

Leadership and Change: A Complexity Perspective

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1 Introduction

Many different types of leadership have been introduced and discussed in numberless books, articles, video tapes, CD-ROMs, web sites, courses, seminars, conferences, congresses: *classical leadership, progressive leadership, visionary leadership, transformative leadership, innovative leadership, imaginative leaders, leadership under uncertainty, leadership under risk, leadership at the edge of chaos, creative leadership, emergent leadership, inspirational leadership, self-leadership*, etc. The authors agree about the major difference between managers and leaders: the former see and solve problems, the latter see possibilities to dissolve (go beyond, transcend) the problems.

Why does the topic of leadership attract so many authors? Is leadership vital for the existence of human society? Or it is the memory of the herd-like life of the primates – a memory possibly ingrained in the unconscious of our psyche - that makes us need ‘shepherds’? Or we all subconsciously keep memory of the earliest time of our childhood when each of us was depending on the ‘leadership’ of those who took care for us? Or it is the thirst for power that becomes so unbearably strong in some individuals (groups, organisations) that they cannot help but persistently seeking to guide (direct, lead, instruct) others?

As long as we differ in our capacity to:

- understand and deal with complexity of life;
- ‘sense’ and cope with various kinds of emergent phenomena, be they natural or human-created;
- be aware (and in control) of our nature - our emotions and desires, cravings and passions, ideas and realisations;
- be responsible (and accountable) for our thoughts and words, plans and deeds;
- communicate, participate in dialogues and negotiations, seek mutual understanding and consensus;
- master the synergy between our reason and intuition, feelings and will, endeavours and actions;
- perform and play roles, express emotions, sense of humour, compassion, and readiness to help others, leaders will emerge in society.

2 Leaders and Crowd

As our whole body-mind structure has been poisoned by being unable to distinct ourselves from the sources of hatred, anger, greed, fear, envy, jealousy, vindictiveness, lust, and many other destructive feelings and thoughts, and to prevent them from moving within us along the whole history of human kind’s existence, there is no chance for those whom we honour as leaders to be free from expression of the above mentioned qualities.

What may differ leaders from the crowd (the public, the majority), it could be their *charisma* - their ability to perform and speak well, persuade and convince, arouse public’s passions and excite the crowd with emotional speeches and promises, - as well as their skilful participation in various manipulative games and plots, lies and conspiracies, conflicts and wars, aimed at removing rivals, gaining supporters or just serving interests of much more powerful cliques or individuals which, while preferring to stay in shadow, fully back the leaders as a reward for their servile behaviour.

In our days, it is clear that without the support of the richest companies and financial institutions in the world, today’s political leaders in the ‘developed’ capitalist democracies would have no chance to be ‘freely’ elected. The 2001 election campaign of the US President cost around 200 million

dollars; no wonder why he serves so wholeheartedly the interests of his major supporters - the large petrol companies in Texas with their hard-to-satiate thirst for access to the richest resources of crude oil in the Caspian region and the Middle East. The US wars against Afghanistan and Iraq led by G.W. Bush mirrored the yearning of the US petrol giants for global economic power.

Incidentally, a rare type of leaders might emerge, who like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King can see and speak the truth, and live and act in accordance with what they preach and teach. Such leaders live not at the periphery of the life dynamics, where the majority of us live, but at their *centre*. At the periphery, we constantly strive to pursue transient goals and superficial entertainments, selfishly crave for material possessions (money, power, fame) and satisfaction of ever-emerging animalistic drives and desires. Those who live at the *centre* have understanding of the wholeness of existence and know how to let its vibrant essence naturally express through their experience, their thoughts and feelings, words and actions.

They strive for enlightenment and wisdom not in order to better satisfy all kinds of egoistic ambitions, but to help (with the power of their knowledge, good will, benevolence, unconditional love, and compassion) people who are victims of social injustice, suppression, exploitation, disasters, maladies, delusions, prejudices, brainwash, and ignorance.

They do not hurry to agree with the majority, as they know that in every society ruled by money the mind of the majority is constantly controlled by the richest social elite either through media manipulation and disinformation (as in the Western type of democracies) or through outright oppression and depravity (as in the countries with totalitarian regimes). *“No sane being would work his entire life within a hierarchical social structure designed to financially enslave him, and voluntarily choose to support the superior life styles of the top twenty percents of society”* (Tibbles, 2001), without being subjected to a constant control exercised by the latter through all kinds of militants and servants: presidents, prime ministers, dictators, and ‘freely’ elected governments with their advanced machinery for generating and sustaining power - armies, police, intelligence agencies, media, technology, science, and the whole system of economic, financial, legal, medical, educational, cultural and other institutions.

