CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract - According to Carson, Tesluk&Marrone (2007),distributed leadership influences and configures individuals, organizations, processes and results at the same time. Therefore, particularly in socio-educational settings, we will not only understand leadership based on personal qualities and capacities, but also grounded on the qualities and capacities of the group. For this reason, among the fundamental principles in the exercise of leadership, we will give particular importance to the creation of a shared vision of the future, supported by the diverse capabilities of a group of actors (microleaderships) that proactively seeks the progress and constant improvement within a learning organization. To implement this distributed leadership in socio-educational contexts, three factors must be taken into account: motivation, training and organization. Finally we point out to some difficulties we encountered in four studies dealing with different educational contexts that help to explain the reluctance to take part in community matters and shared leadership.

Keywords - Distributed leadership, socio-educational environments, education, school, participation

I. THE DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

While tackling social and educational problems, leadership based on personal charisma has always been present throughout history. It seems that democratic maturity would have to entail the strong commitment of multiple actors that engage in leadership in a shared way and with capacity for action and joint mobilization. This sensitivity has been pointed out by several authors who study "distributed leadership" (Day et al., 2010; Gronn, 2009; Longo, 2008; McBeath, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2009), "leadership levels or layers" interconnected to each other (Leithwood, Mascall& Strauss, 2009; Mourshed, Chijoke& Barber, 2010), "systemic or ecosystemic leadership"(Fullan, 2002) and "shared leadership"(Carson, Tesluk&Marrone, 2007),among others.

It is, therefore, the kind of leadership that we could describe as autocompositive—in the sense that it recognizes, values and gives prominence to each one of the people, groups, entities or organizations that are partof a specific project— the one that directs socio-educational scenarios towards higher levels of success. This is explained by the fact that when themain purpose of the organization is the development of citizenship in different ways (not welfarism), the project is leaded in common with these very citizens (agents instead of patients). As a result, both the achievement of the goals of the project itself and the improvement of those who take part in it are more effective, which adds to the ultimate purpose of socio-educational actions: people's development.

According to Carson, Tesluk&Marrone (2007), distributed leadership influences and shapes individuals, organizations, processes and results at the same time. Therefore, especially in socio-educational settings, we will not interpret leadership based on personal qualities and capacities, but also grounded on the qualities and capacities of the group.For this reason, among the fundamental principles in the exercise of leadership, we will attach particular importance to the creation of a shared vision of the future, supported by the diverse capabilities of a group of actors (microleaderships) that proactively seek progress and constant improvement, within an organization that learns (Bolívar, 2011; Gros, Fernández-Salinero, Martínez& Roca, 2013).

This model of leadership, which we have named "autocompositive", includes organizational, executive and evaluative dimensions that must be taken into account. Within each of these dimensions we highlight three characteristic elements of distributed leadership: decision-making, which generates sense of belonging; the management of the implementation, which generates co-responsibility; and critical and self-critical assessment, which generates shared values and criteria. All in all, it fills the mission and the vision or the organization, the driving principles of an organization that constantly learns and transforms.

II. CHALLENGES FOR LEADERSHIP: MOTIVATION, TRAINING AND ORGANIZATION

The development of distributed leadership in socio-educational environments demands facing three challenges, this is to say, it requires working from three vectors: wanting to assume leadership (motivation), knowing how to exercise leadership (training) and being able to exercise the leadership (organization).
In Fig. 1 we summarize the core elements of autocompositive model of leadership in socio-educational scenarios.

