Do networks get emotional?

The role of leaders' emotions for (network) success

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Abstract

Emotions are an important component of human life, influencing dyadic and organization-wide interactions. More specifically, leaders' emotions affect positively and negatively not only their followers, but also organizational and group outcomes. Through a multiple case study of four collaborative governance networks, this paper explores whether and how leaders' emotions influence network success. The results show that the emotional states that leaders bring into the network seem to influence its functioning: positive emotions seem to propel its activities and outcomes; negative emotions appear to curb them. Emotions seem also to interact with network identity and trust in affecting network success.

Keywords: network leadership, predictors of network success, multiple case-study

Introduction

Emotions permeate our thoughts, actions and relationships. They originate at the individual or within-person level, but then proceed through the individual level to interpersonal relationships, groups, and organizations. Emotions possess, in fact, a strong social component which can influence dyadic, group and organization-wide interactions (Ashkanasy 2003; Barsade and Gibson 1998; Hareli and Rafaeli 2008; Kelly and Barsade 2001; Keltner and Haidt 1999).

In particular, the emotions that leaders bring into organizations seem to influence followers and organizations' outcomes. On one hand, scholars have shown how leaders' positive emotions energize followers, whereas negative emotions negatively activate them (Joiner 1994; Kelly and Barsade 2001; Tickle-Degnan and Puccinelli 1999). On the other hand, however, others have highlighted how leaders' negative emotions do not always have a detrimental effect on followers and on outcomes (Johnson and Connelly 2014).

The importance of leadership in explaining public network outcomes has been widely investigated by the extant literature. Scholars have analyzed what leaders do (Silvia and McGuire 2010; Wind, Klaster, and Wilderom 2021), whether leadership in networks can be performed at the individual, shared or collective level (Carter et al. 2015; Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2010; Crosby and Bryson 2017; Müller-Seitz 2012; Ospina 2017), and what are the implications of these different elements for network outcomes (McGuire and Silvia 2009; Murphy et al. 2017). To our knowledge, no studies have explored whether leaders' emotions can also influence a network's functioning and outcomes.

To redress this scant attention, the aim of our paper is to explore whether and how leaders' emotions may have a role in network settings, or better, whether and how the emotions that leaders bring into the network may positively or negatively affect the network's functioning and outcomes. Following Barsade and Gibson (2007), we focus on emotions as feeling states that "are elicited by a particular target or cause, often include physiological reactions and action sequences, and are relatively intense and short-lived" (Barsade and Gibson 2007, 37).

We conducted a multiple-case analysis of four collaborative governance networks located in the Italian city of Bergamo. The four networks are similar under the structural, functioning and managerial viewpoint. However, two of them are successful, whereas the other two are not. Through documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with the networks' leaders, we tried to understand whether the leaders' emotions can help to explain such differences in the networks' results.

The results show how leaders' emotions appear to be critical in explaining the workings of networks. In particular, when trying to explain whether networks are more rather than less successful, a significant role seems to be played by the emotional states that leaders bring into each network, which, in turn, seems to influence the network's functioning and outcomes. Whenever the networks' leadership brings positive emotions into the collaboration (such as enthusiasm, fullness, satisfaction, joy), this seems to act as a propeller of the networks' activities and outcomes. In contrast, when the leadership brings negative emotions (such as frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, worry, shame), this seems to curb the networks' activities and outcomes.

Moreover, a relationship seems to emerge between network identity, network trust and the generation of positive or negative emotions within the network. When network members share a common network identity and are related by trust-based relationships, then positive emotions seem to emerge. Conversely, when partners display a different understanding of the network's identity, and trust unevenly characterizes their relationships, then frustrations, anxiety, worry and anger seem to dominate.

These results contribute to the existing literature on network success and, in particular, on leadership and emotions in collaborative network settings. First, they show the importance of the 'micro-foundations' of collaboration for network success, and suggest the opportunity to develop network studies in that direction. In particular, they shed light on the role of emotions in collaborative settings. Secondly, they suggest that a certain form of distributed leadership may act as an 'amplifier' of emotions, able to influence the network's behavior and ultimately its outcomes.

1. The role of leaders' emotions in organizational settings

Defining emotions in organizational settings

The concept we refer to as 'emotions' is part of a wider group of affective processes which have increasingly attracted researchers' attention (Barsade and Gibson 2007; Casciaro et al. 2015). Barsade and Gibson (2007) note that affect can be seen as "an umbrella term encompassing a broad range of feelings that individuals experience, including feeling states, which are in-the-moment, short-term affective experiences, and feeling traits, which are more stable tendencies to feel and act in certain ways" (p. 37). Among feeling states, the authors distinguish emotions, usually short-lived and prompted by a specific cause (Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991), from moods, which are not necessarily linked to a specific cause and take the form of a general positive or negative feeling (Frijda 1986; Tellegen 1985). Feeling traits, instead, consist of only one category: dispositional affect, which refers to a person's underlying predisposition to experience positive and negative moods and emotions (Watson and Clark 1984).

Barsade and Gibson (2007) note that, given that they are linked to a specific cause or target, emotions are often analyzed as discrete (Lazarus and Cohen-Charash 2001), with several lists of such discrete emotions proposed by the extant literature. Based on Fischer et al. (1990), Ashkanasy (2003) for example proposes an emotional hierarchy with three distinct categorical components: super-ordinate, basic, and subordinate. At the super-ordinate level he distinguishes between positive and negative emotions. At the basic component level, he categorizes emotions under two labels for positive emotions (love and joy), and three labels for negative emotions (anger, sadness and fear). At the subordinate component level, he identifies fondness and infatuation as subcomponents of love, and bliss, contentment and pride as subcomponents of joy. Annoyance, hostility, contempt and jealousy are suggested as sub-components of anger; agony, grief, guilt and loneliness are proposed as subcomponents of sadness; and horror and worry are identified as subcomponents of fear.

