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Embracing dynamic tensions: Peacekeeping as a balancing act of complexity

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Abstract

The article examines how military leaders serving as peacekeepers navigate complexity and adapt to it. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are linked to adaptive peacebuilding and Complexity Leadership Theory, and specifically to how enabling leadership through adaptive space helps to work with the local conflict dynamics and change to sustain peace. The findings are based on 29 interviews with military leaders with command experience in peacekeeping operations. The findings introduce five dimensions that unpack complexity into structural, functional, security-related, professional, and steering-related complexity and provide empirical evidence on balancing actions relating to complexity in a peacekeeping context. The article develops an analytical framework for peacekeeping. It also contributes to Complexity Leadership Theory by unpacking the complexity into dimensions, unpacking the actors into groups and communities with commitments, and addressing power relations and the dark side of their emergence.

Evidence for Practice

- Unpacking complexity into dimensions advances leaders' understanding of their environment and enables them to avoid taking simplistic actions to address complex issues.
- The dimensions of complexity and its inherent tensions and actions advance the development of leadership processes and practices.
- Leaders' balancing actions are always enabled, restricted, and co-evolved in political, historical, economic, and temporal contexts.

INTRODUCTION

This article addresses the issue of leadership in peacekeeping by identifying the tensions in operation from the perspective of military participants and seeks to contribute to leadership theory by developing an analytical framework for the complexity caused by a crisis. Here a crisis refers to a conflict between parties that poses a threat; and which necessitates an intercession to break the conflict cycle to help countries riven by conflict and its destructive effects (United Nations, 2008). Peacekeeping is an intervention to create conditions for a safe and secure environment. Military leaders, among others, are in a position to stabilize the situation and make a change to establish sustainable peace.

Peacekeeping environments have been described as asymmetric (Nuciari & Olivetta, 2021), fluid (Turnley, 2021), complex, and extreme (Hannah et al., 2009; Stern, 2017). Despite the increased pervasiveness of complexity, there is surprisingly little scholarly literature on the precise meaning of complexity in peace operation settings, and how military leaders navigate that complexity. We examine Complexity Leadership Theory and the adaptive peacebuilding approach to understand the nature of the complexity facing military leaders in their environment and what kind of actions they take to address it (McChrystal et al., 2015; Paparone et al., 2008). We hope to reveal what it means to lead in a peacekeeping environment.

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We embed the theoretical discussion in two distinct, but related streams of research developed in different theoretical contexts that inform our understanding of how leaders act in and adapt to complexity. Those streams are research on Complexity Leadership Theory, hereafter CLT (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017, 2018), and adaptive peacebuilding (De Coning, 2018). Both have complexity as their theoretical foundation and hold that adaptivity and adaptive space are significant factors in handling complexity. However, both are framed as abstract and theoretical constructions with insufficient empirical evidence (see, however, Schulze & Pinkow, 2020). To fill this research gap, we address how leaders navigate and adapt to the everyday dynamism resulting from complexity and respond to the request to scrutinize how relational interactions manifest in leadership dynamics (Tourish, 2019). Accordingly, we validate the theories expressed in empirical work in the new peacekeeping domain and advance leadership theory by developing an analytical framework for complexity. The article also responds to the perceived lack of interest in military affairs in public administration (Charbonneau et al., 2020), in which peacekeeping is an example of global governance.

The article seeks to answer the following question: *What are the dimensions of complexity and their intertwined tensions and actions that open the adaptive space for emergence in the peacekeeping operations context?* Focusing on tensions and actions highlights their intertwined nature and the dynamism spurring adaptive leadership. The article contributes to CLT by providing empirical evidence on balancing actions relating to complexity in the peacekeeping context. Unpacking the complexity into five dimensions and analyzing tensions within them offers insights into how to navigate in an adaptive space in a way that does not disturb the fragile equilibrium.

