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POST PANDEMIC LEADERSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA: RESPONDING TO WICKED PROBLEMS USING ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

LIDERAZGO POSTPANDEMIA EN AMÉRICA LATINA: RESPONDIENDO A PROBLEMAS COMPLEJOS UTILIZANDO EL LIDERAZGO ADAPTATIVO EN CONTEXTOS ORGANIZACIONALES

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Jeffrey L. McClellan
Frostburg State University, EEUU
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2032-1720
jlmcclellan@frostburg.edu

Abstract

This paper examines the leadership approach to the pandemic in Latin America based on the traditional cultural approach to leadership in this region. Using the framework of challenges proposed by Grint (2020), a response to Covid is recommended based on its categorization as a wicked, as opposed to a tame or critical, problem. Using a framework of adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994) and advanced change theory (Quinn, 2000), Ricardo Semler's transformation of Semco is explored as an example of an alternative approach to leadership to address wicked problems in Latin America.

Keywords: Leadership; Latin America; Change; Pandemic Leadership.

Resumen

Este documento examina el enfoque de liderazgo frente a la pandemia en América Latina con base en el enfoque cultural tradicional del liderazgo en esta región. Usando el marco de desafíos propuesto por Grint (2020), se recomienda una respuesta a Covid basada en su categorización como un problema complejo, en lugar de manso o crítico. Usando un marco de liderazgo adaptativo (Heifetz, 1994) y la teoría avanzada del cambio (Quinn, 2000), se explora la transformación de Semco de Ricardo Semler como un ejemplo de un enfoque alternativo al liderazgo para abordar problemas complejos en América Latina.

Palabras claves: Liderazgo; América latina; Cambio; Liderazgo en pandemia.

1. Introduction

In early 2020, a virus that appears to have emerged in a single city in China swept the globe and left a devastating wake of economic, social, psychological, educational, political, and health issues. While some progress appears to have been made in responding to the virus, its wake will likely take years to address. Like much of the world, Latin America has been dealt a significant blow, economically and socially. In November 2020, Cottani (2020) explained that the economy of Latin America, as a region, will "contract by an estimated 8.1 percent this year [2020], according to the International Monetary Fund's latest forecast. And while recovery is expected next year, its extent is likely to be limited, leaving economic output well below the pre-covid level by the end of 2021" (p. 1). Countries in Latin America are also among the hardest hit by the virus, in terms of both numbers and death rates (Taft-Morales, 2020). Social and political unrest also appear to be increasing as a result of the virus (Taft-Morales, 2020). The full impact on overall wellbeing as it relates to things like education and other social issues is still unknown.

Unfortunately, much of the blame for the current situation is being directed towards the virus itself. Many lay the problems that we face at the feet of this non-conscious entity that is simply doing what it is designed to do as efficiently and effectively as it can. The nature of the virus is to spread. The issue is not that the virus is spreading, it is how people are responding to that spread that makes the difference between success and failure. An honest examination of the contribution system for the current situation suggests that it is not the virus alone that has contributed most to our downfall. Instead, and despite the lethality of the virus, it is the decisions of leaders and of the followers of these leaders that have shaped national and organizational responses and contributed most to the creation of the current situation. As Grint (2020) suggested, Covid-19 has proven to be a test for "all societies and their leadership" and the way they think about what it means to be a leader (p. 314). Sadly, most societies, including those of Latin America, have largely failed this test and will be dealing with the consequences of that failure for some time. Having said this, to rise from the ashes of the poor political and organizational leadership decision making that has occurred and to avoid making similar mistakes in the future, requires an examination of the paradigms and practices that guided political leadership decision making in Latin America prior to and during the pandemic. In addition, there must also be an examination, acceptance and application of alternative paradigms and practices more ideally suited to the challenges the region faces at the organizational level.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that the challenges that this paper is addressing are not unique to Latin America. Much of what is covered here is applicable to business leadership throughout the world. Furthermore, nothing in this paper is intended to suggest that there are any simple solutions to the issues addressed here, including what is proposed in this paper. Nonetheless, solutions must be sought for these problems and this paper attempts to provide insight and understanding regarding how this might occur.

