Leadership Phenomena

Comments for the Costa Rica session

A discussion about leadership turns often into a sterile description of historic figures such as fascists, saints, artists or Nobel prize winners. The first obstacle for an analysis of leadership is purely semantic (language habits), leadership is confounded with whatever an individual at the top of something does. But after the first obstacle many more and even more difficult obstacles for a meaningful discussion about leadership appear. In order to help the LEAD community (Members, Associates, staff and faculty !) exchange their experience and their understanding of changes in the social, political and economic processes they are part of, there is a need to introduce other parameters, indicators and variables which allow us to do justice to leadership for sustainable development.

Looking at our historical accounts, the aspiration of people at the top of something to not just manage something but to lead it in a profound sense has first arisen in the military, in ancient Greece and Rome. One should stretch it a bit and think of General Colin Powell in the USA as a military leader, becoming an "obvious" candidate for the presidency in 1996 and General Eisenhower who actually became president. But the inner workings of leadership phenomena are subject to many different social processes.

When the business administration thinkers started to be attracted by "management culture" in the early 80s, it became only a short step for anybody at the top of a company to realize that providing leadership would suit him or her just as well. This has then led to a rapid proliferation of leadership education programmes. Already the Sixth edition of the leadership education sourcebook (1996) in the USA lists 150 courses and programmes taught on college and university campuses. Only six years to create 150 new degrees is quite an achievement[1]. Little of that sort exists in Europe and this differences reflects first of all the non-commercial character of universities in Europe. Irrespective of the recent ideological shifts however, leadership as a social reality has been around for millenniums and maybe has remained as high an obstacle for those who try to understand it and those who seek or happen to find themselves exerting it.

A more profound obstacle for an analysis of leadership is that like much in social science, leadership can only be dealt with comparatively[2]. Therefore all methodological questions arising in comparisons of social phenomena apply also to leadership. There are a few initial warnings about comparisons which could be useful to keep in mind.
1) Insisting that the comparability of any social condition should be "proven" always leads to circular arguments. Comparability cannot be established explicitly.
2) Comparisons are often based on "neighbourly societies", but there is no gauge of the degree of difference constituting neighbourliness.

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[1] Comparing their syllabus there is a striking absence of coherence. There is tendency to teach leadership only in connection with certain sciences and link leadership to scientific competence. Several years of professional experience is also increasingly required, indicating that leadership cannot be taught without institutional experience. The major factor for the absence of clear core teaching matter is certainly the difficulty of transforming the largely inconclusive research on leadership into generally applicable concepts.
Another condition for the establishing of this discipline is the influence of consulting companies, whose successful courses attract large fees from industry. Their success forces universities to follow these with respect to course content.
[2] A currently widespread example for a comparative analysis is unemployment. Many economists argue that reducing unemployment in Europe requires a similar modification of income distribution as in the USA in order to achieve a similar magnitude of job creation. The comparison of unemployment between the USA and Europe has not been established conclusively. Since a comparison of unemployment implies an large number of other parameters and there is no agreement on which other parameters result in a correct comparison of unemployment, the conclusion of an econometric analysis follows from the statement of the research question.

3) One can make comparisons between societies and within societies, but apart from the fact that these are indeed different types of comparisons, it remains impossible to show where the discontinuity from one society to another lies.

4) An analysis comparing social conditions has to include the relative position of the society of the individual producing the analysis.

5) Comparisons based on the unity of mankind have tended to produce copies or imperfect mirror images of those societies where the comparison was produced. Especially in development theory, industrial societies figure with the highest advancement of institutional advancement.

6) There is no ideal method for comparison such as those in natural sciences. At the same time, the deepest insights into society are reached in and through comparison. One can use improvisation, exercise judgment, rely on imagination, and hope that the comparisons and the contrasts will be illuminating and fruitful.

Before describing the discussion in LEAD, a few remarks regarding the huge body of research which has gone into leadership can be instructive. There is a sample bibliography attached, which should only give an impression of the different types of publications available.

