CALL FOR PAPERS

SPECIAL ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP AND CLIMATE CHANGE: AUTHORITY, LEGITIMACY AND THE ‘CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE’

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Any theologian understands martyrdom, but only the martyr experiences the fire.

Robertson Davies

Climate chaos, stock market panics, food scares, pandemic threats, economic crashes, congenital anxiety, existential dread … Fear and fears: individual and collective, combining and reinforcing each other (the dynamics of fear itself), are charging through our world. Infiltrating it, jolting it, deranging it.


Climate change and the threat to human well-being it represents is one of Virilio’s (2012) fear-inducing crises, a defining symptom of our times and the greatest challenge facing humanity. The scale of the response required is enormous: the radical decarbonisation of global energy, industrial and transport systems; the mass replacement of oil, coal and gas by renewables such as solar and wind; and the reinvention of established economic, social and political conventions (Hulme & Blackman 2009). As a contemporary ‘grand challenge’ (George et al 2016), climate change ‘like almost all environmental issues, is a debate over culture, worldviews, and ideology’ (Hoffman 2012: 32). This requires a focus on social and environmental concerns beyond profit maximisation, where the demand for action is coming more from social movements, bottom up approaches and community-focused solutions rather than from government and/or business alone, and poses clear ethical concerns and social justice imperatives requiring the re-invention of dominant values.

More often than not couched in the apocalyptic language of abrupt non-linear and potentially calamitous ruptures, the advocates of immediate and far-reaching measures to address climate change emphasise the importance of leadership, as reflected in resource capabilities, legitimacy and credibility (Karlsson
et al 2011), as critical to addressing the crisis of governance facing the Earth’s natural systems. Much of this debate, particularly in the context of political leadership, is predicated on a ‘great man’ perspective on leadership, relying on ‘the exceptional few’ (Schleffer et al 2003: 493) to catalyse opinion and drive effective change. Given the failures to deliver on climate change policies, others have called for a more ‘grass-roots’ perspective on leadership, grounded in sub-national, often local and community-based, initiatives (Ostrom 2012). However, it remains the case that such leadership implications of climate change remain under-researched and under-discussed.

A decade ago Goodall (2008) asked why leading management journals were ignoring climate change, and concluded that such an absence reflected the existence of a kind of ‘ghettoization’ that has led to an undesirable lag in social science between articles appearing in peripheral publications and so-called elite journals. Since then there has been an emerging mainstreaming interest in climate change in organisation and management studies (eg special issues of Business and Society 2012; Organization Studies 2012; Organization 2013). However, while the construction and construal of crisis in general has engaged leadership scholars (Leadership 2015), they have had little to say on climate change specifically.

One reason for this is that in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world characterised by wicked problems defined by their scale, complexity and incomprehensibility, the actions needed require complex and systematic change that crosses traditional institutional boundaries, and requires new leadership capabilities (Kangas et al 2019). There is, however, in the leadership and crisis literature an event-focus not a process-orientation. This diverts attention from slowburn gradual crises which are endemic and constitutive and unfold on a grand scale over a significant period of time (eg climate change) to low probability unexpected, unpredictable but time-limited events with antecedents and consequences that can be measured (eg hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes). There is, in other words, a focus on the epiphenomena not the phenomenon itself. Among the categories of risk related to the changing climate are: government regulation; research, development and innovation; litigious actions against environmental harm; reputational and branding effects; rising supply chain costs; and more frequent environmental disasters. However, while there are numerous articles in management journals that cover these areas, there are very few that focus empirically on climate change itself (Goodall 2008) and/or cross these diversities of risks bringing their place and time realities under a leadership approach/heading that current social movements suggest. The upshot is that in the climate change debate, leadership is the ‘dog that did not bark’ (O’Reilly et al 2015, 490), a silence attributed to the introspective, decontextualized, atomistic and ineffectual characteristics of contemporary leadership studies, leaving unchallenged and unaddressed a redefinition of leadership that matches the ‘goals, ambitions and destinies we foresee for ourselves’ (Hulme 2010: 298).

Climate change, as a wicked problem represents a tragedy of the commons, as economic development based on fossil fuel use has generated benefits in the developed nations at the expense of global environmental destruction (Wright and Nyberg 2019). For Grint (2010), wicked problems require leadership (whereas tame problems require management and critical problems require a command approach). Various commentators have pointed to the need for new forms of and approaches to leadership, including complex adaptive leadership, relational leadership involving different actors, the development of new leadership capabilities in overcoming the institutional barriers in dealing with climate change, and a new sensemaking approach to internal and external stakeholders. However, there is still no clear answer to the ‘what kind of leadership does a response to climate change need and how do we develop it?’ question. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that not only has this question not been answered, it has not even been asked, and leadership has been abandoned, the problem having been outsourced to the younger generation to sort out their own paths to the future.

