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Leadership as an Art within the Context of Wicked Social Problems

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The term “wicked problems” originated from the work of Rittel and Webber (1973) in the context of social planning, having as one of its several defining characteristics the notion of “resistance to resolution.” The researchers came to recognize that the classical problem-solving model of science and engineering based on reductionism and linear thinking, prevalent at the time, was inapplicable to the complex problems occurring within and between social systems. Both a social entrepreneur and social interaction designer, Kolko (2012: 26) defines a wicked problem as “a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons, specifically (1) incomplete or contradictory knowledge; (2) the number of people and opinions involved; (3) the large economic burden; and (4) the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems.” Because the focus of our work is on leadership’s social and cultural influence in the context of wicked social problems, we gravitate toward Kolko’s definition.

Grint (2005) further developed the wicked problems concept by differentiating between wicked problems, tame problems and critical problems, proposing the type of leadership or management that is most effective for each type of problem. Our interest in Grint's work is twofold in that he identifies the need for an engaged collective as being most effective in resolving wicked problems, to which we agree. Then, due to the uncertainty and complexity involved, he identifies "leadership as an art" as being best suited to "engaging a community in facing up to complex problems" (2008: 4). The aim of this conceptual paper is to further develop the concept of "leadership as an art" within the context of "resolving wicked social problems." We do so by first reviewing and then integrating the literature in these two areas to demonstrate how practicing leadership as an art synergizes wicked social problem resolution at the community level. Our own observations and experiences add to the foundations already present in the literature. Our method for exploring the concept of "leadership as an art" in the context of "resolving wicked social problems" is as follows. We begin with a review of the literature on leadership as an art, describing its qualities while at the same time applying those qualities to Abraham Lincoln's leadership during the civil war, a wicked social problem. Next, we review the literature on wicked social problems, applying the qualities of wicked social problems to crime in urban areas. Then, we integrate the qualities of leadership as an art with those of resolving wicked social problems, demonstrating how the two concepts complement one another in practice. We do this within the overarching framework of social systems theory. Finally, to demonstrate how the concepts might be applied in practice, we relate leadership as an art to an actual case of a wicked social problem at the community level to further illustrate how leadership as an art synergized the resolution that transpired.

First, before moving to a review of the literature, we want to identify several ontological, epistemological and axiological philosophies that we hold relevant to this work. As we focus on the *art* of leadership, we do not intend to diminish its foundation in the social sciences. In fact, as the social sciences encompass the study of human relationships within society, we will see from descriptions of leadership as an art, particularly those of DePree (1989) and O'Malley (2012), that its vitality is dependent upon its ability to influence humanity through social interaction. Epistemologically, we view artful leadership, people who practice leadership as an art, and wicked problems in the context of systems theory versus in the context of linear and reductionist thinking. Wicked social problems from their very definition are those that arise from brokenness within complex social systems where social interactions are the building blocks of relationships that either enhance or detract from system balance as a whole. We believe the quality of those relationships is largely dependent upon the practice of artful leadership. We come from an ontological view that begins with seeing the social problem through the eyes of those entangled in it. We share the belief expressed by Rittel and Webber (1973); an accurate description of a wicked problem frames its resolution. Axiologically, we believe that wicked problems are resolved by artful leaders who have the courage and conviction to see beyond the brokenness and possess the empathy and humility to see beyond themselves, embracing the possibilities of a future that holds promise. Artful leaders see the chaos of daily life and rather than becoming overwhelmed by it, use its lessons as an opportunity to fully engage in resolving wicked problems one day at a time.

Second, when studying wicked social problems, we do not subscribe to the McNamara Fallacy, which when summarized suggests that what can't be measured doesn't exist. Instead we support the

position evident from what Handy (1994: 221) has said about the McNamara Fallacy, which is that we should measure what we can; we should *not* disregard what can't be easily measured or assign it arbitrary values, which is artificial and misleading. We should *not* assume that what can't be measured isn't important or deny the existence of what can't be easily measured. When well-established means of measurement don't apply to the problem, we propose exploring other means of measurement on a small scale. As we learn from small scale endeavors, small failures might be best viewed as potential stepping stones to success.

Third, when resolving wicked problems, there simply is no room for the god complex, which Harford (2011: ¶ 4) defines as having “an absolutely overwhelming belief that you are infallibly right in your solution.” Social problems are too complex to understand in this way, making trial and error *on a small scale* an attractive and affordable alternative before attempting big scale change (Harford, 2011). As every community is its own social system, there is no standard template. None-the-less when interfacing with other social systems, resolutions serving one community may be tailored to serve others.

