



Leadership and Leaderful Organizing

Research on building
leaderful movements in
Europe

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1

Introduction

1. Introduction

Leaderful organizing is strategic for movements who believe in the power of collective leadership. It enables activists and organizers to exercise power, respond to changing contexts and scale up their impact.

This study report aims to examine the concepts and practices of Leadership and Leaderfulness in movement and organisations across Europe and identify core competencies that activists and organizers would need to develop in order to build leaderful movements.

We conducted a Participatory Action Research between 2020 and 2022 with an international research team of nine activists and organizers from across Europe coordinated by the European Community Organizing Network (Slovakia) in partnership with LABO (Belgium), Ulex project (Spain), and Zelena Akcija (Croatia).

The team collectively designed, conducted and analyzed the research guided by the following questions:

1. How is leadership conceptualised and practiced in movements across Europe?
2. How is leaderfulness conceptualised and practiced?
3. What are the key competencies for leaderful organizing?

The research was based on a literature review, 22 interviews and 67 online survey responses with movements from 15 countries across Europe as well as discussions among the research team members in regular meetings and workshops.

We found that there is a diversity of conceptualisations and practices of leadership covering both individual and collective competencies.

For many activists and organisers who identify with the values of social and environmental justice, the idea of "exercising power" is viewed as problematic. Our research a connection between hesitations around the idea of power and a reluctance to embrace the concept of leadership across movements in Europe.

This research responds to the movement discourses on leadership and the tendencies to reject power, hierarchies and pursue "leaderlessness", which often resulted in movements limiting their impact in the long term.

We proposes a framework to build a shared understandings of leaderfulness as a strategic approach to distribute power and leadership in movements in ways that enable effective, accountable and agile collective action for social transformation.

The following chapters present an overview of the literature on leadership and leaderfulness, the research methodology, key findings from the research, and a proposal for the competencies needed to create more leaderful movements.

The results of this research will inform the development of a competence framework, a toolkit and training and educational curriculum on "Leaderful Organizing".

We hope to challenge and inspire activists and organizers to rethink the leadership practices in their movements and organisations and consider developing the competencies to build leaderful movements.

Leadership and Leaderfulness

2. Leadership and Leaderfulness

2.1. Conceptualising Leadership

An increasing amount of literature on leadership practices within social movements has been published over the past years. Much of the literature is dominated by North American authors, many of whom focus on individual notions of leadership and on the qualities of individual leaders as the main actors in organisations and movements. As researchers, we tried to explore the tension between individual and collective leadership. We also looked for alternative models of leadership that challenge the traditional authoritarian and hegemonic leadership types.

From a review of different definitions and conceptualisations of leadership, we found useful transformative forms of leadership such as *revolutionary leadership* (Freire, 1970), group-centered leadership (Payne, 1995; Ransby, 2015; Parker, 2020), anti-authoritarian leadership (Walia, 2013), grassroots leadership (Ransby; 2015), or transformative leadership (Gass, 2014), Feminist leadership (Coalition of Feminists for Social Change, 2021), shared leadership (Lahey et al., 2016), distributed leadership (Han, 2014), cooperative leadership (Spade, 2020). We will present some of them here.

Freire's (1970) idea of 'revolutionary leadership' is "the capacity to make oneself followed, that is, to point a direction which others regard as valid, useful, important; and to do so without imposing or manipulating, through open dialogue, reciprocity and persuasion." (Freire cited in Nunes, 2021). This form of leadership is rooted in dialogue rather than propaganda and co-intentional education, where both the leadership and the people attain common knowledge of reality through authentic dialogue, reflection and action.

A key quality for transformational leaders as identified by Freire is humility, which enables leaders to engage in dialogue with the people and not to overrule their will, while at the same time doing revolutionary work of developing critical consciousness, problematizing their current position and thinking beyond daily struggles forward to a new society (Ford, 2021). Through this

process, both the people and the revolutionary leadership act together and collectively.

Horton and Freire (1990) talk about "grassroots leaders" as those who are close to the people's rank, whose qualities are being recognised by people who work and live with them, and who people look to for advice, encouragement and leadership. Social movements can create the unique conditions for grassroots leaders to emerge and be empowered to strengthen their leadership.

Walia's (2013) concept of anti-authoritarian leadership stresses the importance of acknowledging the impacts of unjust power structures on different people through an anti-oppression analysis. It prioritises the lived experiences of the people most impacted by systemic marginalisation and encourages their leadership, as well as accountability and transparency among those in leadership positions.

The **Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (2021)** proposed a concept of 'feminist leadership' with an intersectional approach focused on the intersecting power structures and inequalities experienced by people at the margins of economic, social and political power systems (especially women and girls) and how they affect everyone in movements and organisations. As they point out: "a feminist approach to leadership is inherently intersectional and aims to create spaces in which all people can exercise their agency and realise their potential." (COFEM, 2021, p. 4)

Brown (2017), proposes a type of leadership inspired by natural patterns of adaptation and response to a world in continuous state of flux. She suggests that movements should be able to embrace constant change, fostering deep and radical collaboration, and emergent strategies – constantly assessing and learning from the patterns around us in order to be able to influence changes as they happen. She believes in the power of science fiction to allow activists to imagine

alternative futures and shape them with actions. For example, she finds inspiration in how leaders are described in the political science fiction of Octavia Butler: "her leaders are adaptive – riding change like dolphins ride the ocean. Adaptive but also intentional, like migrating birds who know how to get where they're going even when a storm pushes them a hundred miles off course. Humans? Some of us are surviving, following, flocking – but some of us are trying to imagine where we are going as we fly. That is radical imagination." (Brown, 2017, p.20). If people in movements were to embody the collective leadership of birds, fishes and ants, they would need to develop deep and radical collaboration with each other, be aligned in a shared direction and trust their collective intelligence.

Gramsci (1971) idea of leadership includes both individual and collective dimensions. Gramsci describes 'organic intellectuals' as social agents rooted in the working class who play the role of interpreters of the multitude of tendencies and manifestations that exist within movements and act as binding agents between the working class and the "revolutionary party" (which in Gramscian terms is the articulator of the interests of the working class into institutional politics). They are able to influence political discourses by elaborating and spreading the movement ideology and building consensus among other intellectuals and the wider public. This is a concept that we might equate with an individual notion of leadership today.

