

CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP SET UP IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Mihai FODOR¹, V. SOPORAN², Mirela BADEA³, A. FODOR⁴, D. BADEA⁵

¹ 3rd Battalion Anti-aircraft Defense "Potaissa", str.Armatei, nr.62-64, Turda, Cluj district,
mihai.fodor@yahoo.com

² Science and Material Engineering Faculty, B-dul Muncii, nr.103-105, Cluj-Napoca

³ District Inspectorate of Custom-House Office Olt, str.Carpați, nr.105, Corabia, Olt district

⁴ Emergency-case inspectorate "Avram Iancu" of Cluj district,

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⁵ "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Force Academy, str.Revoluției, nr.3-5, Sibiu, Sibiu district

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Abstract: As a member of the European Union, Romanian's community members' involvement in its development has become a meaningful local feature. Thus, the community becomes durable and viable by the effort of its members and any such tentative should be considered salutary and beneficial. One of the most important factors found in a community wishing to solve some of its stringent problems using local resources is communitarian leadership. Communitarian leaders are not restricted to representatives of local authorities, of non-governmental organizations or business men but also regular citizens interested in increasing the quality of life in the community they live in.

INTRODUCTION

The concerns of an authority in local administration are tied to aspects of citizens' every-day life. Thus, regardless of its field of authority, this representative must come in contact with the citizens demanding solutions for diverse problems and is permanently observed by these. This level of contact has generated, in time, a whole theory and a multitude of courses of action possible to citizens who wish to get involved in the activity of local administration and even in its decisional nature. The process of leadership implies firstly the designation of a direction/course (of action) and influencing others in order to follow it. This can be achieved by applying knowledge and personal leadership abilities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Even though employees occupying posts of managers or supervisors hold the authority of their function, this does not make them automatically leaders. True leaders will act in such a manner to make the people they come in contact with eager to follow their orders or to fulfill specified tasks. Leaders will not consider giving orders a sufficient attribution. A leader can be defined as somebody who: "occupies a certain position in a group of people, influencing others according to their specified positions and coordinates and directs the whole group in order to achieve the proposed goal." [2]

Team leadership can be considered an extension of the above definition: a mutual influencing process manifested between a leader and those following his orders in order to attain goals specific to a group, an organization, the entire society. True leaders are not born

but molded in time. People can not become efficient leaders unless they truly desire this. Good leaders are shaped through a continuous educational, self-taught, instructive and experience-based process. The specific abilities of leadership are innate in only a small extent and thus must be continuously perfected by work and study. The best of leaders will never bring to an end the process of self-teaching and study. The most representative definitions of leadership, as shown by Andrew J. Dublin, refer to:

- reciprocal influence, based on direct and sincere communication, in order to attain the set objectives;
- the art of influencing people through persuasion and personal example;
- the main dynamic force motivating and coordinating an organization in order to finish its proposed mission;
- the ability to inspire trust and support between people, necessary feelings in order to reach the desired goal;

Collaboration mainly implies the involvement of people through personal solutions to the problems they are confronted with and the rejection of adopting or modifying already used solutions. It also involves the identification of common interests and the refusing of rigid solutions. The moment we assume a certain position, we are ready to defend it and we adopt a defensive attitude. Identifying common interests entails finding those fields which bound people with different views. Often, collaborating implies working together with those people whom we regard as adversaries. A collaborative process offers the occasion of sharing one's point of view and perspective in order to build a cohesive future in the community's interest. To sum it up, collaboration represents a conscious effort of involving all the sectors of the community – nongovernmental organizations, decentralized governmental agencies, businesses and individuals – that can contribute significantly to such a communitarian effort.

Collaboration is a relationship with a purpose, when different parties chose a strategic point of view for collaborating with a common goal. The success of collaboration, due to its voluntary nature, generally depends by the ability of one or more leaders to maintain an efficient relation between the multiple parties involved. Collaborative leadership, according to David Chrislip and Carl Carson, is set up by the premise that: "(...) if we are able to join at the same table the most qualified people, having the needed information, they will succeed in elaborating visions and authentic strategies according to the problems of their organization or community." [3]

Collaborative leaders will try to involve everybody in the decisional and managerial process. The assumed decisions result due to a collaborative process of discussions and by adoption of the rule of majority or, ideally, through a consensus. Eventually, a collaborative leader will encourage team-work and build confidence between the members of the organization/ institution in question. Collaborative leaders have certain specific abilities. They can analyze and understand the challenges of leadership, developing strategies that can surpass inertial or resistant circumstances, surround themselves with people and develop a sense of trust among them and transmute necessary abilities for the collaborative process. Collaborative leaders are characterized by their preference for clear actions:

- **They inspire commitment and action:** leaders inspire others with energy in order to create visions and to solve problems; they create alliances, partnerships and discussions' forums; they bring people together and coordinate them in constructive purposes;
- **They lead while promoting themselves as equals to others:** leaders encourage commitment and full participation; thus they create an open and convincing process that participants trust; they induce the feeling of ownership towards the whole process, tear

down the prejudice related to status and authority and assist participants in solving problems on equal terms;

- **They build the environment for an enlarged participation:** leaders make a conscientious and rigorous effort to bring together all the potentially interested parties, necessary persons in the project of defining the existing problems and creating solutions to reach the predetermined goal; they encourage everyone's involvement, bearing in mind that some collaborative initiative fail due to the lack of qualified persons;
- **They sustain hope and enthusiasm:** supporting the feeling of confidence in success through the promotion and the protection of a process truly believed in by all involved parties; they help to setting clear, attainable goals and encourage successes; help people surpassing the harder times.