One of the assertions generally approved claims that factor analytic studies of leadership typically show two dimensions: a people and a task dimension. Any kind of quantification of observed leadership treated as a complex web of interactions, and mathematically analyzed as such, produces those two factors as the most significant variables. This result has then been verified by constructing operational definitions of these dimensions and the result looks for example like the "PM leadership theory" (P stands for group goals, the task dimension, and M stands for group cohesiveness, the people dimension). Varying other variables of the observed leadership with the P and M factors results in quite different conclusions regarding the causal relations. So far nobody, whether psychologist, sociologist or business management specialist, has been able to get to a unit of leadership.

Another way forward is to increase the number of factors beyond two, even though the third one is always less significant. Quantitative analysis with six factors is often sufficient to eliminate any differences between countries. If one presupposes that all societies follow similar rules, this suggests that six factors are sufficient to explain leadership. If one believes that not all societies follow similar rules, then these six factors are excessive and the correct number of variables must be between two and six. Typically these six factors might be called autocratic, autocratic benevolent, consultative, participative, consensus, and laissez-faire style (such as in the publication cited from Gibson). Several other such typologies are being pursued. But the correlation between these leadership factors and other variables has not been conclusive either.

There is a frequent confusion in the literature between the two leadership factors and what is known in management theory as Theory X and Theory Y. Both have been proposed in the Fifties and Sixties and are since taught at business schools. Theory X starts from a supposition that the <u>average</u> employee attempts to reduce his or her workload and seeks clear guidelines for performance, whereas Theory Y stresses the average employee's pursuit of self-realization and social recognition. In an management environment where Theory X is appropriate, the task dimension in leadership is central, whereas in Theory Y, it is the people dimension. Managers ought to adapt to certain leadership styles in order to be more effective. This is a rather crude generalization, but holds schematically in most publications. In one case leadership means more assuming responsibility and providing close guidance to employees (more control and tight management), in the other case leadership signifies empowering employees and releasing initiative and potential.

What the popular management literature fails to address, is that leadership is not separable from subordinateship. The definition of a leadership style must include an understanding of the reason for accepting leadership. What legitimizes leadership is probably never the appropriate mix of <u>hands-on</u> versus <u>arms-lengths</u> control. It is something of a totally different nature. Indeed leadership is related to management but nonetheless radically different. Even though the mix of hands-on versus arms-length might be the same in two different countries or organizations, what legitimizes leadership can be quite different. Leadership appears connected to values or organizing principles in a country or organization. Subordinateship and leadership are related through normative aspects.

One last comment about a deficiency in the management literature on leadership concerns the most important management influence in this century, Taylorism. Frederic Taylor (1856 - 1915) has introduced time and motion studies and other instruments to break down employees tasks into small units to make them manageable. Conveyor belts and a whole approach to manufacturing followed. Without Taylor, industrial relations could have developed quite differently. In many regards, the current trend to create teams on the shopfloor, to increase worker participation, and much of the lessons learnt from observing industrial management in Japan (TQM, JIT, Ringi) is in fact a reversal of Taylorist principles. Instead of transferring decisions from the employee to the supervisor, hierarchies are now becoming flatter, employees are encouraged to see themselves as "knowledge workers" and to use their experience and judgment. Understanding how Taylorist management principles have shaped industrial relations might shed light on how alternatives to Taylorist principles can be developed in the future in leadership terms.

Leadership discussion in Okinawa

In order to give the European Associates an impression of the recent and rather cautious discussion in LEAD please read the attached report on the Okinawa session in 1996. Some of the terms and concepts associated with leadership during the Okinawa discussion are also mentioned in Box 2 (p. 9) of the Costa Rica Concept Paper. In order to characterize the discussion the following observations can be made:

The Mexican Associates had difficulties in applying the term. Arguments such as "even leaders never talk about leadership" indicate that there is a severe moral charge on the term which prevented more substantial qualifications. Brazilian Associates claimed to pursue a more projected leadership directed towards a general societal form. Rather than defining functional parameters of actual leadership in the current Brazilian society, they described requirements in order to bring about social changes such as democracy and the participation of all social groups. Nigerian Associates mentioned traditional leadership traits, which were difficult to articulate in relation to the leadership terms described in Box 2.

