

LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT 2.0

Paper 5 in PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series

Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace

About Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP)

Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP) is a network for social change. Its purpose is to support the development and adoption of ideas about what makes a good society, to connect and strengthen the agents of this work and contribute to the infrastructure that supports progressive social change.

About PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series

For philanthropy and development practices to have a significant impact on root causes of poverty, marginalization and violence, they need to be better aligned with social change agendas that are people led. This involves 'defining key concepts' that are commonly used in development and elucidating their meaning and implications in practice. PSJP is facilitating a peer-learning environment in order to do this and is exploring the themes such as dignity, community resilience, measuring change, sustainability, community philanthropy, leadership, power among others.

These terms are frequently used in development and philanthropy, and they are included in many organizations' mission statements and performance indicators, but often there is no clear understanding of what they mean in practice or how they can be measured. As a first step to develop this understanding we are facilitating discussions among a diverse set of practitioners in the field on these topics and producing papers which will be shared on <http://www.psjp.org>. We hope to engage in wider ranging discussion in response to the papers and invite you to share your perspectives, experience and research on these themes. To contribute a blog write to us at chandrika@psjp.org

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on webinar discussions held on 12 July 2019 among 13 participants representing development and philanthropy organizations from all corners of the world. The paper is a sequel to an earlier paper published in March 2019 entitled [‘Leadership and Development’](#). The research is based on discussion of the original paper with a different cohort of participants.

These papers are part of PSJP’s [Defining Key Concepts Series](#), which seeks to explore commonly used words and phrases in development such as ‘leadership’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘measuring social change’. These terms have many different definitions, none of which is sufficient to fully understand the term. Through these discussions we attempt to bring out the different meanings used by practitioners. We approach each theme with as few preconceptions as possible, so that a diversity of ideas and approaches can be discussed and debated in a safe space.

Our first paper was intended as a starting point. The July 2019 discussions sought to build on those. We are not claiming that the resulting papers produce definitive and comprehensive answers and definitions; rather we are trying to expand and deepen our understanding of these concepts and their practical implications in our everyday development and philanthropic work.

The July 2019 discussions were organized with the same principles of ‘grounded theory’ and inclusivity as the earlier ones. The webinars included a wide range of practitioners ranging from indigenous and community-based foundations to INGOs and international donors. Participants were asked to review the paper produced as a result of the first series of discussions and to answer three open-ended questions:

- Does the paper resonate with you? What would you add?
- What challenges do you face in leadership development?
- What would help you move forward and make leadership more effective in your situation?

Below is an analysis of the July 2019 discussions, presenting the key emerging themes.

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTISING LEADERSHIP

The July discussions confirmed that ‘leadership’ has numerous definitions, qualities and principles that work differently in different contexts. They confirmed the proposition made in the first paper that leadership is not something that arises simply from an individual holding a certain position in an organization, for example executive director. Rather it’s about how people behave in the organization, and about the processes that build up everyone’s leadership in the organization and the community. In reflecting on the earlier paper, this cohort found certain interlinked qualities and principles of leadership that resonate the most with them.

Leadership as a lever for transformation

Transformative leadership that ‘not only causes change in individuals and in social systems but also develops followers into leaders’ is highlighted in the earlier paper. It emerges once again as the central component of how webinar participants understand leadership. Such an understanding stresses changing systems rather than ameliorating the symptoms of problems. Many of the webinar participants are working on complex problems. To give some examples: an indigenous fund in India working to develop Dalit¹ leadership to resist over 2,000 years of discrimination and oppression and the myriad of social problems resulting from it; an organization working to stop child trafficking at the border of Cambodia and Thailand; a global donor supporting community philanthropy and bottom-up approaches to development in a system where the dominant paradigm tilts towards top-down approaches obsessed with efficiency and metric measurements; an international grantmaking organization working on the premise that effective response to HIV and AIDS comes from the expertise and leadership of the communities most affected.

Although very different from one another in their focus of work, what these organizations have in common is that in their specific contexts they are working to transform the very principles that currently govern our society. This requires a change in mindsets. As one participant notes:

‘leadership in our society is not inclusive; it is not democratic, so you need to create a counterculture of leadership that is inclusive and democratic.’

¹ The word ‘Dalit’ represents the communities of the so-called former ‘untouchables’ in India.

It is this quality of transformation that emerges as central to the understanding of 'leadership' among the discussants.

Leadership as 'power with'

A review of literature on leadership presented in the original paper notes Mary Parker Follett's theory of leadership in which she distinguishes two forms of power: 'power over' and 'power with'.