The advantages of collaborative leadership [1] consist of:

- **Credibility and property:** collaborative leadership encourages the feeling of property regarding the communitarian project, that of belonging to an organization/ institution. By implicating everybody in the decisional processes and in finding solutions, the participants will feel they own the process they take part in, thus avoiding the situation of alienation due to externally imposed solutions. This feeling of property contributes to fixing a common goal for fully involved parties.
- **More involvement in implementation:** the members of a collaborative group will be more willing to assume responsibilities in applying and implementing the course of action of the group due to the fact that they were personally involved in its elaboration;
- **Building trust:** collaborative leadership, due to the use of an open process and encouraging dialogue and discussions, facilitates the foundation of a feeling of trust linking those involved;
- **Eliminating situations tied to conflictive interests :** collaborative leadership can contribute to the resolving of conflicts based on interests due to the mutual trust established , by ensuring an open environment for opinion expression and by encouraging the involved parties (individuals, organizations etc.) to find common interest points that can lead to collaboration;
- **Better opportunities leading to substantial results:** the blend between the feeling of owning the process and its results, trust, real collaboration and efficient planning lead to real results in the real world;
- **Generating new leaders:** collaborative leadership contributes to the training of new leaders inside the group, thus ensuring the continuity and a sustained engagement towards the problems confronted by the organization/ institution;
- **Communitarian/ organizational capacity:** including all of those interested in the solving of pressing problems and decision making leads to the apparition of new leaders and to the assuming of more responsibilities;
- **Fundamental changes in the strategies of communities/ organizations:** collaborative leadership generates new collaborations and approaches in solving problems; this will lead to a desire of finding common elements and goals, to attacking new problems and finding better, more efficient solutions;

Some of the **flaws** of collaborative leadership are:

- **It is time consuming:** collaboration requires time; thus taking decisions by consulting a large number of people, organizations, institutions, etc, will seem a slow, conflictive process

- **It is conditioned by the capacity and will of directly solving the conflicts** that will inevitably appear; the solution must be widely accepted by all parties involved;
- **Leaders should suppress their egos:** in collaborative processes, there are no such concepts as that of superiors and more than that, the leaders can not assume the credit for an eventual success. Collaborative leaders must be capable of giving up their own ideas and conceptions and maintain a guiding process to goal achievement, the strategy and plans of action already chosen together;

Characteristics of collaborative leaders:

Potential, active collaborative leaders exist in any community/ organization. They generally share several common characteristics:

1. **Collaborative leaders are respected and credible.** According to the situation, this can mean that they are perceived as being neutral, lacking personal interests in what concerns the collaboration they supervise and the parties involved, thus obtaining an impartial status.
2. **Collaborative leaders succeed in easily building relationships based on respect between individuals or in groups.** The necessity of openly and humbly approaching of all involved parties and of inspiring trust to people governed by different interests and experience indicates that this characteristic is an important advantage for any collaborative leader.
3. **Collaborative leaders possess the facilitator's abilities.** Due to the different situation they are confronted with during collaborative processes, leaders must possess abilities surpassing those needed for the facilitation of a meeting. These include: tolerance in conflicts and necessary knowledge used in a constructive purpose; the ability of involving all of those interested and of ensuring that all opinions are presented and heard; the capacity of reformulating arguments, ideas and opinions in order to make them clear for all those involved, the full understanding of group strategies; the ability of perceiving situations in all their complexity. A good facilitator must possess a covering view on the process as well as the capacity of interfering while introducing the needed elements in order to reach the group's goal.
4. **Collaborative leaders are a genuine catalytic.** They are capable of bringing together the most appropriate people in the most appropriate time in order to optimize working conditions.
5. **Collaborative leaders encourage the birth of new leaders of the same type.** They will not hang on to their authority at any cost , on the contrary, they will encourage the training of new leaders.
6. **Collaborative leaders manifest commitment and responsibility towards the collaborative process and aim at finding real solutions to the existing problems.** Collaborative leaders firmly believe in the principles of collaboration and strongly support it even when facing strong opposition.
7. **Collaborative leaders focus on what is best for the group, organization, community as a whole.** Just as the leader suppresses his ego, thus the other participants/members of the team will do the same in order to find the most convenient solutions.