It seems correct to state that there is a tendency to avoid the leadership definition by pointing to objectives for social change. This might be the integration of one society (Brazil) or the integration of one society into the global sphere (Indonesia). Having defined the objective, one then finds rather similar capacities needed for an individual to then be an actor for change. This is either an indicator that there is a group of related features of the change to sustainable development in all LEAD countries, or that one has not defined leadership, but rather general social aspirations.

Following from this tendency in the leadership discussion, it is fair to state that there has been little effort so far to start from the actual leadership. There are individuals exerting leadership in each society. Leadership is a social phenomena just like crime, suicide or people sticking rings on their fingers saying: "With this ring I thee wed". Leadership is exerted in different forms, recognizable only by the acknowledgment of those who are led. Everybody, even the adversaries of Greenpeace, accepts that Greenpeace does exert leadership. As an indicator for this acknowledgment most would use the fact that Greenpeace has an audience in the general public and that many people are willing to follow their appeals (with their time or their money). Leadership is, in any society, that which brings large numbers of people to change their behaviour in certain respects.

More than in an actual achievement itself, leadership manifests itself by forms or appearances of certain behaviour. This is the reason why it is possible to observe a politician and compare his behaviour to that of an artist. Leadership is, in some cases, a culturally grounded model of elite behaviour. For this reason, it has also been said that

comparing the US presidents, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton, it is easiest to compare the way they play golf, than comparing the decisions of their governments. The form of behaviour with which leadership is recognized changes in a society when an influential individual appears that exerts influence in a new manner. As an example one could use Jacques Cousteau, the French oceanographer. Television was a precondition for him to establish his influence. He provides leadership by using a new medium in order to get the attention of his public.

Box 2 of the Concept Paper shows a number of characteristics of a leader mentioned by some Associates attending the Okinawa session. Everyone can make a little experiment; attempt to forget what he or she knows about LEAD and then look again at that box and try to imagine an individual who would fit that. It seems that leaving aside the two characteristics on the bottom ("magic stone" and god apart) it still resembles a Western European stereotype. It is an interesting question where this stereotype comes from: Christian religion, Luther and Calvin, individuals in the mind of Kant or Descartes, Hollywood movies ? In any case, it is clearly a pre-analytical description of an individual leader. A satisfactory conceptual description of leadership does contain different elements, and in most cases of leadership, only a small number of these elements might be meaningful with respect to an individual. Leadership for sustainable development might be a particular <u>class</u> of leadership and such a class could be impossible to define regarding an <u>individual</u>. An evident aspect of this new class would be an intersectoral ambition, for example leadership through understanding and co-operating with other individuals in countries or organizations with different organizing principles.

As an example of leadership which is suitable for sustainable development reflection, I suggest taking the World Bank, and if an individual is needed, the new president James Wolfensohn. The World Bank exerts leadership in finance, in designing and evaluating development programmes, and in economic research in general. The World Bank is a key actor for a modification of the sustainability of the world economy. The World Bank exerts leadership because of its central function in the world economy and this function is not traceable to an individual within the bank (although it used to be when headed by McNamara). The leadership influence of the World Bank was intact during the years of Barber Conable's presidency, despite the fact that this individual has not had any noticeable influence himself on the Bank's behaviour. The leadership function of the World Bank can be analyzed looking at the recruitment of bank staff, by the importance of the actual flows of funds, by the influence of their research and by other aspects of its operation. There one should take into account a remark of one of the most influential economists amongst sustainable development theoreticians, Herman Daly. After leaving the World Bank Economic Development Institute, arguably one of the most powerful think thanks of our times, he left a rather pessimistic account (he since teaches at the University of Maryland):

