PERSPECTIVES

POST-HEROIC LEADERSHIP: CURRENT TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The present work context has undergone transformations that have substantially changed labor relations and contributed to the emergence of less hierarchical and more collaborative organizational arrangements. This new environment requires a different approach to leadership (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). The "carrot and stick" approach no longer works as it used to, particularly with the new generation of workers, who are more interconnected and have easy access to information.

The dominant leadership paradigm of the industrial era views the leader as a hero: an active subject, who visualizes the future, defines and communicates the strategy, inspires and motivates those who are led, assigns roles, and evaluates and rewards according to performance (Fletcher, 2004). Followers, on the other hand, are seen as reactive, malleable, and "moldable" individuals. It is not by chance that the term "follower" is often used in the literature to indicate those who are passive under the influence of a leader. The most prominent theories arising from this paradigm include charismatic, transformational, transactional, and visionary leadership. Although these theories have their specificities, they all consider leadership as a unidirectional, top-down influencing process, and draw a clear line of separation between leaders and followers. However, this "heroic" and "romanticized" view of leadership does not seem to fit the complexity of current organizational social life, increasingly knowledge-intensive and dependent on collaboration among people (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

Thus, several scholars have challenged the traditional paradigm of heroic leadership and sought a new conception that shifts away from the unique focus on an individual with exceptional attributes and characteristics. In this context, the paradigm of "post-heroic" leadership emerges, highlighting the relational, collectivist, and participatory nature of leadership (Day, 2013; Fletcher, 2004). As the name suggests, these new theoretical currents shift away from the focus on the individual attributes and characteristics of leaders. On the contrary, these theories address leadership as a collective process, a product of interactions and relationships established by groups of people. Interestingly, one of the first authors to challenge this model of heroic leadership was Mary Parker Follet, in her book *The Creative Experience*, published initially in 1924, when she stated that "leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led" (Follett, 1942, p. 3).

Despite this change in the conception of the leadership phenomenon, new theoretical perspectives, particularly those on leadership training and development, still find little space

in the curricula of business schools. In fact, academic and practitioner communities have conducted intense debate, marked by prominent criticisms, which point to the inability of management schools and their respective formal education programs to adequately prepare leaders for the current business environment (Nicolini, 2003; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Rousseau, 2012). These criticisms, in general, are based on the claim that business schools, dominated by the traditional paradigm focused on logical empiricism and structured from an economic view of business (Ituassu & Tonelli, 2014), train professionals to use only linear thinking (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). This implies the training of leaders whose repertoire of skills and abilities does not cover the behavioral complexity required to lead people and manage resources in modern organizational reality (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009).

This essay seeks to present some of these new perspectives that guide the studies on leadership within the paradigm of "post-heroic" leadership, in order to contribute to the consolidation and deepening of a new concept of leadership in Brazil. In general, these perspectives challenge the traditional view of leadership as a vertical, hierarchical phenomenon and monopoly of power or authority. Intending to promote change in the practice of leadership education in schools and organizations, this article identifies the main barriers that hinder the training and development of post-heroic leaders. Thus, we identify some factors that may explain the inefficiency in the training of leaders with behaviors aligned with these new perspectives. In doing so, we aim to encourage and support future research and practical interventions in the field of management education that culminate in the training and development of leadership appropriate to contemporary organizational needs.

THE NEW PARADIGM OF POST-HEROIC LEADERSHIP

First perspective: Leadership as a relational process

Contrary to classical leadership studies, which consider the leader the major driver of change and responsible for the group's performance, the most recent research has increasingly explored the relational nature of leadership, that is, the relationship of mutual influence (bidirectional) between the leader and followers (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). These new relational approaches consider leadership a socio-relational phenomenon, which occurs through social interactions built and developed by the parties involved and that contribute to the construction of organizational reality (Uhl-Bien, 2006). According to this perspective, leadership is not found "in" individual characteristics or qualities, either of the leaders or followers; on the contrary, it emerges "in the space" between them, that is, in the interpersonal relationships and social exchanges between them.

The most prominent relationship-based approach in the literature is the Leader-member Exchange Theory or LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), the central concept of the LMX theory is that leadership occurs when leaders and followers develop effective relationships (partnerships) that result in an incremental type of influence, which culminates in a series of individual and organizational benefits. Thus, according to the LMX theory, the focus of leadership is on the quality of the relationship between the leader and followers, and not on the characteristics of leaders and their followers. By understanding what leads to the development of high-quality relationships, this leadership perspective contributes to the establishment of the necessary conditions for a good working environment, and fosters workers (leaders and followers) committed to and engaged with the organization.