Harmon-Jones, Bastian, and Harmon-Jones (2016), in their attempt to measure discrete emotions, focus on a selection of emotions and on the words that are most often associated with them. The anger cluster, for example, includes words like anger, rage, irritation, and exasperation; joy or happiness are related to words like cheerfulness, joy, enthusiasm, and contentment. An additional categorization (Bericat 2016; Damasio 1994), distinguishes between primary emotions that are universal, physiological, biologically and neurologically innate (e.g. joy, happiness, fear, anger, sadness, disgust and surprise), and secondary emotions, which result from combinations of primary emotions and are socially and culturally determined (e.g. guilt, shame, love, resentment, disappointment and nostalgia). Given the variety of lists of discrete emotions proposed by the literature, Bericat (2016) concludes that probably any list of emotions is arguable; at the same time, their comparison suggests that every list of emotions should include at least such basic emotions as anger, anxiety-fright, sadness, guilt, shame, envy, jealousy, relief, hope, happiness/joy, pride, love, gratitude and compassion.

The consequences of leaders' emotions in organizational settings

Emotions influence our decisions and behaviors. In his study on patients with frontal lobe damage, Damasio (1994) for the first time proved how decision-making is not possible without emotions. Positive emotions facilitate efficient and effective decision-making as happy people are more likely to satisfice in their choice, thus being successful in situations where time is limited (for a review see Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005). When people are in a positive mood, then, they are more prone to take prosocial, supportive and cooperative behaviors (George and Bettenhausen 1990). They are also pushed to find more innovative problem-solving solutions in negotiations and conflict resolutions (Barry, Fulmer, and Van Kleef 2004; Barsade 2002; Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005; Thompson, Nadler, and Kim 1999). Positive emotions also have a positive impact on work motivation, productivity, creativity, job satisfaction, commitment, and a negative effect on absenteeism and stress (Ashkanasy, Ashton-James, and Jordan 2003; Barsade and Gibson 2007;

Cropanzano and Wright 2001; Fisher and Ashkanasy 2000; Staw and Cohen-Charash 2005). This brief list of findings shows how emotions are intimately connected to human life and influence the ways people think, take decisions and behave.

Emotions originate at the individual level (Ashkanasy 2003) and then exert their effects more widely. Emotions possess, in fact, a strong social component which can influence dyadic, group and organization-wide interactions (Ashkanasy 2003; Barsade and Gibson 1998; Hareli and Rafaeli 2008; Kelly and Barsade 2001; Keltner and Haidt 1999).

In recent years, leadership research has increasingly focused on exploring the role of leaders' emotions in influencing followers and organizations' outcomes (Ashkanasy and Jordan 2008; Dasborough and Ashkanasy 2002; Lindebaum and Fielden 2011; Schaubroeck and Shao 2012; Sy and Choi 2013; Sy, Horton, and Riggio 2018; Visser et al. 2013). In particular, empirical evidence has shown that leaders' emotions affect followers more than the content of the leaders' message (Newcombe and Ashkanasy 2002).

Leaders can reveal their emotions in multiple ways, either consciously or unconsciously. They can use verbal, facial or other nonverbal expression (George 1995; Sy, Côté, and Saavedra 2005). Both positive and negative leaders' emotions may influence followers' behaviors and performance (Eberly and Fong 2013; Lindebaum and Fielden 2011; Van Kleef, Anastasopoulou, and Nijstad 2010).

Some scholars have shown how leaders' positive emotions generally stimulate followers' favorable emotions (Chi et al. 2011; Sy and Choi 2013; Sy, Côté, and Saavedra 2005), better perceptions of leader effectiveness (Bono and Ilies 2006; Connelly and Ruark 2010) and higher followers' and organizations' performance (George 1995; Visser et al. 2013). Moreover, leaders' positive emotions have been proved to increase group performance (Gaddis, Connelly, and Mumford 2004; George 1995).

Other scholars have shown how leaders' negative emotions are negatively related to leader effectiveness (Connelly and Ruark 2010; Glomb and Hulin 1997; Lewis 2000; Schaubroeck and

Shao 2012) and followers' performance (Connelly and Ruark 2010; Game 2008; Johnson 2009; Lewis 2000).

The impact of a leader's positive or negative emotions on followers' behaviors and outcomes is, however, quite controversial. Newcombe and Ashkanasy (2002), for example, have showed how leaders' positive emotions can increase or decrease leadership effectiveness: followers' perception of leadership effectiveness is higher when leaders display positive emotions together with positive feedback, and lower when leaders show positive emotions coupled with negative feedback. Van Kleef, Anastasopoulou, and Nijstad (2010) have shown that the effects of leaders' positive or negative emotions depend on the follower's motivation. Teams with high motivation perform better when their leader expresses anger, as anger motivates them to do better and improve their performance; teams with low motivation perform better when the leader expresses happiness. Some authors have found a positive correlation between leaders' negative emotions and followers' levels of effort (Sy, Côté, and Saavedra 2005), project progress (Lindebaum and Fielden 2011) and performance (Visser et al. 2013). Other scholars have argued that leaders' negative emotions can be beneficial for follower performance under certain conditions (Eberly and Fong 2013; Lindebaum and Fielden 2011; Visser et al. 2013). Chi and Ho (2014), for example, showed how the relationship between leaders' negative emotions and follower performance is moderated by the follower's conscientiousness and agreeableness. Visser et al. (2013) proved that both leaders' happiness and sadness can be beneficial for follower performance, depending on whether their tasks deal with creative or analytical performance.

