Ready for a Perfect Storm: Leadership, Dialogue and Trust in a Time of Disconnection

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Abstract: Since the 1980s, intercultural dialogue has become increasingly valued for its contribution to reducing prejudice, improving relationships, increasing intercultural understanding, managing difference and diversity, and contributing to democratic processes. Research has helped us understand, from lived experience and perspectives how intercultural dialogue contributes to meaningful and culturally appropriate societal engagement within diverse communities. But theories of dialogue have been largely on the back foot when applied to models of governance and work on leadership. Anxiety about the adequacy of leadership in our confusing, fragmenting, and fast-changing times appears on the increase. A *better* leadership requires new thinking about governance, new approaches perhaps that are refocused on the potentials and realities in our complex world, and on delivering positive changes to that world. This does suggest that we search for new understandings, and new arrangements for governance, and ones that might not resemble models with which we are currently familiar.

The new ideas in this paper reflect governance that adapts to change, focus on behaviours, models, and cultures of leadership, and amplify the importance of dialogue approaches to key governance relationships. The paper looks critically at how dialogue can both succeed and fail in reinforcing both social capital, generally, and key relations between the governing and the governed. We explore whether the most significant resistance to progress is entirely social (referencing solidarity, shared values, and a sense of belonging) or whether the resistance is from structural conditions (deprivation, inequality, discrimination). In addition to drawing new conclusions from the literature as well as fresh experience from diverse global contexts and new forms of conflict, about the conditions in which dialogue prospers or fails, we highlight where new empirical studies might add to our overall understanding. We look at where both social movements and incidental conver-

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sations might create new contexts for dialogue and for supporting the trusted relationships so important for inclusive leadership and positive governance and what this means for actions and policies.

Keywords: Leadership, Governance, Multi-dimensional Trust, Post-conflict Contexts, Social Capital , Social Movements

Connections Matter

There are few concepts in recent times that have sponsored more heated discussion and debate, within the academy as well as within contestations in public policy, than intercultural dialogue, the process of exchanging ideas, values, and perspectives between people from different cultural backgrounds, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. (Mansouri 2015; Hage 2012, Zapata-Barrero 2015; UNESCO 2013). This is a live and evolving terrain; the discussions have not remained static. There has been a significant transition, globally, in both current academic work and in policy frameworks from a discourse focusing on equality and multi- or interculturalism, towards worries about fragmentation and cultural compatibilities, or living with difference (Marshall 2018). Over the past thirty or so years, this shift has been strongly associated with the increased movement of people, notably migrants, reflecting the seemingly inexorable increase in local conflicts, challenges of climate change and personal decisions and actions seeking to create and pursue economic and other opportunities. In Europe, a politically charged and increasingly toxic public discourse about immigration has moved from an agenda about skills and status to one of legality and cultural compatibilities (Crawley et al. 2018). The response to these questions has remained grounded in primarily Western discourses of assimilation, with dialogic practices and diversity management approaches being critiqued for promoting marginalisation and difference, failing to recognise the potential of this super diversity (Zapata-Barerro 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019; Vertovec, 2007). Diverse and complex communities will not go away, and these will continue to present challenges for relationships and for living together peacefully and positively. The migrations of so many people have heightened concern within academic and policy studies about minority populations and about both the nurturing and the sustainability of cohesive and coherent communities. Intercultural dialogue has continued to be valued for its contribution to reducing prejudice, improving relationships, increasing intercultural understanding, managing difference and diversity, and contributing to democratic processes. Research has helped us understand, from lived experience and perspectives, how intercultural dialogue contributes to meaningful and culturally appropriate societal engagement within diverse communities (Hardy and Hussain 2017). But, we argue, research and experience of such dialogue, including discussion of the essential 3Ps of dialogue – process, positionality, and product – has not taken the opportunity to

draw in and work on governance and leadership. Whereas dialogue has often been presented as a tool, governance and leadership emphasise interventions, the way we organise relationships and encourage, inspire, and frame positive outcomes from those relationships (Hardy 2022). So, the system of rules, institutions, and processes that governs the actions of individuals and organisations within a society and a leadership that can inspire and guide others towards common goals are indispensable elements for securing positive outcomes from dialogue.