Second perspective: Leadership as an other-centered process

As stated earlier, the traditional view of leadership is dominated by approaches that basically attribute greatness, power, and extraordinary characteristics to the leader. This view is especially observed in the theories of charismatic and transformational leadership (Yukl, 1998). Although many authors do not explicitly define these leaders as ego-driven or self-centric individuals, they portray leaders as heroic figures who can, through their aspirations, judgments, and decisions, determine the fate and luck of groups and organizations (Howell & Shamir, 2005).

However, this image of the leader as someone extraordinary, a visionary hero and the only one who knows the paths that lead to the achievement of goals, is out of sync with today's world (O'Connell, 2014). In this sense, studies exploring the importance of focusing more on followers and other participants of leadership to better understand the leadership phenomenon have gained prominence (Avolio et al., 2009). These studies adopt a leadership perspective called "other-centered leadership." This perspective argues that other members of leadership relationships have an active role and unique influence in the achievement of

organizational results and therefore need to be "seen, heard, and cared for." In this way, it is a perspective that moves away from the top-down approach and points to a bottom-up view of leadership.

Within the other-centered approach, the theories of humble leadership and servant leadership stand out. Both move away from the heroic view of the leader and attach special importance to those who are led. Specifically, according to the premises of humble leadership, leaders need to recognize their limitations, give space for the free expression of others, and learn from interactions with their followers (Owens & Hekman, 2012). The literature on servant leadership, in turn, suggests that leaders should act beyond self-interest by avoiding selfish behavior or meaningless demonstrations of power. The "servant leader" is guided by the desire to create opportunities in the organizational environment to help those who are led to grow (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Despite the differences between the two perspectives, there are many similarities between them.

Third perspective: Leadership as a collective process

The traditional view of leadership emphasizes its hierarchical nature. However, there has been a movement to explore the phenomenon more horizontally. Therefore, emphasizing the social and collective process of leadership construction and development is to the detriment of a view focused on the individuals who participate in it (Pearce & Sims, 2000).

In this sense, the investigations have explored several collective forms of leadership, with emphasis on the so-called shared leadership theory. Pearce and Conger (2003) define shared leadership as "a dynamic and interactive process of influence between individuals in groups" (p. 1) to lead them to achieve the objectives of the group and the organization. This perspective challenges the traditional method of approaching leadership so that leadership is distributed among a set of individuals, instead of being centralized in the hands of a single individual who acts as a superior (Pearce & Conger, 2003). The focus is on the latent leadership capacities distributed across the social networks of the members of a working group. Shared leadership is particularly suitable for knowledge-intensive environments in which complex problem-solving is dependent on a collaborative effort among people with distinct skills, not on the heroic actions of a small set of people at the top of the organization.

Thus, this paradigm shift, from leadership centered on a person's action to one focused on a collective construction process, allows the exercise of leadership by all members of the organization, positively affecting the performance of groups and organizations.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS

First challenge: Curriculum based on the development of hard skills with little emphasis on soft skills

The curricula of business schools are primarily focused on the development of technical and specific skills and abilities (known as hard skills) (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007; Navarro, 2008), for instance, finance, accounting, and business strategy. However, despite being an important and integral part of the training of any leader, the acquisition and application of technical knowledge is not enough to train a post-heroic leader. This is because this type of ability, derived from "codified" knowledge, enables leaders to perform the functional dimensions of their work well, but does not enable them to an increasingly relational, collective, and other-centered leadership. In this context, skills that empower leaders to build relationships and establish collaborations become indispensable (Rousseau, 2012). In addition to technical skills, having interpersonal skills, known as soft skills, becomes a *sine qua non* in the post-heroic paradigm of leadership, because the different perspectives that make up this paradigm emphasize the social nature of leadership.

This happens because, when teaching hard skills, schools and universities train specialists who will be recognized as experts because of their mastery of the technique (Laker & Powell, 2011). In the case of other more generic skill types, professionals are less likely to be considered experts. However, universities and organizations should develop programs that specifically target the learning of soft skills to promote the training of leaders. Communication skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, creativity, and problem-solving should be included across the board in curricula and teaching methodologies to train leaders for the current organizational context. Furthermore, specific workshops addressing skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy, self-knowledge, and persistence, to name a few, should be conducted. For example, mindfulness workshops can encourage students to develop a better understanding of their limits and weaknesses,

as well as improve their empathy with others, qualities that are essential for a post-heroic leader.