The crowd cannot tolerate individuals who behave differently from the majority. If the leaders do not express what the crowd wants and fights for, they are unceremoniously rejected. The crowd does not like individuals who see and speak the truth. It annoys people to find out that somebody knows more about their lives than they alone know. This irritates people and makes them feel uncomfortable, insecure and even frightened when thinking: *“What this strange woman (man) speaks might be right; then I have missed my whole life. Damn with those who expose my ignorance and delusion, my surviving without a clue about any other purpose to be born, besides the purpose to earn money in order to consume, multiply, enjoy pleasures, and eventually die!”* Many are the examples of leaders who, after attaining the truth, were stoned to death or poisoned or burn alive or shot.

Individuals, who honestly seek to penetrate into the essence of their own lives and uncover the potential hidden in this essence, do not strive to become leaders of the crowd; they are happy to be leaders of their own lives, to be aware of their capacity to grow in consciousness, and to be responsible for the realisation of this capacity. Paradoxically enough, without striving to become leaders, they attract people through the way they are, through the examples of their own lives, through the way they relate to themselves, the others, and the environment.

3 Emergent Leaders

In the paradigm of complexity, the leader is seen as an individual who naturally *emerges* out of the group interactions with a distinguished ability to think and intuit, feel and experience, relate to the others and wholesomely affect their minds, hearts, and souls.

Leaders who are imposed from outside of the interactive dynamics of a group or organisation are not emergent leaders; their success as leaders depend on their ability to understand as deeply as

possible the nature of the dynamic interactions in the organisation where they have been appointed as leaders, the emergent phenomena, and self-organising drives produced through these interactions.

In the paradigm of complexity, the leader is not a person endowed with the capacity to guide (guard, direct, instruct, command) other people. When complexity of social dynamics increases, spreads, and moves into greater and greater acceleration, it becomes difficult for the leaders to reveal and follow even their own ways, let alone the ways which the others must follow (assuming that 'the others' are capable to think, feel and experience by themselves). "*Follow not me but you!*" used to say Friedrich Nietzsche in his "Der Wille zu Macht" – "Will to Power" - (Nietzsche, 1901), and these words make sense for everyone who navigates through the life dynamics.

What is possible for a leader to achieve, through earnest individual efforts, it is knowledge and practical skill how

- to lead *oneself* through the labyrinth of life while nourishing and realising his/her creative potential;
- to become *self-aware*: alert of what s/he feels, thinks, experiences and intuit;
- to be *responsible* for his/her own thoughts and feelings, words and deeds;
- to live in *the present* – to see the world with unprejudiced and open mind as it is *now*, and not as it was in the past or as it might be in the future,
- to strive after *wisdom* – the faculty of seeing the whole in the 'parts' and the infinite in the finite, – *harmony* – the faculty of experiencing the unity of the existential forms and the eternal rhythm of their dynamics, - and *freedom* - the faculty of self-finding, self-expression and self-realisation within the universal laws of the existential dynamics operating at each and all scales of manifestation: organic and inorganic; animate and inanimate; physical and psychic; individual and social; outer and inner; micro and macro.

The above qualities are not magical; they can be consciously developed, practiced and strengthen. Those, who succeed in realisation of these qualities, naturally attract followers and this happens without asking or waiting for society to formally confer on them titles of leaders.

In the paradigm of social complexity (where the word *complexity* is used in its original meaning expressed through the Latin word ' *complexus* ' which means 'whole') – a paradigm centred in the holistic exploration of *social interaction* and *emergence* , *social self-organisation* and *criticality*, as well as in the holistic study of *non-linear and chaotic dynamics* of life (Dimitrov, 2000 ; Dimitrov, 2002) – an emergent informal leader is seen as a person with capacity to

- (1) understand and experience reality as an expression of the whole of existence;
- (2) 'sense' and deal with spontaneously emergent phenomena;
- (3) ride the waves of self-organisation as manifested through complexity of nature and life.

4 Experiencing Wholeness of Existential Dynamics

In the paradigm of complexity, the existence is seen as an unbreakable wholeness (*Whole*) of dynamics manifesting at different scales. Human dynamics unfold at specific scales imbedded in the macro-structure of the universal dynamics. While a gigantic supernova occurs at the gross scale of the universe, a creative insight (or joy, love, fear, anger, etc.) of an individual 'explodes' at a much more subtle scale – the scale where the swarm of human thoughts and feelings constantly moves. Same all-embracing existential dynamics, different scales of their manifestations! This idea was strongly supported by the great physicist of the 20st century Heisenberg: "*The same regulating forces, that have created nature in all its forms, are responsible for the structure of our psyche and also for our capacity to think*" (Heisenberg, 1971: 101). Existence does not select a special kind of dynamics to manifest through humans and another - through the rest of the existential forms.