In summary, leaders' emotions do matter. However, their positive and negative emotions can be good or bad depending on the situation. What remains to be explored is in which circumstances the leaders' positive or negative emotions are more effective (George 2011).

2. Leadership in public network settings

Network leadership has gained increasing attention in recent times, as network and leadership have ceased to be seen as clashing terms (Currie, Grubnic, and Hodges 2011; Huxham and Vangen 2000; Mandell and Keast 2009; Morse 2010). In fact, a growing body of evidence suggests that leadership in and of networks does exist and play a role, prompting several scholars to explore the concept from different perspectives.

One such perspective looks at the *locus* of leadership within a network, that is at the extent to which a leadership role is played by a single individual, distributed among a few or all members of the network, or is found at the level of the system of relationships (the collective) as opposed to the individual or relationship levels – thereby differentiating the leader from leadership (Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2010; Cristofoli et al. 2021). Notions of individualistic and transformational leadership have been complemented by those of collective, distributed, and shared leadership (Crosby and Bryson 2017; Ospina 2017), with a focus on the relational nature of such concepts, as well as systemic, horizontal or network leadership (Bolden 2011). In their literature review on network leadership concepts, Wind, Klaster, and Wilderom (2021) identify nine such concepts (shared leadership, distributed leadership, complexity leadership, collaborative leadership, collective leadership, democratic leadership, participative leadership, intergroup leadership, and Network Leadership Theory) and suggest that they may be seen as part of a continuum, thereby rejecting the dichotomous framework that sees leadership either residing in a single entity or being shared (Carter et al. 2015; Müller-Seitz 2012).

A second perspective looks at the different roles and behaviors that are enacted by leaders within networks. For instance, Silvia and McGuire (2010) find that integrative leaders share information across the network as well as leadership roles, create trust, and effectively rely on resources and stakeholders from the external environment. They note that network leaders display a higher proportion of people-oriented behaviors, as opposed to leaders within a single organization who tend to display more task-oriented behaviors. Wind, Klaster, and Wilderom (2021) propose

four different network leadership roles – connecting, coaching, catalysing, and consulting – and suggest that certain types of network leadership may be more effective than others depending on the situational context and on the type of desired outcomes. Moreover, given that both network context and objectives may evolve over time, such optimal leadership role may also evolve over time.

Yet another perspective focuses on the role played by network leadership for network outcomes (e.g. Cristofoli et al. 2023; McGuire and Silvia 2009; Mariani et al. 2022; Murphy et al. 2017; Trivellato et al. 2019). Network leaders set the terms for network members to operate and interact, while also ensuring the flexibility that allows results to be obtained at the network level (Keast et al. 2004; Provan and Huang 2012). Wind, Klaster, and Wilde (2021) distinguish between works that focus on performance-oriented outcomes such as team or network performance (e.g. Cristofoli, Trivellato, and Verzillo 2019; Nicolaides et al. 2014; Wang, Waldman, and Zhang 2014;), learning (e.g. Liu et al. 2014), and organizational performance (e.g. Hallinger and Heck 2010; Meier and O'Toole 2002) from works that look at interaction-oriented or relational outcomes, such as members' empowerment (e.g. Huang et al. 2010), satisfaction (e.g. Drescher and Garbers 2016), cohesion and trust (e.g. Drescher et al. 2014; Mandell and Keast 2009), or motivation (Schwarz, Eva, and Newman 2020).

Within this growing body of research on network leadership, scant attention has been devoted to the role that leaders' emotions - which have been proved to have a critical organizational-level impact, as shown in the previous section - may play in a network context.

3. Empirical setting and method

As we aim to investigate whether and how leaders' emotions may have a role in explaining networks' behaviour and results, we rely on case study research (Yin 1984). We chose to conduct a multiple case study as a strategy for comparison and replication, which can be used to identify common patterns and testable results (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1984).

We therefore performed a multiple case-study analysis of four neighbourhood-based collaborative governance networks, the so-called 'Neighbourhood Networks' (NNs), operating in the Northern Italian city of Bergamo. Formally established under the initiative of the Municipality in 2015, NNs bring together public, private and non-profit actors – including at times individual citizens – to tackle local problems and seek innovative solutions. Education, security, the environment, fragility, healthcare, urban spaces and social integration are among the topics that are addressed by local actors through various means. NNs operate by meeting regularly, encouraging cooperation among participants in solving problems, and exploiting emerging opportunities. They are managed by a Municipality Representative with the responsibility of acting as a "super partes" facilitator. S/he is expected to activate network members, and to define a framework for network meetings and for members' interaction. The Municipality of Bergamo therefore established the NNs program with its main objectives, provided a facilitator and physical premises where members could meet, but otherwise left the networks with considerable freedom in relation to membership, and focus and organisation of activities.