He refers to collective leadership as the ability of the working class to lead "other classes" in a cross-class alliance able to challenge the multi-faceted power of the ruling class. Developing the ability for collective leadership and to lead other classes is crucial for social transformation. The development of this ability requires an alignment of movement forces where the

organizations – and the *constituencies they purport to represent* – are meaningfully in collective motion together in a sustainable way.

Nunes's (2021) idea of political movements as part of an "ecology" where leadership is "distributed" among multiple cores of political organisations and initiatives, and can emerge anytime a person or group initiates an action which has the effect (intended or not) of motivating or influencing action by others.

Transformative leadership

Based on the different definitions of leadership aimed at social transformation, we tried to identify the key elements of transformative leadership needed to build leaderful movements,

Transformative leadership involves investing in people's growth and capacities, developing movement's ability to be relational, rooted in reality, collective, supportive, nurturing, intentional, adaptive and visionary finding common purpose and reaching shared goals. Leaderful organizing is an intentional approach to invest in the development of transformational leaders whose role is to serve, deepen and expand social movements.

Organizations that commit to invest in transformational leadership development should never aim to control social movements, but to serve as a midwife that enables these movements to be born and nurture them to thrive and find their own ways. This way we will be riding ever increasing waves of stronger and stronger leaderful movements laying siege at the system, forcing cracks in its shields and pushing forward system change

2.2. Conceptualising leaderfulness

When large masses of people take to the street seemingly spontaneously, we call it a "movement moment" in which we see the power of collective leadership from below

in action. Thousands of people are suddenly taking leadership, showing up in a collective action, bringing a sign or bringing their friends. No one asked them to do it,

they were simply motivated to do it on their own, which gives these moments great energy and power. One way to look at the challenge facing European activists and organizers today is to look for ways to extend the time horizon of the leaderful moment into movement phases that more specifically aim at articulation with institutional politics.

The concept of leaderfulness draws on the idea of "group-centered leadership" by **Ella Baker**, an organizer playing a key role in the civil rights movement in the US, whose approach could represent as a model of leaderful organizing. She argued that people should be empowered to take charge of their own struggles for freedom and was critical of a leadership style which tends to centralize power, decision making and responsibility for meaningful action in a single leader and claimed that 'strong people don't need strong leaders'.

She never used the term "leaderfulness" but she encouraged organizations to embrace a concept of collective leadership (Ransby, 2015; Parker, 2020). Baker supported the leadership development of several student activists of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) by mentoring them and encouraging them to maintain independence from more established organisations. Many of her students led the lunch counter sit-in's and the so-called freedom rides that contributed to the end of segregation.

The term "**leaderful**" was first used by Patrisse Cullors, one of co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US who mentioned in an interview that Black Lives Matter may not have a leader, but the movement isn't leaderless. "We're a *leaderful* movement".

The BLM movement was founded by three black women with an approach to leadership challenging the consolidation of power behind one charismatic leader, and rather focusing on collaboration, building members' power and leadership, and allowing people's identities to inform how the movement organizes. This allowed leadership to emerge from intersecting identities and to produce '*high-impact, low ego leaders*' who focus more on the sustainability and outcomes of the movement rather than personal visibility (Purvi Shah quoted in Tonita, 2015).

Over time as the BLM movement grew in prominence and developed various forms of institutional expression, the structure changed with its co-founders gaining more power, resources and visibility resulting in the leaderfulness of the movement being questioned by grassroots chapters (King, 2020). This shows that maintaining a movement's leaderfulness requires an ongoing process and the risk of one or a few leaders being spotlighted from actors external or internal to the movement is always present. However, we do not believe that the answer to this is to relapse towards notions of leaderlessness, but rather to better understand these tensions as part of building a leaderful movement.

2.3. Leaderfulness vs leaderlessness

Leaderfulness in movements is proposed as an alternative to leaderlessness. Literatures on movements that define themselves "leaderless" or horizontalists, like the "Indignados" and "Occupy" movements show that their rejection of leadership comes from the premise that 'we are all leaders' and power is 'shared', often on the assumption that it is done so equally (horizontally). Mouffe (2018) provides a critique of leaderless movements with insights on why such movements, despite their potential, often end up losing energy and power after periods of intense activity.

"The refusal of those horizontalist movements to engage with the political institutions limited their impact. And without any form of articulation with institutional politics, they soon began to lose their dynamics. Although such protest movements have certainly played a role in the transformation of political consciousness, it is only when they have been followed by structured political movements, ready to engage with political institutions, that significant results have been achieved." (Mouffe, 2018)

In Mouffe's conception, the rejection of leadership by leaderless movements limits

their ability to engage with institutional politics and to achieve bigger results.

Movements that aim to be 'leaderless' and 'structureless' also risk falling into to what Freeman (1973) described as a **tyranny of structurelessness**. Without acknowledging the existence of power structures, they risk creating spaces where power is still being wielded and it operates informally, preventing the holding of leaders accountable and increasing the risks of power abuse and the lack of representation.

While leaderlessness may work in small groups, in order to scale up and increase impact, movements need structures that enable them to distribute power and leadership power' (instead of sharing it) clearly and appropriately, which does not mean evenly or equally.

Freeman does not propose one type of structure that would fit all movements. Rather she suggests that each movement should develop their own structure and experiment with different kinds of structures. She proposes a set of principles

of democratic structuring to ensure that movement are controlled by and accountable to groups rather than individuals. These principles include (1) Delegation of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. (2) Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to those who selected them. (3) Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. (4) Rotation of tasks among individuals. (5) Allocation of tasks along rational criteria (e.g., Ability, interest, and responsibility). (6) Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible. (7) Equal access to resources needed by the group.

Leaderful movements and organisations are characterised by structures, spaces, culture and capabilities to "absorb" some of the energy emanating from the streets into long-term engagement, building relationships of collaboration between people in the movements, distributing power and responsibilities, developing collective leadership, agency, political identity strengthening the belief in the ability to collectively change the world.

3

Methodology

3. Research Methodology

We used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a methodology to investigate the research questions. We formed a research team of nine activists and organizers coordinated by the European Community Organizing Network (Slovakia), in partnership with Ulex Project (Spain), LABO (Belgium), Zelena Akcija (Croatia).