Although we all live in the whole of the existential dynamics, there are individuals among us who are aware about the whole living *in* them and seeking expression through their lives. These individuals are capable to integrate their genuine experience of the existential whole – the experience of its rhythm and harmony, its infinity in space and time, and its urge to create and transform - into their individual consciousness. Moreover, they are able to express this holistic consciousness in their daily life and to transpire its inspirational power to the others through

- their ability to identify themselves with the whole, with the universal, with the eternal;
- the strength of their experience-rooted awareness that the human species are exponents of something much greater and worthier than a bunch of chaotic individual drives, subconscious urges, animalistic desires, and selfish endeavours;
- their joyous sense of being inseparable part of an all-pervading mysterious *Whole*, in which the flowing movement from one experiential event to another happens effortlessly;
- their search for the timeless Centre of the all-pervading web of existential dynamics (forces, energies, substances, forms) and the umbilical cord that has the power to connect those who discover it (within the depths of their innermost selves) with the timeless Centre (Dimitrov and Hodge , 2002).

5 Sensing and Dealing with Emergent Phenomena

Every phenomenon and process in organisations and society arises out of dynamic interactions of many interdependent and complexly interwoven agents (individuals, factors, forces, influences). The emergent phenomena and processes obey two simple ‘laws’:

- Only emergence in potentiality - in a ‘state of implosion’ - can transform into emergence in actuality - in a ‘state of explosion’ (Dimitrov , 2002a);
- Any act of emergence is inevitably preceded by manifestations of subtle and yet perceivable dynamics (Dimitrov , 1998).

These laws show how important is for the leader to explore and understand agents’ interactions; it is in the whirling dynamics of these interactions where the emergent phenomena become activated, that is, transformed from a state of emergence-in-potentiality into a state of actual manifestation. The major factor for this transformation is the nature of the agents’ interactions - the degree of activation of each agent, the strength of the agents’ interconnectedness and interdependency, the degree of complementarity between the stances and actions of the individuals involved in the interactions, the levels of development of their capacities to think and intuit, their willingness to pursue mutual understanding and collaboration with one other, etc. The environment, where the interactions take place, can stimulate, sustain or impede the processes of emergence.

5.1 Formation of Experiential Patterns

However complex and unpredictable the dynamic interactions in a group (organisation, society) may appear, their projections onto the *experiential space* of each individual (Dimitrov and Ebsary, 1997) - the space of one’s thoughts and feelings: ideas and emotions, beliefs and dreams, longings and aspirations, hopes and expectations - tend to form dynamically stable patterns corresponding to the meanings which one assigns to different aspects of the interactions. We call these patterns “strange attractors of meaning” (Dimitrov, 2000a) emphasising the strange (enigmatic) nature of their formation in one’s experiential space.

Examples of such ‘strange attractors’ are the meanings which an individual associates with the overall climate in the group, the characters, skills and ambitions of the people working in the group, people’s relationships to one another, the processes of decision-making and handling conflicts in the group, the impact of various external agents and conditions on the activity of the group, etc.

While exploring the spectrum of the experiential patterns revealing the meanings one construct about the dynamic interactions, as well as about:

- the forces which shape and sustain these patterns,
- the factors which make these patterns change and combine, expand and shrink, dissipate and disappear,
- the ways in which these patterns evolve, interact and transform,
- the actions which these patterns evoke,

One deepens his/her *living* knowledge about the holistic nature of the dynamic interactions in the group.

If, in addition, the individual increases the weight of his/her own contribution in the dynamic interactions within the group, then s/he might develop ability to 'sense' (feel, intuit, foresee) phenomena which are about to emerge out of these interactions, and thus to recognise them *before* their actual manifestations.

5.2 Sensing Emergent Phenomena

There is a theorem in Fuzziology – the study of fuzziness inherent in human knowing (Dimitrov and Hodge, 2002:39) – that says: *we can understand only as much of the world as we have developed and realised within ourselves.*

Our understanding of reality and ourselves grows from within; nobody can implant or pour into one's brain a dose of understanding prepared outside of one's own capacity to think and experience. The knowledge, which we 'borrow' from books and experts, must be internalised, that is, digested by our own intelligence, using our own mental and emotional efforts, in order to be understood and become a factor for the growth of our consciousness. When the consciousness expands, we are able to see more of the world around us, to develop and realise more of our unique inner potential to understand and experience. Phenomena, which we considered as spontaneously emergent - unpredictable and unexpected, - at some level of our capacity to think and know, are not qualified as 'emergent' any more at any higher level of developing of this capacity; their appearance is a result of clearly understood interplay of causes.

