

“EFFECTIVE URBAN LEADERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL ERA”

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Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the tasks of urban leaders and the capabilities they need to be effective in the international era. It first describes the deficiencies of power, resources, competences, knowledge and civic cohesion comprising the local context in which UK urban leaders currently operate. It describes the new ‘deliverables’ now required from urban leaders. It then attempts to set out the shape of the task urban leaders now face, characterised as a triangle of economy, place and leadership, and examines the policy considerations where economy, place and leadership intersect. It proposes a new map of the eight abilities and skills effective leaders need to acquire. It concludes with a possible broad agenda for city leaders, in both policy and personal terms. It is based in large part upon the author’s reflection on his time in that role.

Key Words

Economy. Place. Leadership. Map. Values.

The political leadership of cities is one of the most challenging, varied and rewarding tasks that an elected politician can undertake. Yet little is done to educate, prepare, support or evaluate city leaders in what they do. This paper attempts to frame the leadership task and map the necessary leadership abilities for modern urban leaders.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Britain’s cities once led the world – no longer. In comparison with other European cities London now ranks 23 in GDP per head, Edinburgh is 26, Glasgow 29, Bristol 34 and Leeds 43.¹ That “falling behind” is apparent in

more than just measures of personal wealth. It can be seen across the whole field of urban development and regeneration too.ⁱⁱ And if they lag in means to develop and regenerate, UK cities will continue to lag in prosperity. In his summary articleⁱⁱⁱ Nicolas Falk of URBED explains this lag – he says city and other local authorities in the United Kingdom “*suffer from four critical constraints. First, they lack the powers. Second, they lack the resources. Third, they lack the professional competence. And fourth, they lack the necessary knowledge of best practice.*”

Powers

The history of local government in post-war years has been that of the removal of powers and functions – sometimes to the private sector, more often to public bodies with only the most tenuous democratic accountability. Public health, further education, water supply, public transport, housing and other functions, including large parts of the promotion of local economic development, have all be sent elsewhere. This dispersion both reduces the powers of elected local government and increases the number of governmental ‘actors’ in cities. In Scotland, the ability to raise local taxation has recently been frozen. Those areas where local government does retain control are heavily regulated. In the planning field, for instance, government ministers have the power to “call-in” and themselves determine any application for planning permission that they wish, anywhere in the country, without giving any reason. Elected councils cannot give final legal approval to their own development plan; that again is reserved to government ministers, effectively civil servants.

The former minister, Lord Michael Heseltine, wrote:

“Local government in Britain’s cities has been emasculated and hollowed out. The powers which they once exercised have been removed by centralising Governments unwilling to trust local people to shape their own destiny. Tragically, the ability of our great Cities to lead their own renaissance no longer meaningfully exists.”^{iv}

This is a common sentiment. There are from time to time attempts to move in the other direction. For instance, the ‘power of well-being’, was introduced in recent English and Scottish legislation. It enables local authorities to do anything that will contribute to the ‘well-being’ of their people, provided it is not already covered by existing legislation. This proviso is a strong legal disincentive, since almost everything is legislated for, but, nevertheless, it is a power designed to encourage local leadership and imagination. Unfortunately, it is rarely used. Fewer than one in 12 local authorities in England currently make use of this power.^v The reasons,

perhaps, lie in Falk's three other constraints – lack of resources, competences and knowledge.

Resources

In parallel with the diminution of powers has come a diminution in the proportion of local government spending financed by its own local taxation. In England in 2006-7, local government had a total income to spend of £144.3 billion. Of that £19.2 billion or 13.3% came from local council tax compared with grants from central government of £89.1 billion (61.7%). Property tax on non-domestic properties (which is collected locally but redistributed by central government) was £17.5 billion (12.1%). The remainder came from fees and charges and from asset sales.^{vi}

Further, in England, central government retains the power to prevent or “cap” any increase in council tax by any single local authority that it deems excessive, thus reducing local control over tax and spend even further. In Scotland, the SNP minority administration in 2007 went further and froze all council tax increases, even those to keep pace with inflation, replacing the monies lost with further central government grants.