Finally, we come from predominantly a post-heroic leadership perspective and more secondarily, a critical leadership perspective. From a post-heroic perspective, one that views leadership as a process that is shared among the collective (Collinson, 2017), we identify from the literature those leadership qualities inherent when viewing leadership as an art in the context of resolving wicked social problems. Our choice of the term “collective leadership process” is intentional, as we view collective leadership as a dynamic social process that determines how people *interchangeably* serve in either a leading function, which could be viewed as a guiding function versus a formal leadership role, or a follower function, which could be viewed as a supportive function versus a formal subordinate role. It requires a great deal of trust in the capabilities of members of the collective. At any point in time within a collective leadership process, the function carried out at the time is determined by the accessibility and the expertise of the persons involved and the needs of the collective being served.

From a critical leadership perspective, one that focuses on analyzing power, control and inequalities (Collinson, 2017), we view artful leaders as equalizing agents in three ways. First, artful leaders predominantly engage in power creation through developing relationships *with others* versus by exerting power *over others*. Second, we see artful leaders as talent scouts and talent illuminators, encouraging people to view themselves as equal partners within the leadership process where decision-making is shared. Lastly, we see artful leadership as motivating positive change leading to wicked social problem resolution in an otherwise unstable social systems environment.

Review of the Literature

Leadership is an Art

The Oxford English dictionary defines art as, “A skill at doing a specified thing, typically one acquired through practice” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/art>). For several decades now, there has been prevailing thought that leadership is an art (Depree, 1989; Grint, 2005; Heffernan, 2012; Nahavandi, 2015; O'Malley, 2012). Max Depree (1989: xix) identifies the art of leadership as “liberating people to do what is required of them in the most humane way possible.” O'Malley (2012: ¶ 2), who combines the concepts of leadership and artist, writes, “the best leaders and artists give us

perspective on our social condition (good or bad) and greater appreciation of our world, ourselves, and our choices.”

The work of talented artists, in general, often goes unrecognized for long periods of time, but when recognized, “can change our lives in ways that are as invigorating and real as being hit by a wave” (O’Malley, 2012: ¶ 2). Their work makes an impact that influences us forever, for their contributions are rooted in a keen sense of humanity, one that surpasses most others. Greenleaf (2015: 11) describes this quality as having “a sense for the unknowable” and the ability to “foresee the unforeseeable.” In her Harvard address, J. K. Rowling describes this sense as the “power to imagine better” (Rowling as cited by Smith, 2008: ¶ 6). One classic example of such lasting achievement is that of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most successful change agents in American history, who spent years in working toward abolishing slavery, a very wicked social problem. Lincoln believed that “slavery was a violation of the Declaration of Independence and that its promise of equality was a beacon to guide the whole race of men then living” (Kushner, 2006: 206). A related example of lasting influence is that illustrated by the artwork during the period prior to the civil war. For instance, the artwork of Artist Eyre Crowe available at Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Crowe-Slaves_Waiting_for_Sale_-_Richmond,_Virginia.jpg) titled, “Slaves Waiting for Sale,” dates back to April 6, 1861, just six days prior to the official start of the US Civil War. Not only did it stir up antislavery sentiment at the time, which likely was its intent, but to this day it serves as a reminder of how social injustice ignores the rights of certain people, creating a misleading perception that those treated unjustly are somehow less human than the rest of us.

Such misperceptions relate to the first inherent quality of leadership as an art. DePree (1989) states that the first job of practicing leadership as an art is to define reality. Artful leaders possess wisdom to see the past in light of the present, using that knowledge to visualize a promising future, one that advances humanity. As Greenleaf (2016: 3) so eloquently states, “But since we are the product of our own history, we see current prophecy within the context of past wisdom.” *But artful leaders don’t do that alone.* Whereas a painter uses a palette to create art through color and form that is often intended to change the way we see the world, according to DePree (1989), leadership as an art weaves relationships with the intent of doing the same. “The art of leadership requires us to think of the leader-as-steward in terms of relationships” (DePree, 1989: 10). Thus, artful leaders are exceptionally talented in forming coalitions by weaving relationships.