We selected two high- and two low-performing networks. As explained later, their status as high/low performing is based on a measure of performance that considers the networks' ability to achieve their stated goals (following Cristofoli and Markovic 2016; Provan and Milward 2001; Raab, Mannak, and Cambré 2015). We also selected four very similar collaborative governance networks under the structural, functioning and managerial viewpoint, so as to isolate the impact of such predictors on network results (Turrini et al. 2010). In this way, we can explore whether leaders' emotion may have a role in influencing network results. As shown in the Appendix (A1), all the traditional predictors of network success, as identified by the extant literature (Turrini et al. 2010), are not relevant to explain success in our case. In fact, Appendix A1 compares the four cases along the traditional predictors of network success, and shows that either all cases, both successful and unsuccessful, exhibit the same pattern, or that different patterns do emerge, but without a clear distinction between successful and unsuccessful cases. For instance, both successful and

unsuccessful cases exhibit the same pattern in the case of density of ties, presence of subgroups, governance mode, coordination, integration and control mechanisms, and type of management and leadership. On the other hand, different patterns do emerge for instance in the case of centralization, with a central core agency being absent in one network, and present in the other three: this implies that centralisation does not consistently distinguish successful networks from unsuccessful ones. The same holds in relation to network management, because the division of labour between Coordinator and Municipality Representative that characterises three of the four networks is absent in the fourth, or again in relation to informal coordination mechanisms that rely on strong relations among subgroups in all networks except one. Moreover, we selected networks operating in neighbourhoods with different levels of income per-capita and average population age, in order to control the possible effects of these factors on network participation, activities and outcomes (Irvin and Stansbury 2004) (see Table 1). The homogeneity and heterogeneity criteria that were used for case selection (Patton 1990) allow respectively to look for confirmation of the emerging results within similar cases and to test these results among dissimilar cases. For anonymity reasons, the four networks will be indicated as NNA, NNB, NNC and NND.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

For each case we collected data about the leaders' emotions and about the network's functioning. Data were collected through a two-step procedure.

Firstly, documents and data provided by the municipality of Bergamo were analysed. They describe the networks' activities and their members' participation in network meetings. The data also allowed us to appraise the networks' performance, and to distinguish between high and low performing networks. Measuring network performance is a controversial topic (Cristofoli and Macciò 2018). However, as our networks are mandated networks, with clear goals stated by the Municipality, we chose to follow Provan and Milward (2001), Raab et al. (2015), and Cristofoli and

Markovic (2016), and measure performance as the network's ability to achieve its stated goals. The goals indicated for the NNs, as emerging from relevant documents, can be summarized in the attempt to (1) involve as many people as possible in a (2) continuous dialogue on the most important issues for the neighbourhoods, in order to (3) promote actions and activities to address them. We therefore built a measure for network performance that considers: the number of network participants, the number of meetings per year, and the number of activities that the networks have promoted in the years under investigation (see Appendix, A2).

Secondly, semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) were conducted with the NNs leaders', starting from the NNs Municipality Representative and considering all the most engaged participants. In particular, all the actors emerging as leaders during the interviews were contacted, according to the principles of snowball sampling. In total, 21 interviews were conducted. Although they were quite open, the interviews covered the following themes: (i) structural characteristics and network mechanisms, including formal coordination, integration and control mechanisms as well as informal ones such as personal relationships, network identity, and trust; (ii) network management and leadership, with the related roles, tasks and activities, and the extent to which they are performed by one or by several individuals; and (iii) affective states and emotions related to participation in the network's activities. Emotions, in particular, were assessed through open questions addressing interviewees' experiences with NNs, their 'life stories', as well as their views and emotions emerging during the NNs meetings, activities and interactions with other participants. All interviews were conducted by two researchers, with one asking questions and the other taking notes; they were also recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Each interviewee provided oral informed consent to the interview and its recording; ethics approval was not required by the researchers' institutions at the time the research was conducted.

Data from the interviews were analysed in a three-step procedure: storing, managing and processing (Miles and Huberman 1984). First, we grouped data into the relevant categories. Secondly, taking our lead from the extant literature, we identified single variables within each

category. As far as emotions are concerned, for example, we focused on interviewees' rich descriptions of motivations for becoming involved in the NNs, their moods, affectivity states, and emotions raised by participating in the NNs meetings and activities (Komporozos-Athanasious and Thompson 2015). Our codes for emerging emotions included, for example, "feeling frustrated", "feeling angry", "experiencing enthusiasms", "feeling joy", "feeling a sense of fullness", etc. Thirdly, we looked for relationships between the emerging variables. In this way, we were able to look for interactions between the predictors of network performance as emerging from our analysis. To ensure that the qualitative analysis was reliable (Denzin and Lincoln 1994), we arranged meetings to discuss the data with our colleagues and the interviewees.

4. Results

This section describes the dimensions where a consistent pattern distinguishing successful from unsuccessful networks does emerge (as opposed to all the dimensions summarised in the Appendix, A1): network identity, network trust among members, and network leaders' emotions.