We chose to use PAR to provide space for reflection and analysis for the partner organisations and participants involved in this research. PAR is considered '**research**' because it involves a systematic collection and analysis of data to increase our understanding of leadership and leaderfulness. It is '**participatory**' because the research team participated in all the steps of the research process, we collectively designed and carried out the research, including developing data collection tools, conducting data collection activities and carrying out the analysis. Many of the researchers had limited or no research background and acquired essential research skills in the process by designing and conducting the research together. It is oriented towards '**action**' because the knowledge and key findings from the research are used to inform the design of a training manual for Leaderful Organizing and aim to inspire interventions to make movements and organisations more leaderful. Participatory Action Research is both a learning and liberating experience and a tool for social change.

The data collected through the research included literature on leadership and leaderfulness, interviews, and surveys with leaders and members of social movements, organisations in Europe, as well as the researcher team's experiences and analysis.

The **literature review** covered 20+ readings, books and articles from different authors on the topic of social movement leadership (full list in the references) which was used to contextualise and inform the conceptualisations of leadership in the literature and the origins of the concept of leaderfulness.

The **interviews** included 22 semi-structured interviews with members of a selected group of diverse movements, organisations, and groups working on different issues and in different geographical locations across Europe. 14 interviewees identified with a variety of movements focusing on civic participation, human rights, gender, climate justice and environment, anti-poverty, housing, trade

unions, anti-racism & anti-discrimination and animal rights. 6 out of 20 interviewees do not identify with any movement or find this question non applicable to them. Interviewees represented both local organisations and networks, and took into account the ratio of paid staff members compared to volunteers. The interviews focused on: 1) personal associations related to the terms "leader" and "leadership"; 2) definition of leadership; 3) skills and qualities of a (good) leader; 4) challenges in being in the position of power; 5) cultural patterns of leadership; and 6) leaderful organizing.

The **online survey** was responded to by 67 participants from 15 countries in Europe who identified as directors, founders, coordinators, leaders, facilitators, organizers, members, staff, and volunteers of movements, civic organisations and groups. Most of the respondents are part of movements and organisations at the local level (39%) and national level (39%), 10% work at global level and 9% at transeuropean level. Most of the respondents' organisations and movements function with no paid staff (33%), 21% had less than 5 staff, 20% had 5-10 staff, and 15% have 10-20 staff, 1.5% have 50-100 staff, and 6% have more than 100 staff.

The number of volunteers varied among the organisations, 24% mentioning that they have 10-20 volunteers, 18% having more than 100 volunteers, 13% having less than 5 volunteers, 7% having 5-10 or 50-100 volunteers and 3% there are no volunteers. The number of people actually actively involved in the organisation are in 30% of the cases 5-10, in 25% of the cases 10-20, in 12% of the cases less than 5 or more than 100 and in 10% between 50-100. (more details on the research tools in the Appendix).

Data collected

20+ readings from literature on movement leadership

22 interviews with representatives of movement, organisations and groups in Europe

67 surveys received from 15 countries

Table 1. Summary of research data collected

4

Key findings

4. Key findings from European movements and organisations

4.1. Leadership concepts and practices

From the analysis of interviews and surveys with movement leaders and members across Europe, it emerged that there are a lot of personal, political, cultural, and historical meanings attached to the concept of leadership and leaderfulness. We created spaces to let those meanings emerge and be elaborated, especially in the interviews and in discussions within the research team.

The ways in which interview participants described leadership focused more on collective aspects rather than individual, for example they described it as participation, and inclusiveness (i.e. encouragement of representatives of marginalized social groups), building mutual trust or "collective ownership" and a "co-creative process." While the majority of our interviewees seemed supportive of organisations and movements with horizontal and non-hierarchical structures, they also acknowledged the necessity of some degree of hierarchy for the functioning of organisational processes.

In the surveys the top three words associated with the concept of leadership were inspiration (12 mentions), responsibility (9 mentions), and knowledge and skills (7 mentions). (Figure 1)

A leader was described as someone who inspires, evokes, motivates, empowers, supports, reflects, influences, energises, processes concepts and feelings towards action, creates space for others, has knowledge and access to information, has legitimacy, can make difficult decisions, and is a role model.

Participants shared as examples of "leaders", prominent politicians, civil society representatives in their countries, and figures from their personal life. The feelings of survey participants regarding taking leadership roles were rather ambivalent. For some it was a comfortable and natural position and had a positive connotation. For example:

"Given my position of coordinator, I feel that I am perceived as a leader. In terms of organisational knowledge, my position allows me to have access to most of the information. I can say that this contributes to reinforce my role of leader". (survey participant,

Others expressed the challenge of taking responsibility for a group or an organisation and being able to meet the expectations associated with the role. A few of the participants expressed a strong discomfort, fear, or rejection of leadership and the



Figure 1. Word cloud of terms used by participants to describe leadership

power connected to it. They did not perceive themselves as leaders nor express interest in taking leadership roles. For example:

"I don't find the term a helpful one and don't have any interest in considering myself that way or embodying the role. My political practice, and the kind of world I strive towards, are all about overcoming power hierarchies." (survey participant)

Some participants expressed challenges in embracing leadership and discomfort of holding power and being part of hierarchical structures, mentioning the risks of becoming ungrounded, not listening and being accountable to people with lower power positions, unable to manage people's expectations while remaining authentic to oneself, not imposing oneself, not making decisions or acting on behalf of others, thinking to be irreplaceable, unable to process emotions and burn out. As some of the respondents explain: "The main challenge is to be able to use your power to help the community, not for your own benefit." "Some people can take this 'power' wrongly. They think that if they're in power, the others must work for them – but that's not true at all."

In terms of **organisational structures** in the movements and organisations we engaged, participants indicated that their structures are to some extent formal (they were rated on average a score of 3.7 in a scale from 1 as non-formal to 5 as very formal).

Participants expressed that their movement or organisation present their decision-making processes and distribution of power to the world as mostly non-hierarchical (43% of responses) or semi-hierarchical (40% of responses). Only 10% of participants described their organisation or movement as being openly hierarchical (Chart 1).

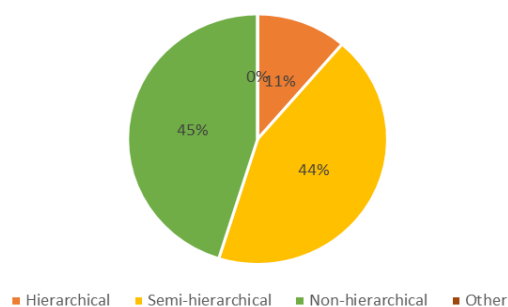


Chart 1. Levels of hierarchy in participant's movements and organisations as presented to the world.