Artful leaders are values-driven and morally courageous. They possess the courage to make themselves vulnerable when they risk sharing creative expressions founded in deeply rooted values. Elgin (2005: 15) writes that those who have the capabilities to change cultural values possess great moral sensitivity, social awareness and broad knowledge of the community, giving them the wisdom and experience to make such changes. Yet their need for moral courage is great, as their wisdom and their vision may not be shared by others, as indicated by the words of Lincoln when starring out to sea, “Though it’s imperceptible in the darkness, I have an intuition that we’re headed towards a shore. No one else seems to be aboard the vessel. I’m alone” (Lincoln as cited by Kushner, 2011: 7).

Artful leaders balance idealism with strategic pragmatism. By that we mean that although artful leaders are driven by noble purposes, they are also keenly aware of how to develop and employ practical strategies to achieve those purposes. They understand the need for balance between idealism

and strategic pragmatism. For example, Lincoln successfully persuades Thaddeus Stevens, a radical Republican, to temper his idealism with strategic pragmatism as he states, “If in pursuit of your destination you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp, what’s the use of knowing True North?” (Lincoln as cited by Kushner, 2011: 59-60).

Artful leadership is about possessing faith in the strengths and capabilities of humanity. In the words of Lincoln, “The part assigned to me is to raise the flag, which, if there be no fault in the machinery, I will do, and when up, *it will be for the people to keep it up*” [emphasis added] (Lincoln as cited by Kushner, 2011: 12). The structural complexity and the diversity of knowledge needed in resolving wicked social problems are beyond the comprehension much less capability of a single person. Understanding this degree of complexity, artful leaders focus on how they might optimize collective efforts in resolving social problems. The job of artful leadership is to leave a legacy that liberates others by freeing them to recognize and develop their special talents, giving them the self-confidence to contribute by becoming leaders themselves in their own way. Artful leadership does this in a spirit of deference, recognizing and respecting the contributions that each individual makes.

Artful leadership is about empathy. Kolko (2012: 45) says the following about empathy. “To compassionately feel what it is to be another individual, one must identify with his culture, his emotions, and his style . . . to empathize with any degree of useful rigor requires a great deal of time, patience, and emotional energy.” When defining reality, artful leadership is having the sensitivity to accurately assess reality through the eyes of others. Accurate assessment arises from accurate observation, involving a holistic appreciation of how cognition, feeling, physical well-being, relationships and spirituality comprise what it means to be a human being. Thus, when working toward resolving wicked problems, artful leaders demonstrate a high level of empathy as they communicate reality in a holistic way, exemplified by Lincoln’s words at the close of the war. “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds” (Lincoln as cited by Kushner, 2011: 126)

Artful leaders are authentic. According to Eagly, “Authentic leaders advocate goals that are grounded in shared values and they intend that their actions promote goals that benefit the larger community” (2005: 460). In the context of resolving wicked social problems, we favor Eagly’s definition for two reasons. First, artful leadership is founded upon goals derived from shared values and may only flourish when both leaders and followers believe in the authenticity of each other’s interactions. Second, resolving wicked social problems benefits the larger community. Lincoln was known for his ability to portray authenticity in his relationships. “I do the very best I know how. . . If the end brings me out all right, what’s said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference” (Lincoln as cited by Hoffman, 2015: ¶ 10).

Artful leaders are resilient. Resilient individuals are able to recover quickly from calamity, including personal failure and the failure of those around them. One of the five major components of WestPoint’s leadership program is dealing with failure, which, when simply put, is to learn from it and move on (Timmons and Drooker, 2003). Similarly, according to Luthans and Youssef (2007: 334), “setbacks become opportunities for learning, development, and flourishing.” This is a vitally important lesson in that if we dwell on failure, it drains our ability to focus on success. Lincoln found himself in dire circumstances many times throughout the civil war. The loss of lives weighed heavily upon him,

and there were many mistakes made by him and those in his command. Yet he did not let his emotions overshadow his focus on abolishing slavery. In the words of Lincoln, “I am not concerned that you have fallen; I am concerned that you rise” (Lincoln as cited by Alioto, 2012: ¶ 1).