This also adds the question that if research into dialogue has not taken the interventions and institutional context of governance and leadership as critical influencers, does it fall short when seeking to deliver positive outcomes? This is a time, after all, when the interconnections and interdependencies appear to demand that we organise our encounters and exchanges in very different ways. It may be that dialogue between individuals, organisations, nation states and even globally, is in an interregnum between an old regime (that is struggling) and a new one that is yet to be born, but it feels more that the power of Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of the *eternal return of the same* is being reasserted (Ross 2019).

This paper, then, is an important, though preliminary, look at why work and understanding of dialogue and that of leadership might valuably be brought closer together. In essence, we propose, this is most likely to succeed through the lens of governance – the processes that societies and communities adopt to manage both the relationships and the consequences of the relationships that dialogue enables and reinforces. En route, we look at trust, the belief or confidence that individuals or groups have in each other or in institutions, which is crucial for building relationships, cooperation, and social cohesion. Trust, in our view, provides the foundation for legitimacy, accountability, and social cohesion (Charron & Rothstein 2018). In turn, good governance practices can help build and maintain trust by promoting transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. According to the United Nations Development Programme, 'trust is a critical ingredient for effective governance, as it enables citizens to hold decision-makers accountable and creates an enabling environment for sustainable development' (UNDP 2018).

Moreover, trust can be built and sustained through meaningful dialogue and engagement, as it helps to build relationships and foster mutual understanding among stakeholders. For instance, a study by the International Institute for Sustainable Development found that 'dialogue and engagement can help build trust between stakeholders, leading to more effective decision-making and improved outcomes' (IISD 2020).

This is not new thinking; both the academy and practice point to the interdependency of intercultural dialogue, governance, and trust, suggesting that trust within

and between co-existing communities of difference can ensure the delivery of positive outcomes even where disagreement, hostilities, or just basic misunderstanding prevails at different levels of society (Kymlicka 1995). Dialogue, governance, and trust, then, are closely intertwined concepts that play an essential role in shaping the way societies function. This interrelationship is complex and dynamic. Dialogue can promote trust and improve governance by facilitating communication and participation among stakeholders, including citizens, policymakers, civil society organisations, and other actors. According to a study by the World Bank, 'dialogue and participation can help build trust between citizens and government, enabling better decision-making, reducing the potential for conflict, and promoting sustainable development' (World Bank 2017).

Context Matters

Alongside the migration flows of the recent past, has been the consolidation of a new increasingly interconnected and interdependent world offering countless opportunities, most particularly for young people – opportunity for encounter, for exchange, and for engagement, to meet with each other, to travel, exchange ideas, and discover other cultures and backgrounds. But this reality has not meant there is more understanding, nor more mobilising of the positives of encounter and exchange. Societies and cities are increasingly diverse, but experience shows how prejudice, misunderstanding, violent extremism, and social fragmentation remains widespread (Hardy and Hussain 2017). This raises new questions, questions about the meaning of 'progress', about the foundations for peace and sustainability, for interculturalism and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Most fundamental are the questions as to how societies can be supported in building a true and lasting rapprochement of cultures (UNESCO 2016).

In this context, sustainability and the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, are not a matter for governments alone, but for all segments of society, including universities, civil society, and the private sector; a whole-of-society frame. Sustainability has deeper roots than financial and economic assets. It is about promoting trust in relationships, however strained they may be, respecting cultural diversity, fostering equal opportunities, and allowing the reading of these efforts through diverse lenses, the essence of learning to live together. It is about building on the experience of the past for a better future. It is about adapting to local needs and contexts. This requires attention to governance and to some of the characteristics of twenty-first century governance at that, including recognition that the real contest in our societies is between those who do not believe that we can live together in peaceful relations and those who believe that we can. Trust-based relationships require stronger media literacy and freedom of expression as well as the mobilisation

of softer power based on the resources of culture, education, the sciences, communication, and information, and they require level playing fields and equity in knowledge production. Sustaining trust-based relationships will need social spaces to be secured that allow people to be real participants and in which they are and feel like equal stakeholders. These ideas were promoted within the UN system for the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013–2022). UNESCO has engaged in relentless advocacy for respect of cultural diversity and clarification of thinking in this area (UNESCO 2015), including for recognition of the importance of social capital, of investing in capacity and institution building, and of helping governments to address the needs of their citizens and to respect their rights (Cox 2009). Through this critical perspective on the appropriation and interpretation of intercultural dialogue within policies and practices, it is argued that, as the Charter of the United Nations told us more than 70 years ago, human dignity and dialogue are central to peaceful coexistence and development[2]. These may be necessary, but, we argue, they are not sufficient.