Network identity

As far as *network identity* is concerned, the analysis suggests that the two successful cases NNA and NNB are characterized by a very strong network identity, built through a shared understanding of the network's ultimate aims and role. Members of NNA, for instance, see the network as a space where people can contribute their diverse competences to the design and implementation of projects of common interest. As described by the Municipality Representative: "*NNA is seen by its members as an amplifier of relations. It allows relevant competences to be shared and interest to be raised around a specific project. Then, different competences and interests will converge into the next project*". In case NNB, this shared understanding is described by the local school's Principal as follows: "*It was immediately clear, and we understood it, that NNB is not a political body. It is a space, an opportunity to discuss and share ideas about the future of the neighbourhood. It is not an*

institutional body with clear responsibilities to deliver certain outcomes, but rather an opportunity to think about what we can do. This has been clear to all network participants since the beginning of the network's activity". Conversely, the two unsuccessful cases are characterized by a misunderstanding about the network's fundamental aims, which has worked against the formation of a shared network identity. The NNC Municipality Representative highlighted that network members did not understand that NNC was not a political body. As a consequence, several meetings and a substantial amount of time and energy were devoted to discuss about NNC's objectives. As explained by NNC's Municipality Representative: "*It was a very difficult and tiresome process. I had to repeatedly clarify NNC's aim because several people had other expectations. They thought NNC was a political body, but this is not the case. It was very difficult to let people understand"*. In the case of NND, the President of a local association declared that the network does not play what she believes should be its intermediary role with the Municipality. In her words: "*Despite a few positive joint initiatives, I've seen over the years that several collaborations are just not feasible. In theory NND is meant to take on the demands of citizens, but in practice this does not happen*".

This is coherent with the extant literature arguing that network identity is a predictor of network success. As Keast and Mandell (2013, 5), in fact, argue: "the way in which people identify with and behave in networks can either enable or constrain functioning and performance".

Network trust

Another dimension where the analysis shows a consistent pattern that distinguishes successful networks (NNA and NNB) from the less successful ones (NNC and NND) is *trust among network members*. Consistent with the extant literature (Klijn, Edelenbos, and Steijn 2010; Klijn et al. 2016; Ysa, Sierra, and Esteve 2014), in successful networks trust among members is high, based on interpersonal relationships but also on the results obtained through shared efforts; it is not taken for granted but continuously renewed. In case NNA, for instance, the network Coordinator noted that "*there's a high level of trust among the neighbourhood's residents, who have known each other for*

a long time and displayed their commitment to the neighbourhood itself". In the two unsuccessful cases, conversely, both trust and distrust coexist in the network, linked to a mixed history of pre-existing interpersonal relationships, with certain members appearing to work more easily together than others. In case NNC, for example, it was necessary to spend a lot of time to build trust among network members: they did not know each other and were not used to working together. The network spent a lot of time and energy to build trust, and sometimes mistrust still emerged. In case NND, the Municipality Representative noted that "*trust exists within small groups of people who were already working together and knew each other. There is trust, for instance, among those who are involved in the activities organised by the local Church."* However, trust rarely crosses the boundaries of these small groups; more frequently there is a certain extent of mistrust between different groups.

Network leaders' emotions

All four NNs feature a leadership that is distributed among three or four actors, who for various reasons play a prominent role within the network. In the case of both NNA and NND, for instance, the leadership is distributed among the NN coordinator, the Municipality Representative, and the employee of a non-profit that is a member of the network. In cases NNB and NNC the leadership is distributed among four network members, who always include the Municipality Representative, and the network coordinator in the case of NNB (as NNC does not have a formally appointed coordinator). In all cases, these individuals variously exercise a leadership role in three main domains: planning and implementation of the network's activities; coordination of the relations among members (including mediation and conflict resolution); and management of the network's relationships with outside actors, including public and private organizations as well as the other NNs. These leadership roles shift among the 3-4 relevant figures depending on the issue or the people who are involved. These results are consistent with those of recent contributions emphasizing an increasing shift towards shared, distributed, and collective forms of network

leadership (Carter et al. 2015; Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2010; Crosby and Bryson 2017; Müller-Seitz 2012; Ospina 2017).

Our exploration of the leaders' emotions when participating in the networks' activities, instead, presents a marked difference between successful and unsuccessful cases. Our results show, in fact, that the two successful networks, NNA and NNB, tend to be characterised by positive emotions, whereas the two unsuccessful networks, NNC and NND, tend to be more frequently characterised by their leaders' negative emotions.

The emotions that characterize NNA include fulfilment, gratification, pride, and enthusiasm. The network's Coordinator recounted that participating in the network brought to her contentment and wellbeing, mostly because of its fabric of relationships. In fact, NNA is described by another member as a "*welcoming, non argumentative network, where people are not critical of others' proposals, and are open to reconsider their position on an issue in order to accommodate members' initiatives that are collectively judged to be worth it*." One of the interviewees, similarly, reported that "*there's a lot of respect among members. In those rare instances when there is a misunderstanding, or expectations are not met, people calmly explain their perspective*".

The leaders are also particularly proud of their networks' initiatives, like the requalification of a local park, or the submission of a survey to the neighbourhood's inhabitants on their quality of life. One of the interviewees noted that she sees NNA as "*a way to build social cohesion and enhance the quality of life within the local community. These are fundamental issues I strongly believe in, and that's why I'm here*". A sense of fulfilment is reported by another person we interviewed, as she stated "*participation in the network makes me feel alive, it gives a meaning to what we do with our lives*".

A sense of enthusiasm is shown especially by the Municipality Representative, who recognized that "*residents who contribute to the network's initiatives may be motivated by various reasons, for instance they may be interested in the quality of the park because they have school-age children*". But he also noted that there is more than that: "*They have certain skills and competences*

and they make them available for a community project, as was the case with a local architectural firm who contributed to the park's requalification free of charge".

This general sense of satisfaction and contentment is well expressed by one of the people we interviewed as he recounted: "*I feel well (within NNA). There is an absolutely positive, welcoming, trusting, collaborative atmosphere. At times during the meetings someone brings sweets, we have a drink together, and this contributes to a family-like atmosphere. I cannot find a single emotion that can incorporate all that*".