Example: When we understand that people's health is inseparably connected with the health of their environment, there is nothing emergent – unpredictable and unexpected - in the explosion, however large in number and variety it might be, of people's diseases and deaths due to a fatal increase of the pollution of the air (water, soil).

So, the key factor for developing our ability to sense emergent phenomena lays in the development of our consciousness. Of course, this is not an easy process. It has very little to do with accumulation of fragmented scientific knowledge or mere collection of facts information. Today's stressful and competitive conditions of life, the illusory imperative towards material wealth and consumption, the constant fear of unemployment, crime, terror, war, lethal diseases, catastrophes, disasters, etc. – fear, which makes it easy for the handful of the richest in society to control the majority - make our minds neurotic. And with neurotic minds, to grow in consciousness is *impossible*.

In the practice of the 'classical' leadership, it is assumed that the leader must put significant efforts to influence the thoughts and feelings of the others, to impose changes in the dynamic patterns of meanings formed in the experiential space of each individual, and to know how to manipulate, if necessary, their brains using charismatic speeches and persuasions. The paradigm of complexity reveals an *entirely* different way for leaders to influence the development of their organisations: not by trying to impose changes in people's understanding, but through persistent efforts aimed at 'cooling' their own minds, harnessing their will, concentrating their attention, honing their awareness and thus expanding their consciousness. *Sine qua non* for this to happen is a genuine effort on behalf of the leaders

- to minimise their egoistic drives and thirst for selfish achievements, and

- to master their skills for creating possibilities for people to understand what impedes their realisations.

5.3 Dealing with Emergent Phenomena

As everyone is much 'closer' to his/her experiential space than to the experiential space of any other person, it is easier for an individual to explore and deal with the dynamic patterns of meanings, which are formed within his/her own experiential space than in the space of another person. Any change in these patterns appears as a change in the meanings which the individuals associates with specific signs of their reality and leads to changes in the ways they interpret and undertake actions in response to these signs. The actions inevitably 'breathe' emergent phenomena in the environment.

While exploring the links between the changes in the experiential patterns and the emergent phenomena following these changes, the leaders can gain understanding about those changes, which bring forth emergent phenomena in harmony with the mission of the groups (organisations) the leaders belongs to.

Leaders who master their ability to instigate such kind of emergent phenomena may develop skill to *create* them, that is, not only to sense the emergent phenomena in their group, but also to manage them – make them appear and change in accordance with the leaders' vision.

There are three leverages for mastering leaders' capacity to sense and deal with emergent phenomena: *reason, intuition and the power of will*.

5.4 Synergy between Reason, Intuition and Will

According to Varela – one of the godfather of self-referential philosophy of the autopoietic (self-creating) nature of life (Maturana and Varela, 1980), - intuition is "a basic human ability which operates constantly in daily life" in tandem with our reasoning. "Intuition without reasoning is blind, but ideas without intuition are empty" (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch 1999). Not mental speculation about complex dynamics of life, but awareness of their unfolding is at the core of the *modus operandi* of intuition.

The higher the degree of one's awareness, the greater is the chance for experiencing those precious moments of 'convincing clarity', which characterises every intuitive insight, every spark of human creativity.

Depraz, Varela and Vermersch indicate three dynamic phases of human awareness: *suspension* of one's habitual thought and judgment followed by *conversion* of attention from 'the exterior' to 'the interior' (from the external manifestation of nature towards its internal manifestation in us) and ending with *letting-go* or maximal receptivity towards the living experience (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, 1999).

Although deeply emotional experiential events may trigger spontaneously the initial phase of one's awareness, this phase usually requires an intense use of individual will power (zeal, energy, determination, concentration). Without will power, the flow of habitual thoughts (and actions attached them) can hardly be broken. All kinds of traditions, customs, standards, and stereotypes keep the mind drifting along what is adopted (accepted, approved) by the commonsense majority in society.

If one succeeds in suspending the habitual thought, the attention then turns inwards, distancing itself for a while from the world outside; this is the second phase. Here the will power – the power of concentration – works together with the power of reasoning keeping the latter focused on understanding one's own intellectual and emotional attitudes, motives, values, virtues.