With a growing recognition within governance of the importance of dialogue, governments are recognising the need to intervene with diverse communities to build inclusive and cohesive societies, mobilising dialogue as a purposeful tool to foster greater understanding between different cultural groups, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing democratic participation.

The United Nations has been a key player in promoting intercultural dialogue and governance. The UN Alliance of Civilizations[3], for example, was established in 2005 to promote dialogue and cooperation between different cultures and religions, with the aim of promoting peace and sustainable development. The UN also promotes intercultural dialogue through various initiatives, such as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, which is celebrated annually on May 21st.

In addition to the UN, many other organisations and governments around the world are recognising the importance of intercultural dialogue as a tool within overall governance. The European Union, for example, has developed several policies and initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and combating discrimination and intolerance. (Nahles 2021). The Council of Europe has also established a framework for intercultural dialogue which promotes the exchange of ideas and best practices between different cultural groups (COE 2018).

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2 This vision is at the core of all efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16 within the frame of a new UN Peace Architecture.

3 https://www.unaoc.org/

So, intercultural dialogue and governance are two closely related concepts that play important roles in shaping our societies. By promoting greater understanding, respect, and cooperation between different cultural groups, intercultural dialogue can contribute to the development of more inclusive and cohesive societies. At the same time, effective governance is essential for ensuring that intercultural dialogue is conducted in a manner that is respectful of individual rights and freedoms and that promotes the common good. Dialogue and leadership are closely related concepts that play important roles in promoting understanding and cooperation between different cultures and societies. Effective intercultural dialogue requires strong leadership skills, as it involves navigating complex cultural dynamics, building trust, and promoting mutual understanding. Leaders who are skilled in intercultural dialogue can create a sense of shared purpose among diverse groups, promote respectful communication, and facilitate cooperation across cultural boundaries (Hardy 2022). Research shows that effective intercultural leadership is essential for promoting successful intercultural dialogue, and effective intercultural leadership involves building trust, promoting open communication, and actively seeking out diverse perspectives (Gandolfi 2012), principles reinforced by research conclusions of scholars of *adaptive* leadership (Heifetz et al. 2009).

Ideas Matter

Adaptive intercultural leadership involves building trust, promoting open communication, and actively seeking out diverse perspectives on a continuous, never-ending basis. Leaders who are skilled in intercultural dialogue are able to create a sense of shared purpose among diverse groups and promote respectful communication and cooperation across cultural boundaries. This suggests, then, that leadership (and effective governance) are dependent variables for successful, purposeful dialogue. Before looking at the consequences for the arrangement of governance in and of our diverse communities, we consider how theories of dialogue developed and highlight where new research might be needed.

Interculturalism, as a diversity management approach was being discussed long before the 2000s, but it gained the serious attention of academics and policymakers only around the turn of the millennium. The intercultural approach to diversity management started being discussed across European countries like Spain, Greece, Germany, Netherlands, but much less in Britain and mostly in the field of education (Meer and Modood 2012a). Serious attention was being paid to this discussion because of the difficulties that the governments had been facing whilst following other approaches to diversity management, particularly multiculturalism which seemed not adept at meeting the challenges that globalisation and super-diversity were posing (Vertovec 2007). Multiculturalism with its focus on differences was deemed to

encourage separatism and hostility, stifle debate, refuse common values, instigate a sense of segregation, and give rise to populism (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Grillo 2017; Zapata-Barerro 2015, 2017a, 2019).