Collaborative leadership practice

The main responsibility of a collaborative leader is to establish, maintain and protect a collaboration process that can allow everybody to participate in the group's project. In order to achieve this, the collaborative leader must follow a certain course of action:

1. He must support the group in establishing a set of conduct rules, unanimously accepted and encourage mutual respect, participation and trust. These rules can be written or oral but as a general rule, the more explicit they are, the better. They can include indications regarding meeting protocol, individual or joint responsibilities and measures for conflict solving.

2. He must make sure that all express their own point of view. This mainly represents the possibility given to each member of the group to openly talk during meetings and secondly, the active encouragement of those who have not yet expressed themselves. Thus, between two meetings, novelties and new factors must be communicated in order to give the possibility of reaction and efficient communication.

3. Encouraging and shaping an enlarged participation. Collaborative leaders are obliged to invite all the segments of the community or organizations to participate, receive new members and present them to those already involved, include them in discussions and groups and help them acquire the needed abilities in order to fully participate. Probably, the most important requirement is that collaborative leaders should create such a work atmosphere that all these conditions would eventually be fulfilled naturally, without further intervention.

4. Ensuring a real interaction between the participants. In order to develop confidence (trust), especially in those that previously could be considered adversaries or competitors, people need time to adjust. This generally depends on the leader (but also on others), him/her being the person that can build an environment of mutual trust, openness and safety through personal example.

5. Interceding conflicts and disputes. Conflicts are inevitable. Trying to ignore them, hoping that they would disappear is most probably the worst possible approach. In collaborative groups, conflicts should be approached directly, solved and used in order to build trust between the members of the group and restore a positive atmosphere for finishing the project at work. A creative answer to disputes is a vital function of the collaborative leader.

6. Assisting the group in creating and using mechanisms for opinion solicitation. Collaborative leaders assist the members of the group in acquiring and using new mechanisms of interaction and opinion solicitation that would include: demanding expertise, information research, direct exchange of techniques and approaches.

7. Maintaining a collaborative approach in problem solving and decision making. The leader must be assured that an individual, an organization or a group will not take a course of action without demanding the consent of the larger group they are part of. In many cases it is necessary that the leader encourage divided groups to come up with their own ideas, suggestions or plans, yet the larger group must give its approval and the results should be approached in open discussions in the unified group.

8. Leading the group towards efficiency. A collaborative leader will “force” the group in taking decisions and following courses of action:

- He will help them to work out the most suitable plans of action.
- He will be assured that the members of the group take responsibilities and honor them efficiently and according to the schedule.
- He will constantly remind each and every one of their responsibilities and that success is depending on the fulfillment of these.
- He will remind the whole group that the plans and the implementation procedures should be adjusted according to partial results.

9. Assisting the group in choosing straightforward projects to implement in order to build a feeling of confidence and demonstrate the value of collaboration. It is important that collaborative leaders direct the group towards choosing tasks that can be achieved with the existent resources, in the allocated timeframe. Early successes will motivate and legitimate the group.

10. Supporting the group in identifying and obtaining the necessary resources needed for the proposed tasks. Almost any project requires minimal resources in order to be implemented, whether they are financial, human or material. Collaborative leaders shall join forces with the members of the group in order to find and obtain these resources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Collaborative leadership in local communities

Recently, local authorities of the communities throughout the world have started the implementation of a new approach of the decisional process – citizens are invited to contribute in finding solutions for communitarian problems. In this context, citizens can offer information, supervise the way how laws and regulation are enforced and can also devise innovative solutions to a variety of problems. Subsequently, local authorities comprehend that by involving citizens in decisional processes, they will manifest a feeling of property towards the solutions they have helped designing and thus accept and support the measures taken by authorities.

Collaborative leadership is ideal when addressing critical communitarian problems. Whether they touch issues related to the quality of water, the lack of jobs or of housing space etc. these problems will generally affect a large number of the members of the community. Naturally, people wish to get involved in the decisions that will affect their lives. The members of the community can contribute with a diversity of personal experiences, knowledge and energy when solving one of the problems confronted by their community. This is of course a difficult process due to the diversity of interests and opinions generated. Yet, as we have already mentioned, collaborative leaders can find solutions to most situations and inertias, bringing people together in order to develop abilities and build a sense of self-confidence. Leaders will assist in elaborating and implementing new collaborative processes, in the purpose of solving the existing problems.

CONCLUSIONS

The communities that are enriched by such leaders will only gain from this advantage. Communities need leaders capable of listening, synthesizing and coming up with collaborative solutions by determining people to efficiently contribute in the implementation of solutions reflecting the needs and concerns of the community.

Leadership is one of the most important factors that can be used for the evolution of the communities we are a part of, and the more communitarian leaders, the more the number of communitarian development projects will increase due to the visionary quality of the leaders, their ability to identify the pressing problems of the community and the design of development projects for the communities they serve,

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