

Leadership as Distributed Initiative

Creating the movement for a shared direction

Adrià Garcia i Mateu

It is worth to start this essay by stating which assumptions have been used in order to approach the question of what does leadership means for the author. The first one is that whenever is mentioned leadership it will be framed as a group of individuals, at least +1, involved in an action. The author has deliberately excluded the inner leadership capacities, described at the end of the work as the qualities that embodies the 'catalyser'. The second assumption is that this group of individuals, or collective, will be treat as a social distributed living system (SDLS) and will be link it, thanks to Fritjof Capra's work in his book *Hidden Connections, a Science for a Sustainable Living*, to the ongoing research about the origins of live.

Living Systems from a Natural Science perspective

In order to help us understand what are the characteristics of living systems, and taking a strategy used by the scientific method, it has been studied by the scientific community how does it works a cell, as it is the simplest living system that express this characteristics of life (Capra, 2002).

What the research done by scientists, and the work of digestion carried out by Fritjof Capra has shown, is that a cell is first defined by its cell membrane, which define the system boundaries and is in charge of the permeability with its surroundings as well of the cell's molecular composition, preserving thus its identity. Within this boundary it takes place the "metabolic process (1) that involves special macromolecules - very large molecules consisting of long chains of hundreds of atoms. Two kinds of this macromolecules are always found in all cells: proteins and nucleic acids (DNA and RNA). [...] There are essentially two type of proteins - enzymes that act as catalyst of various metabolic processes, and structural proteins, which are part of the cell structure. [...] The RNA molecules serve as messengers, delivering coded information for the synthesis of enzymes from the DNA." (Capra, 2002,6).

For this biochemical interactions between molecules, we could use the analogy that the DNA is the information, the enzymes are the interaction and the RNA the relationship. There is, nevertheless, another important quality in this simplified explanation of the cell that has been also acknowledged by scientists, and is that this metabolic process it always takes place in a form of a chemical network, also know as a *distributed system* of chemicals. In words of Fritjof Capra, "wherever we see life, we see networks".

But even understanding the tasks that have all parts of a cell in the network, is not enough to explain life. To sort this out is used the concept of self-generation, understood as:

"living networks continually creating, or re-creating themselves by transforming or replacing their components. In this way they undergo continual structural changes while preserving their weblike patterns of organisation" (Capra, 2002,10). This was first identified by biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela who gave it the name of "autopoiesis" (literally, "self-making").

Finally, is from this definition of a living system as an autopoietic network that it can be extracted that life is an emergence property of the distributed system as a whole (Capra, 2002).

After on, the author will use the definition of life above described to play in the metaphorical arena about the purpose of a distributed living system (DLS), in order to link it later with a social distributed living system (SDLS) that exercise leadership.

This gives space for freedom that leads the author to think that what differentiates a DLS from a Distributed non-Living System are the *interactions* (2) between the parts found in the system as a whole. Hence, the necessary condition for life, is *movement*. At this point we can agree that for the system to change the state from a dead system to a living one, there must be an *initial action* that *creates* life. Thus, the purpose of the DLS in order to be, alive, is to continuously re-create this *initial action* to maintain the *movement*.

From Leadership to Initiative

As stated at the beginning of the essay, the following will be based on the parallelism that as wherever we see life we see DLS, the author will apply the same principles of a DLS to a SDLS.

Hence, if we extrapolate the findings in DLS stated above to the social context, it results that as the purpose of every person of the group is to continuously re-create life by *initial actions*, it will be needed a *proactive attitude* from the individuals of the collective.

Here the author finds an unavoidable obstacle with the word *leadership*, because; of the implicit question of - who follows? that creates a passive reaction, and for being a model of building behind. Instead, the author proposes the word *initiative* that; invites to ask - who goes next? creating a proactive reaction, and invites to build upon. (Figure 1). The author will use after on the word initiative for what is understood nowadays by leadership.