'In the "power over" model, leadership is coercive and conflictual. Power is conceived as a finite resource in which people struggle to obtain more than they currently have. In the "power with" model, leadership is coactive and based on cooperation. Power is an extensible resource, not only growing with use and benefiting all parties, but also leading to high levels of trust.'

It is this 'power with' model, which emerged as most resonant in the previous discussions, that found favour with the new cohort. 'Power has to empower not oneself but the people,' affirms one participant. 'Leadership is about enabling others around you,' claims another.

In terms of the practical ways in which the concept of leadership manifests itself as shared power to address systemic injustices and inequalities and the imbalance of power, several participants are building the capacities of communities on the ground to manage their own resources, to develop ownership of their problems and the solutions to them, and to build their voice and agency. The following practical methods emerged from the discussion.

Ensuring local ownership

'Leadership is ownership, ownership is power,' states one participant asserting the importance of local ownership. Many others relate to this and manifest it in their work in different ways. An organization working with Dalits in India focuses on supporting local leaders as a core strategy in achieving its mission. They do this by ensuring that the leaders come from the local community and live where they work. 'There has to be a complete engagement with local issues,' the participant representing the organization stresses. To elucidate how it works, he explains that the leaders must focus on three local issues:

- '1) work with the village primary school to make sure that there is high-quality education and no discrimination towards Dalit children
- 2) organize youth across castes to come together and take up common programmes to try to reduce communal tensions in the village

3) focus on access to drinking water because this is the issue causing maximum pain and trauma, especially to Dalit women.'

Another organization, an INGO working with rural communities in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia, focuses on building the capacity of families and communities to manage their own resources.

'Most of our African communities are told what to do and think but we are facilitating a process of transition for them towards leading for themselves and owning their own situation.'

They do this through a three-year programme working with communities on 'how to share ownership of their problems and their solutions'.

Others focus on building local ownership through grantmaking. A participant representing a global donor supporting a community philanthropy organization worldwide explains:

'when we are devolving resources to the ground, we are essentially devolving power and building agency.'

Another organization supporting communities affected by HIV and AIDS concurs. They stress the importance of 'really funding CBOs as leaders in their own experience and work'. They fund community-based partners who work primarily with women and children who have been affected by HIV and AIDS.

Enabling voice

Webinar participants identify as critical the role of leadership development in enabling the 'voice' of community stakeholders in the processes that affect their lives to be heard. This is consistent with our earlier discussions on the topic. While raising the voice of marginalized populations is in itself a leadership development process at individual, family and community level, participants also stress the building and leveraging of 'critical voice' to influence large-scale systems, in particular the development field itself, which they identify as riddled with factors favouring top-down approaches. The organization concerned with the development of community philanthropy and 'bottom-up' approaches articulates this clearly. They invest in building community philanthropy around the world, enabling the accumulation of local resources and the ability of people to do things for themselves. One of the ways in which they do this is by bringing together community philanthropy organizations

‘to grow their confidence and voice and to politically decolonize themselves to dare to think differently and dare to speak up rather than do what the system says: apply for a grant in this way and report on it this way.’

They stress the need to ‘really grow that critical voice – that’s about thought leadership as separate from all kinds of community-level leadership’.

The organization supporting communities affected by HIV and AIDS also emphasizes the importance of building community-level leadership and then using their position to get a seat at the table with the international funding community for their partners. They aspire to take everything they are learning and to publish and share that work internationally so they can influence what is funded on the ground and the way it is funded.

What these organizations hope to do is to use their own position and power

‘to articulate up the system and create a pipeline of leadership and voice to get into some of those circles of leadership that often feel closed’.

The organization working with Dalits in India tries to build a connection between local leadership and the larger leadership by creating space for meetings and opportunities for them to talk to each other. They try to ensure that the local leaders they support are able to engage with the state machinery right from the local administration to the district level.

Enabling multiple sources of power

Prior discussions stressed inclusivity and collaboration as a way of distributing power and building collective leadership rather than leadership being vested in a single or a few individuals. The participants in the later webinars also identify these qualities as critical to challenging the systems that they seek to change. They come to this through various means. The organization working to develop Dalit leadership finds that leaders are more effective when they collaborate and work together.

‘Individual leadership is less effective than group leadership, so we try to promote groups of four to learn from each other and to ensure they are not isolated.’

They are also mindful of the importance of inclusivity in building leadership among the most marginalized groups.

‘In the group we also maintain a social, gender and religious diversity. They don’t all have to be Dalits, we also include people from the Muslim and tribal communities. We focus on women. It is a non-negotiable principle for us that 50 per cent of the leaders have to be women.’

In addressing the problems within the development system, the organization concerned with promoting community philanthropy also stresses the imperative to enable many sources of power.