2. Historical Paradigms and Practice in Latin America

In relation to the historic paradigms and practices of leadership within the Latin American cultural context, numerous studies have been published that provide important insights regarding the leadership culture of the region (Behrens, 2010; Castano et al., 2013; Irving & McIntosh, 2010; Kryzanek, 1992; Littrell et al., 2009; Osland et al., 2007; Romero, 2004). While some of these studies have focused on the business leadership culture of the region, most of the literature on leadership has focused on the political leadership culture of the region. Indeed, the literature suggests that the concept of leadership is generally considered to relate most to political leadership within the region (McIntosh, 2011). Historically, however, leadership across sectors has often overlapped as political leaders were often also the economic leaders and tended to manifest similar approaches to leadership across both sectors (Hurtado, 1985).

Culturally, leadership in Latin America tends to be high in power distance and characterized by significantly hierarchical social stratification (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). Positions of power are pursued by leaders to increase personal influence and authority within society (McIntosh & Irving, 2010; Stephens & Greer, 1995). The need to expand one's influence, appears to be rooted in a cultural dependency on ingroup social networks as a means of survival (House et al., 2004). Control of such groups through positional authority facilitates social ascendence and success (Dealy, 1992). These cultural elements tend to foster a person-centered approach to leadership characterized as personalismo (Behrens, 2009; Bordas, 2013; Bown & McClellan, 2017), which is common in "countries where institutions such as bureaucracies, political parties, pressure groups, legislatures, and the like are poorly developed" (Neher, 1996).

Another core cultural value is leisure. This value appears to be rooted in a belief precolonial assumption that manual labor is "inappropriate" for positional leaders and represents an underlying force that has shaped the leadership culture of the region (Dealy, 1992).

These cultural tendencies appear to promote a focus on local interests (McIntosh, 2011), building political alliances, seeking access to financial resources (McIntosh & Irving, 2010), reciprocal sharing of political privileges with one's ingroup (which often leads to corruption), and self-protective leadership characterized by strong demonstrations of strength and power combined with stifling resistance (Hidalgo, 2012). The result is a tendency for Latin American leadership to be characterized as a "strong man" form of leadership such as that exhibited by caciques, caudillos, and patrons (Coleman, 2006; Kryzanek, 1992; Romero, 2004).

It is worth mentioning, however, that the collectivist values and the paternalistic nature of leadership within the region tends to temper these tendencies to some extent and in some cases (Bordas, 2013; Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). Latin American leadership has generally been seen to possess an element of paternalistic, reciprocity-based concern for followers' needs resulting in a highly person-centered approach to followership (Behrens, 2010; Bordas, 2013; Dorfman et al., 1997; Martz, Fall 1983; McIntosh & Irving, 2010; Osland et al., 2007). An important element of this highly relational culture, is the concept of simpatia (Bordas, 2013). Triandis et al. (1984) explained that Simpatia refers to a leader's ability to engage others in a way that causes him or her to "perceived as likeable, attractive, fun to be with, and easygoing" (p. 1363). Furthermore, they demonstrate a sense of social "conformity and an ability to share in other's feelings" (p. 1363). In addition, they tend to behave

"with dignity and respect toward others, and . . . strive for harmony in interpersonal relations" (p.1363). These cultural tendencies cause many to avoid interpersonal conflict and emphasize the positive in positive situations and deemphasize the negative in negative situations (Triandis et al., 1984, p. 1363). Thus, these relational, collectivist, paternal practices are a cultural counterweight to the more power-distant aspects of leadership in Latin America.

Additional cultural characteristics include an emphasis on charismatic influence (Behrens, 2010; House et al., 2004; McIntosh, 2011) rooted in values the precolonial cultural values of dignity and grandeur (Dealy, 1992). This emphasis on charismatic influence is likely partially responsible for the tendency towards populist leadership (De la Torre, 2007; Paz & Cepeda, 2010). Latin American charisma is shaped, to some extent, by the concept of machismo and its roots in the underlying value of manliness (Dealy, 1992) and an underlying cultural value for craftiness and deception that often results in dishonesty and corruption (Dealy, 1992; McIntosh, 2011). Together, these characteristics foster a charisma culture based on authority that is rooted in power and a strong social presence (Cabane, 2012).