THE ESSENCE OF CLT

Complexity Leadership Theory is a new leadership theory addressing how to lead organizations to ensure their adaptability in complex and dynamic environments (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017, p. 9) define complexity as “rich interconnectivity” meaning that “when things interact they change one another in unexpected and irreversible ways.” The theoretical basis of complexity stems from the physical and biological sciences (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Wheatley (2006) was among the first researchers to specifically relate complexity theory to the fields of leadership, arguing that mechanistic top-down leadership is ineffective in responding to modern challenges. Since Wheatley’s work was published, a wide range of complex leadership approaches has emerged (see Rosenhead et al., 2019). The original focus of CLT on the business context has expanded to encompass research on public sector leadership (Murphy et al., 2017), public administration (Eppel, 2017),

governance systems (Nooteboom & Termeer, 2013), multi-actor governance (Craps et al., 2019), the leadership of professional development (Boylan, 2018), hybrid organizations (Christensen & Lægveid, 2011), and nursing (Uhl-Bien et al., 2020). Recently Uhl-Bien (2021a, 2021b) has applied the theory in the context of pandemics. Accordingly, CLT provides a fruitful framework for understanding an environment as complex as peacekeeping operations from the leadership viewpoint.

Complexity Leadership Theory is a meta-theory for adaptability (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018) that is needed to “meet complexity with complexity” (Ashby, 1962; Craps et al., 2019). Adaptability requires three leadership functions. *Operational leadership* encompasses formality, rules, standardization, administrative efficiency (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016; see also March, 1991) and efficiently managing routine challenges, allocating resources, and integrating innovation into formal systems (Murphy et al., 2017; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). *Entrepreneurial leadership* embraces innovation, learning, flexibility, and growth (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016; see also March, 1991) and creates novelty that helps adapt to pressure or capitalize on opportunities (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017, p. 16). However, adaptability increases when both operational and entrepreneurial forms of leadership are intertwined (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). *Enabling leadership* helps in this process by creating conditions for adaptive process through adaptive space (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018, p. 96). Therefore, enabling leadership involves behaving ambidextrously by ensuring both/and mindsets (Murphy et al., 2017; Nooteboom & Termeer, 2013; Schulze & Pinkow, 2020).

Enabling leadership opens up and nurtures an adaptive space that enables the adaptive process to occur (Uhl-Bien, 2021a). Adaptive space is a relational and fluid construction defined as a “network and organizational context that allows people, ideas, information, and resources to flow across the organization and spur successful emergent innovation” (Arena et al., 2017, p. 40). The adaptive process happens when “individuals and systems engage tensions between pressures for change (e.g., innovation, novelty, learning, growth) and pressures for stability (e.g., current performance, short-term results, status quo) through *conflicting* and *connecting* to generate adaptive outcomes” (Uhl-Bien, 2021b, p. 1403). Leaders can enable conflict by creating adaptive spaces for heterogeneity—conflicting ideas, perspectives, realities, and worldviews—and connecting by linking differences to (re)formulate an adaptive response to tension (i.e., experimentation). These processes create operational adaptive responses (i.e., loosening up the formal systems and administration), entrepreneurial adaptive responses (i.e., new creative thinking, operating, behaving), or recombination of those (Uhl-Bien, 2021a; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The adaptive process is accomplished when the new idea is integrated into an operational system in the form of a new order (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016), or in unsuccessful cases, the adaptive process is abandoned (Uhl-Bien, 2021a).

From the military leader's viewpoint, operational leadership in peacekeeping efforts often involves preventing conflict by controlling change. An outsider as an influencer uses clear lines of authority, standard operating procedures, and routines and allocates the resources necessary for the operation to succeed as planned. Entrepreneurial leadership refers to innovative ideas and solutions, deploying new tactics and strategies to address challenges to adapt to pressure. Similar to CLT in a peacekeeping context, adaptability is enhanced by using enabling leadership both to ensure stability and spur change (see Murphy et al., 2017; Nooteboom & Termeer, 2013). Adaptive space also enhances the unity of effort without the unity of command, which has often been the sole focus of leadership in extreme situations (Stern, 2017). However, modern peacekeeping operations are deployed in weak and failing states with limited capacity to deal with threats, the root causes of which lie in the cultural-historical context. The field of operation expands to society as a whole and its subsystems. Therefore, the crucial question is how to lead and adapt to the kind of complexity defined through local knowledge—content complexity—and through processes and social relations to locals—process or social complexity (see Conklin, 2005; Stoppelenburh & Vermaak, 2009). Consequently, a holistic understanding of peacekeeping and the importance of the *local* have become an issue, and the theoretical development of these notions has been undertaken in the adaptive peacebuilding approach (De Coning, 2018).