‘There is a tendency (in international aid, development and philanthropy) to look for a single organization to represent the views in a country so this is where being able to make small grants really helps because we are investing in lots of different spaces and places. This creates a bubbling up of different kinds of voices along the way. You need to embrace the messiness of multiple narratives and voices if leadership is to endure through narrative shifts and changing norms.’

CHALLENGES

It is clear that leadership is understood as a force for transformative change in the work of the participants. They employ the concept of leadership development to level out power imbalances. However, they also identify a number of challenges in this process.

Leaders as gatekeepers

A feminist organization in Eastern Europe has been conducting an external evaluation using community consultation to reflect on their programmes. Their one-on-one community consultations with different stakeholders have revealed a number of challenges, including ‘gatekeeping’ by senior leaders:

‘Some people we consulted reported that there are leaders who are limiting the community and reserving their own positions of power. They have become rigid. For example, Roma women face obstacles with male Roma leaders. Some other communities face challenges around existing leaders not allowing the emergence of new players in the community like youth leaders.’

The foundation in India identifies with this hurdle of confrontation with the established leadership and the play of insecurities.

This tendency to control the community and to hang on to power can impede the development of the community. As the participant representing the feminist fund points out:

‘you can’t expect that you’ll have a call for proposals and the marginalized community will self-mobilize and come forward if they have leaders who are restricting them. Also these leaders have connections with the government, so the community is trapped.’

The organization working to stop the trafficking of children similarly reports: ‘When we go in to a community we have a lot of resistance from the older generation.’ Their staff face a lot of pressure from the community to accept the issues as given and not challenge them and they need to keep motivated in order to deal with this.

One strategy to mitigate the challenge of push-back from the existing leadership is to take them on board. On the Cambodia-Thailand border, they work to empower village leaders to advocate to stop trafficking. This point is also encapsulated in the earlier discussions, which gives the example of an organization working with traditional communities in India that works with local leaders such as village elders and heads of *panchayats*, partly because ‘nothing gets done without their say so’. The earlier discussions note that this is crucial to building trust within the community. In similar vein, for the organization working with Dalits in India, the most important factor in getting through the resistance is to ensure local ownership of the issues and processes of change:

‘You have to protect the people. This only happens if you are a community-based leader, this is how you are protected.’

Intergenerational transfer of power

A related challenge is about the transfer of power, or rather the lack of it, from one generation to another. One participant points to what she calls ‘the context of historical moments’: at one point certain leaders are the flag bearers of a major struggle but when the context changes new perspectives and approaches are needed. She pinpoints why this happened in her context:

‘In the feminist movements there are leaders who were very important, who were at the frontlines of the movement and had made a huge contribution to the movement, but reflective processes were lacking and there was insufficient delegation of responsibility. There is a lack of communication between the old generation and the new, a lack of

intergenerational transfer of knowledge and a lack of respect. We are struggling how to create a bridge.’

An INGO working in Tanzania on the health and livelihood of poor people say that their number one priority is to hand over control to the local communities but so far they have failed to do. One of the challenges they face is ‘an ineffective local model of a supreme leader. There is a strategy of not grooming young people to take over.’ As with the feminist organization mentioned above, this too speaks to a lack of communication and trust between generations resulting in the failure to relinquish control.

Leadership skills

The earlier discussions identified a skill gap as a limiting factor in effective leadership development. They spoke mostly of the lack of professional experience in the development sector and of the failings of the education system. The new discussants dig deeper into the skills required for the development of transformative leadership in the face of complex problems. They acknowledge specific issues that pose a challenge. The first, identified by the feminist organization, is about building resilience in leaders and helping them to accept change, and specifically about the lack of skills for conflict transformation and management within the movement.

‘How do you become more adaptive to changes? How do you set protocols, manage conflicts, etc?’

The discussant stresses the importance of this in the face of failure of projects as a result of personal conflicts among the leadership.

A second gap relates to the lack of skills required for a systems change approach. An international organization that works with young people to develop philanthropic giving led by young people identifies this as a challenge. Based on feedback from their partner organizations, they are finding that the young people tend to fund what they describe as ‘helping projects’ rather than ‘changing projects’.

‘It’s easy to come up with a project that helps a problem along but doesn’t really change the fundamental building blocks. Rather than running a project to change something, they run a project to mitigate the effects of something. In our view that is because of a deficit of leadership skills.’

In order to address this challenge, they conducted a pilot leadership project in Georgia focused on getting young people who have run these projects once to now start thinking about their own leadership.

‘How can they develop to the next level and start making that shift from helping projects to changing projects? How can they use the power they have got and think strategically about how they make change?’

