Marta Szperlich-Kosmala

Uniwersytet Jagielloński
ORCID: 0000-0002-4383-0675

Participation and cooperation as a key answer to increase global responsibility
The role of local changemakers

Introduction

Pandemics, wars, humanitarian crises, water supply, starvation, demography, social, gender, and regional and national divisions and disparities are only examples from the past three years. The roots of today's challenges are complicated and run deep. In social studies and service design (based on design thinking methodology) they are called *wicked problems*. They are so complex and connected with each other providing we cannot suggest any single solution to each. Lack of global responsibility is one of them. Can it be solved?

Since the *anthropological frame of mind* (Czarniawska, 1992) is close enough to the subject, I have chosen ethnography as the main methodological perspective, with special emphasis put on the participatory action research paradigm. As a researcher, I try to bracket myself in order to explore social reality; but as an activist, I also try to implement change, as I am a part of it.

Action research is a systematic, iterative, and active method useful both in design strategy and implementation of change. This kind of investigation also demands a practical approach associated with management science, more precisely the management of change. Change managers are devoted to search development opportunities through empowerment. The research perspective is based on the belief that humans are supposed to be looked upon as an end in itself (Kant, 1997).

Given in a nutshell, action research consists of the following agenda:

1. Spotting a problem with an experiment
2. Performing a cycle of problem identification, planning, action (change implementation), and evaluation
3. Iteration of prototypes (simulations) to enable informed change-making
4. Challenging the *status quo*
5. Effective re-education resulting in knowledge and an increase in know-how.

Being a researcher in such a paradigm, one is able to manage and perform within these three: research, action, and cooperation (participation). From a hermeneutic point of view, it is a very enriching perspective. Collecting data (pre-existing interpretations), testing (engagement, experiment), eliciting data integration, and deeper understanding are the footing of the hermeneutic circle (Ricoeur, 1976).
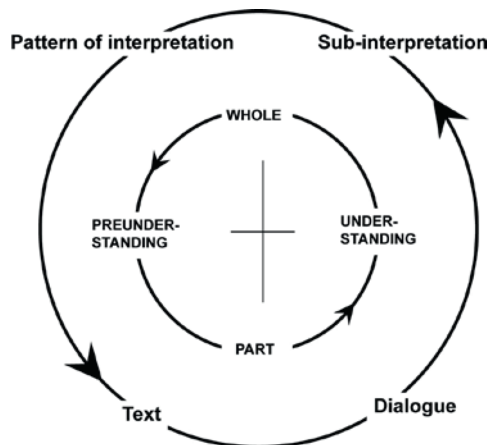

Figure 1. The hermeneutic circle basic version (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, p. 66).

As local knowledge is required in ethnography-based methodology, during my research I met local leaders, mostly women, in order to conduct in-depth interviews for better understanding of *conditio humana*. Rich descriptions, full immersion, storytelling, and contextuality also come to the assistance. Together with methodological triangulation, these elements all led me to discover that there are two key factors that have a great impact on a sense of responsibility:

• Participation
• Cooperation

The aim of this article is to present the connection between these two factors and global responsibility from the perspective of a new model of leadership.

Subject

Monika Kostera says: 'Our times are characterised by a particular kind of volatility without specific change vectors' (Kostera, 2020).

Zygmunt Bauman used to call it *interregnum*: the state of liquid modernity, where everything has become unstable, precarious, and uncertain (Bauman, 2017). The term *interregnum*, then, is not entirely negative. When cultural norms do not work and standards are loose, humans are more open to social experimentation and creating a sense of community – *communitas* according to Victor Turner (Turner, 2010). People at *interregnum* are in front of implementing true and deep change, based on humanity: bottom-up, self-management that ignites systematic work on global transformation. Yet, they need a proper leader to initiate and motivate their engagement.

Monika Kostera suggests initiating such a change even before we do not know what its output could be or what the cause is. *Occupy Management!* (Kostera, 2015) is not only the title of her book; it is also a very specific postulate of deeds, actions, and initiatives directed bottom-up by an organisations' members and facilitated by world leaders.