Taxation on commercial and business property (non-domestic rates) is set by central government and distributed back to local government, not on the basis of the source location of the tax, but on the basis of local “need”. Thus the non-domestic rates system removes any virtuous link or incentive between actions by a local authority to improve its economy through development and the taxation revenue of that authority.

Cities in the UK increasingly lag behind continental European competitors in infrastructure provision of all kinds, in part because local capital spending is almost entirely dependent on central government provision of capital funds or approval of borrowing. There is one recent exception to this - the introduction of ‘prudential borrowing’. A local authority may borrow capital if it has provided for the future repayment of the costs of such borrowing, either from its own resources of taxation or from the revenue to the project which the borrowing will fund. With council tax capped or frozen, the ability to do so is again greatly restricted.

All this hinders the capacity of cities and other local authorities to shape their own future. As a recent House of Commons Select Committee says: *We regret that, despite the series of reviews of local government finance that have taken place over the last 30 years, from the Layfield Committee onwards, there has under successive Governments been little change designed to create a funding system that supports and enables local*

authorities to fulfil their role as 'strategic place-shapers'..... reforming local government finance is a key component in empowering local authorities.^{vii}

Competences

Restrictions on both powers and resources, together with constant oversight from central government, does nothing to encourage improvements in either political or professional competences. What is the point of getting better at your job or being innovative in how it is done if the law and the detailed regulations supplied by central government already tell you exactly what to do? There are, of course, many stars and many unsung heroes working in local authorities. But there are also many who simply keep to the rules. Training is mostly “*limited to helping individuals to understand the statutory requirements, or achieve professional qualifications, rather than enabling teams to work together better on complex issues involving many different specialised skills*”.³ In other words, training tends to reinforce professional protectionism, rather than encourage problem-solving, innovation and an improved set of outcomes on the ground.

Knowledge

Nicolas Falk and Sir Peter Hall saw another key disparity between the culture in continental European cities and those in the UK. “*We found that successful European cities were far keener to learn, and communicate their experience than their British equivalents. This reduced the risks and enabled them to secure efficiencies by climbing the ‘learning curve’ – here we seem to have a ‘forgetting curve’, where experience (of others) is discarded as irrelevant*”. In part, this reluctance in the UK to learn from others can be placed at the door of the press and the public who often see learning visits to other cities, especially when they are in other countries, as simply “junkets” for the participating politicians or professional staff. When local government has so little freedom to act on its own and is so constrained by central government, it is perhaps unsurprising that learning is seen by the public and press, and by people in local government, as an expensive treat rather than a necessity.

Civic cohesion

There is one other, less tangible, context which has grown slowly over the years and it, too, places restraints on the capacities of cities leaders. There seems to have been a decline in civic and social cohesion in UK cities and a decline in a sense of common purpose. Without them leadership is harder.

This decline originates in large part from the inequality in British society, which grew rapidly in the 1980's and 1990's and which, though now more stable, remains high.^{viii} With inequality comes a breakdown in trust. People then feel less secure, less connected with their neighbours and less co-operative.^{ix} Common culture and goals then shrink, affecting the well-being of civic society alongside that of individuals.

Allied with high inequality, the growing spatial separations and divisions in our cities^x also undermines civic cohesion; poor people have been moved to housing areas special to their own requirements and the better-off have moved to their own suburbs, graded according to affluence. The knowledge and understanding of others in different circumstances from oneself is thus diminished, especially on the part of the wealthy,^{xi} so as to become almost absent; and therefore any sense of civic common purpose naturally declines.

NEW DELIVERABLES

Alongside that local context, changes in the wider world are putting larger demands on city leaders. Put simply, instead of only being required to deliver national services to national standards at a local level within their local budget, city leaders, alongside that essential service delivery, have other deliverables that reflect both increased local expectations and the place of the city in the international arena. The new deliverables may be grouped under three headings.

More for less

Expectations of more and better services and performance by local authorities come both ways - from central government and local citizens. It is an ambition that most local political and professional leaders will share, and so, because that goal must be achieved with the same or fewer resources, delivering more for less becomes a key objective. Failure to achieve that objective will limit the belief that citizens have in the feasibility of the achieving wider goals.