> *"The top-down attitude promotes a vision of development that the Bank has swallowed whole - a vision that encourages the idea that northern levels of consumption and styles of living are not only desirable, but obtainable on a worldwide scale. It is an unexamined, false premise. I don't blame the Bank entirely for it. I lay more blame on academic economics. A great deal of what's wrong with the Bank can be traced directly back to the dogma of academic economists and the economics profession which trained most of the Bank staff, and which continues to advise the Bank from academia".* Bankcheck Quarterly, no.8, June 1994, p. 8

Other observers of the Bank disagree with Daly's opinion of the influence of academic habits and see a stronger role for McNamara's influence which shaped the Bank beyond his term as its president and his institutional legacy. Others see the influence of the economic interests of the USA or the bureaucratic inertia of large administrations. But if one assumes for a moment that Daly's judgment is correct, then leadership towards sustainable development ought to include the capacity to counter the dogma of academic economics and do so in a manner relevant to the World Bank's leadership role as a rather blind vehicle of these dogma.

Leaving aside the World Bank again, leadership for sustainable development does comprise capacities and attributes that apply to individuals but which become pertinent not by the individual's behaviour but by a definition of his or her actions with respect to the institutional affiliation (tasks not people). Such criteria are not well represented amongst the terms and concepts in Box 2 of the Concept Paper or in the discussion held in Okinawa.

Agency versus structure

Another suitable introduction to a discussion of leadership, not in terms of individual attributes of a leader, but in terms of different shapes and shades of leadership, is a conceptualization with respect to the nature of action (agency) within its context (structure) of an individual, for a leader and a follower.

There is a very old and continuing debate in social sciences around agency and structure, from which a lot of insight can be gained. Some of the most influential social scientists today, such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, have started their work by looking at the dichotomy between agency and structure. The definition in the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology is:

> **agency** (p.7): *often synonym for action, emphasizing implicitly the undetermined nature of human action, as opposed to the alleged determinism of structural theories….. it has wider meaning to draw attention to the psychological and social psychological make-up of the actor, and to imply the capacity for willed (voluntary) action.*

> **structure** (p. 517): *the different kinship, religious, economic, political and other institutions of a society may be said to comprise its social structure, as might such components as its norms, values, and social roles. ….. Where structure has been placed at the forefront of sociological discussion it has tended to generate a causal determinism in which the efficacy of human agency is lost. Structures invariably seem to exist separately from, but nonetheless to determine, motivated social action. …. The major divergence in sociological usages of structure is between those who see the term as referring to the observable patterned social practices (roles, norms, and such like) that make up social systems or societies, and those for whom structure comprises the underlying principles (for example relationships to the means of production) that pattern these overt practices.*

Defining the agency of an individual in a certain social context, one can conceptualize possible forms of leadership. Whereas education realizes social structuration (maintenance of social structure) in the USA, where only a successful member of the upper middle class can afford to send the children to Harvard or the MIT, a comparable mechanism of social structuration would be the cast system in India. Comparing an individual's obstacles and opportunities along these different modes of structuration, agency becomes an effective concept of comparison. A poor black woman from the Bronx can get to Harvard, and so can someone move from one cast to another. Leadership can consist of overcoming

established social structures. Or rather changing them because social structures are always both enabling and constraining to an actor.

Agency can serve to distinguish individuals and to legitimize leadership. In a highly individualist context, any manifestation of independent agency could increase leadership claims. While politicians in Germany and Britain gain influence by unifying their parties, and while company directors in these countries spent decades as faceless "company men", French politicians are more important than the parties they belong to and often heads of French corporations are distinguished by passing the entry exam to the ENA and the Ecole Polytechnique. President Mitterrand of France had an illegitimate child (produced at 58) and when he took her for dinner at a famous restaurant, only the menu they chose was widely discussed in major newspapers. While this is unthinkable in the USA, nobody would be able to discuss it in China. The President's meaningful agency seems quite different. Mitterand's past in the Vichy government during the Second World War was a major issue, since it is close to the institutional history of the French government. Besides the ethics question, there is a more profound question: what are the parameters of leadership, what parts of an individual's behaviour is relevant to his or her role in the public and what is not ? Leadership in France is obviously more defined through individual action, whereas in Germany and in Britain, leadership is legitimized through individual behaviour in closer relation to the institution. To what extent an institution, the obvious legal entity, should be compared or whether the principles organizing the institution should be compared is an open question according the above cited dictionary.