The research has also suggested that traditional approaches to Latin American leadership may be characterized as less planning and team oriented and less participative, and more conflict avoidant (Dorfman et al., 1997; Romero, 2004; Stephens & Greer, 1995). The Globe study, conducted by House et al. (2004), found that within Latin America, leadership practice is characterized by high levels of power-distance and in-group collectivism with low gender egalitarianism and performance orientation. There is also evidence of a higher-than-average emphasis on charismatic and self-protective leadership. However, significant evidence also exists to suggest that these paradigms are changing as the values in relation to leadership seem to be moving towards higher performance orientation and gender egalitarianism and lower power distance as well as higher participative and team oriented leadership (House et al., 2004).

These traditional paradigms and practices of leadership suggest a tendency for leaders to approach situations such as the pandemic with an autocratic and authoritarian approach to decision-making characterized by a paternalistic approach to leadership. This approach is likely motivated by face-saving, self-protective concerns that emphasize concern for the leader's positional power and in-group needs. This response is consistent with the commander approach that Grint (2020) suggests is appropriate for dealing with what he calls critical problems. Unfortunately, it is not well suited to problems like a global pandemic, poverty, social injustice, or any of the myriad of challenges Latin America faces today.

3. Types of Problems and Leadership

It is no secret that different situations call for different approaches to leadership. Ever since the early trait and style research studies failed to find a single set of traits or a single style that predicted effective leadership in all situations, researchers have recognized that leadership is situational (Ayman, 2004; Lussier & Achua, 2007; Northouse, 2019). In his work on adaptive leadership, Heifetz (1994) suggested that the nature of the problems one faces partially determines the approach to leadership that should be taken. He postulated that leaders face two types of challenges: adaptive and technical problems.

According to Heifetz (1994), technical problems are based on recurring issues that are well known and understood, as a result, they can be resolved using already

existing knowledge, processes, and responses. In contrast, adaptive challenges are more complex, systemic, and not well understood. Consequently, the knowledge that leaders need, the responses that are required, and the processes that must be employed to address these issues do not exist when the problems arise. As a result, dependency on the "application of current technical know-how or routine behavior" is more likely to exacerbate the problem than to solve it (p. 35). This is evident in the unintended economic, social, political, and educational consequences unleashed because of the initial quarantine responses of leaders to the pandemic.

Grint (2020) offered a more expansive model for thinking about challenges by suggesting that there are actually three types of problems and three corresponding responses. The first type of problem is tame problems, those that occur on a regular basis and for which standard, well-worn and effective responses already exist. He argues that these require only "management" responses. Critical problems, or crises, are challenges that arise that are expected and understood, with set solutions, and require serious, urgent, and timely responses. According to Grint (2020), traditional crisis leadership approaches of acting based on prepared responses using commanding leadership are essential in these situations. Thus, the traditional Latin American approach to leadership, which mirrors this commanding style, is relevant and potentially effective in these situations.

In contrast to these tame and critical problems, are what Grint (2020) terms wicked problems. He argues that these challenges are ones that "are complex" and "may not be solvable." Nonetheless, they "might be ameliorated with a collective response" characterized by collaborative efforts, systemic thinking, and active experimentation on the part of the collective community. This is the kind of challenge that covid-19 presented to leaders across the globe. In addition, the generally paternalistic, and authoritarian managerial and commanding responses to this wicked problem largely failed to address the virus and, as suggested previously, only created more problems. Grint (2020) argued that this is because authoritative leadership or managerial practices cannot address these kinds of issues. What is needed is leadership. To be more specific, the kind of leadership that Heifetz (1994) referred to as adaptive leadership.

This approach suggests that the work of responding must be given back to the people who need to make the affective, cognitive, and behavioral changes necessary to respond to the problem because these changes must occur in their paradigms and practices. Thus, followers must be enlisted to participate in and take ownership of the responses. This means that, according to Heifetz (1994), leaders must, first, recognize "the adaptive challenge" or "wicked" problem. Then they must "focus attention on the specific issues created by" the problem to help people see the need for change. In doing so, they must also transition from an authority-based approach to a more facilitative leadership approach (p. 99) by inviting others to accept responsibility for taking part in the change and then supporting them in making changes.