Delivering more for less will require determined skill and innovation; it will not continue to be enough simply to impose monetary 'efficiency savings' and targets.

The current predilection for using such centrally or locally imposed performance targets to achieve efficiency is now being challenged.^{xii} Increasingly therefore "*instead of force-fitting services to arbitrary targets...the place to start is determining what people want and then*

redesigning the work to meet it.... Counter-intuitively, improving services in this way makes them cheaper, since it removes many centrally-imposed activities that people don't want. ^{xiii}

Many attempts at greater efficiency have looked at the back-office functions of local government, but, as with targets, real efficiencies here can hinder or damage other local goals. For instance, current efforts to find efficiencies of scale in local government purchasing by having local authorities collaborate to buy in bulk on the national or international market can act against the need to support local prosperity or neighbourhood regeneration through local purchasing. ^{xiv}

Delivering more for less in a way that benefits the whole city, and not just the local authority coffers, will require real skill and innovation. Some city leaders, because local services are of the most immediate concern to voters, will concentrate in this area – providing good local education to those who use education, good social care for those who use social care or good public transport for those who use public transport. This is necessary, but in the international era, it is not sufficient.

A place in the global economy

Cities play a fundamental role in the global economy. Urban-based economic activities account for up to 55% of GNP in low-income countries, 73% in middle-income countries and 85% in high-income countries. ^{xv} Most of the world's trade takes place between cities. If a city is to prosper, whatever the proportion of its contribution to the global economy, then it will have to find, define, develop and maintain its unique and particular role in it.

To achieve this city leaders will need to deliver in three related areas. They will first have to increase the pace of physical investment. Physical infrastructure emerged from a recent Global Competitiveness Report as the UK's most important economic weakness in relation to other advanced economies, reflecting the low rate of investment over the previous two decades, ^{xvi} itself a consequence of restricted local government powers and resources. In the UK especially therefore, new strategies will need to be found to bridge the capital resource gap for investment.

Secondly, they will need to look to the real activities within the city economy, underpin the areas which are already strong and which can look to the future with confidence, seek to fill any gaps in skills or activities, perhaps through immigration, and enhance the diversity of economic structures and activities, especially with activities that are forward-looking

and innovative. Diversity is important because it appears to facilitate *dynamic adaptation to new situations without painful structural decline. This is becoming more important in the context of accelerating economic change and globalisation.*^{xvii}

Thirdly, they will need to look at the identity of the city in the world, strengthening its distinctiveness through concentrating on developing real economic activities which provide the city with its differential economic advantage and conveying that identity to the global community through everything from good branding to special events.

Sustainability

In the longer term still, city leaders will need to deliver sustainable prosperity, long term social cohesion and environmental sustainability for their city. These goals will all be within the agendas of national and international authorities, but they can not be delivered nationally or internationally without the active involvement of cities. This is crucial and for a number of reasons.

City economies form the major part of the global economy and action to deliver a sustainable economy, a stable and wide prosperity, will necessarily be founded in cities.

City activities generate close to 80% of all carbon dioxide emissions.^{xviii} Transport policy, energy use in new buildings and retrofitting older buildings, waste and materials management to combat climate change and the actions needed to mitigate it, from flood prevention to health care, are all only effective when implemented at a city level, though supported by national regulation and budgets.

If governments are to succeed in persuading citizens to accept a low carbon future, they will need to pursue increased economic equality as a cultural means of reducing competitive consumerism, shifting “*the sources of human satisfaction from economic growth to a more sociable society*”.¹¹ Cities are where most people now live and they are key partners in making such a shift. Inclusion and integration can be delivered only at a local level, where people live, through local action, although again supported by national rights and protections.

CONCEIVING THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION

Faced with that significant set of deliverables and a less than favourable context within which to meet them, city leaders are faced with a significant conceptual and communications task. How should an individual leader - a

directly elected mayor or a leader with a cabinet, it makes little difference – respond and shape his or her role?