Who or what institution is the agent of a shift to sustainable development ? That is an open question, not the least because at present I cannot think of an institution opposing it. The Concept Paper for Costa Rica states that the concept of sustainable development is a societal one. It has been said that institutions pursuing Agenda 21 must be a new type of institution. What are then the features of such a new institution ? One way to ask those questions is to identify normative features of such an institution. An agent for a shift to sustainable development could then be defined first through fixing these normative features. In day-to-day life, looking at a particular pattern of behaviour, individuals tend to follow the equation:

$$\text{agency} = \text{moral responsibility} = \text{context of moral justification}$$

Whether an institution or an individual, one is responsible for one's action only if one has a moral obligation to consider other options for the particular action. Identifying an agent for a shift to sustainable development might be achieved through identifying a modification in social structures allowing the agent involved to consider options for moral behaviour which were not generally considered appropriate before. As theoretical constructs, agency and structure are mid-range concepts, allowing one to engage in meaningful comparisons of necessary changes towards sustainable development.

Suggested definition of leadership

> "Leadership is an outcome of an information-bonded influence relationship among leaders and co-workers, who are involved in a purposeful development process which moves toward an ideal-seeking state."

This seems a workable definition where an individual position in a wider structure is combined. This implies that one cannot define leadership devoid of an organizational context. Leaders have a distinct function with respect to the information creating bonds and the ideal state sought. This can be realized from many different positions within a hierarchy or even from outside it.

Leadership is a benign social phenomena, like solidarity or ambition. It appears as a complex symbolic interaction which can be understood in each context by analyzing the subjective reasons for those who lead and those who are led. Beyond the analytical interest, the only advice worth giving from research at present is that there are unlimited forms of leadership, and that new ones can be created by mutual recognition, as a tacit contract between free and responsible agents. The more innovative the leadership form, the more intelligent the agents.

All of the above is not more than a contribution and an Associate, Member or staff might find it useful in adding to his or her perspective on leadership.

Culture in   LEAD

The enclosed leadership and culture video has been produced by LEAD International. It is intended to serve as an introduction to a wider debate about cultural differences relevant to sustainable development.   This debate necessarily takes place amongst the LEAD Members and Associates, seeking to improve their professional collaboration.

The video has been developed by Len Ishmael, outgoing executive director of LEAD International. She was assisted by Erika Svendson and Maureen Cunningham. The video is based on interviews held with LEAD Associates at the last international LEAD session in Okinawa in October 1996. The group discussions in Okinawa were set up with the purpose of stimulating the culture and leadership debate. Watching the video it is evident, that the discussion groups were given suggestions at the outset, oriented to rather general differences between national cultures, represented amongst the LEAD Associates.

As stated in the video itself, many Associates judged this approach difficult due to the implicit assumption of the coherence and unity of a "national culture". Many Associates spent most of their discussion time explaining why they think that there is no such thing as a national culture.

LEAD-Europe has not been consulted in the process of this leadership and culture effort. Therefore LEAD-Europe's critique of the video ought to be oriented to an alternative approach to the leadership and culture debate, rather than pointing to the obvious difficulties of the approach chosen by LEAD International.

Therefore this papers serves three purposes:

- suggest a different approach
- attempt to define how this debate is feasible in Europe
- enable the LEAD-Europe Associates to judge whether they are comfortable with this approach

First, it is indeed urgent to improve the exchanges between the Associates from different LEAD programmes. There has to occur a profound debate about the importance of the cultural differences between the countries where LEAD Associates and Members are active. This is a precondition for the purposeful enhancement of LEAD as a network. Otherwise, LEAD will be limited to a one way training and information dissemination institution.