Similarly to NNA, NNB is characterized by leaders' positive emotions such as enthusiasm, joy, fullness, satisfaction and pride. The network is conceived by its participants as "*a facilitator of relationships, a generator of ideas*", as explained by the Coordinator. "*The NNs are not conceived to act fast. They are spaces where you have the possibility to reflect on what is better for your neighbourhood*", explained the school Principal, and added "*If you interpret the network in this way, you will be very happy to take part in it… There are some evenings I come back home (after the network's meeting) and I am very pleased*". Similarly, another interviewee declared: "*NNB offers the opportunity to meet, talk, share ideas, devise projects. It's a wonderful experience. I wouldn't like to live in a neighborhood where people are not involved in anything. NNB is an actor working for the public good and it is wonderful to be part of it. I am very happy to participate in NNB's meetings. I try to be always present*".

The same sense of satisfaction and fullness is recounted by the Coordinator, who sees NNB as a laboratory "*where you can experiment; this is very motivating, this is what makes it exciting*", and by the Municipality Representative: "*I'm always feeling well within the network*".

The Municipality Representative expressed pride in relation to NNB's activity: "*This is a very busy network, they do lots of things*". He is also proud of NNB's way of working: "*What struck me is NNB's ability to reflect, and to build collaborations day in and day out, both within and outside the network*".

On the other hand, as far as NNC is concerned, one of the most frequent emotions to emerge is concern. The Municipality Representative was concerned that the NNC's aim was not understood by its members. She recounted: "*I was afraid that NNC would be considered as a sort of political body, and that my role would be seen as political. Actually, I am not a politician. I am a technician. I have been repeating this for three years*". The fact that the Municipal Representative was so worried that NNC's members misunderstood the network's aims caused several delays in the activities. The network spent a lot of time and energy discussing its aims and objectives. Several meetings were dedicated to allow people to get to know each other. "*It was a very "laborious" process. At a certain point, I was afraid that people would give up, and in fact someone left the network. Today I'm concerned. I saw the evolution of this network. I noticed some problems. We did progress to some extent, but it looks like we need again some time …*", said the Municipality Representative. Similarly, Maria recounted that "*sometimes it is very difficult to go out and participate in the network's meetings. Sometimes I ask myself what we are doing. I'm afraid we won't have a future*". She is afraid that if the network doesn't come out from this inertia, everything will fail. One of the interviewees is similarly concerned that NNC will never be able to produce something meaningful, and that its members will leave the network.

Another emerging emotion is frustration. One of the interviewees told us that the Municipality Representative thought that one of the NNC's aim was to build a "community". The network therefore spent a lot of time discussing about this, but the process was very long and slow, without "real objectives". She said that many people have left the network during this process: "*Not everybody felt like coming to the meetings only to introduce themselves, without any real initiative to work on*". This sense of frustration is accompanied by a certain extent of embarrassment. "*I met some extraordinary people. I would like to invite them to join the network, but I feel slightly embarrassed about it: imagine if they come and they get bored, and they leave the meeting wondering what this is all about…*" recounted one of the interviewees.

Another emotion that at times comes out is anger. NNC is characterized by a sort of "hostility". If someone joins the network with new proposals, s/he may have to struggle with members' reactions. Sometimes the discussion flares up and the Municipality Representative has to intervene to calm the spirits. As mentioned by a member: "*There is one member who is very peculiar: he seems to be angry with the whole world. He brought his anger within the network, and this created tensions among participants*".

The case of NND presents a number of similarities with NNC: here the emotions that most frequently tend to emerge from the interviews include anger, disappointment, frustration, tenseness, and hostility.

A manifestation of anger comes from the Municipality Representative: "*At the beginning I was very nervous, I felt so angry because I couldn't let (them) understand why I was there. The first part of each meeting was used by participants to yell their grudges and claims against the municipal administration. I tried to bring back the attention to the issues we could work on, but without much success.*"

Other emotions include hostility and disappointment. As noted by the Municipality Representative, "*the local church is quite jealous of its own projects, and is reluctant to extend them at a wider level. An example is the group of disabled kids involved in activities within the church's grounds: why the need to create such a group when similar initiatives already exist in the neighborhood?*" As noted by one of the interviewees: "*some difficulties are linked to political affiliations, and others to pre-existing misunderstandings. At the end of the day, those (members) who had different expectations managed to adjust them, or else they left the network*."

Hostility is accompanied by a sense of frustration. Beyond certain macro events, like the Spring Festival, "*it's much more difficult to plan and implement smaller initiatives*", noted the Municipality Representative. Similarly, the network Coordinator noted: "*It sucks up a lot of energy, and therefore I had to cut my participation in a number of (sub-network) meetings, otherwise I would have spent (in them) several hours each week*".

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the role of leaders' emotions in influencing network functioning and outcomes. We built upon the extant literature on the determinants of network success (network structure, mechanisms, management and leadership), and explored whether emotions may indeed play a role for network success. Our cases were selected in such a way to isolate the possible impact of the traditional predictors of network performance on network outcomes.

Other factors do indeed seem to play a role in influencing network outcomes as they show a consistent pattern across our four cases, and they happen to be linked to each other.