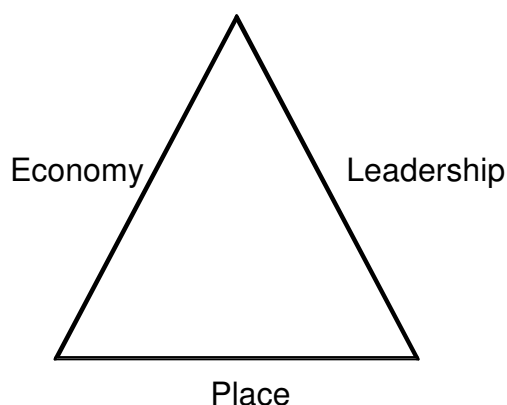
A pair of central questions, though seemingly obvious and simple (and rarely openly asked, it appears) can help to clarify the response and shape both the task of leadership and the personal capacities necessary to perform it. Those simple, obvious questions are – what do I want my place to be like? And how do I get there?

These questions have the advantages of focusing on the place, the city, as a whole, not just on aspects of it, of making values very plain, of forcing attention to results, and of emphasising the crucial role of individuals and their capabilities.

With those questions in mind, how does the city leader conceive and shape the task of leading the place, its economy and its people and how does s/he shape his or her own capability and behaviour to achieve those tasks? This paper attempts answers to those questions.

SHAPING THE TASK

With a resonance to the ‘place, work, folk’ formulation of Sir Patrick Geddes, it is possible to shape that task as a triangle - with interesting considerations to be made at the intersections of the sides of the triangle: between economy and place, between economy and leadership and between place and leadership.



The intersection of economy and place

All, or at least most, economic activity exists in a place. This is true at a global level as well as a street level. It was, and sometimes still is^{xix}, thought that information technology would radically break this link, that

people could work and interact from anywhere. Certainly some trading happens outside of place, as it always has done, and has now accelerated and widened using the internet, but it turns out that, with information technology and the knowledge economy, place becomes more important, not less; knowledge workers choose where to work and choose places where they, and those like them, like to be. Being face to face builds trust and enables complex communications.

We can readily understand that economy creates place, that wealth or poverty and a specific kind of economic activity, car-making or farming, mining or banking, shapes what that place is like. Now we begin to see, especially in knowledge- and skill-based economies, that place, its quality and ability to attract, shapes a particular economy, its scale and its nature. We are beginning to learn, alongside the classical inputs of land, labour and capital, that 'place' - the localised amalgam of specific spaces, objects and characteristics - might also be thought of as an economic contributor all on its own. Jane Jacobs, writing about the economies of whole cities, put it this way: *'Consider too the physical arrangements that promote the greatest profusion of duplicate and diverse enterprises serving the population of a city, and lead therefore to the greatest opportunities for plentiful divisions of labour upon which new work can potentially arise.'*^{xx}

Effective city leaders will explore the relationship between economy and place in their own city and will create appropriate strategies to address key areas. These are likely to include:

- *Connections*: from local public transport to international links to wi-fi city centres
- *Public space*: from public squares to green corridors to community halls
- *Land use*: from brownfield regeneration to affordable housing to urban design
- *Liveability*: from public safety to late night licensing to cultural activity
- *Identity/attraction*: from special events to city floodlighting to branding

Such strategies, and there will be more, are about change and often development, and will arouse fear and uncertainty in many citizens, leading to conflict. Most citizens are fearful of development (perhaps with good reason, given the poor quality of much of it, especially housing, in the UK today); 85% oppose further development in their own locality, 57% even oppose new schools.^{xxi} Skilful communication and persuasion by leaders

about the nature of the intersection between economy and place will be needed.

The intersection of economy and leadership

Nations have well-established models and frameworks for economic management. But most people live in cities, whose prosperity is more variable, volatile and open to external forces. But city leaders, in the UK at least, have few formal powers over the development and direction of their own local economy, these having been abrogated and moved elsewhere. For this reason if no other, it seems rare for cities to understand fully their own city economy, what makes it work, expand, contract. The first task of city leaders is to analyse, understand and publicly describe their economy.