Finally, artful leadership is about living with paradox. Bolden (2016: 32) describes paradox as requiring us to accept the idea that multiple truths exist simultaneously. To illustrate such a paradox, Thaddeus Stevens describes the 13th amendment and Lincoln’s role in getting it passed as, “The greatest measure of the Nineteenth Century. Passed by corruption, *aided and abetted by the purest man in America*” [emphasis added] (Kushner, 2011: 114)

In summary, defining reality, possessing a keen sense of humanity, weaving relationships to build coalitions, values-driven, morally courageous, idealistic yet strategically pragmatic, having faith in the capabilities of humanity, empathetic, authentic, resilient and able to live with paradox--such are the inherent qualities of leadership as an art, the qualities that engage others in becoming the change agents needed in resolving wicked problems. Most importantly, when resolving wicked problems, the thing that distinguishes leadership as an art from other forms of leadership, is to not only possess these qualities in good measure, but to possess the wisdom to know which of them take precedence along the way.

Wicked Problems

The term “wicked problems” has grown in popularity in the literature over the past 45 years. It has evolved to refer to such things as strategic planning within corporations, urban development projects, supply chain management and other complex projects that are mainly focused on an end product (Camillus, 2008; Edmonton, 2016). Those are not the wicked problems we are referring to here. Rather, we are focusing on wicked social systems problems. Parks (2005) refers to these social systems problems as “swamp issues” necessitating changes of heart and mind. Distinguishing complex wicked social problems from other wicked problems is an important distinction. Wicked problems in social systems benefit the most from leadership as an art, as both leadership as an art and resolving wicked social problems have the same overarching goal, that of improving humanity by building relationships versus by building things. As Schuyler (2016: 1) artfully writes, “There is something deeply nourishing about focusing attention on creating a healthy world. . . finding ways to appreciate the current moment while contributing to people and actions that we sense to be toward life.” Hammerschlag (1993) states that creating such a healthy world means placing values before objects and morality ahead of expediency. This is not to diminish the importance of building things, which also may improve lives and relate to social systems problems; it is just not the type of wicked problem we are focusing on here.

As previously noted, one of the defining characteristics of wicked social problems is that once they are accurately described, the description frames their resolution. However, the description is a complex moving target requiring ongoing accurate assessment. In fact, several researchers state that there is an art to resolving wicked problems, including not recognizing too early in the process what resolution to apply (Grint, 2005; Heifetz and Linksy, 2011; Rittel and Webber, 1973). Let’s take crime as an example of a wicked problem. Crime meets Kolko’s (2012) description of a wicked social problem. According to Health and Human Services (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2835847/>), in 2007, 23 million criminal offences were committed in the US resulting in economic losses of \$15 billion to

victims and another \$179 billion in government expenditures for police protection, judicial and legal activities, and corrections, demonstrating the large numbers of people involved and the economic burden imposed. Crime is also a cultural problem in that there are subcultures, such as gangs, that view crime as a way of life. Information about a specific crime committed is often incomplete and victims of crime rarely describe the situation the same as perpetrators. The number of people involved in crime, including victims, perpetrators, the justice system and all the individuals and community organizations attempting to reduce crime is in the hundreds of thousands, and the take on how to best combat crime varies from group to group, which meets Kolko's criteria of number of people and opinions involved. Because of the complexity of the problem and the differences between communities, trying to combat crime on a big scale is doomed for failure. For the most part, there is no template. To illustrate, although there are certainly some similarities between violence in Miami and Chicago, such as the presence of gang warfare and poverty, the external environmental factors for violence in Miami are in many ways different than those in Chicago. To say otherwise, would imply that the culture, laws, climate, religious influence, police force, health care status, socio-economic status, transportation systems, population and political environment, all factors that are known to influence crime, are the same for Miami as for Chicago. Yet we know that not to be true. In other words, the uniqueness of the community defines the uniqueness of the problem and its resolution at various points in time. Based on the number of variables involved, trying to gain resolution on a large scale is not going to happen. We don't have the capabilities of doing so, and even if we did, the problem would change by the time we found a resolution. Such are the dynamics of wicked problems within social systems, which illustrates Kolko's last criterion of the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems. Hence, we need to look beyond the large-scale problem to seek resolution. As Moss Kanter (2012: 694) states of large corporations, "When giants transform themselves from impersonal machines into human communities, they gain the ability to transform the world around them in very positive ways." Similarly, we believe there exists a synergistic relationship between leadership as an art and wicked problems at the community level, where collective interests and problems are shared. The artful leader sees the complex dynamic problem as a part of the community in which it resides and his wisdom and experience with that community aids in resolving wicked social problems at the community level.