Around the turn of the millennium when voices critical of multiculturalism started becoming more vocal in Britain, a UK Home Office Report on Community Cohesion (UKG 2002) was published as an enquiry into violence involving British South Asian youth and white youth. The report suggested that these communities led parallel lives with no meaningful interactions and exchanges. Not long after, came the devastating '9/11' attack in the USA and a wave of terrorist attacks across Europe accompanied by the rise of xenophobia and far-right populism. All these events alarmed academics as well as policymakers, and it was international organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Council of Europe that sought to respond to the growing need for an alternate approach to diversity management. The UN through UNESCO had formulated a series of conventions and guidelines from 2000, advocating the promotion of dialogue and intercultural interactions. The most poignant response to these diversity-related anxieties came from the EU and the Council of Europe (COE) who launched multiple initiatives and helped develop and discuss an alternate approach to diversity management. The EU declared 2008 as the Year of ICD, and that year COE released its White Paper (WP) on Intercultural Dialogue, 'Living Together as Equals in Dignity' (COE 2008), a policy document that has ever since become the starting point of all discussions concerning interculturalism and ICD and has been critiqued as well by sceptics such as Kymlicka (2016). The WP's findings indicated that many practitioners across Europe no longer found *multiculturalism* an adequate framework. The WP's conclusions, discussed widely in prior editions of this Journal, proposed a refinement with *interculturalism*, which it said would be a move beyond the flaws of multiculturalism and assimilation, by acknowledging diversity as well as the importance of contact. The approach was addressed as a 'forward-looking model' for managing diversity, suggesting that diversity can be managed positively, and intergroup conflict can be reduced by enhancing face-to-face relationships and developing intercultural understanding (COE 2008, 2). This implied a significant and new need, as yet undelivered, for attention to *governance*. These opinions were echoed in the UNESCO World Report 'Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue' (2009a, 2009b) as well.

'Proximity' became important to manage diversity, and the missing aspect of interpersonal interactions in multiculturalism was now addressed by the newly recognised intercultural approach to diversity management (Levrau and Lookbuyck 2018, 9). Wood et al. (2006, 9) argue that the reason interculturalism began to gain prominence was due to its stress on 'communication' as a tool through which 'an intercul-

tural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and generate reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds'. The emphasis now was on face-to-face relationships which explains the reliance of the approach on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which necessitates contact for reducing prejudice. Levrau and Lookbuyck (2018) state that as Europe began to embrace interculturalism, cohesive community could be actively encouraged by profiling a mutual vision that values diversity positively, that gives equal opportunities and develops positive interpersonal relationships. The intercultural approach to diversity thus is an approach that emphasises the significance of contact and dialogue, the need for community cohesion and commonalities, and the importance of micro-level interpersonal interactions (Levrau and Lookbuyck 2018).

Dialogue Matters

Barrett (2013) draws on his research in Canada and Europe and argues that dialogue is central to interculturalism's principal objectives of building a cohesive society based on shared values. The proponents of ICD in their documents and initiatives (e.g., COE 2003, 2008; UNESCO 2005, 2016; European Parliament 2015; Pfändtner 2010) argue that it is only through interculturalism that contemporary problems arising out of globalisation, transnationalism, and super-diversity, which previous approaches such as multiculturalism either ignore or exacerbate, can be addressed if not solved. Interculturalists believe that these problems can be foregrounded by employing dialogue – interactions and negotiations. This will enhance similarities rather than seeking to maintain differences.

Interculturalism works by getting people to interact on an interpersonal level where they can openly talk to each other, recognise the advantage of diversity, and cooperate in areas of mutual interest, so that individuals belonging to groups with divergent group goals may arrive at a position of less prejudice guided by commonalities. Dialogue is central to the agenda of interculturalism and has strategic and operational significance to managing diversity. It guides the move that interculturalism makes from the 'groupist' approach to managing diverse opinions. It aims to utilize the 'individualist' potential of culture, where culture is a manifestation of a distinctive identity and is accessible, accommodating, and vibrant and has the potential to move beyond the narrow yet collective confines of ethnic, religious, regional, and cultural affiliations (Meer and Modood 2012a, 177; Zapata-Barrero,2016, 4).

While the EU was discussing ideas of ICD, the COE itself endorsed ICD as means to ensure mutually enriching management of diversity through the declaration titled *Intercultural Dialogue: The way ahead*, which urged the preparation of a 'White Paper on integrated policies for management of cultural diversity through intercultural

dialogue and conflict prevention' (Council of Europe 2005, 5) to help the COE implement the ICD strategy. A consultation document was first produced in 2007 (Council of Europe 2007; Bunjes 2013) but its definition of ICD was found to be inadequate and loose and after discussions and deliberations the final White Paper on ICD was finally released in 2008, which defined ICD (2008 17) as

> [a] process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, based on mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. Intercultural dialogue contributes to political, social, cultural, and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. It fosters equality, human dignity, and a sense of common purpose. It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote tolerance and respect for the other.