With limited powers, effective city leaders will know that their best action is to create a vision that others can share and an economic programme that others can join. In doing so, city leaders will be saying that co-operation between the various economic actors in the city will bring greater benefit than competition and will influence the behaviour of those, private or public, who do have economic levers to pull.

Within that framework city leaders will want to articulate a programme of co-operation to secure and promote prosperity and will create appropriate strategies to address key areas. These may include:

- *Common purpose*: from support for trade associations to promotion of visions for the future to collaborative programmes
- *Investment*: from long-term infrastructure planning to new financial mechanisms to joint public/private projects
- *Trade*: from trade fairs to local ‘match-making’ events to export promotion visits
- *Migration*: from ‘diversity acceptance’ within local companies to language and interpretation programmes to availability of housing
- *Learning*: from university commercialisation support to school-to-college-to-job programmes to transitions for less-skilled people into the labour market
- *Innovation*: from university/business conversations to seed-corn funding for new ideas to support for cross-sector networks

The intersection of place and leadership

Ever since people settled in one place and formed the communities that in generations became our town and cities, we have created places that uniquely reflect our collective needs. More recently, the extremes of industrialisation and neo-liberal economics, lauding the values of competitive individual action above collective values, have helped us lose

some of that public art of place-making. John Kenneth Galbraith memorably called that process “private wealth and public squalor”.^{xxii} That loss has been accompanied by a loss in our language, both visual and verbal, about how to talk about ‘place’ in a way that makes sense to citizens.

Without good place-making or ‘urbanism’, *‘the life of the individual is blighted, the life of the community is stillborn and the future of the planet is jeopardised. With it, people can find expression for their own creativity, communities can develop their own vision and leadership, and can be secured for the enjoyment of future generations....The practice of good urbanism can establish a high quality of living, nurture a healthy and creative way of life, support economic, social, political and cultural activity and deliver robust, distinctive and attractive environments for our villages, towns and cities.’*^{xxiii}

‘Place’ is more than simply a set of buildings and spaces – it is the way in which those physical arrangements interact with human activity. And the strength of that interaction is a component in civic common purpose. The well-being of a community is, at least in large part, shaped by the quality and functionality of the place which it inhabits and the ‘leadership of place’ is therefore a central component in the task of city leaders. They will want to create appropriate strategies to address key areas. These may include:

- *Understanding*: from analysis of the ‘peopling’ of the city to public debate on place identity to breaking down professional barriers
- *Value*: from studies of private value accruing from public space to joint investment programmes to linking the values of heritage to development
- *Language*: from citizen inquiries to children’s projects to leader’s workshops.
- *Well-being of Place*: from sustainability and environmental programmes to community safety to ‘conviviality’ programmes

SHAPING THE LEADERSHIP

This section is about the leadership “side” of the triangle. It is about the essentially political task and is addressed, using the second person, to those who undertake it – whether elected or not, whether individuals, like mayors, or leaders with cabinets. And it is about individual behaviour – because for leaders the political is the personal. How do you - a city leader - shape your own capability and behaviour to the task of effective leadership of the place, its economy and its people?

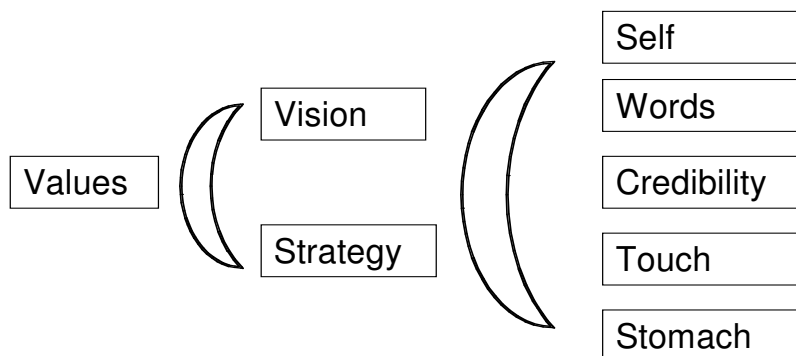
Leadership, local leadership, political leadership is, in most academic studies, written of in terms of the jobs to be done, the context of those jobs and the personal capabilities needed to perform them well. For instance, the well-regarded Warwick Leadership Questionnaire seeks to analyse “context, challenges and capabilities” and then sets out the necessary capabilities as:

- *Public service values*
- *Critical thinking*
- *Decision-making*
- *Personal effectiveness*
- *Strategic direction*
- *Advocacy and representation*
- *Political intelligence*
- *Communications*
- *Organizational mobilization, and*
- *Systems and tasks.*^{xxiv}

This is unquestionably useful, although it conflates tasks with capabilities. However, it has two disadvantages. First, because of its focus on organizational matters, it encourages a managerial approach to political leadership, which works for managers, but not for politicians. Second, it largely ignores the most important factor in political leadership, important to politicians and citizens alike, and that is the role of emotion, especially in communication.^{xxv} And in that way, it underestimates the scale of the political and leadership task. In effect, it tells you what to do, rather than how to do it. Both are obviously important.

This deficiency arises because studies and formulations such as this are written by observers rather than participants in leadership. This paper, by taking a different approach, attempts to sketch a personal “how-to” map for city leaders. Effective leaders may instinctively go where this map points; to others it may be new ground.

In a democratic society the fundamental task of a political leader is to secure a majority for a course of action. It is about knowing what you want, convincing others, and doing it. Or, in other words, what do I want my place to be like and how do I get there? The map has eight “destinations”.



What do you want?

1. *Your Values*

It is often surprising that elected politicians, especially local ones, find it difficult to say what their fundamental political values are and therefore what they want for the place they are to govern. For instance, all the councillors belonging to the present (and new) governing coalition in Edinburgh, soon after their 2007 election, were brought together by the Council's chief executive and asked, for his guidance, what it was they wanted for the city. No one answered. Their manifestos, though full of detail on specifics, gave few insights into the political values they hold – and upon which, presumably, they were elected.

Perhaps one reason why politicians, in common with most people, find their basic values difficult to articulate is because values are so ingrained in our psyches and, therefore, so very obvious to us (even when others hold completely opposite values). They shape every metaphor by which we think. George Lakoff^{xxvi} explains that those metaphors and values are rooted in our experience of and attitude towards the family. Those on the right of politics adhere to the “strict father morality” and those on the left to the “nurturant parents morality” (though we all have bits of both moralities in us most of the time).

The first task of any politician is to get a good look at the compass by which you will steer as crises loom, as they surely will. What are the values that you live by, can you analyse them, shape them and make them coherent to others? When asked what you want for your city, depending on

your place in the political line-up, you might, from the right, answer “ordered, clean, a place of opportunity”, while from the left you might answer “prosperous, cared-for and fair”. Knowing your values and articulating them in terms of the city which you help lead, is the fundamental first point in the map.

2. *Your Vision*

Your vision for your city converts those broad and timeless values into the particular place you help to govern and the time within which you do so. It is not a policy document. It is about, for instance, what “prosperous, cared-for and fair” means for the people of the city, today and tomorrow. It is about ends, not means. Where are you trying to get to? What exactly does “fairness” mean for your city today? Your vision is about the city and its people, but it is also about you, the city leader. It needs to resonate in its expression with your own personal story, what you stand for and what you won’t stand for. It is a statement of principles, of the big picture, and is essentially about appealing to the emotions and a call to arms for those who share your values.

It will provide a vivid and moving narrative describing the choices that the city has, the bright future that awaits if the right choices are made and the dangers ahead if they are not.

3. *Your Strategy*

All good leaders are constantly looking to the future and talking about the path towards that future. It’s the way of keeping everyone in your organization, and in the wider world, with you on that same path. Your strategy, devised between politicians and professionals, is that broad path. It sets out the elements that comprise your vision of the future and the means to get them .

There are two inter-twined elements to strategy. The first obvious strand is the big and the bold ideas; the building, say, of a new public transport network to underpin the renewal of neglected parts of the city and bring more “fairness” into who can get to where the work is and how they get there.