Artful Leadership and Wicked Problems

From the preceding thoughts, we might then infer that the art of leadership and the art of resolving wicked problems have much in common. By that we mean that practicing leadership as an art synergizes the resolution of wicked problems. For example, leadership as an art and resolving wicked problems are dependent upon an implicit understanding of the situation at hand (reality), which artful leaders have developed through practice and experience. The artful leader sees things like a major league hitter sees a baseball. The ball looks like a grapefruit where most people cannot see it at all. An artful leader learns from experience to understand the complexity of wicked problems through the eyes of those experiencing them, with the goal of creating a shared reality of the problem in order that the collective may develop a shared vision on how to resolve it. This is important for three reasons. First, we seek visions that reflect our own aspirations (Kouzes and Posner, 2012). Second, a shared vision motivates (Senge, 2006), leading to shared problem resolution. Third, an accurate description of a wicked problem serves as the framework for its resolution (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

As a second example of synergy, we look to DePree's definition of leadership is an art as founded in empathy while Kolko (2012: 45) identifies empathy as essential in resolving wicked problems. He writes that interaction designers who work on resolving wicked social problems need to compassionately feel what it is like to experience them. To illustrate, Kolko writes of a designer who wanted to better understand the effects of aging on vision. She did so by listening to aging adults describe fuzzy vision; to experience what they were describing, she placed drops of baby oil in her eyes. An artful leader possesses the empathy needed to resolve wicked problems by first seeing reality through the eyes of those experiencing them.

So how does this synergistic relationship lead to resolution of wicked problems? We propose that the synergy existing between the qualities of artful leadership and the qualities required for resolving wicked problems are stable components in what otherwise comprises the instabilities found within broken social systems. We further believe this to be a critical factor to success in resolving wicked social problems in that past research repeatedly identifies the need we have for some form of stability and belonging in an otherwise unstable world, and those needs are met by forming stable social relationships (Brown, 2012; Maslow, 1954; Umberson and Montez, 2010), the fundamental element of social systems.

Social Systems Theory

About five years prior to Rittel and Webber's (1973) paper on wicked problems, von Bertalanffy (1968) published his book on general systems theory, formalizing the idea that studying wholeness rather than studying parts of the whole would lead us to develop a research paradigm quite different from reductionism and linear thinking. Since that time, systems theory has been adopted by several prominent researchers across disciplines including Argyris and Schön (1974); Senge and Sterman, (1990); Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) among others. Systems theory is far too complex a topic for us to discuss in detail within the confines of this paper. There are several excellent resources that do that (von Bertalanffy; 1968; Buckley, 1967; Norlin, Chess, Dale and Smith, 2003). What we do want to point out, however, is that social systems theory, a subcategory of general systems theory, provides an overarching framework for thinking about the relationship between social systems and wicked problems (Norlin et al., 2003). According to Norlin et al. (2003), a social system comprises two or more individuals who have functionally interdependent relationships. Social systems and the environments in which they reside are in a state of constant flux, evolving over time as a result of interactions occurring within and between them (2003). All social systems are open, meaning that they are influenced by the external environment; the points at which they interface with other systems in the external environment form the boundaries of the systems involved. An advantage of systems theory is that it brings to the forefront the idea that knowledge gained in one system is not an island onto itself. Take for example the following simplistic application.

Returning to the previous example of crime, we might view Chicago as a community that comprises a social system with many subsystems. Violent crime, considered a subsystem of crime, is a wicked problem within the Chicago community. From the Chicago crime data reported over the past 45 years, however, there has been a dramatic decrease in violent crime within Chicago (Papachristos, 2013). A number of subsystems could be responsible for the reduction that has occurred. As statistics in the external environment and within the Chicago community show a direct relationship between the

incidence of violent crime and the prevalence of illegal drugs, perhaps the crack down on illegal drugs, including educating youth regarding the negative impact of illegal drug use and the increased incarcerations for illegal drugs, has had an effect on reducing violent crimes within the Chicago community. If this were to be the case, then the interfaces occurring between various Chicago subsystems, such as community youth groups, the formal educational system and the criminal justice system, may have led to the reduction.

Another factor to consider is changes in methods of reporting violent crime within Chicago over the past 45 years. Enhanced technologies may have improved the accuracy of reports over time. Finally, the increase in median household income occurring within Chicago over the past few decades could be a factor in reduced crime as research shows a direct relationship between poverty and crime, demonstrating the influence of economic factors on two related wicked problems existing within Chicago, specifically crime and poverty.