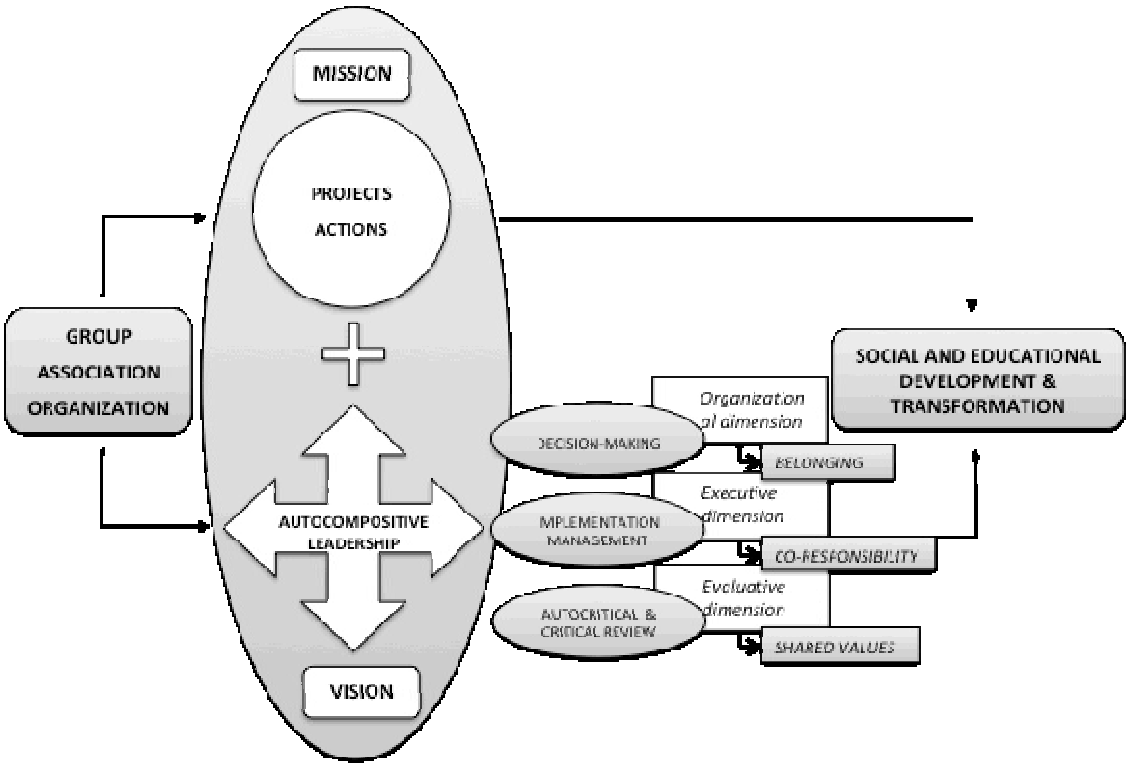


Figure 1. Autocompositive leadership
Source: elaborated by author

2.1 Motivation

Regarding motivation, we need to consider, first of all, actions aimed at promoting reflection on the basis of the right and duty of participation and shared leadership, in general, and giving it a meaning and a place in the discourse of the group. Also, it's important to be in touch and observe models of good leadership practices, especially if they are close or belong to the same context. Likewise, raising awareness about distributed forms of leadership must be promoted throughout the socio-educational arena and among the different agents, advancing, thus, towards a culture where democratic values are based on feelings of co-responsibility and civility, and understanding co-responsibility as reciprocity in the exercise of rights, duties and freedoms and respect for people, organization and common progress. In our studies on coexistence, mediation and positive management of conflicts (Boqué, 2003; Boqué, 2010) we have highlighted the importance of some elements to take into account when it comes to give back leadership to each individual.Among these elements, it's worthy to emphasize legitimation, empowerment, recognition and revaluation, as conditions and purposes that encourage the assumption of leadership roles. Carson, Tesluk & Marrone (2007) ponder that when the team focus on common goals, it both increases the perception of the sense and the motivation when making proposals and supporting other initiatives. For this to happen, these authors identify social support (appreciation, recognition, cooperation, etc.) as a key factor.

2.2 Training

In terms of leadership training, we are not referring only to its more technical, strategic or management dimension, but rather to the construction of a true participatory culture as human and social capital, a culture that points low in terms of distance in power and high in collectivism.

The study by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011), in reference to the management of educational centers, establishes five areas of leadership: teaching and learning, the development of others and of oneself, innovation and change and management, and commitment to work with the community. Here, the emphasis is placed on the mission (teaching and learning), on the vision (innovation and change) and on the personal and community development (development of others and of oneself, management and commitment to the work with the community).

Training for leadership, in our view, must be formal and experiential at the same time, because it is not just about joining good wills and dispositions but about knowing how to do it, a knowledge that is being built during the process (Gros, Fernández - Salinero, Martínez & Roca, 2013) and that contributes to continuous professional development.

The preparation can be directed to: knowledge and critical reflection about specific topics, development of skills related to the objectives of the organization, acquisition of communication and interpersonal skills (Boqué, Alguacil & Pañellas, 2011), or positive conflict management and change management.

2.3 Organization

With regard to the organization of channels and instances for the exercise of autocompositive leadership, it is necessary to understand that the political, democratic and pedagogical dimensions articulate, in large part, the possibilities and options of which an organism or group configures its model of operation around a plurality of microleaderships. For this, we need to clarify the mechanisms for redistributing power and decision-making, how values and beliefs are assumed and how to contribute to mutual learning in each context.