Participants' perception of the actual decision-making processes and distribution of power in their organisations or movements was not always reflecting what was presented to the world. Indeed, 9% of participants moved their response from non-hierarchical to semi-hierarchical; and 2% moved it to hierarchical. Most movements (51%) were described as semi-hierarchical. (Chart 2).

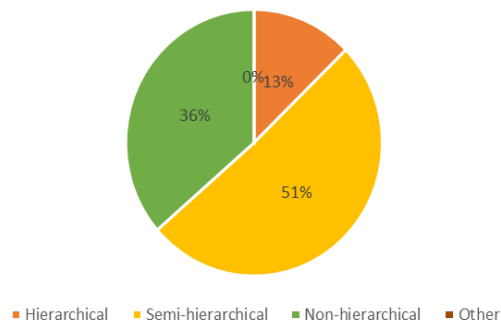


Chart 2. Levels of actual hierarchy in participant's movements and organisations.

From the narrative responses it emerged that many participants that were critical of the "traditional" perception of leadership indicated that their ambition was to be part of non-hierarchical movements or organisations.

In summary, participants shared a tension between how organisations present themselves to the world as compared to their actual level of hierarchy in organisational structures, decision-making and distribution of power. Many of our respondents' organisations and movements aspire or claim to have non-hierarchical structures with equal distribution of power and decision-making. However, in reality there are different factors that make informal hierarchies emerge based on roles within the organisation (e.g. paid and unpaid staff), level of seniority, expertise, identity, levels of engagement in the organisation, access to decision making spaces; decision making processes, legal responsibilities and reporting responsibilities. Here are some quotes that express these contradictions by participants:

"We want to achieve non-hierarchical relationships / structures; however, certain people have experience, skills, influence over others, external relationships, privilege that creates hierarchy." (survey participant)

"We are all formally equal [...], however

in situations where many members are inactive there is a centralisation of power around those who are regularly and reliably active." (survey participant)

"We want to be led by the multi-racial and inter-generational working class, but in the end many of our spaces are dominated by white middle class folks." (survey participant)

"Lack of inclusion happens because we have very few people coming from our societal minorities in our movement. In the rush to actions, or when writing long guidance papers or organizing long meetings, people tend to forget this. I am aware that this might scare some people off to join". (survey participant)

There is a recognition that there are challenges both with hierarchical and non-hierarchical structures.

Non-hierarchical structures seem to work better with smaller groups and informal organisations, whereas when the organisation becomes bigger with more people and paid staff, non-hierarchical structures become dysfunctional. Among the downsides of non-hierarchical structures, besides the emergence of informal hierarchies, there was the long time spent in meetings and decision-making processes. As participants explain:

"Although there are many benefits to aiming to be non-hierarchical, this does lead to longer conversations where every viewpoint is given lengthy consideration, an unwillingness to say that one idea is better than another idea, and an unwillingness to set any parameters around the start of a

conversation or predetermine it in any way [...] that might be seen as "undemocratic." (survey participant)

"Sometimes dangers of disempowerment by decisions taking much longer by having to go from group to group, and sometimes being overturned by another group, which identifies issues in decision making and delegation." (survey participant)

"I have observed a fetishising of placing on a pedestal less hierarchical models of decision-making [...] without fully embodying the spirit of what it means to decentralize decision-making and the corresponding internal reflections and shifts in power that need to take place for this to be practiced meaningfully." (survey participant)

Leadership cultures in movements and organisations are also influenced by the socio-political contexts they operate within. In most countries in Europe leadership positions are still being dominated by men, and women still face significant challenges in leadership roles. As one of our interviewees explained

"women who succeed in leadership in Italy tend to acquire male characteristics to be accepted in the system and this excludes a real female participation because it becomes a self internalised propensity in the system that only a 'male' personality can lead" (interview participant).

Most of the countries we covered in the research were described as being characterised by widespread hierarchical, top-down models of leadership, often embodied by their political leaders

4.2. Leadership challenges

From the surveys, it emerged that among the main organisational challenges with leadership practices in movements and organisations there were the following:

Long meetings and decision-making processes

In non-hierarchical movements and organisations there may be the tendency to

want to involve as many people as possible in all decisions and use consensus as decision-making process where every viewpoint is given space to be expressed, and with poor meeting facilitation, meetings tend to become longer. Furthermore, if one or a few people object, there is the risk for the process to stall and the decision not to be taken. Long meetings can reduce

participation and may be a cause of exclusion for some people (e.g. parents if the meeting goes overtime). Organisations that are unable to make decisions and implement them risk getting stuck and unable to make change. It is one of the crucial roles of leaders to move groups towards making collective decisions and actions.

Poor distribution of power and responsibilities.

experienced people often silencing less experienced ones which discourages younger members to take on tasks and leading to the work not being equally distributed.

Lack implementation and accountability

This is a widespread challenge in organisations that are non-hierarchical or semi-hierarchical. They often do not have clear control and accountability systems and people are reluctant to hold others accountable for not implementing decisions as there is a belief in self-accountability. This affects power dynamics and progress because when decisions and plans are not implemented and keep on being rescheduled and re-planned there's the risk to invalidate decision-making processes. Leaders have a crucial role to play in ensuring there are accountability systems, as well as setting the example themselves of being accountable. Otherwise, they will lose trust.

Group dynamics, inclusion and conflicts

One of the challenges mentioned by participants referred to the informal power dynamics in groups that affect inclusions of people from different backgrounds, race, gender, disability, class, educational level in movements and organisational processes. Societal power structures and systemic injustices can be reproduced in our movements affecting power distribution, who are in leadership positions, and whose views and opinions are represented through the collective narratives and

When movements and organisations have inefficient ways of delegating power and responsibilities, it limits their ability to exercise collective leadership. Interviewees leading more hierarchical organisations, mentioned the challenge of every decision needing to go through them, which slows down processes and burdens them with the risk of "burning out". Interviewees leading non-hierarchical organisations found it challenging to equally distribute power and responsibilities with more

actions. This may create tensions and conflicts.