Using systems theory as an umbrella, this simplistic example identifies several of many subsystems that interface to potentially reduce the overall reported incidence of violent crime in the Chicago community. Studying these relationships between various subsystems can lead to a more accurate description of the problem, which may then lead to more effective problem resolution. We now move toward a more detailed account where the synergy between a wicked social problem and artful leadership led to problem resolution at the community level.

Case Study Application: Teen Pregnancy in Milwaukee

Demographics

Milwaukee, the largest city in the State of Wisconsin, US, has an estimated population of 595,047; 26.5% of its population is reported to be under the age of 18 with 51.8% of the city's total population reported as female. Predominate race estimates are 46% White, 39.2% Black or African American, 18.2% Hispanic or Latino and 3.8% Asian. Educational level reported is 82.5% high school graduate or higher and 23.5% Bachelor's degree or higher. Over the period of 2012-2016, median household income is reported as \$36,801 and per capita income reported is \$20,630. Persons in poverty are reported as 28.4% compared to Wisconsin's reported 11.8%. All of the preceding demographics are taken from the US Census Bureau for the year 2016 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/milwaukeecitywisconsin/RHI125216>). Milwaukee is reported as the eleventh most racially segregated city in the US (Sauter, Comen and Stebbins, 2017). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2015) reports Milwaukee as ranked fifth for violent crime in a listing of US cities with populations of 250,000 or greater. In 2002, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Milwaukee was reported as having the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the US (Lyles, 2013).

The Goal

Although the city had been battling teen pregnancy for over 30 years, as evidenced by its reported teen pregnancy rate, not much headway had been made during that time. In 2008, the Mayor, the Health Department and the Center for Urban Population Health established a goal to drop Milwaukee's teen pregnancy rate by 46%, which would remove the city from the top ten cities with the highest teen pregnancy rates. The United Way of Milwaukee and Waukesha took the lead in forming a coalition to

meet the challenge. Many thought the goal was unachievable. In 2013, three years before the target date, the city had exceeded its goal with a 50% decrease in the rate of teen pregnancy. The case that follows is how it transpired.

Social and Cultural Problem

Teen pregnancy met all the wicked problem criteria identified by Kolko (2012). It is a social problem that is undesirable for the majority of the community and people felt compelled to do something about it. Teen pregnancy is also a cultural problem. Subcultures within a community have differing opinions based upon their experiences, education and beliefs. A high poverty rate, considered both a cultural and economic problem (Reeves, 2015), has a direct influence on teen pregnancy. A culture where religious beliefs see abstinence as the only form of birth control also experiences higher teen pregnancy rates (Stanger-Hall and Hall, 2014). A youth subculture that glamorizes teen pregnancy, as determined by coalition interview data, too experiences higher teen pregnancy rates.

Incomplete or Contradictory Knowledge

The teen pregnancy campaign caused controversy within the community. The preceding examples of subcultures within the Milwaukee community demonstrate incomplete and contradictory knowledge and the large number of people and opinions involved. Some saw campaign images as degrading and cruel; others said that the campaign's edginess was what was needed to achieve the goal (Corpus, 2015).

Large Economic Burden

In 2004, Milwaukee recorded 1,869 births to teens. The estimated long-term cost of each teen pregnancy in the US is \$79,320 (Batog, 2006). Based on the estimated long-term cost per pregnancy, total long-term costs were \$148,249,080 for that year. To put the figure in perspective, that's equivalent to \$382.11 of annual cost per working person living within Milwaukee, equivalent on average to one person's groceries for a month.

Interconnected Nature of One Wicked Problem with Other Wicked Problems

Teen pregnancy is interconnected with other social problems. As reported by the National Conference of State Legislatures (2013), only 40% of teen moms finish high school and only 2% finish college by age 30. Children of teen moms perform worse on school readiness measures and they are 50% more likely than children born to older moms to repeat grades or drop out of school. Moms and children on public assistance for healthcare hurt the healthcare system as public assistance services are reimbursed at less than cost, which then has a negative impact on private insurance rates (2013). According to the National Conference of Strong States (2018), teen pregnancy is directly and strongly correlated with poverty, and 63% of teen moms receive public assistance within the first year following the baby's birth. This translates into taxpayers paying for support that might be used for other needed community services. Teen moms generally have little to no disposable income, which results in less revenue for businesses. Finally, findings from an issue brief published by The College of New Jersey (n. d.) indicated that sons born by teen moms are incarcerated three times more frequently than those born to older moms. Teen pregnancy impacts multiple social systems affecting everyone in the community.