Heifetz (1994) recognized that this lack of an authoritative response can lead to distress as people often expect leaders to make decisions for them, especially in high power-distance cultures. Nonetheless, he argued that authoritative responses do not promote the fundamental transformation needed nor do they honor the complexities of the system in which change is being made. Therefore, adaptive leaders must regulate the distress levels people experience (too much and they become overwhelmed, too little and they do not see the need for change) while bringing attention to the need for change and the lack of set answers, and inviting participation in the change process (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

As followers come to the table, the leader must then facilitate the process of solution finding by involving people in dialogue about the need for change and the changes that need to be made based on an understanding of the big picture and through engaging in the work of building relationships, managing attention, providing information, managing conflict, and facilitating decision-making and action (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). To do this, people must be willing to either set aside private agendas and political preferences or at least surface these and take them into consideration, and leaders must model the way by encouraging others through their actions and the stories they tell. This requires seeking and sharing accurate information without bias to facilitate the process and avoid groupthink.

Clearly, the current challenges that leaders face in Latin America, and throughout the globe, are of all three types: tame, critical, and wicked. Consequently, all three approaches to leadership are needed. Unfortunately, the commander approach that works well for critical issues appears to represent the traditional approach in Latin America that is used, by default, to address most problems. Effective management and adaptive leadership are needed. Effective management is simpler. There are multiple models for its application throughout Latin America. Adaptive leadership is more challenging, and yet, problems like Covid-19 highlight the need for a greater application of this leadership approach.

As is evident, however, adaptive leadership sharply contrasts with the traditional approach to leadership in Latin America. Likewise, it does not align with follower expectations of how leaders will solve problems for them. Thus, the distress level of such leaders and their followers is likely to be high. Leaders who strive to take the approach advocated for by Grint (2020) and Heifetz (1994) may find themselves rejected based on the incongruence between their approach and the culturally accepted norms for leader-follower relationships, which in Latin America tend to be characterized by paternalism, disloyal opposition, weak political structures, and revolutionary tendencies. What is likely needed is an approach to leadership that incorporates both traditional approaches and more adaptive responses.

4. Combining Approaches

An example of this middle path can be found in the work of Ricardo Semler (Semler, 1993). Semler inherited the family business, Semco, from his father in Brazil. He also inherited a very traditional approach to leadership. However, health problems and other issues led him to a realization that a change needed to occur in his business. As a result, he developed a vision of a highly adaptive, democratic workplace that gave not only the work back to the people but also, ultimately, removed himself as the head of the organization. Interestingly, his approach to implementing these changes was anything but democratic, at least at first. He began by firing his leadership team because they would not support the changes. He then began imposing changes on the workforce in a very authoritarian way. As these changes took hold, the process of change transitioned to a more democratic approach. The result was the creation of what is, perhaps, one of the most democratic organizational cultures in the world. He then used the same approach in a government position to which he was appointed.

Semler used a very traditional, Latin American approach to implement a democratic structure and culture that resulted in his being able to, ultimately, lead in a way that was more consistent with the adaptive leadership model. Latin America may require a similar approach, using more traditional leadership approaches to implement adaptive leadership processes.

The need to apply more effective, adaptive leadership approaches to the "wicked" problems of modern society suggests a need for change in the paradigms and processes of political leadership in Latin America. Fortunately, there is evidence that such changes are desired and occurring because of the introduction of new ways of thinking about leadership and new approaches to leadership (Hidalgo, 2012; Romero, 2004). These changes are evidenced by the shift in leadership values suggested by the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). As mentioned previously, these include a transition towards higher performance orientation and gender egalitarianism and lower power distance as well as higher participative and team-oriented leadership. It will be interesting to see how these have evolved in the second GLOBE study, which is now in the works.

All of these culture shifts are more aligned with adaptive leadership practices, and are, at least in part, likely a result of the increasing involvement of women and other traditionally excluded social groups as leaders in Latin America (Bown & McClellan, 2017; Jalalzai, 2016; Muller & Rowell, 1997; Osland et al., 1998). Indeed, it may be more than coincidence that women leaders are at the head of some of the countries that have best handled the covid-19 problem. With the changes that are occurring, the cultural context of Latin America may be in the early stages of ripening for the kind of changes that are needed. Nonetheless, culture change occurs slowly and the traditional leader and follower approaches take time to change as well (Schein, 1992). However, as the example of Semler and other similar culture changes suggest, this may be best achieved by leaders who take a more authoritative approach to the effort to initiate change but then use a more adaptive methods to facilitate the actual change.

