
Pollinating ideas: let us become persuasive communities

“The actions of the leader transform and lead others
to become servants like their leader.”

(Marist Voices, chap.7 - Br. Vincent de Paul Kouassi)

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In March 2022 I took over the management of the organization under which Marist activity in Catalonia operates. With more than 1,600 professionals, we take care of socio-educational activity in our 10 schools, 15 social works, houses and youth movements.

This responsible post represents for me one more step in a professional journey marked by leadership in social-transformation projects: community projects that pursue social improvement and that only obtain results when the leadership that we refer to as “distributed” (all the nodes of the ecosystem are important) is put into action. But it is not only a professional “step”, it also represents a personal commitment to the Marist mission. A mission that is necessary and that makes the greatest amount of sense in the world of today because of its relevance and value.

I have learned, therefore, that PERSUASION is not only a very valuable characteristic defining people who exercise good servant leadership, but it is also a dimension that must necessarily be contagious to obtain relevant changes.

The most important transformations are only achieved if there is an increase in the ability to persuade of all those involved in the desired change.

What good is it for a leader to persuade his or her immediate team if this team does not also exercise its persuasion on its most immediate environments, if the proposals do not reach every last corner with the same amount of energy?

Fostering a “persuasive” environment or organization is stimulating, energetic and generates light in a world of many shadows.

How can we become a persuasive organization? How can we activate a pollinating organi-

zation, where everyone is capable of generating new ideas and projects for change and positive transformation?

Everything has already been written, and I am not going to share anything that has not been put on the table before. In fact, the chapter by Br. Vincent de Paul Kouassi, is excellent and contains valuable reflections and references on leadership and persuasion. I would simply like to share with you two ideas that I found useful.

**1.- The ability to persuade contains a great deal of debatable expertise.
But it is not the be-all and end-all**

The ability to argue one's position is the first that comes to mind: those who know how to develop good arguments and express them assertively, have much to gain. So, how you practice your debating skills will allow you to have better results.

Are you the best advocate for your cause, project, or initiative? That's what I always ask myself. Would you be able to argue your proposals before a people's court of 10 completely different people with different experiences and aspirations, and have the same effect on all of them?

First. Knowing all the starting points of view even the most remote, contrary or critical, improves the substantive and debatable quality of the proposals. The interest in knowing what others think allows you to anticipate the answers to their concerns, but also to adjust initial ideas (it is said that Mandela learned from his father to listen to everyone first and speak last).

Second. The clearer and simpler the discussion, the more it can be shared with a number of people. It is more contagious and more "reproducible". So a big question to ask is: can what I have just explained be reproduced by anyone in their natural, professional or family environment? If ideas cannot be shared in the family environment for example, they have little persuasive trajec-





tory. In Brother Vincent de Paul's example: could the school workers, on returning home, explain and argue to their families why the switch to bank accounts was positive?

The persuasiveness and pollination of ideas also depends on our ability to share them using metaphors and “poetic” comparisons which bring arguments and explanations closer to people's real lives. Talking about mustard seeds, yeast, older and younger siblings coming home, keeping the lamps lit, giving away your tunic or dusting off your sandals, allowed many to understand complex ideas, but also allowed them to reproduce them and share them with others, activating their own persuasive capacity, becoming members of a persuasive community.

In addition, experience tells us that sometimes it is not a matter of arguing, of convincing the “rider”. We are all riders (rational beings, with intellect), but also elephants (people with much inertia and habits that are difficult to break), as explained by the theory of change proposed by the Heath brothers in their 2011 book *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard*. Sometimes we forget the elephant part, we forget that the great contribution is not in the argumentation, but in paving the way for the dimension of great inertia that we all carry inside. Sometimes changes do not happen because we argue for them, but because we facilitate them, because we clear the way, we make people's lives move on without further complications. Marcellin Champagnat inspires me, he stands as a great reference-point, always looking for ways to move forward and make things happen.

2. Ideas that inspire, but also move

Another consideration that has greatly helped me is to ask whether shared ideas have only TRANSCENDENCE or also RELEVANCE. Transcendence is the importance of what we are going to do, something which will be a valuable legacy for the future. Promoting peace in the world, fighting social injustice, educating and evangelizing, protecting the environment, are

transcendent ideas of great value. They inspire. We are in an organization where many of our colleagues are inspired in their lives and are actively engaged. But we cannot think that, today, transcendence alone will have the power to mobilize everyone in all circumstances. That's where we have to ask ourselves whether shared ideas are also relevant for each and every person individually. "OK, what you are proposing to me is important for the world, but is it relevant for me?". So persuasiveness increases when you combine the transcendent argument with the relevant one. And there's nothing more relevant than feeling needed: "Without you we're not going to be able to do it. You are important." Do you convey the value of the person in achieving the goal? Do you make the people as important as the causes? Because if you balance the two dimensions you get maximum persuasion. People align with each other on common ideas and move together because they feel on an individual level that their contribution can make a difference.



Jesus spoke to everyone. He knew how to use a language close to the lived experience of his time. He paved the way by his example. He transmitted transcendent ideas and moved people internally, making them feel relevant and important. It is the power of love. A force that allows all of us to be persuasive. It allows us to configure ourselves into a persuasive community.

Perhaps if Aristotle had had the opportunity to know him, beyond logos, pathos and ethos, he would also have written something about the power of persuasive communities and organizations, capable of infecting others, of pollinating and transforming the world collectively.



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If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to fms.cimm@fms.it