According to the results of a 30-year longitudinal study, however, "when poor minority women, who represent a disproportionate share of all teen mothers, delay their first birth, their life chances are only

marginally improved, if at all (Furstenberg, 2008: 3). In other words, the interconnection between poverty and minority status negatively effects life chances for all births, not only teen births. This is an important finding in that it points to exploring certain more indirect but powerful resolutions in addition to ones that more directly focus on the problem. For example, Furstenberg suggests that adjusting the earned income tax credit and strengthening public education may have a more positive impact on reducing teen pregnancy rates than only focusing on sex education.

Applying the Qualities of Leadership as An Art to Teen Pregnancy

Defining reality.

The first thing campaign leaders did was to define reality, first from the perspective of the people most *susceptible* to the problem, teens. They did this by conducting personal interviews. What they discovered is that teens glamorized teen pregnancy (Brenner, campaign co-chair, personal interview). Some saw it as an opportunity to obtain celebrity status; others saw it as a boost to their self-image. As long as that was their perceived reality, not much was going to change in relationship to the problem. Thus, the first job of leadership was one of redefining reality for teens *not* yet entangled in the problem, many times best done through the eyes of those *already* entangled in the problem, specifically teen moms and dads. It is their reality that helped to identify the resolution. The primary tool used to accomplish the goal was a massive advertising campaign, consisting of 65 mini-campaigns over an eight-year period. The multi-media campaign was provocative and shocking, but it worked. The goal of a 46% reduction in teen pregnancies was achieved three years prior to target date and by the target date that percentage had increased to 65%. According to those directly involved, the campaign, though controversial, was a success. The link to the “Teen Pregnancy Prevention Campaigns” is <https://www.unitedwaygmwc.org/Teen-Pregnancy-Prevention-Campaigns>. We highly recommend visiting this link to the multimedia campaign examples that illustrate what we have stated here.

Keen sense of humanity.

The willingness to commit to this project is a demonstration of the keen sense of humanity that Greenleaf, Rowling and others describe. Just as Lincoln viewed slavery as a violation of human rights, artful leaders in this campaign saw teenage pregnancy as a violation of human rights that had impacted past generations, was impacting the present and would impact future generations without changing teen behaviors. They could see the pattern of teen pregnancy and its negative impact on life chances repeating itself generation after generation, and they could see the negative impact on social systems and the community as a whole, and collectively they chose to do something about it. In the words of Rowling that at the time had not yet been spoken, this keen sense of humanity gave them the power “to imagine better” (Rowling as cited by Smith, 2008).

Empathy.

In order to frame the resolution, the problem had to be seen through the eyes of those entangled in it. It was their shared stories and insights that generated the ideas for the campaigns. But for that to successfully happen, those guiding and supporting the work involved needed to actively listen and become very sensitive to what they were hearing from teen parents during personal interviews, while at the same time think creatively about how to use the data collected to accomplish the goal and to persuade others to support very provocative campaigns within a conservative community. It was their

gained sensitivity to the problem that led to the authenticity needed to persuade many others to accept the campaign.

Faith in the strengths and capabilities of humanity.

Artful leaders are not there to resolve community problems on their own. Rather they are there to guide and empower community members to resolve these problems together. Artful leaders know that if they build connections with key community constituencies, people from those constituencies will do the work needed far better than having someone else do it for them. This ownership of the problem and its resolution then becomes a motivating force that encourages the community to take on more community challenges. As an example, the Teen Pregnancy Initiative is now setting targets for reducing the percentage of those diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases.

Weaving relationships to build coalitions.

Partnerships formed throughout the campaign shared an interest in achieving the outcome, but they had to work out the differences in how the outcome was achieved. The social systems driving the campaign included education, healthcare, business, government and faith-based organizations, which pretty much comprised the entire community. Artful leaders from each of these areas networked to build coalitions needed to achieve the goal. This took a higher level of thinking in that the methods of goal achievement had to align with the core values of each constituency while still accomplishing the goal. This was achieved by developing multiple sub-campaigns tailored to the different constituencies involved. However, the main target of the campaign had to be teens; thus, the campaigns for the most part needed to influence teen behavior. It was their behavior that had to change, and that change had to come from their own recognition that teen pregnancy caused hardships for them. Artful leaders had persuasive discussions with the various constituencies to convince them of these points. None-the-less, not everyone was on board with the provocative nature of the campaign.

Values-driven, morally courageous.