This is viable if one views the need for change in leadership culture as a critical problem or crisis, one that merits urgency and uses established methods for addressing the problem. Leaders can then use the traditional approach to leadership to enact an adaptive leadership process to facilitate the change and create a more adaptive leadership culture. This would likely involve authoritative decision-making regarding the need for change and the implementation of change, combined with clear communication that the process of adaptive leadership represents a well-established method to facilitate that change. In the process of doing so, they could then shift their own approach to leadership, as Semler did, as the culture ripens for such changes. Quinn (2000) described a process for leading change that is consistent with this approach.

Quinn (2000) called his approach Advanced Change Theory (ADT). It begins with the leader capturing a vision of the potential for change that can only emerge in and through productive community. Quinn defines productive community as "an envisioned set of relationships that are synergistic in which the collective good and the individual good are one" (Loc 3055-3056); or, in other words, a group that is working together in accordance with the principles of adaptive leadership.

Once the leader captures a vision of what can be achieved through productive community, he or she must look within to establish a way of being that is consistent with the kind of leadership that is needed to facilitate adaptive leadership work. Quinn (2004) described this way of being as purpose centered, other focused, internally directed, and externally open. What this means is that the leader must commit to the change at a personal level and then clarify and commit to a clear sense of purpose and vision that takes into account the collective needs and desires of all stakeholders while ensuring that the process is values based and open to feedback and adaptation. This ensures that the leader will be able to make the transition to adaptive leadership as the system becomes more accepting of such an approach.

In order to ensure that the commitment to change is real, the leader then focuses

on recognizing the gaps between his or her desired way of being and acting and his or her actual way of being and acting and strives to close these gaps (Quinn, 2000). In the approach suggested here, this transition takes place slowly and publicly as a symbol for the change that is taking place in the broader community. This process can elicit fear for the leader as his or her hypocrisy is revealed and the community must embrace the realization that while the path to change may be clear (the adaptive leadership approach), there is little clarity about how it will evolve and what the ultimate outcome will be. This fear, as Heifetz (1994) explained, must be maintained within a stable holding environment to move the process forward. This requires balancing conflict with psychological safety (Schein, 1992). According to Quinn (2000) the leader must strive to align follower goals with those of the goals of the group, consistent with the model of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and embody the collective vision in the story he both tells and enacts through his or her own behavior, as suggested by Kouzes and Posner (2012) and Gardner and Laskin (1995). Having done so, the leader is ready to begin to disturb the system.

The idea of disturbing the system emerges from the theoretical realm of complex adaptive systems (Quinn, 2000). These systems are unpredictable and chaotic and function as "living" organisms that have the ability to self-organize and generate creative responses through initiative, communication, feedback, and relational interaction (McClellan, 2011). They are characterized by adaptive wicked problems and can, therefore, only be engaged with through adaptive leadership processes that involve disturbing the system. In his book, Quinn (2000) specifically states that leaders need to use the adaptive leadership process of Heifetz to engage in the kind of disturbing of the system that this step requires. As they do so, leaders need to influence others with moral power as opposed to legitimate authority. This means ensuring that the leader maintains his or her commitment to the transformation by managing his or her way of being, thinking, and acting so as to align these with the adaptive leadership process that is being pursued. This can be achieved by taking the following actions based on the research reviewed here.

To begin with, leaders need to recognize the problem as a wicked problem and an adaptive challenge. This means realizing that no known solutions exist and that responses will require comprehensive, systemic understanding of the problem and deep cultural change in relation to the solution. Nonetheless, they will need to act in a strong decisive way, consistent with the cultural paradigms of leadership in Latin America, to galvanize support. In doing so, they will need to organize in ways that allow for adaptive leadership approaches that promote cultural change.

Early in the process, leaders will need to do what Heifetz (1994) calls "getting on the balcony". When an adaptive or wicked problem arises, it is important to get a systemic perspective of the challenges. At the outset of the pandemic many leaders organized Covid response teams. However, these teams were often, at the national level, either made up nearly entirely of politicians and health professionals. Unfortunately, such limited disciplinary teams were incapable of providing the necessary broader insights regarding social, political, economic, educational, and cultural implications of issues such as those created by Covid and, therefore, unable to provide comprehensive systemic solutions that avoid the unintended consequences that the narrowly considered responses often created. An interdisciplinary team is needed to provide the kind of perspective and recommendations that are needed to address complex, multifaceted wicked problems. It is also important that such teams be as non-partisan as possible to elicit trust across the political spectrum of the society.

