Towards a Resilient Leadership

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Based on new avenues of research in the domain of leadership and particularly in what is called aesthetic leadership, our paper will focus on this notion to show how core disposition developed by leaders in time of crisis may be of precious help to inspire leaders and managers in charge of building capacities to advance resilience. Our presentation will identify the components of a leadership oriented toward anticipation, and able to effectively manage crises by discerning the opportunities lying behind chaos to construct the meaning necessary for learning. Among these dispositions, three of them will be mostly put forward to expose a perspective on resilient leadership: sensibility, reflexivity and wisdom.

The analysis focuses on the dynamics of the continuous interaction between individuals around various organizational artifacts; be they material like tools and infrastructures, or non-material like processes, plans, symbols, events and technologies. Especially, it looks at the dynamics of the complex relationships between the organizational members interacting, the organization and its skills, the broader social and cultural context in which it is embedded and how all of these relate to each other.

The first core disposition, aesthetic sensibility, is related to activating one's sensibilities to perceive and judge situations and events. The individuals understanding the dynamics of the relationships perceive events and projects them in the future to understanding how it will unfold and impact on the ongoing situation. They may judge its significance in the specific context, and discriminate between the relevant and the irrelevant, making decision and taking action on this basis. In social relationships, it concerns both the understanding of the dynamics of the interaction by the individual, and the ability to place oneself in the shoes of others and understand the situation from their perspective. Thus, one may express in ways that resonate with their experience and appeal to them, respecting their opinions and values. This resembles the intrication principle of quantum mechanics. It is suggested that two physical elements or systems without link are in independent quantum states, but when they enter in relationship and interact, they become enmeshed, acting on one of them having an influence on the other despite their relative distance.

But with dynamic and complex interactions ongoing, the situation is constantly evolving in unpredictable ways. Either their own actions produce unexpected consequences, or new unexpected events occur.

The second disposition deals with leaders' focused attention to stay grounded in the ongoing experience, with a critical attitude to stay open to newness and alternative possibilities or interpretations, in order to adjust to changing circumstances. Thus, they may have a reflex-like interaction with their changing context, knowing intuitively what to do. Namely, they may know which amount of what action to undertake in order to solve the problems at hand. In practice, it means that the individual does not follow recklessly a previous course of action. Rather, with a focused attention, they remain alert and check how the situation evolves. There is a constant movement to subtly perceive new events, project them in the future and make judgments, deciding whether they carry on the same course of action or not. When the situation develops in ways that violate their expectations, they may look at it anew, quickly restructure their interpretations in a flexible and creative way, to identify new possibilities that they mentally project in the future. Based on how they feel, they may intuitively know what to do, using their sense of balance and harmony to decide the degree to which they modify their course action, and the order and sequencing of their actions. These modifications may range from minor to major, if not complete invention. They make choices on this basis, even though it may be difficult to justify in rational technical terms. It is a constant process of adjusting to changing circumstances, through hermeneutical rounds of sensemaking, decision and action, that one checks again to re-judge, decide and act as the situation commands.

For leaders, this is based on the attitude of believing in positive possibilities of transformation despite the challenges at hand, and focusing one's attention on them. It entails a willingness to let other voices express being able to deal with tension, conflict and contradictions in the dialoguing among various stakeholders. They express in ways that contribute to the solution and giving space to others to use their talent. Leadership in this sense becomes more and more collaborative, and there may be a shift from confrontation to collaboration. It does not mean working against the forces of situation, but working with them, as one moves from 'making do' to 'doing with' others.

Practical wisdom, the third disposition, simply put means doing the right think at the right time in the right manner for the right reason. It emerges from the contextual interactions of the individuals dialoguing and reflecting on their situation to evaluate and choose options (Küpers & Statler, 2014). It is the dynamic disposition to sense, perceive, make choices and realize actions (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013) as they spontaneously apprehend and experience situations in their broader context influencing how they think, feel and express themselves (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014).

It translates in the ability to arrive spontaneously at imagining creative solutions that transcend and reconcile conflicting individual and collective interests, short term and long term perspectives. Its embodiment is seen in leaders' way of interacting with people and artifacts to take decisive actions that make a difference and open up possibilities (Gärtner, 2011) of transformation. Similarly, the virtue component of practical may be seen in the ability to translate the moral and ethical norms of the broader social and cultural setting of embeddedness appropriately to the specific situation they experience.