Clearly the provocative nature of these campaigns caused controversy within community constituencies. Vulgarity often breeds contempt as many of us hold decency and respect as core values central to social structure and founded in tradition and culture. "Core values are deeply and intricately interwoven into institutions, practices, and ways of life" (Elgin, 2005: 4), again demonstrating the need for a systems approach to wicked social problems. One of the campaign posters that was specifically mentioned as being shocking and cruel is titled, "Baby Can Wait," (Gubrium and Karause, 2015) and is available for viewing at https://www.unitedwaygmwc.org/UnitedWayMilwaukee/TPP-Campaigns/ControlYourLife_Toy_930px.jpg.

Teen pregnancy leads us to reflect upon the universally accepted core value of preserving the well-being of future children by better insuring that our institutions, practices and ways of life are supportive of that value. Thus, although the campaign placed core values into conflict and forced tough choices, the community had to consider its actions based upon the prevalence and intractability of the problem and the shared goal that the community set. In other words, the community was faced with making choices about which "right" was most correct under the circumstances, the traditional right of decency and respect or the universal right to protect children, and ultimately the community, from harm. It took courage to make these choices.

Idealistic and strategically pragmatic.

The goal of reducing teen pregnancy was integral to the ideal of creating healthy social environments where future children might have an equal opportunity to flourish. However, neither the ideal nor the goal could come to fruition without the creation and implementation of strategically pragmatic acts such as those demonstrated by the campaigns. In other words, there needed to be a balance between idealism and pragmatism. Artful leaders recognize that balance as critical to success. To work toward the ideal, we often times need to employ less than ideal pragmatic strategies and doing so has its consequences. The United Way lost some of its funders due to the controversial and provocative nature of the campaigns. “You get positive and negative reactions,” said Laura Gainor, executive director of Serve [Marketing], which created the campaign media. “But we want that [positive and negative reactions] because we want people talking” (Anderson, 2018).

Resilient.

Artful leaders are resilient. Mueller, founder of Serve Marketing, the country’s only nonprofit advertising agency, states, “I’ve done seven or eight co-sleeping campaigns and the co-sleeping rate is still horrific. Babies are still dying ... I’ve done foster care campaigns that have increased parents inquiring by 415 percent in a year and some that have only increased it by 50 percent. They weren’t as powerful.” (2018: ¶ 36). The experience and wisdom Mueller gains from past campaigns for underserved charitable causes influences the creation of future campaigns. Resilient leaders do not lose sight of their purpose and they remain confident they can achieve it by applying wisdom gained from past experience to future opportunities.

Able to live with paradox.

Working toward achieving the ideal by accepting less than the ideal is, in itself, a paradox. The fact that abstinence is the only irrefutable way to prevent teen pregnancy, but it doesn’t, is a paradox (Stanger-Hall and Hall, 2011). The findings from two studies on teen-mom programming suggest that the TV shows glorify teen parents but reduce teen births is a paradox (Khazan, 2013). Artful leaders recognize paradoxes and use them as advantages to their purpose instead of wasting time and energy trying to resolve them.

Conclusion

Our aim in writing this conceptual paper was to further develop the concept of “leadership as an art” in the context of resolving “wicked social problems.” We begin with a review of the literature on leadership as an art, applying its qualities to Abraham Lincoln’s leadership during the civil war, a wicked social problem. Next, we review the literature on wicked social problems, applying the qualities of wicked social problems to crime in urban areas. Then, within the framework of social systems theory, we integrate the qualities of leadership as an art with those of resolving wicked social problems, demonstrating how the two concepts complement one another in practice. We conclude with an actual community case, where we relate leadership as an art to the wicked social problem of teen pregnancy, demonstrating the synergy that leadership as an art brings to resolving the problem at the community level.

The magnitude and complexity of social problems impact all of us on a daily basis, making them worthy of our attention. By working toward their resolution, they unite us in ways that privilege us to

personally grow and develop by engaging in a vocation that demonstrates our empathy for humanity. We see leadership as an art as a stabilizing force that motivates people toward making positive changes in a dynamic world of interfacing systems seeking balance. Though resolutions to wicked social problems are imperfect and temporary, the qualities of artful leaders are humane and enduring. Our hope is that the integration of leadership as an art and wicked social problem resolution described within this work might lay more foundation for further reflection, theory development, research and practice in this area. There is an abundance of good work to be done and the rewards are many for those compelled to make service to humanity their most important vocation, one that may be fulfilled by honorable practice within many occupations.

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