Some criticised the initial application of ICD by the Council of Europe as being too narrow since it was limited to individuals and mostly in the field of arts, and that it understated an approach that could help build understanding and improve relationships within communities as well as at the national level (Ganesh and Holmes 2011). Ganesh and Holmes also register their dissatisfaction by adopting a definition that located ICD beyond the mere tolerance of others and defined ICD as

> [a] process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups, and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes (The British Council 2013)

ICD as defined above is frequently deemed to be the entry point into any conversation about the communication that takes place when individuals or group members of different cultures meet. Neither of the descriptions, with their common promotion of openness, respect, and exchange can completely indicate the complexity of dialogue in different contexts (Haydari and Holmes 2014), particularly in contexts which are yet uncharted and increasingly complex in terms of both stakeholders and the structure of what defines conflicts and contentions and our approach to managing them. Intercultural communication is essentially dialogic. It can help renegoti-

ate and reconstruct the position of those participating in dialogue (Holmes 2014) and can help bring balance to challenging conflict situations. It can also help cultivate conflict in a positive manner. which can help redirect it towards an increased sensitivity towards other participants and can lead to transformative change (Broome 2017). It is quite evident that ICD with its aims and aspirations generates high expectations amongst academics and policymakers alike, but whether these expectations from dialogue in general and ICD specifically can be met in practice depends upon the contextual realities of the case and the methodologies used to conduct dialogue.

New Challenges Matter

Contextual realities matter, and more research is needed to develop a context-sensitive methodology to keep dialogue relevant, and leadership will play a role.

As described above, the fairly-comfortable journey of the development of ideas and understanding of ICD has remained significantly inclined towards contexts where conditions of conflict have been similar and therefore contextual conditions have not shown great variation. In general, any success that the ICD model of dialogue has seen has been in Western contexts, where the question of capacity building and equitable participation are much less demanding than in other contexts where the drivers and actors are very different. Phipps (2014) is very clear in her criticism of ICD of a real lack of accommodation within the theoretical frame of contexts that are not characterised by the conditions found in scenarios where ICD has been most successful. Phipps suggests that the approaches in ICD applications remain ritualistic and very limited in outreach. Once concepts migrate into other political and social contexts, they cannot remain grounded in the refined prototypes of the scholarship and practice from which they first emerged. Such current trends in conflict as those in either the super-diverse societies of the 'West' or non-generalisable struggles of the 'non-West' are scenarios where dialogue, though used extensively, remains a much-contested intervention. There is no particular lack in terms of the available number of theories of dialogue and pre-made toolkits, but the missing element that deeply affects any impact the dialogue may have is the lack of consideration about contexts and the contextual fragilities that each case brings and also how this dialogue is operationalised in these subjective conflicts. It is important to understand the fragilities and subjectivities that characterise modern conflicts. As we explain further, below, in complex and very uncertain environments, a newly revised and reformulated language of dialogue is required, and one that rescues dialogue from the principal oversight of traditional discourse that privileges extravagant and generalisable results over small contextual victories (Hardy and Hussain 2017).

Here lies the 'perfect storm' of our title. The 'perfect storm' refers to a contextual reality defined by a contemporaneous complexity and uncertainty where academics and practitioners alike place insufficient emphasis on and recognition of the socio-political settings for knowledge or relationship formations. It is here, in our view, that governance and leadership can have the most significant impact.

To explain this thought, we begin, first, by illustrating the lack of sufficient attention paid to socio-political settings in which knowledge is produced. These settings are important as they determine the power relations between actors; they also determine how certain methodologies are privileged regardless of their level and scope of applicability; and these therefore mirror the capacity of any dialogic intervention to not only be successful but sustainable. What we are faced with as a result is an epistemological setback that requires a better informed and more critically sensitised new age of dialogue. Epistemology is the premise upon which the validity of knowledge is assessed, and, so far, traditional dialogue epistemologies have assumed this position of privilege. It is not in the spirit of critical scholarship to believe that there exists a singular objective way of approaching dialogue, without any space for variables of culture, within ICD. Lack of reflexivity and reliance on generalisable claims of traditional dialogue practices, can lead us to investing in processes that may be successful in the short run but lack the elements that can make it sustainable. This also may mean that by changing only cases and not methodologies, we are effectively adding to the epistemic imperialism by engaging in research that is descriptive in nature and uses traditional methodologies, without challenging the West-centric normative obsession of research designs and processes: the eternal return of the same!