Figure 1. Garcia i Mateu, 2011

Living Systems from a Social Science perspective

Thanks to a priceless conversation with my colleagues Anton Valkov and Sara Rose Robert it came across that to really embrace the whole dimension of the initiative that takes place within any kind of SDLS (company, administration or other organisation) first it is needed to update the purpose of a DSL and add the human perspective. As homo sapiens sapiens we do not have just the attribute as every other living organism to exist but as well the capacity to be conscious about our own existence. Is then, when is added this phenomena to the purpose of the DLS, that appears a new perspective to the *movement*, that is the *direction* of this movement.

The first reaction after unveiling this social dimension of the purpose of any SDLS is to think, direction to where or towards what? And is here where the author profoundly believes that lies the shift, because it appears obvious that if as a human living organism the only purposes that we can conceive is to *move* in a *direction*, then our efforts about where this direction leads us lose meaning as just will be defined when this movements stops and life ends with it. This opens a new perspective for presence, the alignment of movements or the attention to the process.

After accepting this social dimension of the purpose, a whole different reality can be built upon how we organise our social constructions, and therefore, how we understand the initiative. Is from this reality that the author imagines the initiative in a SDLS.

Initiative in a Social Distributed Living System

At this point of the argumentation process is worth to define how a SDLS will look like, applying the principles found in the research done for the DLS, and how initiative takes place:

- The purpose of a SDLS is to create movement for a shared direction, implying that continuous initiatives are needed to maintain the movement, and for a desired momentum the group direction must be shared and aligned with personal directions, which are calibrated (graduated?) with values, beliefs and identities. As every movement, is understood as a process.
- The life of a SDLS is created as an emergence attribute of the system, making the whole more than its parts and assuming the needed initiative from every individual essential to create movement for the shared direction.
- A SDLS is open and permeable to its environments, always conserving its identity.
- A SDLS is a "living network continually creating, or re-creating itself by transforming or replacing their components. In this way it undergoes

continual structural changes while preserving their weblike patterns of organisation" (Capra, 2002,10).

- As a Social DLS, all relations in system are based upon trust, empathy and shared responsibility.
- In a SDLS the old understanding of the leader is defined as a catalyser or facilitator of the interactions that take place within the SDLS.

Being conscious that is not a common denominator of the current organisations perform as a SDLS, the author propose to use the term *distributed initiative* to refer to *the synergies or dynamics that take place in a given system that moves in a direction*, structured or not as SDLS. Assuming that the way in which the initiative is assumed will define sooner or later the structure of the organisation.

Reflections

It is impossible to remain immobile in front of the amount of challenges that is facing our civilisation. Specially when we are trying to overcome them using organisations of any type that were created in an *époque* where a totally diverse vision of our specie in this planet was in place.

It is our mission as a generation to be aware of the current situation that surrounds us, from what we are discovering with science to deep human knowledge or the historical perspective, and be consequent with what really means be human being.

The reasoning presented in this work can be accepted or not, the author acknowledge the theoretical character of the work, but strongly believes in the potential of the perspective that opens for both individuals and collectives to rediscover a perspective that it has been always here.

How will like an organisation that sees itself as a "living network continually creating, or re-creating itself by transforming or replacing their components, [...] undergoing continual structural changes while preserving their weblike patterns of organisation" (Capra, 2002,10). How will look like an organisation that give special conscious attention to the process and understand the result as a consequence of this process? How will look like an organisation that creates room and celebrate the preciousness of every person to take the initiative in each part of the process?

Finally, the author assumes as well the weakness of some reasonings showed in some areas of the work, walks the talk and takes this particular essay as a process to a inter-intra personal development and a future solid work, as the genius once said, "art is never finished, only abandoned", (Leonardo da Vinci).

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Notes

1. *The sum of the biochemicals processes involved in life* (Capra, 2002).
2. *Definitions*. Interaction: Reciprocal action or influence. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). Action: From Proto-Indo-European *h₂eǵ-, *ag^h- (“to lead”)[1]. Cognates include Ancient Greek ἄγω (agō, “I lead”), Old Norse aka (“move, drive”).

References

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