ADAPTIVE PEACEBUILDING AND CLT

Adaptive peacebuilding was developed to cope with complexity (De Coning, 2016), to navigate the local ownership versus international interference dilemma (Juncos, 2018), and to criticize the liberal peace theory, which views change as a top-down, template-driven, process that is based on linear cause-effect logic without incorporating local ownership and self-determination (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Loode, 2011). Under peace theory, the ambition is not to resolve the conflict but to invest in the resilience of the local social systems to prevent, cope with, and recover from conflict (De Coning, 2016). For peacekeepers, this means balancing how to contain violence and guarantee safety and how to stimulate local social systems to sustain peace without interfering on too large a scale and not undermining the society's ability to self-organize (De Coning, 2020).

Adaptive peacebuilding is informed by concepts of complexity, resilience, self-organization, and local ownership (De Coning, 2016). The concept acknowledges the importance of adaptation to uncertainty while encouraging a shift in the focus from ends to means and working with, not against, change to sustain peace (De Coning, 2018). As in CLT, the adaptive space is central to the adaptive and self-organization processes. It is important to give local people

space and agency to engage with local communities and stakeholders and learn and innovate together (Loode, 2011). Doing so requires promoting curiosity and innovation, valuing failure and learning from mistakes, anticipating surprises, and capitalizing on crises, through experimentation and collecting feedback (De Coning, 2018). In particular, the process calls for multiple parallel interventions. Continuous iterative processes and short-cycle feedback loops aim to ensure the most effective initiatives are sustained and refined. This co-evolving adaptation to local social systems fosters and sustains self-organization (De Coning, 2020). In other words, leaders facilitate and stimulate the creation of space in which the members of a community or society can collectively develop resilient self-organized systems and capacities for self-organization.

Adaptive peacebuilding not only benefits from but also expands CLT. Adaptive peacebuilding does not specifically address leadership issues, and thus the three CLT leadership functions—the operational, entrepreneurial, and the enabling—complement the approach and enable it to be expanded to encompass leadership functions. However, the adaptive learning approach does assume there will be any planning and performance assessment by the leaders, the local community, and other stakeholders. In the adaptive learning process, the accumulated knowledge creates the variation of the activities and enables their assessment as an open-ended process. In contrast to CLT, an adaptive process contains parallel intervention, back-and-forth movement, co-evolving adaptation, and ongoing organizing (cf. Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). In contrast, in CLT, the process seems to go through sequential stages of being integrated into the operating system as a new order (Uhl-Bien, 2021a).

METHODS

The current research adopts a case study method to advance theoretical insights because it “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Here, peacekeeping operations provide the case and context that highlights the role of complexity in a crisis. Peacekeeping also represents an unusual case in that it has the potential to thoroughly illuminate complexity. The method and the case are thus aligned with the theory-building effort.

The informants are Finnish military leaders ($N = 29$) with command experience at platoon ($N = 10$), company ($N = 8$), and battalion level ($N = 11$) in peacekeeping operations. The main task of military leaders is to navigate the complexity inherent in conflicts, influence the prevention of violence, create human security, and maintain peace. The military experiences of the leaders interviewed to create a sample that is representative when studying the challenges to leadership amidst complexity in an extreme context. The informants were chosen from across hierarchy levels to ensure the data reflected sufficient

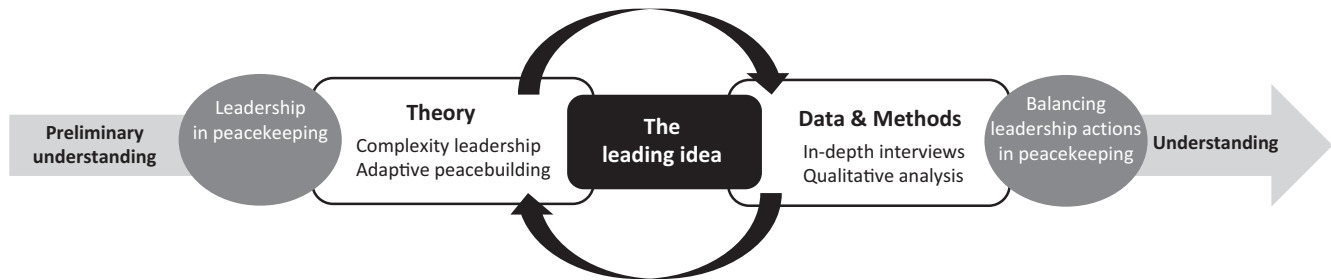


FIGURE 1 Abductive analysis process

breadth and variety of complexity in their work as leaders.