There are a variety of ways to approach cultural differences in order to help the Associates. The LEAD International approach is marked by the fact that cultural differences in leadership are addressed via criteria, descriptions, conditions, parameters of INDIVIDUALS or of individual behaviour.

Furthermore connecting cultural differences immediately to sustainable development, the discussion amongst LEAD Associates becomes more meaningful to the raison d'être of LEAD.

In order to illustrate that approached proposed by LEAD-Europe, two different issues will be discussed, equity and sustainability, and leadership in terms of the dichotomy of agency and structure.

Equity and sustainability

Recent efforts by an international research consortium, the Luxembourg Income Study, has produced a new set of data, which allows to describe equity with more precision than before. The following graphs summarize some of the findings. The vertical axis gives the income, the median income is normalized to 100, and the vertical axis the population. The income comprises revenue from employment as well as rent from other holdings. The left side show the curves for 1981 (and '79) and the right from 1986 and 1987 (with the 1981 curve dotted for comparison). Differences in the year of the data reflect different availability of complete census data.
Looking at the income distribution curves the differences between countries are striking. The changes between 1981 and 1986-87 are quite different, more poor in Sweden and the USA but less so in France and the UK, and reductions in the middle class in Sweden, UK and USA. But more important are the differences between the shape of the curves.
Given that all of these countries are basically in the same phase of economic development, with rather similar political systems and strong historic links, one can presuppose a clearcut answer where the differences come from. Without pursuing other answers, one seems straightforward. The differences reflect different definitions of the concept of citizen.

A Swedish citizen cannot be vastly better of than the other Swedish citizens, but he/she is allowed to be worse off if he/she does not participate in the effort of material well-being of the whole society. The Netherlands define a citizen as having a considerably higher minimal level of well-being and allow a citizen to be a lot better of than the others. Whereas in the USA, 15 % of the population live with less than the minimal citizen condition in the Netherlands and France. An American citizen is thought of being much more responsible for his/her condition than in the other countries.

This answer to the differences in income distribution is still too short, one ought to propose a more analytical argument for the status of a citizen in society, but for the purpose in this paper that qualification is sufficient. Given the amount of redistribution of wealth implied in these differences one can suppose that these differences are close to the very heart of these societies.

Equal treatment of a citizen in society means quite different things depending on the definition of the meaning of this citizenship. The differences of citizenship reflect cultural reasons. Much has been written in history about the importance of the Open Frontier (to the West) as a cause for the stress in individual responsibility in the USA, some even in relation to the particular features of the juridical system of the USA.

Logically, these differences in the definition of citizenship are also valid for the equity notion in sustainable development thinking. If in the USA, an important part of the population is only a nuisance and a drain for the others, the others have no reason to improve the condition of the poor. Since it is their fault, the rest of the population cannot do much for them anyway. This perspective can easily be extended to the poorer parts of the world population. Worldwide equity concerns are different from those within a society, but the blame is then put on the political system of a country which does not allow its citizen to express their potential.

Intergenerational equity concerns do have more cloud in the USA, because contrary to the general attitude in the countries with more organic solidarity, the next generation cannot accept a reduction in realizing its potential in order to achieve something. Whereas it is acceptable for the Dutch to leave some dikes to be build in the future, American rhetoric of leaving a burden of debt (budget deficit) results in tremendous efforts to allow a new start for the next generation.

Summing up, cultural differences in the notion of equity between citizens and between generations contain a lot of potential for fruitful debate between LEAD Associates, helping them to identify differences in the pursuit of sustainable development in their home countries. These differences within European countries (and the USA) are even more marked comparing other countries.

Indeed the notion of equity allows to describe differences between China and Brazil better than more visible differences in food and dance. As a normative concept, equity contains most of the cultural traits in society, while being central to sustainable development. It allows to introduce individual attributes, equal with respect to what condition, as well as aggregate attributes such as social hierarchy. Equity therefore permits to discuss cultural differences more meaningfully within LEAD.

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