As Katz & Kahn (1978) pointed out, distributed leadership is more competitive and advantageous, because when members of a group put their competencies at the service of the same project, personal and organizational commitment and mutual influence increase, which makes the team more operational (Day, Gronn& Salas, 2004).

III. LACK OF LEADERSHIP: RELUCTANCE AND CHALLENGES

The lack of leadership in socio-educational organizations becomes a real concern at the time that efficient leadership is identified as a critical element in achieving better results (Barthy et al. 2005; Rhodes &Brundrett, 2006). The reasons why the assumption of roles associated with leadership in educational contexts is being avoided, according to Hobson et al. (2003) could refer to:

- experiencing feelings of solitude and professional isolation
- having to face the legacy, practice and style of the preceding leader
- addressing multiple tasks, setting priorities and managing time
- managing budgets
- dealingwith inefficient people
- implementing new initiatives
- managing buildings, spaces ...

As shown in the previous list, the exercise of leadership implies some emotional burnout and the assumption of some management tasks (time, space, material and human resources) totally necessary for the functioning and existence of any organization but seen as a burden for those who carry them out.

The management of change and the resistance originated would be another problematic area, since history is what the organization has assumed, while the future is something insecure that is still unknown. The MacBeath's et al. (2009) study coincides with the previous data, although in this case the directors of the educational centres also point out, as a positive element, the satisfaction of being able to influence the lives of boys and girls.

In our study about the students' perception of their participatory role in the university (Pañellas, Alguacil&Boqué, 2013), we found a certain degree of misinformation and ignorance of what happens in the university as well as of the students' own rights and duties related to the leadership of the educational community (98% of respondents did not know the Royal Decree 1791/2010 that establishes the University Student Statute, for example), andalso the feeling that the student's voice was not taken into account as it should. When questioned about the lack of involvement and contribution to the internal and external university community matters, students argued work reasons, disinterest for the current activities, commitment with other community activities outside the university and dependence on public transport to move around.Once more, there are factors that affect the resources and a point of ignorance and mistrust that translates into passivity, along with those young people involved in projects that are not related to their academic life.

In another line of research, more related to culture and education for peace (Boqué et al., 2011), a comprehensive analysis of the textbooks published in Catalonia was carried out for the subject of "Education for citizenship and human rights". These manuals address boys and girls aged between 10 and 12 in a compulsory educational stage, which means that this subject ends up being part of the educational background of most citizens. Leaving aside the current controversy over the continuity or extinction of the subject in Spain, we found that those indicators that could help students feel themselves as subjects and actors of their present and future lifesare not sufficiently represented. We refer to questions such as:

- The space-time frame where the boy or girl is located, generally directed to the study of the past, presents the facts as sealed and thus contributes to a passive and resigned understanding of the facts. Neither macro nor micro social levels are connected, so that the repercussions of childrens' own actions into global issues and vice versa are completely blurred.
- The perception of reality, which should allow students to form their own opinion from various sources of information, to make visible the contradictions, changes, crises, social conflicts and their actors, it is usually limited to a linear story and non controversial view of our societies. In this way, it is difficult for boys and girls to feel invited to actively intervene in their environment, because they do not even dare to discern options and alternatives to transform the future that matters them more than anyone else. The fact of having an "own voice" is directly associated with the leadership capacity (De Dreu& West, 2001; Simons, Pelled& Smith, 1999).
- The human values and child rights, including the concepts of violence and peace, are presented as "donated goods", which explains why many people end up ignoring that the rights and well-

being they enjoy are the result of a long and arduous conquest and leadership effort, often the tribute of people and communities that have not been indifferent to social injustice.

- The construction of a just, democratic and solidarity society covers issues that, in a considerable percentage, are not present in the books, such as: the sense of identity and belonging (16.7%), self-esteem, empathy and affectivity (17.6%), equality in diversity (7.1%), values and norms of coexistence (12.5%), conflict confrontation (0%), practice of citizenship (10%), development and cooperation (25%) and environmental awareness (36,3%). If we add to this data the passive approach to these issues and its merely informative approach, the percentages would be placed in all cases above 50%, also with regard to the confrontation of conflicts that do appear in all manuals.

If we pay attention to these issues, it is to add to the reluctance mentioned above the limitation of the lack of preparation for leadership in socio-educational scenarios of most people. Another very different issue would be the promotion of entrepreneurial competition that is currently favoured within the sector, since it is directly connected with productive and economic development.

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