Research in Progress:

Progressive Leaders' Inner World:

How leaders perceive their environment and their roles.

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1. *Interviewing progressive leaders.*

Progressive business is understood as ecologically sustainable, future respecting, and prosocial enterprise. By ecologically sustainable we mean the physical and ecological Earth system that should be sustainable. Prosocial means that human beings live in a society and want to serve the enhancement of societies. In a principled way, it means that business activities should minimize their harm on nature and allow minimal harm to come to others. Finally, business activities should respect the freedom of future generations, and must serve the wellbeing of people. This view of business is more profound and committing than the triple bottom line concept of CSR, which often is understood as a voluntary option. With the term progressive business, we mean a more inherently progressive complete enterprise than merely tacking on CSR to traditional companies.

O'Higgins and Zsolnai (2018) present and analyze eleven "progressive" companies and found interesting commonalities between the different companies; one was the notion of frugality in the sense that you do not waste, but recycle. The other commonality was that "all the companies seemed to have an inspired leader or a leader who was like a missionary about what they were doing. Sometimes leadership moved into future generations of leaders. They might have had an original leader but then they got another leader who took over the reins with the same zeal." (see interview with O'Higgins http://www.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/eng/content/corvinuskioszk/progressive-business accessed May 28, 2019.)

The eleven companies (op.cit) presented and analyzed in O'Higgins and Zsolnai (op.cit) range from small single unit enterprises to large global multinationals. They also represent a variety of industries and countries: Triodos Bank (ethical and sustainable banking, The Netherlands/transnational), Béres Pharmaceuticals (preventive and natural medicine and organic wine making, Hungary), illycafé (artisan coffee production and distribution, Italy/international), DKV Integralia (inclusion of disabled people into society and the workplace, Spain), Sonnentor (organic food, Austria), Armor (printer accessories and cartridge recycling, France), Lumituuli (clean energy generation, Finland), John Lewis Partnership (co-operative model governance in retailing, UK), Novo Nordisk (human centered pharmaceuticals, Denmark/international), Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group (responsible hospitality, Norway/international), and Unilever (consumer goods, UK/Netherlands/global).

Our main idea is to select progressive leaders – not necessarily the same as those who were interviewed and link the interviews to the "*Progressive Business Models: Creating Sustainable and Pro-Social Enterprise.*" (O'Higgins and Zsolnai 2018). The overall purpose will be to understand how progressive leaders or virtue in business

work in practice, through their mental models, narratives and actions. This is important under the counter virtue pressures exerted by the mainstream business system. This requires some in-depth understanding of how such leaders conceive of and construct their world. Thus, we select the leaders own narratives centered on defining moments in their lives combined with the repertory grid as important methodologies.

2. *Why using a combined strategy of narratives and role rep*

The narrative approach is broader than the Role repertory grid. First and foremost a narrative approach may take the impact of different eras in recent history into account. As Bennis & Thomas in their book *Geeks and Geezers. How Era, Values and Defining Moments Shape Leaders* (2002) express, leaders transformational experiences as well as different eras are very influential in the lives of outstanding leaders. For instance, for people who have survived wars, the war experience is a crucible and will be central for the rest of their lives. David Gergen (in Bennis & Thomas, op.cit. pp xxiv) write: "Time and again,….leaders both young and old have emerged as they have faced tough – even harrowing – challenges, stiffened, adapted, and eventually have come through on the other end". It might be the death of a beloved child, years in prison, enduring years of prejudices against women executives, racial prejudice etc. Often leaders have engrossing stories and demonstrates that if a person not only can survive, bet create positive meaning out of a crucible experience, she or he can develop into an outstanding leader. The challenge is to embark on a journey, 'conquer their dragon" and return in a transformed state (Gergen op.cit pp xxiv).

Gergen also argues that there might be a striking difference between men and women in the sense that many women do not get the same opportunity to discover their leadership skills as men. One of the challenges is to provide woman with greater educational opportunities so that they can find their crucible. It is also interesting to ask, when most people in the Western world have not experienced a war like World War I and World War II, what if anything has taken its place as a crucible? And what can be done to provide inspiring opportunities for the potential leaders of the new generations?

We do find in Bennis & Thomas (2002 pp199-201)) a well-designed interview form to explore the leader's mindset. First, we may ask the leader to look for major turning points and defining moments in her/his lifetime. What are those defining moments? Why were they chosen and what role failure has played in her/his life? The last question in the first section is: "Do you feel lucky?"

In the next section there are different questions about how to describe yourself as a leader and your leadership style, and possible changes in your leadership style, if you are a good follower, and whom you admire. The third section is related to success. How do you define success? How did you define it at an age of 30, and would define it when you are 70? Following up with the question: What makes you happy? In section four the questions are about meaning, and what matter to you most in your life right now, and how would you allocate between the different tasks/things/matters? Furthermore, when you are in a crisis, where do you go to get advice? What differences do you see between your generation and your children's generation, and

your parents' generation? What do you want to leave as a legacy? Do you feel your work and nonwork are in balance?

Repertory grid methodology have been used in a multitude of management contexts (cf Stabell 1978). We believe that the repertory grid "tool" based upon the clinical work of Kelly (1955, 1963) is a fruitful methodology that might be used to elicit the conceptual maps of progressive leaders.   The research group has used repertory grid in different settings. O'Higgins (2002) used repertory grid (also labelled 'Role Repertoire test') in an in-depth study of 26 prominent non-executive directors and chairmen in Ireland. A number of interesting results were generated through the study. Ims (1987) applied the repertory grid to study managers in the electricity sector in Norway, focusing on their information source use and the managers personal constructs of their different information sources. At the outset we explain our approach as a combination of using the repertory grid as a nomothetic and an ideographic technique.

Easterby-Smith et al (1996, p.6) suggest that the benefits of the role rep methodology can be listed as six pro-arguments:

1) The participant can explore his own world her/himself. This world is not a model given by an expert – and the exploration can be stimulated by a non-psychologist.

2) The participant can write down a perception of relations that are unclear and often implicit.

3) The visual representation of perceptions will give a focus in the analysis, which will allow communication of the perceptions.

4) One may verbalize constructs that otherwise will be hidden.

5) By developing a "grid", that is a cognitive map of a selected domain of the participant's inner world, one may explore domains that the participant has not been aware of. As Polanyi (1958) writes, we know more than we can tell, and the tacit knowledge represents a resource to be reflected upon.

6) This can – on a personal and professional level be a creative and effective way to develop better self-insight.

3.   *Instrument development.*

The "Role Rep" instrument to be used has been developed and explored by the research group. We have discussed how to sample the participants, how to obtain commitment amongst the participants, and how to apply the "Role Rep" instrument. Based upon several meetings the development and elaboration of roles were done, and the instrument was applied on a third leader (July 2019). The leader is anonymized as H and she/he was committed to reflect upon the interview and the interview process. Furthermore, successively a fourth and fifth version have been developed.

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