Capacity challenges

One of the challenges mentioned by participants was the lack of capacity in terms of human resources capacity and resources. Leadership is affected by overworked and overwhelmed people with conflicting priorities and too many projects to handle, lack of capacity, in an ever-changing and fast paced context, difficulty in recruiting and high turnover, political pressure, lack of communication, low participation of members or volunteers.

Challenges in funding leadership

Financial challenges affect the ability to fund leadership and adequately pay leaders who are dedicating considerable time, energy, and competences to the organisation/movement. This affects organisations and movements in their ability to implement the plans on which they have decided.

"We're a rather small organisation and I have the feeling that if I cannot pay someone enough (or at all), I cannot ask them to be a leader. Or when I have so much to do, how can I raise new leaders?" (survey participant)

These challenges show how movements and organisations need better leadership practices, structures and cultures that enable effective collective leadership, power and action.

4.3. Leaderfulness concepts

Most of the people who participated in the interviews and the survey were not familiar with the concept of "leaderfulness" and

reported that they have never heard the term "leaderful movements". Some tried to define it in their own words. For example:

"A leaderful movement is a movement that inspires many individuals who adhere to its values/work. [...] Leaderful could also mean 'full of leaders'. A movement with many leaders can be very good if all leaders work together and acknowledge the co-leadership of others, especially on certain areas of work." (survey participant)

"A leaderful organisation could put in the spotlight on many of its members who are creating the changes in their own geographical and/or topical areas. These people would be shown as inspiration and examples." (survey participant)

"it's ok to have volunteers and paid staff but have the same decision-making power. Rotating coordinators or people who facilitate different teams so they meet regularly and are accountable to each other. Office manager that manages all the leaders. With different teams, the spokesperson role can rotate as well. Everyone is leading a process they want to lead." (interview participant)

Leaderfulness was mostly associated with a positive concept with the meaning that "everybody can be a leader" or everyone has the potential to become one. Some linked it with the ideas that movements need more leaders, or that leadership needs to be disseminated and distributed so that everyone has the opportunity to lead and is empowered to learn. Participants assumed that leaderful movements would not have a rigid hierarchy, but structures for anyone to step up into leadership roles, getting people more engaged in some way that does not only give them a function or a title, but making them actively engaged in the movement in the long run.

A participants used a metaphor of leaderfulness in movements that takes

inspiration from the functioning of the different parts of the human body:

"The cells in each of our bodies each have their own consciousness and operate in decentralized manners, yet when our hearts and brains beat in coherence, these decentralized cells across our body take on a unified 'hum' that brings them into alignment – while each doing their own unique thing – for a greater purpose (of keeping us alive and thriving). [...] I think leadership in our movements can learn a lot from the body/organizing principles within nature. Becoming a connector - or like the inter-cellular network within our bodies [...] embodying the balance of giving and receiving, would go a long way to embodying the world in which we want to live." (survey participant)

This definition reminds of Brown's (2017) suggestion to take inspiration from patterns of collective leadership in nature and replicate in movements and organisations.

Some participants expressed concerns that the concept feels too idealistic and associated it with an expansion of individual leadership at the expense of others.. The comment below exemplifies how the concept was rejected:

"Our movements have had some fantastic people in them – not all of them famous. But after centuries and centuries of Heroic Leaders it's become much easier to see the downsides – in gender, class and race for one thing, but also in careerism and authoritarianism, and (it is now more obvious) also in abusive and exploitative relationships. Today we have quite enough celebration of Famousness, Hotness, Coolness, Radicalness and all the rest of it – it's fine for Instagram but it's poison to the attempt to create a different world." (survey participant)

4.4. Leaderful movement practices

Most of the participants indicated that their movement or organisation already have practices that enable leaderfulness and or are working towards it. These practices are

both individual or collective include and include the following:

Building relationships. Creating spaces for relationship building and networking within

and between groups, organizations or movements through one-to-one conversations, check-in meetings to share feelings, safe and caring spaces, teambuilding, appreciation, and systems to address to conflicts when they arise.

Participatory meetings and decision-making processes. Facilitating effective participatory meetings and decision making processes to meet the objectives and build leadership could be done in different ways (e.g. sociocracy, circles). It is important to use different meetings for different purposes (e.g. meetings to discuss and take decisions, developing strategies, delegating power and responsibilities, following up on tasks and dealing with those that have not been implemented).

Accountability systems. Developing systems for clearly sharing responsibilities, following up on decisions and actions are coherent with our vision of distributing leadership.

Clear organisational structures. Creating leadership structures that enable distribution of power and leadership across the organization in different ways such as forming working groups that allow spaces for more people to step up in leadership roles and enable emerging leadership. As a participant describes:

"Diversify leadership with different activities led by different people who can be responsible for themselves, without having to be checked in on by someone." (Survey participant)

Power distribution practices: Rotating leadership positions and encouraging different people to practice leadership in multiple areas and projects (e.g. meeting facilitator, working group coordinator). Ensuring peaceful and effective transfer of power and responsibility between members.

"Rotating coordinators or people who facilitate different teams so they meet regularly and are accountable to each other. Office manager that manages all the leaders. With different teams, the spokesperson role can rotate as well. Everyone is leading a process they want to lead." (Survey participant)

Equity and inclusion practices: Relating to one another as equals. Creating inclusive spaces accessible to diverse people, experiences and voices to participate, be heard, and lead. Acknowledging systemic injustices and being intentional in challenging them by prioritising affected people in leadership and decision-making processes.

"Emphasis on identifying people with lived experience and empowering them to take on roles and be visible." (survey participant)

"All too easily – there are constant gravitational forces pulling us back there, in a hierarchical world structured by massive inequalities of power, wealth and cultural status and where most other organizations are full of this. The effort is to relate to one another as equals and across differences." (survey participant)

Access to information for example by using online platforms for communication and decision making as tools to increase access, transparency and participation. (e.g. Discord, Trello, Slack, Signal, Basecamp).

Leadership development: Developing the leadership of movement members in a supportive environment and transfer of new leaders. Good practices here include onboarding processes of new members to transfer capacity and mentoring systems to ensure a continuous leadership capacity development, and support.

When talking about the **leadership culture** in the movements, organisations and groups, participants described it in different ways. Some described positive cultures nurturing leadership, equal, non-hierarchical, collaborative, respecting diversity, open to distribute power, aware of power dynamics, able to channel and listen to initiatives stemming from below. Others described the culture in their movement as inauthentic, toxic, with misuse of power, "attempting to legitimate itself through practices without embodying the meaning of those practices" (survey participant).

