

The Leadership Function in the Transcomplex University: An Approach from Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory and Adaptive Governance. The Case of Venezuelan Public Universities.

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the theoretical and practical problem of how to conceptualize and study leadership in universities subjected to extreme transcomplexity. The objective of the study was to analyze the Leadership Function in the Transcomplex University: An Approach from Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory and Adaptive Governance. The case of Venezuelan Public Universities. The methodology adopted a theoretical-empirical design of multiple case studies, combining a theoretical-critical analysis of Luhmannian concepts with a qualitative analysis of empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews (n=18) with key stakeholders (university authorities, academics, and students) and a review of documents at two Venezuelan public universities selected for their exposure to different levels of external pressure. The results identified three mechanisms through which the leadership function is produced in this context: 1) the structuring of communication networks; 2) the production of decisions under highly contingency conditions; and 3) the generation of temporary structural couplings with the environment (State, community) that allow for institutional survival. The analysis showed that, in contexts of hyper-complexity, effective university management does not reside in hierarchical control, but rather in the design of coupling spaces that facilitate the emergence of distributed leadership and continuous adaptation. The findings indicate that the Luhmannian framework, complemented by adaptive governance, offers a powerful lens for demystifying heroic leadership and redirecting attention toward the systemic and communicative conditions that enable collective action in knowledge organizations in critical condition.

Keywords: Emergent leadership; Social systems theory; Luhmann; Adaptive governance; Transcomplex university; Organizational complexity; Venezuela.

Biographical Sketch: Born in San Fernando de Apure in 1984, he holds a Bachelor's degree in Education with a specialization in Agricultural Teaching from the Simón Rodríguez National Experimental University, a Master's degree in Management and Institutional Planning from UNELLEZ Apure Campus, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Administrative Sciences at the Simón Rodríguez National Experimental University. He currently works as an administrative staff member at the Simón Rodríguez National Experimental University, Apure Campus.