If leadership is seen in terms of a process of social influence, these dispositions relate to the practical and experiential ways in which it emerges from the continuous social interaction of leaders, followers and other stakeholders around material and non material artifacts in space and time. It therefore concerns the ways in which these actors intersubjectively make sense of events and constantly enact part of their reality through their very actions, as they struggle to constantly adjust to dynamic, complex and challenging circumstances. The issue shifts then from traits of characters or mere technicity, to exiting these dispositions in order to shape the organization in various forms consistently with the evolution of their situation and context. Namely, it is about being able to structure, unstructure and restructure the organization in space and time, often in creative and improvised ways, in line with the rhythm of events and actions. Organizing and re-organizing demands that they learn, unlearn and relearn. This is what may ensure resilience over the long run.

Preparation then shifts from identifying a range of predictable threats, to being ready to face the unpredictable; and it means learning to improvise with individuals one is little or not at all used to working with.

This paper intends to show how these three dispositions could be used to articulate a specific view of urban resilience in relation with leadership. More specifically it appears that urban resilience literature considers situations and contexts resembling those aesthetic leadership investigates. We thus turn to a quick review of major issues put forward by the urban resilience research stream.

The recent review of the field of urban resilience by Merrow et al. (2016) acknowledges the lack of common definition on urban resilience. However, it articulates the issue of urban resilience around four sub-components which are 'multi-scalar, networked, and often strongly coupled' (p.45). Namely, the authors stress 1) in the ***Governance Networks***, the diversity of actors and institutions with differing interests shaping decisions 2) the variety of materials produced and consumed in cities in the ***Networked Material and Energy Flows*** 3) the built environment in the ***Urban Infrastructure and Form*** 4) and among others, the monetary capital, justice and equity, as well as the demographics implicated in the ***socio-economic demographics***.

From this perspective cities could be viewed as urban systems which are highly complex and adaptive (Godschalk, 2003), extending beyond the sole boundaries of the city (Ernston et al., 2010), and 'embedded in broader 'networks' of global resources, commodities, communication, and multilevel governance' (p. 45). Defining urban resilience may already be a 'highly contested, political, and participatory process' (p.46), as it concerns how 'people, activities, institutions, resources, and processes interact in emergent patterns' (Desouza & Flnery, 2013; p.98), with a contextual dimension of the city at play.

In turn, the tentative integrative definition of urban resilience advanced is: '… the ability of an urban system-and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales-to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive

capacity' (p. 39). From our prior discussion on aesthetic leadership it appears that the aesthetic view may have much to share with research on urban resilience.

Most importantly, the review identifies six conceptual tensions that in our view an aesthetic leadership perspective could contribute to resolve.

A first tension concerns the dynamic linkages of physical and social networks with multiple components (ecological, social, technical) in cities, with both human and natural processes in interaction; and their intertwining with distant places with which they exchange many forms of artifacts. This is at the root of the conceptual divergence on urban resilience. However, it represents a starting point from an aesthetic perspective taking due account of the complexity of the dynamic relationships between all of these elements, and their links the broader context.

A second tension is related to the positive vs negative view on urban resilience, meaning respectively maintaining basic functions (defensive) or rather improving and prospering. Following the question raised by some authors about if (and when) it would be even desirable to return to a previous state, a practically wise leadership would nuance such perspectives. A tradeoff may not be affordable for a resilient city. The key may be in the appropriateness of the judgment in contextual ways, as advocated by practical wisdom.

Those may be reconciled, overcoming the dualism and engaging the issue in search for possibilities that both maintain basic functions and allow to improve and become more and more capable of absorbing shocks. It brings to the fore the fact that what is named basic function or critical infrastructure is but a judgment of value, subjective and contextual, which may have to be debated between various stakeholders. The challenge becomes then one of imagining under various circumstances and threats (flooding, ecological disasters, social unrests) which physical and non-material artifacts (physical infrastructures like buildings, roads, bridges and hospitals, tools; non-material like communication systems, technologies) may be affected, to understand and judge from the perspective of stakeholders inside and outside the city, what would become a priority, urgent or critical. From there on, the key for

leadership is to enact narratives that appear credible and convincing in front of the right audiences, and to take actions that appear capable of solving the problems. Practical wisdom may help in this regard, and it stems from their understanding of the dynamics of the relationships.