Language and culture

Northern-based INGOs operating programmes in the global south face cultural and language barriers. A global health organization that works in Mali to redesign health systems for universal health coverage speaks of these challenges. They want to be able to ensure an equal opportunity work environment in their team but they are struggling to understand the power dynamics in Malian society. Another challenge is that their team works in French while all the professional development opportunities available to them are in English and held in the Bay area in the US.

‘The lack of opportunities for mentorship and professional development for our Franco-phone staff has been a real obstacle.’

An INGO working on mental health in Uganda and Zambia also struggles with cultural boundaries, which they find a limitation in ‘developing the next generation of leaders’ in their team in Uganda.

Culture and language can be limiting factors even in providing the most appropriate support to communities in times of crisis. The global health organization was faced with inter-ethnic conflict in rural Mali. Their team had been first responders to an incident wherein an entire village was massacred and they were dealing with post-traumatic stress. They reached out to another INGO working on mental health (the one mentioned above) for support, which they received. However, the participant stressed the challenges around providing the right kind of support even in such an extreme situation.

‘I personally feel quite nervous about being this well-intentioned white western person coming in steamrolling the actual needs of the community. I feel my hands are quite tied around how to provide useful support that doesn’t actually overreach and get something wrong.’

The discussions also explore the ways in which some participants are trying to overcome these difficulties. The INGO operating programmes in Uganda is now using local firms to help with leadership coaching of their senior staff in

Uganda. Another international organization working in Africa (on HIV and AIDS) addresses this problem via grantmaking and promoting peer-to-peer learning within the communities they serve.

‘We don’t implement the programmes that we are funding; they are run by people in the communities and by organizations based there ... we take our lead from our partners and our funding is responsive to their needs and challenges. One of the other things we’ve done is to bring our partners together to share best practices through a roundtable or peer-to-peer mentorship so they can share strategies among themselves.’

STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP

We asked the discussants to reflect on what would help them to make leadership more effective in their specific contexts. Here is what they said.

Accessible training resources

A clear need emerged for resources on specific aspects of leadership development such as strategic thinking; community organizing; conflict transformation; enabling people to reflect on their own experience and needs; research and methodologies for analysing the impact and challenges in leadership development such as pushback by existing leaders; and research/case studies on the intergenerational transfer of power. ‘Not everyday mainstream training but something identified through a consultation process,’ says one participant. They are looking for resources that enable them to learn how to be most effective as leaders.

‘Until we understand the levers to pull and barriers to take away we are going to struggle to help communities move forward.’

Resources could take the form of literature or videos; they need to be more accessible to organizations operating at all levels in all parts of the world and to be context-specific and culturally appropriate. Discussants emphasized the need for resources not just for CEOs and programme staff in offices but also for developing local leadership in village communities in India or Mexico, Roma settlements in Eastern Europe, etc.

Communication tools

People also talked of the need for appropriate means of communication – tools that can enable people to come together, learn and realize their own agency for change and potential for leadership.

‘With the limitations of literacy and barriers of language we have to find communication tools that are visible and audible.’

Peer meetings

While people stressed the need for easily accessible online resources, there is also a strong desire for face-to-face meetings in real space:

‘Peer interaction and meeting is really important for this group to move forward from their own perspective.’

Participants recognize the power of networks and their ability to transcend individual limitations and achieve what one cannot achieve alone, valuing ‘any opportunity to collaborate, to share knowledge, and to be together to create’. They also identify the need for peer meetings, both to enable diverse but like-minded development and philanthropy organizations (such as the webinar participants) to meet and interact and to enable them to bring their community partners together.

‘There is something that happens if you bring people that are already leading this work in their community to the table together, and that is knowledge sharing.’

As an extension of peer learning, participants also explore the idea of ‘cultural exchange programmes’ to enable people working in diverse contexts with different approaches and missions, people who wouldn’t necessarily meet otherwise, to come together and share different perspectives.

‘You take people out of Uganda and put them in a community in Mexico. Swapping people about, particularly on the north-south axis, might kind of shift issues that seem to be stuck.’

Opportunities to influence the aid and development sector

Another need is to create opportunities to bring grassroots organizations that are implementing programmes and solutions within their communities to the table together with international aid, development and philanthropy

organizations. The aim is to shift the external funding and development paradigm,

‘which is driven by narrow views and shorter timeframes and is unable to seed a system. Instead they field a few strong trees and say, look, this is leadership.’

They want to be able to raise the critical voices of grassroots organizations, community philanthropy and other approaches to development which are more people-led to show evidence about

‘what happens when you invest in leadership, that it’s not somebody’s success against somebody’s loss. Instead there is the notion that it’s about responsibility, collective action and participation but our northern philosophy of *I think therefore I am* gets in the way and that translates into the design of projects and project funding.’

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