Movements with cultures that enable leadership development try to embody the values of equality, diversity, openness,

dialogue and distribution of power. For example, as participants explain:

"Within our movement we've arrived at our ways of working from many different perspectives, but fundamentally we are concerned with an equal and open distribution of power in a deeply collaborative context, both with one another and in the world we are trying to bring about. And we see that concentrations of power and prestige are ways in which the forces we are opposing reproduce themselves within our movements" (survey participant,

*"We have spent decades learning how to relate *between* organizations, movements and communities as equals and in ways that respect diversity. [...] That includes of course engaging with people who organize differently [...]. We have to find ways of engaging them as equals and allies across differences – knowing when to have the argument and when to leave it aside." (survey participant,*

These examples show that leadership cultures that prioritise collaboration and power distribution among diverse people and groups contribute to shift power in movements towards embodying those values.

A way in which participants suggested to promote leaderfulness in movements is creating awareness of the concept and how to practice it within movements by discussing it collectively in movements.

In conclusion, from an analysis of the literature, interviews, and surveys, as well as the experiences of the research team, we noticed that despite the fact that the term "leaderfulness" is still not well known among movements in Europe, there are already a number of existing movement practices that promote collective leadership.

As a research team, based on findings from the literature and the data collected we developed the following conceptualization of "Leaderful organizing":

"Leaderful organizing is building groups, organisations or movements that distribute power and leadership in ways that enable effective, accountable and agile collective action. It is an approach that seeks to embody the values that we aim to realise in the world." (The research team,

Leaderful organizing could help movements flourish by inspiring, motivating and energising people to engage with movements, build leadership, and believe in their power to drive change.

5

Competencies for Leaderful Organizing

5. Key competencies for Leaderful Organizing

Movements and organisations that aim to embrace leaderfulness and build collective leadership would need to build the competencies for leaderful organizing.

Some of the literature on leadership (Han 2014; Horton and Freire, 1990) indicated that people are not born with leadership skills, rather "those skills develop through careful cultivation, mentorship and experience" (Han 2014). They emphasise the importance of developing leadership in movements and organisations.

While in a leaderful context we can all be leaders, that doesn't mean we all are leaders (yet)! Leaderful movements should have a 'developmental view' of people, creating opportunities for people to learn competencies they do not have, grow into the capacity to hold responsibility, and support others and hold them in mind (going beyond self-preoccupation).

Survey participants indicated that among the key leadership qualities (Figure 2) there are communication, active listening, articulating visions, empathy, fairness, openness to vulnerability, sharing responsibilities and delegating power and responsibilities, as well as the ability to identify, support, and empower new leaders.

Interviews participants also shared that among the key leadership qualities there

flexibility, adaptability, intention to involve other people in processes, inclusiveness, transparency, responsibility, and knowing your role. Interviews presented two competency areas of leadership, namely orientation to goals and orientation to people. An example of goal-oriented leadership shared by an interviewee is:

"I don't get distracted. I'm always looking for "what does this serve for?". I ask myself every time somebody asks a question or we have a debate. [...] I have the right intuition to say: "wait, no, why are we discussing this now?"

Whereas relationship-oriented leadership

"I'm quite interested in the idea of leaders as containers. So I think I offer quite a good role. I'm attentive. I care about people I guess. I'm attentive to what's going on psychologically for people.

Based on the research findings we propose a set of competences for leaderful organizing needed for movements, organisations. The competencies were organised in three levels: (1) Intrapersonal competencies (within the individual), (2) interpersonal competencies (between individuals and groups), (3) systemic competencies (between organisations and in relation to the systems). In this section describe the competencies in each of the levels.



are motivation, strong political will,

Intrapersonal competences for leaderful organizing

Intrapersonal competencies refer to the competencies that individuals need to develop to contribute to build leaderful movements.

Emotional Literacy

This competence is essential and includes

Figure 2. Word cloud of terms used by participants to describe leadership

emotional intelligence and the ability to access in oneself and others' emotional core questions. This includes fierce vulnerability, open mindedness and humility, emotional self-regulation, cultivating 'constructive' and sustainable emotions, and building trust.

Self-awareness

Individual competences include being aware of one's own ways of seeing, ego stories, traumas, triggers, patterns and ability to work with them. Self-knowledge, and self-accountability.

Personal Resilience & Motivation

Competencies for self-care and self-motivation, personal resilience and awareness of one's limitations, ability to sustain action over time and avoid burnout. This also refers to reckoning with loneliness and the mental and emotional burden of taking responsibility, which could lead to burnout.

Ability to work well with power

Being comfortable with power and embracing leadership as personal transformation and social transformation. This includes analysis of power, self-awareness of one's power and privilege, openness to share power, shifting perceptions of power, letting go of control

and allowing others to take the lead.

Embodying values

This refers to being grounded in core values and able to use a moral and political compass to make decisions, never losing sight of 'the good of the whole' as a guiding principle, and developing ethical perspectives.

Skills for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous (VUCA) contexts

This refers to the competencies needed to navigate in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous world such as the ability to be comfortable with uncertainty and complexity, flexibility, holding contradictions and competing ideas, courage to take risks, hold one's centre and stay grounded in moments of stress.

Reflection and learning

Practising reflection and self-reflection on experience, humility, critical thinking, stepping into growth identity (not fixed identity) and drawing lessons learned to inform future action.

Interpersonal competences for leaderful organizing

These competencies are needed to improve relations between individuals within groups, movements, and organisations.

Distributing and working with power

The ability to foster collective leadership by distributing power. This would include individual competencies such as analysis of power dynamics in groups, frameworks for effective decision making and governance, and knowing when to "step up and step

back." It also includes collective competencies such as adopting an intersectional approach, methods for power analysis, distributed governance structures, blended decision making.

Leadership Literacy

The competences at the individual level would include embracing leadership development and personal transformation, understanding different leadership types and practices, and the interplay between

individual and collective leadership. Collective or structural competences, analysing leadership structures and practices, understanding leaderfulness and its link to social transformation. Fluency with case studies and examples case studies and examples of collective leadership and leaderful movements from movement history

Communication

Individual competences include dialogical communication skills with emphasis on empathetic listening - the ability to hear what is being said and what is not being said to build trust and unity within movements. Ability to hold/deepen conversations, give and receive feedback, to use non-violent communication techniques to effectively convey points of view in ways that move people into action. Collective/structural competences include setting up space for dialogue and feedback, and having hard conversations.