Then there’s another more elusive strand but just as important. It is about behaviour and belief. Successful city leaders will know that they alone can’t make the changes that the city needs, but that every citizen plays a part; if citizens are not ‘on side’ in how they behave on a daily basis, then the leader’s vision will likely fall short of achievement. Every successful leader will work, consciously or otherwise, towards the big decisive shift, a

tipping point, in belief and behaviour that comprises an essential part of the vision of the future. It can come through legislation as the successful ban on smoking in public places, first in Scotland and then in the rest of the UK, has shown, and it can also come through what Gladwell calls a “social epidemic” generated by the little things that make a big difference.^{xxvii} A strategy of small things (using perhaps Gladwell’s three rules of ‘*the law of the few*’, ‘*the stickiness factor*’ and ‘*the power of context*’ and the new insights of behavioural economics from other authors) will very often be just as important as a strategy of big things, though more difficult to devise because political leaders are less used to thinking about it and doing it.

Values, vision and strategy are all about what you want. The rest is about convincing others and getting there.

How do you get there?

4. Yourself.

Professional and managerial city leaders have time to grow their way into the job; political leaders rarely do. Both, particularly the politician, find themselves in roles shaped around and by the current occupier, where there is a high degree of public exposure and where stress and extreme time-pressures are normal. Learning and deliberate self-awareness are, therefore, both very necessary and at the same time very hard to acquire.

Successful city leaders will set aside deliberate time away from the office to learn, deepen their skills and widen their worldview. They will also build in time for personal reflection: keeping a daily diary is a common and useful way to reflect on your success and failure.

5. Your words.

Leadership is so much about words and how they are deployed. Your words are the weapons of democratic politics and government. Yet still so many public servants, professionals and politicians, fail at the first hurdle: to “*communicate within the experience of his audience*”.^{xxviii} Successful leaders will find ways to use the words and respect the values of those to whom they speak.

They will know, too, to match words to task. Some specialist audiences and messages require plain, clear, fact-filled, almost technical words. Most audiences do not, especially audiences of citizens; unsuccessful leaders are those who “*present voters with facts and figures to support their arguments (and) present laundry lists of issues and position statements*”.

Successful leaders eschew the technical and “*tell emotionally compelling*

stories about who they are and what they believe in They speak at the level of principled stands.”²⁸

Successful leaders will also know that their words will often be more convincing when they come from others. They will always find ways for key messages to come from the mouths of proxies, even unwittingly; that is the way social epidemics start. It doesn't take many voices to start them, but those voices do need to be carefully identified and nurtured; Gladwell's 'law of the few' identifies what he calls “*connectors, mavens and salesmen*”.

6. *Your credibility.*

Good words, over the longer term, are ineffective if the source of those words lacks credibility. Credibility comes in part from perceived competence. This is why it is important for successful city leaders to deliver well on basic services and get 'more for less'.

Credibility also comes from knowing and understanding your city in the same way that the citizens know and understand it. If that is the way the city really is, so much the better; the citizen's understanding can be reinforced with all the appropriate evidence and narrative. If that is not the way the city really is, and this, with the decline in civic cohesion, is increasingly likely to be the case, then knowing both the perception of the city as well as the reality of the city allows you to talk about necessary change from the standpoint of the audience, or as they would think 'to be grounded in reality', not 'over their heads'. Targets can be missed by aiming too high, as well as too low.

7. *Your touch.*

Leadership is all about the ability to bring others along with you. Your interaction with others is critical to success. Conventional thinking here would use such neutral words as 'personal effectiveness' and 'political intelligence'. In fact, leadership is not neutral, is full of emotional content and it is more useful to think emotionally and consider how your words and actions touch other people; do they come closer or do they shy away?

There are many elements to an individual's 'touch' and only you can determine what it might be at any one time. But it includes respect, timing, clarity, disagreement, imagination, charm. And will certainly be about seeing and reacting to the needs and values of others.

