

## How to Re-Tell a Story That Has Been Already Told by the Others?

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Understanding of leadership and leadership dynamics implies developing an understanding of the leader, the followers, the context, the processes and the resulting consequences (Pierce & Newstrom: 2011)<sup>i</sup>. As suggested by a number of social scholars<sup>ii</sup>, leadership is a social influence relationship interactive between two or more people dependant upon one another for the attainment of certain mutual goals, bound together within a group situation (Ibid.). Thus, leadership, as highlighted by Murphy (1941) is essentially sociological in its nature; is socially constructed through interaction, emerging as a result of the constructions and actions of both, the leaders and the led (Smircich: 2011)<sup>iii</sup>.

When studying Muslim collective leadership, problematic external context and heterogeneous fellowship present particular challenges in identifying and understanding leadership processes taking place. Muslim community, as minority within the secular Spanish/European context must accommodate a problematic external context, a still important role of religion, the influence of imams<sup>iv</sup>, and the increasing role of women, young Muslims and emerging intellectual leaders. On the other hand, Muslims as a community embrace a variety of cultural and ethnic diversities and thus, culture-imposed values very often come to stand as an important situational variable.

Thanks to SYLFF and to be more precise, SRA<sup>v</sup>, I had an opportunity to visit UCSD and thus, get closer and learn from the US context and its Muslim experiences, that are apparently different, and so the leadership dynamics. As shared by the imam of Muslim Community of San Diego during my visit, 9-11 was a big and loud wake up call that presented a new challenge to the passive community and its leaders: *how to re-tell your story that has been already told by the others?* To apply the terminology of Erving Goffman – one of the most influential American sociologists, suddenly all *front stage* actions of the community leaders became visible and followed through a magnifying glass and so, the community leaders were urged to undertake new and more proactive roles. The new role implied little margin to “error” at the *front-stage*, in order to avoid alternative readings and at the same time, to master a heterogonous community at the *back-stage*. Within the framework of

Goffman's *dramaturgical approach*, front-stage is the area where the individuals (or actors) appear before the audience and where positive self-concepts and desired impressions are offered and constructed, while back-stage is the area where individuals can drop their social roles and identities.

Back to Spain or EU context, contextual variables and situation that determine the leadership relationship are shaped by different state policies and point to rather different claims of the community and hence, leadership dynamics. It has been identified that Muslim leaders' discourse in Spain tends to fail in reaching the interlocutors, making the auto-promotion rather inadequate. In addition, it is observed that as a tendency, Muslim representatives and speakers do not have sufficient language or cultural and social knowledge of a host country that apparently hampers the dialogue. According to Nogales (2008)<sup>vi</sup>, imam figure is especially relevant in the context of immigration due to inexistence of other religious institutions. However, many imams appear to be "imported" that becomes the determinant factor: they might be familiar with immigration problems and see the necessity to re-interpret the traditions in the light of dominant values of the host society, though not always well prepared. Yet, in the light of a renewed interaction with the government and growing presence of Islam in public debates, Arigita (2006, p. 576)<sup>vii</sup> highlights the changing profile and structure of leadership: "*Leadership in Spanish Muslim communities are undergoing monumental change. Since the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission in 1922, the socio-democratic profile of Muslim communities has been completely modified with the addition of new Muslim immigration to Spain. This fact, together with deep divisions between the original representatives, has increased the desires of different groups to develop new mechanisms of representation of Muslim, on the local and national levels*".

Despite different contextual variables and situation, a common challenge remains to construct legitimate stories (some of them that has been already told and shared by the others) that would justify the corresponding leadership roles. In addition, one of the leadership roles implies meaning making, and real change "*involves influencing the meanings that different groups make in the contexts of competing and conflicting definitions of reality and of value*" (Sorenson et al.: 2011, p. 33)<sup>viii</sup>. A collective leadership<sup>ix</sup> effort might come to the rescue, although a very well prepared performance is needed to respond to the wide audiences and to manage a

heterogeneous fellowship, with minimum mistakes permitted at the front stage, as well as at the back stage. As highlighted by Grint (2011, p. 10)<sup>x</sup>: “*We need now a collective approach to decision-making to counter the romance of (individual) leadership and to better cope with an increasingly complex world*”.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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<sup>i</sup> Pierce, Jon L. and Newstrom John, W. (2011), *Leaders and the Leadership Process: Readings, Self-Assessments & Applications*, 6th edition, McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

<sup>ii</sup> E.g. Murphy (1941), Hollander and Julian (1969), Smircich and Morgan (1982) etc.

<sup>iii</sup> Smircich, Linda and Morgan, Gareth (1981), “Leadership: the management of meaning”, in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Volume 18, Number 3, p. 257-273.

<sup>iv</sup> The real important of imams, though, has been much exaggerated, particularly in the perception of European authorities. As Van Bruinessen (2011, p. 8) puts it “*real power in the mosque is not in hands of the imam but of the organizing committee or, if the mosque belongs to the larger association, the executive board of that association*” (Van Bruinessen, Martin and Allievi, Stefano (2011), *Producing Islamic Knowledge. Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, Routledge).

<sup>v</sup> I would like to thank SYLFF for this opportunity to conduct my research at the Global Leadership Institute (UCSD). I am especially thankful to my advisor at the UCSD - prof. Babak Rahimi.

<sup>vi</sup> Sanchez Nagoles, Jose L. (2006), *El Islam en España actual*, Biblioteca de autores cristianos, Madrid.

<sup>vii</sup> Arigita, Elena (2006), “Representing Islam in Spain: Muslim Identities and the Contestation of Leadership”, in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 96, pp. 563-584.

<sup>viii</sup> Sorenson, Georgia, Goethals, George R. and Haber Paige (2011), “The enduring and elusive quest for a general theory of leadership: initial efforts and new horizons”, in *SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, eds. Bryman, Alan, Collinson, David, Grint, Keith, Jackson, Brad and Uhl-Bien, Mary, Sage publications: London.

<sup>ix</sup> Collective leadership, as defined by different scholars, e.g. Seers, Keller and Wilkinson (2003), also Hiller, Day and Vance (2003), is a property of the group rooted in social exchange-based roles, involving a complex of roles and/or serving multiple functions or roles.

<sup>x</sup> Grint, Keith (2011), “A history of Leadership”, in *SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, eds. Bryman, Alan, Collinson, David, Grint, Keith, Jackson, Brad and Uhl-Bien, Mary, Sage publications: London.