imposed a goal upon these governments, it is unlikely that government would comply and the United Nations itself might be labeled as dictatorial.

Again, we refer to the arrows between leaders and followers that represent a mutual relationship between the two parties. In our case study, these arrows represent the negotiation and reciprocal influence that must take place when agreeing to the goal and the means to achieve it – in this case the UN is the leader and the various world governments are the followers. Likewise, the intersecting lines connecting the leaders and the followers to the goal represents the importance of the UN and these various governments working together to achieve the goal once they have determined the goal to be met. The Paris Agreement models leaders and followers working together to best determine the common goal and best means of achieving it.

The context for the Paris Agreement is the rise in global temperatures due to anthropomorphic climate change through the release of greenhouse gasses. This is the pressing exigency that called for the United Nations and governments worldwide to

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come together to create a common goal. In so doing, the parties to the Paris Agreement acknowledged that they can no longer focus exclusively upon their own countries. They recognized that these various bodies are interconnected through the natural world, and to care for the whole they are also caring for themselves. It was this unique environmental context that makes the ethic of the common good so compelling in this instance.

The Paris Agreement is special in that, through its sponsorship through the United Nations, it wholly acknowledges the cultural values and norms that encompass the leadership process. In 1992, key players such as the United States refused to sign another international treaty sponsored by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol. More recently, a new climate change initiative hosted in 2009 by the UNFCCC in Copenhagen also failed to achieve global agreement. The framers of the Paris Agreement learned from these failures and took a 'bottom-up' approach that allowed each government to devise its own strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.⁷⁵ There were dozens of meetings leading up to the meeting that produced a week-and-a-half of talks and negotiations between countries and required compromises on all sides. By listening to the concerns of all parties, the hosts of the Paris Agreement were able to address the values held by the wide array of nations represented. Key players who had resisted efforts from the UNFCCC in the past, such as China, the United States, and India, approved the final document.⁷⁶ By acknowledging the competing values and norms from all the countries represented at the convention, the framers of the Paris Agreement were able to successfully develop a treaty and advance the common good. Countries can determine their own contributions and take into consideration their unique systems and resources as they contribute to the goal of mitigating climate change and honoring the agreement.