So, when dialogue, and our understanding of dialogue, remains limited by boundaries of traditional dialogue approaches, then the theoretical and methodological position of traditional dialogue practices become more and more impermeable. But no theoretical and methodological position can remain impermeable forever. To make inroads into this, it is necessary that research and scholarship move beyond descriptive critique and invest more in the normative aspect – in the process of knowledge production. This entails a move beyond de-contextualised and non-reflexive approaches and from one that relegates focus to the normative aspect (Young 2000). Ideas must develop that address the how of knowledge production and are also involved with who produces knowledge. This encourages focus on how an equitable space for knowledge production is created (in dialogue) and what impediments those that study communities may face. This reconstruction of dialogue ideas will help make knowledge production both contextually responsive and responsible, and will, we hope, be substantiated by the sustainable success of dialogue, a testimonial to epistemic growth.

One way of questioning the normativity of traditional dialogic practices is to critique their oversimplified bottom-up approach, where the leader is considered either an overbearing 'director' of dialogue or, in an attempt to be critical, an 'unnecessary character', and trust is often considered the by-product of a dialogue process, which may need building pre-dialogue but its post-dialogue sustainability often lies beyond the scope of dialogue processes and remains untouched or to-be-seen in reports and papers. Both, though valid descriptive critiques, demand more engagement. If we are to make epistemic progress, we must take risks with the normative aspects of dialogue, and one such aspect is the re-evaluation of the role of leadership and the potential of trust. To attempt a reinvention of critical methodology, where critique of epistemic practices is not limited to descriptions but is about building effective research designs that challenge traditional way of knowledge production, we will look briefly at the relationship between dialogue, leadership, and trust. This is clearly setting an agenda for fresh empirical work.

The sustainability of effective or successful dialogue, or how to keep at it if it is working, may well be dependent on how well it is managed or facilitated, or how governance and leadership can support it. The success of dialogue as a tool should be determined by how well and for how long it helps reduce tension and creates interpersonal relationships, including trust-based ones, that can continue without an external dialogue practitioner having to intervene. But leadership can make a significant difference. A leader can initiate capacity-building activities that can reduce inequalities between actors in dialogue. A reduction of inequalities is linked to an increase in trust, given that actors acting on a level playing field will interact more freely and, by acting more freely, they will reduce any mistrust that may otherwise prevail. The reduction of mistrust here would not be utilised solely for the purpose of one dialogue initiative but rather might see a leader mobilising, as a structural actor implementing structural changes that can increase the social capital of those following, for example, through the provision of support that improves socio-economic parity; this makes groups more confident of their positions in any intergroup dynamic. Building capacities and creating equity ensures a long-term positive impact on relationships, and dialogic interventions can have better long-term impacts. Including the leader as a positive normative force can improve the equity and thus the trust in dialogue.

In turn, dialogue itself can be a serious trust enhancer. Positive leadership that leads to equity in dialogue can mean a more effective and sustainable dialogue. When groups who have an engaging leader focused on capacity building take part in dialogue, would they not be more likely to come from the perspectives of equity and the process of knowledge production (dialogic process) and more likely to increase the level of trust in the newly found interpersonal relationship? Close contact and

proximity, as premised in ICD, then become an added advantage. Empowered actors who engage in dialogue do not find proximity threatening but may realise it to be an asset in terms of exchange and learning.

The inclusion of the leader, therefore, in new normative projects of conducting dialogue, can mean creating conditions that make dialogue equitable and therefore the process of dialogue trustful and sustainable.

A Perfect Storm

Creating the conditions for equitable and sustaining dialogue that endows communities with more comfort and confidence in the contemporary, complex, and uncertain context has become more critical as the stage set for dialogue has itself become so difficult. The ongoing debate about the characteristics and application of dialogue, and its many variations, continue to test whether the most significant resistance to progress is entirely social (referencing solidarity, shared values, and a sense of belonging), or whether the resistance is from structural conditions (deprivation, inequality, discrimination). Here, in our view, lies the importance of the relationship between dialogue, the *tool*, and governance, the *terrain* for application.

The stakes are high. Communities everywhere are living in a period of great uncertainty and risk, and a period of failed systems, failed governance of important parts of life, whether health, finance, the systems that protect our planet, or our systems of government.