In the face of a crisis, leaders have at least three options:
1. Pretend that nothing has changed
2. Just let it go
3. Facilitate the change.

If the last option is applied, we might be dealing with a state that is supportive rather than oppressive. Zuzanna Skalska calls it *wise statehood* (Skalska & Kołodziej, 2021). The previous options only jeopardise attempts to initiate change.

In fact, as we live in constantly changing circumstances of VUCA, the world of entropy or even dystopia, we need to rebuild social, economic, and political responsibility to address global crises – and to survive.

There is a reason why our civilisation is on the brink. As Douglas Rushkoff states in his book *Team Human* (Rushkoff, 2019), a long-standing issue of an antihuman agenda is the underlying cause of the current human collective incoherence and disempowerment.

'By unearthing this agenda, we render ourselves capable of (…) reconnecting to one another, and remaking society toward human ends rather than the end of humans' (Rushkoff, 2019, p. 3).

These solutions must be *designed* with as many *stakeholders* as possible, *cooperating* as much as possible. Quoting Rushkoff again, 'being human is a team sport' (Rushkoff, 2019).

Such an attitude is compatible with service-dominant logic (SDL), which is a frame of human economic activity based on five axioms:
1. A service is the basis of trade
2. Value is co-created by stakeholders, including beneficiaries
3. All social and economic stakeholders are resource integrators
4. Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary
5. Value co-creation is coordinated by stakeholder-led institutions.

This kind of logic requires very careful management, which relies on drawing and (re)using existing resources instead of making them from scratch (Flemming, 2017). Management that is more working on abilities than anything else. Today, these abilities should be recognised, rewarded, and put at the service of growth and development. Having this in mind, in the VUCA world, GDP is the curse (Klaus Schwabb calls it *Kuznets' curse* (Schwabb, 2022)).

Leadership

This kind of change demands a new model of leadership. What has come out of my research so far is that a progressive leader should apply and *share* lots of responsibility. This *sharing* of responsibility would be the greatest challenge in Poland, where we are taught to play a *one man show* with constant competition and grading at school, beginning in kindergarten.

Following the book *If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* (Barber, 2013), the management praxis could learn a lot from progressive city leaders. Cities (and towns) could be places where communities and co-ops are built, or where the idea of civil society comes true. Under one condition: their leaders should be knowledgeable and brave enough to share leadership with others.

In his famous book, Barber says that cities are the most promising chance for democracy. They should be sought as social change labs (Barber, 2013) and model future organisations. Apparently, Barber did not have to deal with Polish mayors (88% are men – we will not decide here whether this is a coincidence or not) who tend to compete with the most talented and the most active citizens instead of benefitting from them.[1]

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1   This comes from my own experience, as I have been a 'change agent' in my hometown, Starachowice, where I also conduct my local research studies. I did not start my agency as an opposition, on the contrary, I offered my know-how to the local government, but the proposal was rejected, and I soon became 'a public enemy' for the town mayor. That is how autoethnography and participatory action research comes to the aid of social change.

That is our Polish specificity of management: the average Polish leader is afraid of admitting that he or she does not know everything. Participation encounters one big obstacle from the start.

Primum non nocere might be the new leadership call. Asking for advice is not something to be ashamed of; it is an extraordinary talent and the foremost sign of leaders in change. Our civilisation has developed on such a basis: no single individual can learn everything. We share know-how with our fellow humans and that is one of things that binds us together. We need each other. Alone, I do not survive. A good, self-esteemed leader see this and takes advantage of it.

The new leaders should learn how to lead *without* actually leading: how to guide people and facilitate organisational processes as *a backseat driver*, i.e., a person who gives clues that one can accept or reject. He or she might be more experienced, but it is me who holds the wheel now. That is our shared responsibility because we are both in one vehicle.

Participation

The new world will belong to stakeholders (not just shareholders) and new leaders should follow. Each stakeholder and each single employee should be responsible for the actions he or she undertakes.