Another tension concerns the adaptation to specific threats vs more general adaptability. This other duality may be overcome if one thinks of urban resilience as a way of thinking (Folke, 2006) to envision them as capable of both functioning under specific challenges, but also ready to face unpredictable threats, as suggested by Walker & Salt (2006). This makes the adaptive capacity (Brown et al., 2012) critical for the long run, and especially for preparation in our view.

A fourth tension resides in the mechanisms for system change between 1) persistence to resist disturbance 2) incremental adaptation 3) and radical transformation. This may be seen as linked to another tension in the timescale of action (the definition of rapid change not being clear). From our perspective, these two last tensions have to do with the proportion of action and the rhythm of change. Following the suggestion of a continuum from persistence to transformation (Meerow et al., 2016 ; p. 45), the issue may be posed in terms of proportion that varies in a contextual and situated manner, in space and time. The appropriate pace of change involves the subjective perception of various stakeholders, and the conflicts that may ensue. One may remember how leaders are blamed for not responding quickly enough (e.g. Bush in Hurricane Katrina, Trump in the ongoing civil unrest implicating white supremacist groups).

The issue of leadership in urban resilience may therefore be approached around these three core dispositions to open up interesting questions.

First of all, it may be that the core capacity to build is this adaptive capacity mentioned by Brown et al. (2012) which seems key to urban resilience. From an aesthetic perspective, this would entail the ability for leaders to sense the relationships between the different stakeholders, the physical infrastructures (water, building, transportation, energy, environmental) as well as intangible ones (e.g. communication systems) in their social and economic context, and how they relate to other close or far areas, in order to understand the

dynamics behind the way they are connected and constantly interacting. The accuracy of their perception at this level will influence how effectively they judge and evaluate threats, and consequently, the decisions they make.

Besides, given that ecological disasters and flooding have the potential to rapidly overwhelm their resources and pre-established plans, this adaptive capacity entails the willingness and ability to change at a pace and degree that is consistent with the evolution of the contextual circumstances they face. For leaders, it means sensing how the situation may evolve, judging relevant issues and stakeholders they understand the perception and interests of. This goes with an ability to join forces with various groups (public and private, different social bodies, engineers…) to animate a fruitful dialoguing and tap into their potential resources, energy, talent and expertise, making them part of the solution. This is usually facilitated by the establishment of a real-time communication leaders have to maintain whilst changing their practices and processes, distributing effectively decision power and authority, and various kinds of resources to usual and unusual stakeholders across space and time. This process entails some degree of creativity and improvisation. Leaders may have to draw on other technologies, processes or practices (from other domains or places) that they appropriately translate in their specific context.

Also, symbolic and ethical issues may arise, especially during massive civil unrests. The key here is the ability to come up with solutions that translate the ethical norms of the society appropriately to the specific situation, and their enactment in a timely fashion. This is linked to practical wisdom.

In this sense, a serious challenge ahead seems to be related to the inclusion of spontaneous civil efforts to participate in recovery, and the difficulty of coordinating those with more traditional stakeholders.

Such a view raises several questions.

In terms of preparation, the issue of how and to what extent cities include bordering or far located places/stakeholders in their preparation efforts may become more and more central. A related one may concern how different bodies of the social corpus may participate in resilience building. If one

considers that a central issue is the ability to improvise together, then knowing a variety of stakeholders with which leaders maintain pre-disaster ties is as much important for resilience building than the ability to rapidly establish ties with little or unknown stakeholders. Preparation would therefore extend to these stakeholders, and often beyond the scope of usual boundaries.

A second issue may be related to the potential of new and emerging trends, materials, technologies and processes in rethinking urban resilience. How could advances in IT, intelligent infrastructures contribute in resilience building? Are there new materials, construction processes, information tools and technologies that may enhance resilience? If so, what are the challenges ahead?

Eventually, does the metaphor of 'the urban system as a complex living organism' open up possibilities to better conceptualize urban resilience?