This has been reinforced by the ghettoization of climate change research referred to by Goodall (2008), and is somewhat ironic given the efforts being made to bridge the theory/practice and rigour/relevance divides, as reflected in, for example, calls for a more engaged scholarship, a focus on evidence-based management, increased concern with the (practitioner) coproduction and impact of our research, and calls for breadth of perspective vs narrow data mining based on the analysis of practice involving reflective practitioners. None of this is new. However, the academy – and this applies with as much force to leadership studies as to any other domain – remains dominated by theory-driven research
rather than phenomenon-driven scholarship, the self-referential knowing more and more about less and less, excavating silos not building bridges. In the words of Robertson Davies, the Canadian novelist and academic, the academy is increasingly producing theologians not martyrs. It is against this background that we have developed this Call for Papers for a Special Issue of Leadership. We are interested in receiving agenda-setting papers addressing leadership and climate change from multiple perspectives and disciplines. This includes policy studies, political economy, economics, development studies, sociology, geosciences, engineering, philosophy, literary criticism (fiction, and SF in particular, as source material) as well as the usual suspects eg leadership studies, organisation theory and behaviour, technology and innovation management, ethics, sustainability studies, strategy, human resource management and entrepreneurship.

In terms of style of paper, we welcome conceptual papers, reviews, polemics, agenda setting pieces, critiques, empirical analyses, and applications of heroic and post-heroic leadership models to climate change. Papers adopting a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary perspective are particularly welcome.

Among the topics that could be addressed are, for example,

- How does the definition of ‘climate change’, and the ways it is construed and constructed across multiple discourses contribute to a particular idea of leadership? For example, how do climate scientists view their leadership role, as opposed to politicians, policy makers, civil servants, financiers, business people, artists, writers, and so on?
- What can we learn from work done on leadership for sustainability?
- Is the ‘leadership model’ broken and do we need a new model, understanding and role of leadership in dealing with climate change?
- How can leadership appeal to, address and lead people out of the ‘confusion and anxiety about the goals, ambitions and destinies [they] foresee for’ themselves?
- What, if any, contribution can ‘new leadership’ (servant, compassionate, relational, ethical, spiritual, altruistic) make to tackling climate change?
- What are the governance issues in climate change and how can they be addressed by effective and new forms of leadership?
- How do leaders develop and demonstrate legitimacy and authority, and to what extent is leadership authority in climate change claimed and/or ascribed?
- How do we decide, as individuals, organisations and society, what we value and how is this reflected in the leadership we have and aspire to?
- Who are the actors involved in climate change leadership – for example, inter/supranational organisations, governments (national, regional, local), NGOs, protest/activist movements, communities, grassroots activists, creative makers, private sector organisations (from MNC to SME), individuals – and how do they address climate change?
- What is the leadership process in the climate change protest movement eg Extinction Rebellion, The Time is Now, Sunrise Movement, Peoples’ Climate Movement, and what can leadership studies learn from the social movements and social innovation literatures?
- What is the political economy of leadership and climate change, as reflected in, for example, the distinction between reliance on neoliberal market mechanisms, corporate self-regulation and social enterprise solutions (‘caring liberalism’) on the one hand, and social change through fundamental and systemic social movements and campaigns focused on justice, equality and human rights?
- What are the distributive justice implications and leadership challenges of climate change internationally and intra-nationally; who are the winners and losers (eg climate change refugees and displaced persons)?
- What is the nature and role of climate change leadership in a post-truth fake news world, and how is legitimacy and authority ensured? (Leadership 2019)
- What is the scope for individual agency in seeing leadership as the decision to lead ourselves?
• How do we match the demand for effective leadership with its supply, and can we match the ‘who, how and why’ of the supply side of global climate change leadership with more analysis of followers and their views on leadership (Karlsson et al 2011)?
• What can we learn from current social, community and bottom up movements for climate change leadership, including the iconic role of individual ‘climate change warriors’ such as Greta Thunberg?
• How can such bottom-up leadership bridge the diversities of climate change risks, bringing together place and time realities as well as the multitude of transparent yet diffused stakeholders?
• What are the leadership implications of organisational responses to climate change, variously represented as:
  o The choice between business-as-usual, the green economy and climate mobilisation
  o The creation of new organisational landscapes and ways of organising
  o Managing climate change and its consequences, including exploitation of climate change as new opportunities (products, markets, services) are identified by ‘climate change entrepreneurs’ (Bruner et al 2018)
  o Minimising/reversing climate change eg by mitigation strategies, including carbon accounting, emissions trading, carbon capture, utilisation and storage
  o Building resilience, that is the ability (eg of an organization) to remain functioning, to build up and utilise resources, develop new and unusual ways of doing business?

Submission process

All papers for consideration for the Special Issue should be submitted via the Manuscript Submission link at http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/Leadership indicating that they are for the ‘Leadership and Climate Change’ special issue. Queries about the Special Issue should be directed to the Guest Editors at r.harrison@ed.ac.uk, Kathi.Kaesehage@ed.ac.uk, and C.Brace@exeter.ac.uk

Timeline

March 31st 2020 papers due
August 31 2020 reviews completed and decisions on manuscripts
November 30 2020 revised papers due
December 31 2020 second round decisions
February 28 2021 final papers due and final decisions
March 2021 papers submitted to journal production
August 2021 publication of Special Issue

References


Goodall A H (2008) Why have the leading journals in management (and other social sciences) failed to respond to climate change? *Journal of Management Inquiry* 17, 408-420


Virilio P (2012) *The administration of fear*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)