A direct democracy has been a trend for a while. At the 21st Conference of the World Summit on Participatory Democracy in Grenoble (December 7–10, 2022), the theme was 'Taking Action! Towards a democratic renewal in the face of the ecological, health and social crisis'. Participants made a general statement that change will only be achieved with the participation of all. But apart from this general statement, they determined the guidelines called the Grenoble Declaration: nine commitments from local elected officials and seven appeals for increased participatory democracy (OIDP, 2022).

The first commitment is as following:

1. We commit to examining ourselves, for all of our public policies, to understand if we have done our utmost to involve citizens and make them participate;

As the proverb says, 'it takes a village to educate a child'. We believe that it takes a whole society to make democracy work. A democracy that excludes even only one of its citizens is already incomplete. In urban planning, culture, the creation of laws, ecology, health, equal rights for women and men, when citizens are given the power, they often go further and faster than politicians who are afraid to interfere. (OIDP, 2022)

When people take part in decision-making processes, 'they align in ways that open up novel avenues for sharing values and rationality criteria and, therefore, for exercising responsible agency' (Bonicalzi & Gallotti, 2018).

Responsibility is a civil right. In a questionnaire survey[2] conducted in June 2022 for my research usage, 58% respondents pledged they *would like to participate more if they could see their actions bring any change*. A sense of agency is a crucial component of empowerment and any engagement at all – and that should be a key factor for leaders' decisions.

In Pierre Bourdieu's perspective of performance studies (Bourdieu, 1990), we understand social agency as constructing the subject within a specific field of power. *Em*powerment, so to speak. Blanchard suggests replacing the hierarchy with self-directed individuals and effective teams (Blanchard, 2019). I am keen on that suggestion because there is also a link with freedom, both in decision-making *and* in acting with a sense of responsibility.

Responsibility

Responsibility comes together with participation. It seems to be a common-sense idea, but it is well established and repeatedly observed social phenomena, including my own research. As Ewa Bogacz-Wojtanowska points out, *a community of practice* has both practical and emotional benefits, and a sense of responsibility, strongly connected with a sense of agency, is one of them (Bogacz-Wojtanowska, 2015).

Responsibility means that we *respond* (same in Polish *odpowiedzialność – odpowiedź*). Being *responsive* does not mean being *reactive* – just like our immune system which responds to viruses or bacteria after vaccination. Being responsive means being *adaptive* to changing circumstances, being agile. Creating a responsive immune system is one of the newest trends of management at all levels and stakes: resilience.

Resilient leadership should provide all the services the community needs and sharply address these needs, with relatively low resource usage – which means employing stakeholders in participation and cooperation processes to mobilise resources in order to create a welfare society.

Yet the role of the leaders cannot be underrated. They have to be equipped with *moral responsibility* for the Other in Levinas' sense (Levinas, 1991). The moral impulse is pre-social according to Levinas; it comes before all relationships

2   *Badanie aktywności obywatelskiej mieszkańców Starachowic* – an online questionnaire consisted of 15 questions among small town (Starachowice) inhabitants. 241 people participated.

and actions. Actually, it does not work in groups at all. Some might even think (including Bauman) that this is utopia: this burden might be too heavy for common people to carry. Although a strong leader is able to lift the unconditional responsibility, but also:

- Codifies duties for others to learn
- Sets the scope of indifferences and morally neutral deeds.

These are the frames for the new revised social order preceded by a new social contract based on cooperation.

Cooperation

Thankfully, humankind has evolved to cooperate. Relations are our superpower. We do not have sharp paws or teeth, but we are armed with quite a working brain and the ability to build connections: both within the knowledge network and with others (not only our kind).

Although an antihuman ethos has overtaken people's society, undermining our ability to connect, it is all driven by the human need for higher levels of social organisations (Rushkoff, 2019). Having this potential, people are able to regain the capability of collective power, however 'cheesy' this may sound.

At the global level, international cooperation and multilateralism are essential to address challenges of our global community. Governments, international organisations, and civil society must work together to develop and implement solutions that are fair and effective. Interactive, civil governance is, indeed, a vital trend.