Although not directly related to the technical content of a management course, these skills are recognized by practitioners as the main differentials of a modern leader. For example, Daniel Goleman (1998), in his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, presents research evidence that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of career success than experience or IQ, and that emotional intelligence explains twice as much as technical or cognitive skills the difference between better-performing leaders and average leaders.

Second challenge: Mastery of prescriptive approaches and lack of holistic/humanistic approaches in leadership education and training

Many scholars criticize business education programs and curricula for teaching simplistic, model-based leadership that is much more prescriptive than descriptive or evaluative (Day, 2013). In other words, leaders are taught to follow a successful "formula" to manage people and achieve expected results. Mabey (2013) adds that interpretative and dialogical discourses of leadership are under-represented in teaching and leadership development. Whereas large business schools have been moving to change the curricula of Business Administration courses, most of them - and this is the reality of schools in Brazil - still fail to generate critical and reflective thinking about the organizational day-to-day activities, favoring analysis rather than synthesis (Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004).

Despite having a potentially central role in the context of a knowledge society in which the training and development of leaders are central processes of social and economic change, the educational system in management is still based on a recursive process through which theories and images of what leadership is and what leaders should do serve as models and references for the type of leader that students want to be (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015). For many theorists, this process results in a narrowing of the notion of leadership to an activity focused on objectives that can be divided into a set of skills that an individual should possess and that are not affected by any variable (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). However, as previously argued, more and more leaders are expected to be able to look at others, establish positive relationships with the followers, and even encourage a collective process of leadership. A prescriptive and simplistic view of leadership leaves no room to work on the behavioral complexity required for the training of leaders according to the new conceptions of leadership (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Thus, it may be beneficial for leadership education to promote a more holistic and humanistic training of leaders (Waddock & Lozano, 2013), because these approaches seem to have more potential to develop individuals with humble, relational, and collective behaviors. Holistic and humanistic approaches are those that seek to integrate fragmented disciplines into a global understanding of the organization, which foster systemic thinking, and instill a broader sense of business purpose (Waddock & Lozano, 2013). This can be done through multidisciplinary curriculum design and experimental pedagogical practices that enable the materialization of holistic and humanistic principles, for example.

Third challenge: Absence of active teaching-learning methods

Most leadership training and development courses and programs, particularly undergraduate courses in Business Administration, emphasize passive learning methods rather than promoting real, active situations for living leadership in an integral, multidisciplinary manner (Navarro, 2008). Therefore, it is unlikely that there are many opportunities to experience leadership in action, which inevitably impairs the trained professional to exercise leadership in his or her work environment fully. In fact, there is abundant evidence that students do not automate skills when passively listening to lectures or attending presentations without active learning opportunities (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993).

Analyzing the curricula of the best-ranked business schools in the United States, Navarro (2008) concludes that the passive view of teaching and a kind of "functional silo" (i.e., subjects offered alone) predominate in the curriculum structure of the courses of the top 50 schools, while many schools seemed not to require experiential and active learning elements. This is also the reality of Brazilian business schools (Nicolini, 2003).

It is only possible to learn about leadership through leadership practice, just as it is only possible to learn how to ride a bicycle while riding a bicycle. This "learning by doing" is perhaps the only way to enable leadership development and unlock the organization's leadership potential. Active learning methods address many of these concerns. However, although action learning has become a frequently discussed topic in management education, few academic, research, and practical initiatives have made this approach a primary method for developing leadership skills and improving leadership behavior. Even recognizing the difficulty in implementing active learning methods, it is imperative that management and organization schools invest in less traditional approaches, such as role play, simulations,

and problem-based learning activities (Salas, Wildman, & Piccolo, 2009). Although they require greater training from all those involved in the education process (educators, schools, and learners), these techniques have proven to be much more effective in training successful leaders.

CONCLUSION

This article aims to present a new paradigm of leadership, the post-heroic leadership, which emerges as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of the hero-leader who decides alone and motivates his followers either through his charisma or rewards. In this way, we identified recent perspectives in leadership studies adopting this new paradigm, as well as the challenges that need to be overcome in the training and development of post-heroic leaders.

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