Firstly, network leaders' emotions appear to influence network success. Those networks where leaders display positive emotions (such as enthusiasm, pride, fulfilment, and satisfaction) appear to be characterised by better and easier relationships among members and a willingness to accept and accommodate old and new members' proposals. They also display a relatively high level of trust that is partly based on existing positive interpersonal relationships, but also on a record of commitment in the implementation of the network's activities. Good relationships and previous positive experiences then seem to contribute to members being more enterprising and open to current and future network activities. This happens, for instance, in NNA, where participants are willing to consider new initiatives even when they conflict with their position. This translates into more initiatives being implemented, which is a crucial measure of our networks' success. In contrast, the networks where leaders display negative emotions (such as frustration, anger, concern, and hostility) seem to be characterised by difficult relationships and a less than welcoming attitude, which is partly linked to pre-existing local and historical conditions, but also to an interpretation of the network's meaning that is not favourable to its effective functioning. This appears to make members less prone to propose and encourage new initiatives, with the result that the network does not deliver in terms of one of its main intended outcomes (i.e. projects and initiatives that address

local needs.) This is the case of NNC, where several members interpret the network as a channel to transmit their grievances to the municipal administration - rather than a tool to collectively address local problems/needs - with the ensuing frustration when this does not happen.

Secondly, network identity seems to have a role in explaining network success. Both successful networks, NNA and NNB, feature a strong network identity that is built on a common understanding of the network's aims and of the role it is meant to play to foster the neighbourhood's growth and wellbeing. Conversely, both NNC and NND are characterised by an inability to reach a common understanding of the network's role, despite the efforts of the Municipality Representative. The fact that the Municipality established the networks, but otherwise left them substantially free in their workings, allowed such identity-related dynamics to emerge and develop in different directions.

Thirdly, network trust seems to be important for network functioning and network success. In both NNA and NNB trust is high due to positive pre-existing interpersonal relationships, and also due to the results that are reached through a common effort aimed at finding shared solutions to local problems; trust here is not taken for granted, but continuously renewed through members' commitment. In contrast, both unsuccessful networks, NNC and NND, feature a low level of trust, due to difficult pre-existing interpersonal relations among some members, and the tendency by small groups to cluster around certain key actors (such as the local Church). It follows that certain members are able to work together better than others, which weakens the overall cohesion of the network and its effectiveness. As mentioned above in relation to network identity, the freedom granted by the Municipality has likely limited what could have been a positive effect on trust of the Municipality being the networks' establishing entity.

Moreover, a relationship seems to exist between network identity, network trust, leaders' emotions and network functioning and results.

The presence of a strong network identity appears to foster positive emotions such as fulfilment, joy and pride, as interviewees feel that their time and efforts are directed towards a

common goal. Conversely, the lack of such shared network identity appears to foster negative emotions such as frustration and hostility, as people perceive that the network's aims are being misunderstood and/or disattended.

In a similar vein, the presence of trust renders people more open and welcoming towards (new and existing) members as well as proposals, which fosters enthusiasm for new initiatives and pride for implemented activities. On the other hand, the presence of mistrust among groups of members makes them less willing to collaborate and wary of other people's intentions, which generates frustration and hostility.

In case NNC, for example, network members did not know each other and did not share the same idea of the network's identity and objectives. Some of them thought at NNC as a sort of political body entrusted with the responsibility to interact with the local government and bring new ideas and proposals. As a consequence, they felt frustrated by a network where people "simply discussed", but thought to be "doing nothing". The Municipality Representative was then forced to devote a lot of time and several network meetings to discuss about the network's identity, in the attempt to arrive at a shared vision. This increased the feeling of frustration and concern, and generated in some cases anger among network participants. As a consequence, it was very difficult for them to develop a positive interaction and allow the network to achieve its goals.

On the other hand, NNB was characterized by strong personal relationships and trust among network partners who knew each other and were used to work together. They immediately understood and built together a common network identity. The network was created as an incubator of new ideas about the future of the neighbourhood. Network members enjoyed participation in meetings and sharing ideas and proposals. This created positive emotions such as fulfilment, enthusiasm and joy, which allows the network to work and achieve its results.

Our results therefore suggest that the extant literature can greatly benefit from a focus at the micro-level of the individuals involved in the collaboration, and on micro-level dimensions such as people's emotions (Eshuis, de Boer, and Klijn 2022), because (i) they affect the network's

functioning and its success, and (ii) they combine with network-level dimensions – such as network identity and network trust – as they produce such effect (see Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

A circular relationship whereby (positive or negative) emotions facilitate or hamper interaction seems also to emerge, with the related (positive or negative) implications on the network's functioning and outcomes; at the same time, the quality of interactions and behaviours, with their consequences, may impact on the positive or negative emotions of the leaders. In this perspective, our results do extend to inter-organizational networks what has been found by the literature at the dyadic, group and organizational level (Ashkanasy 2003; Barsade and Gibson 1998; Hareli and Rafaeli 2008; Kelly and Barsade 2001; Keltner and Haidt 1999), i.e. that interactions within such networks may be influenced by emotions and their strong social component. In fact, our findings suggest that there may be a cycle where, on one hand and as shown by the literature, emotions influence decisions (e.g. Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005; Schwartz et al. 2002), and behaviours (Baron 1990; Barsade 2002; George and Bettenhausen 1990; Spector and Fox 2002); on the other hand, such decisions and behaviours in turn influence emotions. The emotions that are being influenced include those of the acting individuals, but also those of the wider group, in our case the NNs. It follows that a positive or negative group emotion may emerge not only as a combination of individual-level affective factors that group members bring into the network (Barsade and Gibson 1998, 2007), but also as a result of these members' behaviours (Levitats, Vigoda-Gadot, and Vashdi 2019). This generates a sort of self-reinforcing cycle, with positive and negative emotions leading to actions that prompt emotions of the same kind.