Transformative Collaboration

Competencies needed for collaboration within movements in ways that enable transformation. Individual competences include group facilitation skills (e.g. listening for points of agreement and/or disagreement, summation of various points of view and helping groups towards meeting collective goals), forming vision and collective purpose, sustaining motivation, balance tasks, processes and relationships, transforming conflicts. Collective/structural competencies include systems for accountability, conflict resolution, recognising talent, mentorship and honouring each other's potential, managing expectations, and facilitating collective learning.

Organizing

This includes building relationships between movement members through one-to-one conversations, facilitating participatory and effective meetings to identify analyse shared problems and solutions, enable engagement and empowerment through participatory and democratic collective decision-making processes and action.

Strategy, Planning and implementing

Leaderful movements require members to possess a clear sense of vision and focus despite distractions. Individual competences include developing long-

term visions and strategic planning, embracing responsive strategies, designing and offering clear processes to achieve goals. Collective competencies include developing clear organisational structures, planning, collective division of power and responsibility, systems of accountability and follow up on tasks. Accountability requires practising having difficult accountability conversations to ensure work gets done and that their personal boundaries are respected.

Culture of Care and Resilience

Leadership is not only achieving goals but also focusing on relationships and care of people in the movement and the organisations. Individual competences include emotional intelligence, container building, relationship and trust building, ability to 'go for the good of the whole', supporting others' strengths/struggles. Collective/structural competences include creating spaces and a culture of self and collective care to support resilient and sustainability movements, ability to recognise and address the needs of the group, using systems of relational accountability, mechanisms to prevent burnout. Practices include embodied practices, check-ins, spaces to share feelings, being vulnerable and seeking support, appreciation, teambuilding and mutual support systems.

Active Solidarity

Acknowledging how different forms of systemic injustice affect different people differently and create spaces that empower and prioritise the most affected. Individual competences include creating safe spaces for diversity and difference, awareness of group dynamics (mainstreams and margins), valuing a diversity of experiences and voices to participate and be heard and working well with power dynamics.

Systems View and Skills for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous (VUCA) contexts

Being able to think systemically about problems and solutions, and responding to the context. Individual competences include holistic/ecological thinking, the ability to hold multiple ways of seeing/knowing/being - even contradictory ideas and methods. Collective competences include working through the fog of ambiguity and contradictions.

Ongoing learning

Facilitating ongoing learning for organisations and movements. Individual competences include modelling humility and openness to learning, practice self-critique and feedback, facilitating collective reflection and drawing lessons learned

Systemic competences for leaderful organizing

Systemic competencies for leaderful organizing focus on the relation between movements and the socio-political systems and context they operate within and engage with.

Power and systemic analysis

Systemic competencies for leaderful organisation include analysing power structures and systems, creating spaces for power analysis of socio-political systems and relevant actors, adopting intersectional approaches to movement building, developing power distribution structures and cultures.

Leadership Literacy

This competence at the systemic level includes understanding leadership structures and creating systems for leadership development such as onboarding programs, rotation of leadership, mentorship and accompaniment. Accompaniment in movements implies taking risks together with the people or groups we are mentoring, not just "giving advice." Collective competencies include the ability to build structures for collective leadership like leadership groups, working groups or sup; and between movements like coalitions building.

Strategic Development

Practising growth-oriented leadership, empowering others, delegating, and enabling movements to scale up. Individual competences include strategic thinking with a long-term vision, developing theories of change, balancing long term and short-term planning, responsive visioning, and emergent strategy development.

Organizing

At the systemic level, this refers to building networks, alliances and coalitions among movements and organisations, transnational, transversal, and trans local organizing, building relationships between

from experiences. Collective competences include a "culture of debrief", making the time to reflect on actions and learn lessons, documenting movement experiences and knowledge, building cultures of "mutual learning".

constituencies, prefigurative organizing, coalition building, developing shared visions and coordinated strategies,

Building alignment and solidarity

This competence requires an alignment and collective motion of different actors within and between movements in the long term. Individual competences include the ability to align and working in coalitions. Collective competences include creating shared infrastructure, spaces and processes systems for internal organisational alignment and for inter-organisational, engage in shared political education.

Narrative and Framing

This competence requires developing a capacity to shape and influence narratives, framing problems and solutions based on the values we share. Individual competences include value-based framing, ability to articulate identity (who we are), purpose (why we do what we do), ability to inspire action (what we invite you to do).

Skills for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous (VUCA) contexts

At a systemic level, this competence is the ability to embrace adaptive strategies. Individual competences include the ability to make assessments of a movement's strategic course and to make changes as needed. The greater the level of leaderfulness, the greater the ability of people who do not hold official leadership positions to practise this level of reflection and adaptation. Collective competences include developing emergent strategies to changing contexts, and creating systems to enable emergent leadership.

Ongoing learning

This competence requires creating systems for leadership development in movements and documenting movement experience and knowledge for leadership development. For example by documenting and streamlining onboarding

processes, creating mentoring systems to ensure a continuous leadership development, and support systems for planning and implementing.

These competences for leaderful movements will inform the development of a competency framework, a toolkit, and an educational curriculum for activists and organizers to cultivate leaderful movements.

6

Conclusion

6. Conclusion

This research aimed at examining how movements and organisations conceptualise and practice leadership and leaderfulness in Europe. We developed a conceptual and practical framework with key competencies for leaderful organizing that will inform and support the development of tools for activists and organizers to cultivate leaderful movements.

A research team of nine organizers and activists used Participatory Action Research to collectively conduct the research design, data gathering and analysis. We examined about 20 literature texts on the topic, conducted 22 interviews with movement leaders and 67 online survey responses with movement representatives from 15 countries.

The research was guided by the following research questions: (1) How is leadership conceptualised and practised in movements across Europe? (2) How is leaderfulness conceptualised and practised? (3) What are the key competencies for leaderful organizing?

The key findings were that leadership is essential for movements and it has both individual and collective dimensions. Leadership is already present - formally or informally - in all forms of movements, organising and activism. Even movements that aspire to be "leaderless" are still led through informal and covert power dynamics and structures.