8. *Your stomach.*

A poor leader is a hesitant leader. Hesitation is not the same as caution or prudence. Hesitation is about knowing that the choice in front of you is tough and all the options full of risk and potential opposition – and therefore putting it off to another day. Machiavelli was very clear that making no decision is very often worse than any possible decision that could be made, worse than even the worst choice on offer.^{xxix}

Decisions and leadership require courage. Without it you won't be able to take the risks or learn from failures that all good leaders must. Courage is perhaps the most important virtue you must cultivate because all else is nullified without it. If you can find a 'bravery pill', then take it.

AN URBAN LEADERSHIP AGENDA?

Assuming that there are sufficient resources and legal powers, urban leadership in the international era will be effective, and the cities they govern successful, if leaders know how to define and shape that always fascinating point at which the task, and the capabilities of the individuals addressing the task, coincide. The analysis in this paper now allows some tentative conclusions to be drawn about some characteristics of that nexus. They are expressed as a seven-point summary agenda covering the 'must-haves' in governance, policy and individual leadership. They are in addition to the important agenda of service provision and credibility building through 'more for less'.

Governance Must-haves

1. Inclusive structures and whole city alliances

With limited powers and resources of their own, city leaders will use those of others. That means that for city leaders to implement a shared vision for the future, there will need to be effective structures aligning the activities of the many agencies and interests in the city.

These 'partnership' structures are now becoming ubiquitous; the challenge is to make them dynamic and effective when the legal powers and budget of each individual partner ("health" or "police") require them to restrict actions to their own specialist areas of competence. For instance, better health might often be better secured if health authorities spent health budgets on housing improvement. Part of the response to the challenge may be to find a way in which all partners, though formally answerable to and funded from elsewhere, can respond to the democratic leadership of the city.

2. Long-term agenda building

Goals and strategies often require to be implemented in stages over the long term if they are to be effective. These long-term agendas can easily be disrupted or abandoned by short term expediency or political change. The governance processes of the ‘partnership’ structures therefore need to ensure that broad goals and strategies are not only accepted within the basic values and world views of all key partners, but embedded firmly within their policies and budgets.

Policy Must-haves

3. Economics of place

Cities always have had many individual policies designed to impact on the prosperity of the local economy, from providing for movement and transport to supporting or securing trade. Successful cities will see the need to weave these into a whole strategy, based on a deep understanding of the nature of the particular city’s economy, of the place it inhabits and of the intersection between the two.

4. Well-being of place

The physical nature of the place itself, compact or spread-out, clean or otherwise, its buildings and spaces, its relationship with its past and its future, is always a prime focus of city government. Successful cities will understand the relationship between the well-being of the physical environment within the city and the well-being of those who live there; they will see the need to understand the distinctiveness of the place and find the language to provoke the changes that need to be made.

5. Civic cohesion policy

Cities are social organisations that exist to provide proximity, a proximity that allows everything from the economy to culture and knowledge to flourish. If that proximity is hindered, by physical or social barriers, then cities will function less well. Successful cities will sustain and enhance their civic cohesion, physically and socially, especially at times when the historic need for all cities to receive inward migrants is at a flood. Recent research suggests, too, that greater equality, itself a cohesive force, brings significant and wide-ranging social benefits.¹¹

Personal Leadership Must-haves

6. Outward-looking Stance

With the fragmentation of functions, the multiplication of local agencies and the hollowing out of the powers of democratic local government, leaders, especially elected leaders, can no longer simply offer leadership of one agency. Effective leaders will see themselves as the leader of the city,

rather than, for instance, simply the ‘leader of the council’. They will take an outward-looking stance, creating a highly visible space for leadership that reaches beyond the boundaries of administrative divisions, legal powers and electoral timetables.

7. *Trust-building Behaviour*

Trust, particularly trust in government of various kinds, is a fragile and seemingly diminishing commodity. Blame and disdain appear more prevalent. Without trust, civic cohesion, common purpose and active support wilt away and effective action becomes harder. Difficult as it may be, successful leaders will seek to sustain whatever social capital of trust exists and build upon it. Credible delivery of services and projects and the creation of wide alliances, as well as their personal behaviour, will be part of that process.

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