Unfortunately, this was not the approach taken by most political leaders. As a

result, business leaders were dependent upon information that was largely derived from these myopic bodies to guide their own responses. In the absence of such guiding teams at the political level, organizations may have been better off had they created their own response teams that took guidance not only from these political bodies, but also looked to other sources for more interdisciplinary information on how to respond to the situation.

In addition to broadening the sources from which they glean information, these internal response teams would be wise to establish a set of guiding principles to shape and direct their work, resembling how Semco reorganized their work to embody the principles of democratic participation. The kind of principles needed to facilitate the type of deep change suggested here are embodied in the literature reviewed previously. They include those reflected in the fundamental state of leadership outlined by Quinn and Spreitzer (2006): be purpose centered, clearly articulate the purpose that is being pursued and stay true to that purpose while avoiding partisan goals and ends; be internally driven, establish guiding principles and values and examine and align processes and actions with these values; be other focused, identify and respond to the challenges, needs, and desires of the people broadly; be externally open, and be humble and open to feedback and information even when it goes against one's own perceptual biases. This means communicating the principles widely and seeking feedback to ensure that the work of group is consistent with these principles. As part of this effort, leaders should work to expand a coalition of support, sway the middle, and make sure to include the opposition by readily accepting their feedback without bringing excessive attention to it (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The team should regularly reestablish its commitment to its guiding principles and examine its processes to ensure alignment.

Having established guiding principles, the team needs to share significant and valid information widely that allows people to understand the nature and complexities of the problem that is being faced. Currently, most people in Latin America are acquiring their information via the internet and social media (Salzman, 2015). In general, such information is suspect as it is generally highly biased and occurs within networks that facilitate confirmation bias and create echo chambers, in which people's often unfounded political biases are simply reinforced due to a lack of diversity and dialogue (Modgil et al., 2021). At the same time, they should ensure that information that increases the stress on individuals is balanced with information and efforts that provide a sense of psychological safety and support that effectively manages the symbolic holding container within the organizational environment.

The team should then organize and lead change at the local level within the organization. Consistent with the principles of adaptive leadership and advanced change theory, the people who are making the change need to be involved in the effort to bring about the change. As Heifetz (1994) explains, there is a need to "get to the balcony" in order to gain perspective, but changes need to be made "on the dance floor" where the action is taking place. This means identifying lower level and informal leaders of influence within the organization and helping them organize action learning groups armed with information that allows them to propose strategies and take action at their level in collaboration with coworkers to address the issues that arise throughout the organization. Communication between these local elements and the organizations primary response team should be managed carefully to ensure accurate and honest feedback, collaboration across the organization, and alignment with the principles that guide the effort. Given the cultural tendencies of Latin America, it is likely that strong, personalistic, charismatic leadership will be needed to

organize these teams and to communicate the purpose and principles in the process of initiating these teams. This approach will then give way to more principle centered leadership as the teams move forward.

Conclusion

If this sounds like an idealistic and significant challenge, it is. This paper is not meant to suggest that the challenge of achieving the kind of change that is being proposed is small in any way. There is evidence that societal culture changes do not happen quickly or without issues (Neher, 1996). Indeed, the need to change the way we approach political leadership in the face of the wicked challenges that we are encountering is, itself, a wicked challenge. Nonetheless, the global pandemic we have experienced has revealed to us, even more than before, the limitations that the traditional approaches to political leadership in Latin America possess. This is a wicked problem. Fortunately, this problem is also a crisis, in that models of leadership do exist and processes for facilitating change have been provided to meet this challenge. Progress is possible and the potential benefits merit the effort. Leaders can use the traditional, culturally accepted approaches to leadership to initiate these processes and begin to facilitate the kind of transformation that is needed. Using the adaptive leadership process and the ACT model for change, leaders can bring about changes like those Ricardo Semler achieved at Semco. These will likely have to be adapted to meet the unique cultural contexts in which they are applied. Nonetheless, they represent a solid foundation for bringing about change. It also merits reiteration that these challenges are not unique to Latin America. They are global issues, but each cultural context will have to face them in their own way. The approach outlined in this paper is based on the cultural context of Latin America, but may be adaptable to other contexts. Ultimately, however, whether leaders and followers in Latin America, and throughout the world, are ready for these changes, can only be determined as these changes are pursued.

Conflict of interest

The authors of this manuscript state that there are no conflicts of interest with any entity or institution, or of a personal nature in this publication.

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