Not recognising the key role leadership plays or not being strategic about it may limit the power and impact of movements and organisations in the long run.

Leaderfulness allows movements to unlock power. Building leaderful movements means developing a stronger and shared understanding of leadership and adopting movement practices that distribute power and leadership in ways that enable effective, accountable and agile collective action. It is an approach that seeks to embody the values that we aim to realise in the world".

Leaderfulness implies both *more leaders* as well as *a more fully articulated practice of collective leadership*. And it does not exist in a vacuum. Leaderfulness is directional. Namely, it is a movement orientation aimed at unlocking more power than we have right so that our movements can be in position to win more than we are currently winning.

There are several already existing movement practices that support leaderfulness in movements, including building equal relationships, participatory meetings and decision-making processes, accountability systems, clear organisational structures, power distribution practices, inclusion and equity practices, and leadership development.

Movements and organisations that aim to be transformative, need to actively name, understand, and systematize movement leadership practices that support the development or strengthening of leaderfulness and the competencies for leaderful organising.

The key competences for leaderful organizing emerging from this research are both individual and collective. They include:

(a) intra personal competences: like emotional literacy, self-awareness, personal resilience and motivation, ability to work with power, embodying values, skills to navigate a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, as well as reflection and learning;

(b) interpersonal competences including distributing and working with power, leadership literacy, communication, transformative collaboration, organizing, accountability, strategy, planning and implementing, building cultures of care and resilience, active solidarity, and ongoing learning

(c) systemic competences include developing a power and systemic analysis, leadership literacy, organizing, strategic organisational development, building alignment and solidarity, narrative and

framing, systemic view, and systems for ongoing learning.

As next steps, the research will inform the development of a competence framework, a toolkit and training and educational curriculum on Leaderful Organizing.

We hope that this research will inform movement discourses and practices on leadership and inspire activists and organizers to develop the competencies for leaderful organizing.

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8. Appendix

Interview guide

Introductory/Warm up questions

1. Please introduce yourself and your role in the organization
2. Which political/organizational context do you identify with?
3. Which movement do you identify with?
4. What comes up for you when you hear the word 'leader' or 'leadership?' Have your feelings changed over time in any way?

Personal experience/beliefs

5. Who would you consider a leader?
6. Do you consider yourself a leader? If you are not a "leader," what are you? How would you describe yourself?
7. How do you see the different layers of social identity to be reflected in the leadership of the group you work with?
8. What would it take to help you consider yourself a leader? What is the obstacle to embodying that role in the work?

Skills and qualities

9. What personal qualities do you have that make/would make you an effective leader?
10. What are the challenges of being in positions of power? What skills and reflections do you have? What support do you need?

12. What do you consider to be the qualities of a leader that make movements move forward?

Cultural patterns

13. What is the cultural experience of leadership in your country? Is there something that would be particularly useful/relevant for us to know, when we start the process of developing materials and resources?
14. What is the cultural experience of leadership in your organisation/movement?

Organisational context

15. What does the term "leaderful" or "leaderful movements" mean to you?
16. Have you ever heard these terms? If yes, in what context? What emotions do these terms evoke in you?
17. In terms of this idea of leadership development, what are the key challenges you are experiencing? What are the gaps?
18. What are the best practices you are seeing?
19. What would a leaderful organization look like? Could your organization become that?

Wrap up

20. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Sample of movements & organisations engaged in interviews

Field Research Matrix (Interviews)

	Western Europe	Central & Eastern Europe	SE Europe	Local Organization	European Network	Staffed Organization	Volunteer-driven
Climate / Climate Justice	Code Rood (Netherlands)	Reset (Czech Republic)	Zelena Akcija (Croatia)	Extinction Rebellion (Hungary)	Young Friends of the Earth	Global 2000 / FOE (Austria)	Climaximo (Portugal)
Anti-racism / Anti-discrimination	Umoja (Belgium)		fAktiv (Croatia)		European Roma Grassroots Network		#GentZonderGrenzen (Belgium)
Civic Participation / Political Organisation	Attac (France)	Center for Community Organizing (Slovakia)	Zagreb je Nas (Croatia)	Barcelona en Comu (Catalunya / Spain)	European Community Organizing Network	AHang (Hungary)	Genova Che Osa (Italy)
Anti-poverty	Jong Gent in Actie (Belgium)	City is For All (Hungary)		London Renters Union (UK)	European Anti-Poverty Network		

The research team chose to conduct field interviews with a sampling of organizations from the larger pool of research subjects. Organizations were selected based on geography, kind/size, and main issue area.

Survey questions

The survey included the following multiple choice and open-ended questions:

General questions

1. How would you describe your role in the organisation? *
2. Which movement does the organisation identify with? Which issues is it mostly working on? (You may choose more than one option.) *
3. In which country is your organisation located? *
4. Which of the following would describe your organisation the best? * (Global, Transeuropean, National, Global)
5. How many paid staff members are there in your organisation? *
6. How many volunteers are there in your organisation? *
7. How many people are actively involved in the organisational work?
8. What are the first 3 words that come to your mind when you hear the word "leadership"?

Organisational practices

9. How would you describe the structure of your organisation from 1-5 (1-not formal at all; 5-very formal)
10. How does your organisation present its decision-making process and distribution of power to the world? (Hierarchical, Semi-hierarchical, Non-hierarchical, Other).
11. How would you describe the decision-making process and distribution of power in your organisation?

(Hierarchical, Semi-hierarchical, Non-hierarchical, Other).

12. What are the most frequent organisational challenges you see in your organisation?

Optional questions on leadership

13. Who would you consider a leader?
14. What personal qualities do you have that would make you an effective leader?
15. What are the challenges of being in positions of power? Which skills are instrumental in navigating those? What support would be welcome for you and/or the leadership within your organisation to better address these challenges?
16. How would you describe the culture around leadership and distribution of power, in the movement you identify with?
17. In what ways can leadership help movements to flourish? How do you see it usefully embodied and expressed in the movements you know, by individuals and/or organisations?
18. What does the term "leaderful" or "leaderful movements" mean to you? (Have you ever heard these terms? If yes, in what context? What emotions do these terms evoke in you?)
19. What would a leaderful organisation look like? To what extent could your organisation become that and how?



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