At the same time, the geopolitical balance of power is in flux as we transition from a unipolar world order into something new. Historically, as the Russian war on Ukraine is showing, such transitions are characterised by heightened tensions, competition, and mistrust, and thus a high risk of conflict. These developments, separately, and even more so when compounded, increase the risk of global conflict, depending on how we – as individuals, societies, states and international organisations – decide to act, use dialogue, and apply leadership. The shared experience of the 2020–23 COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that we will need to invest in strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacities of our social networks and governance systems at all levels – local to global. And what governance concepts and methods can guide us in this evolving context, now and in the future?

Unfortunately, we have lots of examples of the shortcomings of dialogue in governance underlying the application of dialogue assumptions and models to the governance and implementation of international and local peacebuilding efforts to learn lessons and identify best practices that then inform the international standards on which future peace operations are premised. Governance regimes that are more ad-

aptive to context will rely, increasingly, on completely new approaches to dialogue and much more research is called for to understand dialogue within complex and adaptive systems. How will we need to reconfigure the context of dialogue and dialogue itself to both accommodate complexity and improve positive impact?

Studies of complexity inform us that uncertainty and irreproducibility in this context are not the result of insufficient knowledge or inadequate planning or implementation but rather a tell-tale characteristic of complex adaptive systems (Varney 2021). As Varney points out, non-linearity plays a critical role in the emergence and self-regulation of complex systems, including social systems; the nonlinearity inherent in complex social systems implies that it is impossible to pre-determine what kind of societal arrangement will generate self-sustainable peaceful relations in a specific context, nor is it possible to pre-plan a series of steps that can lead to such a societal arrangement, and this creates real difficulties for preparing the conditions in which dialogue can take place and have positive outcomes.

A more adaptive governance approach in times of post-conflict when peaceful relations are actively sought and encouraged, often through dialogue mechanisms, would be specifically designed to cope with the uncertainty, unpredictability, and irreproducibility inherent in complex social change process. It is an approach where those who govern, together with the governed affected by conflict, actively engage in an iterative process of inductive learning and adaptation, in other words, doing whilst learning and learning whilst doing. Complexity science provides a theoretical framework for understanding how the resilience and adaptive capacity of social systems can be influenced to help them prevent, contain, and recover from conflict. Insights derived from how self-organisation maintains and transforms complex systems suggests that for peaceful relations, generated or helped by dialogue, to become self-sustainable, resilient social institutions that promote and sustain peace need to emerge from within the culture, history, and socio-ecological context of the relevant society.

The interface between dialogue and leadership within governance is not a simple one. Communities are peaceful when their institutions and processes of governance are able to ensure that political and economic competition is managed without people resorting to violence to pursue their interests. For peace to be self-sustaining, society thus needs to have sufficiently robust social institutions to identify, channel, and manage disputes peacefully (Killelea 2020). *Better governance* and *dialogue* can assist this process, but if there is too much intervention, harm can be caused through the disruption of the feedback critical for self-organisation to emerge and to be sustained. Every time an external intervention solves a problem, it interrupts the feedback needed to stimulate societal self-organisation. Both nation states and social

institutions develop resilience through trial and error over generations. Too much filtering and cushioning slows down and inhibits these processes. Understanding this tension – and the constraints it poses on international agency – helps us realise why leadership or governance interventions in dialogue processes have made the mistake of interfering so much that they ended up undermining the ability of societies to self-organise.

Dialogue models applied by adaptive systems of governance are thus conscious efforts to achieve people-centredness by placing the affected community in the driving seat of an iterative doing-whilst-learning process aimed at navigating the complexity inherent in trying to nudge social-ecological change processes towards sustaining peace, without causing harm.

In the Contemporary World, Social Movements Matter

The contemporary context also highlights the challenges for dialogue and governance through the nature of conflict that both seek to confront. As we have indicated, dialogue in uncertain times is difficult choreography, but the challenge has been compounded by changes in the nature of conflict itself. Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, most of the conflicts shaping contemporary division can trace their origin to an increasingly visible means of showing dissent. The significant growth of social movements, as in the Arab Spring, the widespread Black Lives Matter, or 'Me-too', has tested the traditional models of dialogue and leadership and their respective roles in trust building and conflict management. When mutual concerns among societal groups call for unified action, what emerges collectively is known either as 'critical mass' (Oliver et al. 1985) or more famously 'social movements'. Most recently, scholars have observed that the world is currently witnessing the largest wave of mass social movements in world history (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel 2020; Chenoweth et al. 2019). Despite a lack of attention by social movement scholars, leadership plays a key role in social movements (Staggenborg 2004). Social movements are categorised by the horizontal organisation that dismisses the idea of hierarchical forms of governance by focusing on horizontal and decentralised networks, where 'collective action can effectively be coordinated without the need for representation and hierarchy' (Kokkinidis 2012, 238). Such organisational structures are therefore self-governed whose efficacy depends on how efficient the leadership is (Ganz 2004). Leaders provide paths to pursue common goals and lead by proposing an alternative to the uncertainty that the context may present.