In the third phase the duality between external and internal worlds seem to dissolve into a state of maximal openness and receptivity, 'letting-go' of any voluntary tension. In such state, the individual awareness, and thus the potential for emergence of intuitive insight reaches its climax.

The three phases of human awareness link tightly the will power and reasoning with intuition. This link is of vital importance for the 'best practice' of leaders' performance.

6 Riding Self-Organisation: Secrets of Apotropaic Leadership

Self-organisation is a core concept in the Paradigm of Complexity used to describe the process of formation of orderly patterns out of apparently chaotic dynamics. Under specific conditions, the intensive interplay of chaotically directed forces and energies suddenly transforms into clearly distinguished consistent dynamic patterns. The patterns and the forces sustaining them form inseparable wholes: the forces sustain the patterns and, at the same time, the energy within these patterns feeds the forces.

The self-organised tandem 'pattern-force' is demonstrated in any holistic vortical structure (vortex). Examples of vortices in nature are: eddies, whirlpools, whirlwinds, tornadoes, maelstroms, hurricanes, etc. The forces, which emerge out of a vortex, can be of extremely great magnitudes.

Our galaxy represents a gigantic vortex in the form of a self-sustained unfolding spiral.

One can hardly imagine how incredibly great must be the magnitude of the overall self-organising impetus in the universe that serves to support all the levels of the existential dynamics, including human (social) dynamics. This drive must act as an omnipotent self-propelling engine (like the 'engine' sustaining a hypothetical tornado of limitless whirling power) able to feed with energy the whole universe with its astonishing variety of ever moving, evolving and transforming phenomena and processes. One can recognise the work of this engine in the blossom of a flower as well as in the waves of the ocean, in the pulsation of a simple cell as well as in the beats of human hearts, in the rhythm of our breathing as well as in the rhythm of the cycles of solar activity ([Dimitrov, 2000b](#); [Dimitrov, 2000c](#)).

While ignorant or unconscious about the processes of self-organisation constantly manifesting through our nature, we follow them automatically and dance like slaves under the tunes of all kinds spontaneously emergent 'self-organised' instinctive drives and desires.

While aware and conscious about the processes of self-organisation in us, we are on the way to master them. This is exactly what is required from the leader: to be able to see and ride self-organisation (and thus to understand and master its unfolding) at different levels of manifestation in her/his own nature: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. Otherwise, the leadership is doomed to fail: a blind human being leads other people to nowhere.

We refer to the kind of leadership that is in harmony with one's endeavour to master her/his self-organising nature as *apotropaic leadership*, where the word '*apotropaic*' is of Greek origin and means "having power to avoid destruction or avert evil influences".

Towards destruction - catastrophes and disasters, bondage and suffering, pain and grief - lead us those who following the cult of ego are driven mainly by their will to power - an ill-will, which they seek to impose on the world for their own pride, glory or pleasure.

By understanding self-organisation as manifestation of their innermost nature, the apotropaic leaders become aware of the ways it works within them. While trying to integrate the experience of the wholeness and universality into their individual consciousness, the apotropaic leaders broaden the horizon of their experiencing and understanding of reality, and push further the boundaries of their consciousness. This helps them feel and understand the impetus for self-organisation as expressed in another person, and even recognise the obstacles, which impede its realisation. Once the obstacles are seen, the apotropaic leaders may facilitate emergence of conditions helping people understand and deal with what impedes the unfolding of their potentials.

The apotropaic leaders abstain from judging another person by their own standard of knowledge and truth. It is impossible to 'fix' or 'improve' one's urge for self-fulfilment. The only 'tool' for

help, which the apotropaic leaders can offer, are their own wholesome lives - the depth of their understanding of the life's conundrums, and a sincere readiness to share this understanding.

The self-organisation in individuals (as well as in all the living forms in nature) is a sacred process of unfolding of their inner potentials. No one can re-create this potential in one's life span. No one can win when fighting with it either. Any external intervention aimed at modifying one's self-organising ability tends to produce alien (to one's nature) effects with unpredictable consequences.

The realisation of individual self-organisation can reach its creative apotheosis only with real, authentic dynamics; therefore any imitating or following other people's behaviour, or borrowing other people's knowledge and skill decreases the chance for finding one's own way for self-realisation. While encouraging us to follow recipes offered by all kinds of experts and gurus, society weakens our individual capacities to genuinely experience and consciously develop the power of our creative self-organising nature.

Therefore, it is a challenge for us to become apotropaic leaders of our own lives.

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