According to Adler and Heckscher (2006) there are three features of cooperating community:

Figure 2. Three features of cooperating community (Średnicka, 2019, based on: Adler & Heckscher, 2006, pp. 11–77).

This is what distinguishes social groupings, both traditional ones based on mutuality and emotional bonds, and modern ones referring to instrumental relationships (*Gemeinshaft* and *Gesselschaft*, Tönnies, 1988), from progressive cooperating ones. The last type requires a special kind of member who do not have to be leaders, but definitely set the whole organisation in motion: the changemakers.

Changemakers

Changemakers, especially local changemakers, are meant to be *social change designers*. They can act as catalysts for broader change by inspiring others and building momentum for collective action. They can also help ensure that global solutions are grounded in the needs and perspectives of local communities. By working together, global and local actors can build a more responsible and sustainable future for all.

As Anna Domaradzka says (Domaradzka, 2021), these actors challenge the *status quo* and introduce change to the existing scope. According to Finnemore and Sikking (Finnemore & Sikking, 1998) they are called *norm entrepreneurs* – a particular kind of contestant. It is clear from the reading of their concept that we refer to changemakers here. The subject has not been explored enough yet, hence my interest in the topic and area of research.

At the local level, changemakers play a crucial role in promoting participation and cooperation. These individuals and groups work within their communities to raise awareness, build networks, and advocate for change. They can be activists, social entrepreneurs, educators, or simply concerned citizens who take action to make a difference.

A changemaker is not always easy to spot. Due to the process of social omission, based on the famous concept of *adiaphorization* developed by Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 2017), a changemaker tends to be transparent unless they *contribute* (that is, discover something, rescue somebody, give their life to protect a tribe).

The most challenging part in my research is to distinguish between 'normal' local leaders and local changemakers. Nevertheless, it is crucial for the development of good practices and future benchmarking. Methods of ethnography, case studies, life stories, and different observations based on action in action research methodology come in handy.

As the authors of *Change Leadership: Oxymoron and Myths* suggest, change has pace (Todnem, Hughes & Ford, 2016). So do changemakers. They might require very particular conditions to make an impact: enough space, enough pace. Then they thrive, which simply means the whole society can benefit from them.

Summary

To sum up, a crisis is useful for us because we can be faced with our *status quo* to challenge it: rethink, respond, remake. If a crisis is permanent, the whole public (and private) strategy, public policy, management and politics, global and local, needs a complete makeover.

Considering all of this, academics, policymakers, politicians, leaders, and local changemakers should turn towards participation and cooperation in search of common sense and, in particular, the synergy of the crowd to increase our responsibility. Especially we, the academics, are responsible for providing intellectual outcomes to the realm of VUCA. I am positive that the knowledge we provide will not only be expertise and reliable but also applicable. Comprehensive know-how and clear guidelines produce results that support better decisions in change-making and minimise risk in 'risky' times.

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Abstract

Currently we, the world's inhabitants, are facing many challenges. The roots of these events are complicated and run deep. As we live in constantly changing circumstances of VUCA,[3] a world of entropy or even dystopia, we need to rebuild social, economic, and political responsibility to address global crises.

Humankind has evolved to cooperate. Considering this, academics, policymakers, leaders, and local changemakers should turn towards participation and cooperation in search of common sense and, in particular, the synergy of the crowd to increase our responsibility. Multi-level governance and direct democracy seem to be the new order in management. As do networking, innovation co-creation, and welfare society. These tendencies and trends will be presented in the paper.

The particular role of changemakers as (not exclusively) leaders will be shortly discussed, in particular what traits and strategies they should adopt to be able to implement and manage

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3   VUCA is an acronym based on leadership theories that means: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. These terms reflect the general conditions of our world. VUCA is also a practical code for readiness and anticipation of crisis.

change in the world. How should they encourage people to participate in decision-making processes? Should they think big or work at a grass-roots level to increase local responsibility? This paper will briefly cover what action we should undertake to secure our future and how extensive changemakers' facilitation of the process needs to be.

Based on research, scientific forecasts, and self-collected data alike, the paper has been maintained in the action research paradigm, as I believe nobody can ethically study change without implementing it.