According to Ganz (2004), leadership within social movements is not only about having a charismatic leader, it involves identification, recruitment and development of leadership at all levels. Social movements lack any previous collective base of

grassroots efforts and the new leaders responsible for creating this 'new collective' do so through forming interpersonal relationships by engaging individuals, networks, and groups (Ganz 2004; Feldman 2020; de la Sablonnière 2017; Chenoweth & Stephan 2011). Interpersonal interactions are the guiding principles of dialogue. From our discussion of ICD earlier we can suggest that the grassroots efforts are in practice dialogic instances and dialogue in action. Leaders of social movements engage horizontal leadership, which in the context of contemporary social movements means being 'leaderful', as argued by Nardini et al. (2020), is a form of leadership which is neither top-down nor flat but where multiple leaders embrace collective decision making as they work together towards a shared goal. Ganz (2004) further suggests that since no formal structures are involved, voluntary commitments people make to one another create the fabric from which formal structures may be woven but it is important to note that these shared understandings of power and collective decision making are only possible when relationships are based on a mutual commitment to a shared future. Sustained interpersonal relationships and contact can enable more cooperation. When people share common ground, as do the horizontally engaged grassroots members of a social movement, they reinforce their shared views, thereby deepening their social bonds and people may develop an interest in the relationship itself, creating what Robert Putnam and others describe as 'social capital': a 'relational' capacity that can facilitate collaborative action of all kinds (Ganz 2004; Berger 2014; Nardini et al, 2020).

Crutchfield (2018) and Nardini et al. (2020) suggest that successful contemporary social movements are made possible when they are characterised by strong interpersonal relationships between members of grassroots communities who are engaged in horizontal dialogue and are guided by a common goal. Balkin (2005) in his discussion of the failure and success of social movements suggests that a successful social movement is one that is capable of eliciting concrete structural and institutional change over time, otherwise social movements may protest long and loud, but governments are not seen to heed them. This assertion brings to attention the dependence of social movements, as very special forms of governance, on horizontal organisation and dialogue, bound by the necessity of shared goals. It is important to pay attention to the horizontal relationships responsible for creating tangible action among the participants, but as Balkin (2005) states and as is evident by the otherwise deemed successful social movements there is no or very limited impact (Rochon and Mazmanian 1993) because the visible fallacy of the horizontal is that it stresses working only with the members of the horizontal networks and rarely investing a similar level of energy and interest in simultaneously engaging vertical networks, which is where the potential for actual change in the form of institutions is.

A contemporary successful social movement therefore needs success defined in the terms of Balkin (2005) as being capable of eliciting change over time by changing the background expectations, reshaping common sense, and most importantly moving the boundaries of what is plausible and implausible, a combination of some basic shared interests, horizontal dialogue for solidarity and vertical dialogue for long-term impact and institutional changes.

Governance Matters

Intercultural dialogue is an object of concern in response to conflicts and the extent to which this can be used to resolve conflicts or at least minimise their likely occurrence. This paper has located discussions of dialogue within the tensions, conflicts, and desired transformations characteristic of a contemporary complexity – a world of connection and disconnection, a world in which encounter, exchange and engagement risk indifference, at best, or intense conflict. Conflict is not an inevitable by-product of cultural difference but as globalisation and political alignments have made national borders more porous, cultural borders and boundaries have sharpened and become increasingly visible and, in some cases, more separate. This dynamic context for dialogue has become unmanageable without a significant increase in our recognition and understanding of the role that governance and leadership will play. There remains a pressing need to update our dialogue on dialogue so that our understanding remains relevant and accurate given the complexities. We must understand our tools but understand also how leadership and governance arrangements can help us select the most appropriate one for the job in hand.

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