On the basis of our results, we suggest the following propositions, which should be tested through future research:

Proposition 1: Positive (negative) leaders' emotions are able to impact positively (negatively) on network success.

Proposition 2: A strong (weak) network identity impacts positively (negatively) on leaders' emotions.

Proposition 3: A high (low) level of network trust impacts positively (negatively) on leaders' emotions.

One additional contribution of our study relates to the role played by our networks' distributed leadership. While most of the extant literature focuses on individual leaders and their emotions, with the related influence on followers' emotions (e.g Fox and Spector 2000; George and Bettenhausen 1990; Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994; Huy 2002; Staw and Barsade 1993; Silard and Dasborough 2021; Sy, Côté, and Saavedra 2005), we suggest an addition to this literature that appreciates the role played by a leadership that does not rest with a single individual. In fact, all our networks feature three or four individuals who lead in a non-linear way: leadership shifts among them within each network based on different factors, including the issue being discussed or a tension in need of being addressed, or a relationship with an external actor requiring attention. In other words, leadership roles emerge at different times in different people depending on collaboration conditions. As mentioned above, we observed a role played by the emotional states that these individuals bring into the network, which also appear to influence the network's functioning and outcomes. Whenever the networks' leaders bring positive emotions into the collaboration, this seems to generate a positive emotional energy and acts as a propeller of the networks' activities and outcomes. In contrast, when leaders bring negative emotions, this seems to generate a negative emotional energy and to act as a curb on the networks' activities and outcomes. Our data do not allow us to explore how such emotional contagion takes place in our networks, which will be a fruitful objective of further research. A partly related issue refers to the fact that leaders' emotions are likely to be influenced by their interactions with members, which are also

themselves affected by leaders' competencies and ability when managing group dynamics. Whereas our data do not allow us to draw conclusions on this issue, we suggest that future research should devote more attention to members' interactions and how they influence members' and more specifically leaders' emotions.

From a theoretical point of view, our study contributes, first, to the literature on the determinants of network success, as it highlights the potential role played by individual members' emotions, which appear to affect the network's overall emotional climate and influence the network's outcome (Eshuis, de Boer, and Klijn 2022; Keast 2016). More specifically, we suggest that members' emotions are likely to be affected by the presence and the absence of network identity and network trust. Secondly, our results contribute to the existing literature on leadership in collaborative and network settings (Keast and Mandell 2014), as they point out that leaders may be able to translate individual emotional states into an emotional climate that affects the networks' behaviour and, ultimately, network outcomes. Moreover, such a role may be played not only or necessarily by a single leader within each network, but also by several individuals who lead people and activities in various directions depending on the issue at hand.

Our results matter also from a managerial standpoint, because they show how micro-level factors such as emotions – together with their determinants and the dynamics they propel – may influence network performance. Public administrators who are interested in ensuring positive network performance should then focus not only on design variables, but also on these micro-level factors, and on the interactions that might take place among them. Whenever negative emotions are brought into the network, attention should be given to the drivers or causes of such affective states and to the mechanisms and the dynamics behind the contagion – and to the possible remedial actions. One additional consideration from a managerial viewpoint is related to the possibility that members' affective states may be guided in a certain (constructive) direction through explicit strategies. For instance, these could include the definition of certain roles and "rules of engagement" by the members themselves aided by a facilitator. Lastly, our results suggest that

insofar as leaders may be able to manage their emotions – for instance through emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) – they may trigger certain dynamics and outcomes rather than others. The forms that such emotional labour assumes at the leadership level should be explored through further theoretical and empirical research.

The limitations of this study are linked to its case study-based nature, which will require further studies to be carried out for instance with other types of networks, such as service delivery and governance networks, and other sectors, such as healthcare or environmental protection. Other limitations are linked to the small sample size and to the study's reliance on self-reported data: future studies will need to explore the validity of our results for larger samples, possibly by using also different methods, and by relying on other data sources, such as physiological measures of emotions and semantic contextual information. One particular limitation relates to the generation and reinforcement of positive emotions: the two successful networks have likely benefited from accidental groupings of individuals whose activities produced early success that acted as a reinforcer of positive emotions. Similarly, the two unsuccessful networks may have been prevented from a more positive evolution by their members' previous experiences, and their related difficulty to see any positive achievement within their reach. Future studies would therefore benefit from a longitudinal perspective, so as to explore if and how such (negative) reinforcement effects may be interrupted, and by way of which mechanisms (e.g. through a leadership shift). A related limitation is linked to the fact that we have focused on the emotions of the network leaders, without giving sufficient attention to those of participants, which are likely to affect network dynamics and ultimately outcomes. In addition to stressing a focus on participants' emotions for future research, we suggest that network leaders should pay attention to *why* participants take part in these and similar kinds of collaborative efforts. A concentration on these aspects may help leaders to better understand, first, the emotions that participants bring into the network in the first place, and secondly, the emotions that emerge as a result of the network's dynamics and outcomes. A last observation relates to the need to disentangle the link between emotions, behaviours, and network

success. While our case studies do not allow us to shed sufficient light on this link, they point to a direction, which builds on the work of Kelly and Barsade (2001) and Hareli and Rafaeli (2008) and their adaptation to network contexts, that will fruitfully contribute to a better understanding of the micro-level determinants of network success.

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