The military leaders interviewed were veterans of operations in Lebanon and Afghanistan. The length of time the leaders had spent on each mission varied from 6 to 12 months. The interview dealt with themes such as general and specific training, the unit commanded, and personal, operational, and field experiences related to operational situations (see Appendix S1). The interviewees were asked to relate critical and complex incidents in which they were personally involved to bolster the narratives with illustrations of leadership and complexity. The study draws on 23 h of in-depth interviews; the shortest interview took 48 min and the longest 2 h and 50 min.

The lead idea of this article—identifying the tensions of leadership manifest in peacekeeping—was formulated by closely reading the interviews, that is, by applying abductive logic (Aliseda, 2006). An abductive analysis utilizes a dialogical process of theory and practice to unveil the target phenomenon (Figure 1). The process required that the dimensions of complexity were created first. Then the complex view on leadership was combined with the literature on adaptive peacebuilding to form the theoretical framework (Gioia et al., 2013; Langley, 1999), and the dimensions were refined with their intertwined tensions and actions (Murphy et al., 2017; Appendix S2). The tension and actions create the adaptive space for adaptation. Consequently, an interpretative framework was used to explore the leadership balancing actions inherent in peacekeeping, which are illustrated in the excerpts in Appendix S3. This comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Figure 3) also validated the theories and extended leadership theory (Yin, 2018) by developing an analytical framework to illuminate the complexity resulting from a crisis.

FINDINGS: OPERATING IN AN ADAPTIVE SPACE

Complexity Leadership Theory indicates that complexity is realized as tensions that create an adaptive space for leaders to adapt to and enable change (Uhl-Bien, 2021b). Operating in an adaptive space demonstrates how complex issues manifest in peacekeeping operations. The findings address the research question: *What are the*

dimensions of complexity and their intertwined tensions and actions that open the adaptive space for emergence in the peacekeeping operations context? Those dimensions are organized into five modes of complexity, including the constituent tensions and actions.

Structural complexity: Tensions arising at the boundary between local and external

Peacekeeping operations are undertaken in volatile environments, where there is minimal infrastructure and poverty, corruption, and crime are widespread. Peacekeepers create secure and stable environments but also facilitate local social systems to encourage self-organization, including good governance and development. These aspects of a peacekeeping mission can cause tensions and make operations challenging. External economic aid can also hamper the self-organization of local systems (De Coning, 2020) and risk instilling dependence on foreign resources, in which case the resilience of the local system will be depleted (Normandin & Therrien, 2016).

Incomplete structures and absent local governance practices increase pressure. As an external party working at the micro-level, peacekeepers cannot address local, macro-level problems. The CLT perspective indicates that while the system is aggregated from its parts, the interplay of these parts produces emergent patterns, which are not analytically reducible to their constituents (Stacey, 2010). While emergent phenomena are seen as occurring on the macro-level, the emergent whole has the power to affect micro-level components and processes. This kind of duplex nature of emergence epitomizes the downward causation portrayed by Blitz (1992).

A peacekeeping operation also relies on local services but needs to balance the conflicting interests of the various religious, ideological, and ethnic groups involved in service production. The upshot is that peacekeepers have to balance and adapt their actions as they navigate the external and local boundaries and the delicate tension between many local actors and their motives. The situation opens the possibility of a wicked game occurring that no one can master. The rules and the players change constantly because no player can grasp the whole problem (Lundström & Mäenpää, 2017).

While a peacekeeping mission forms a set of its own, peacekeepers are also part of the larger environment: As their operating environment changes, they must change or co-evolve with(in) it (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Furthermore, these changes alter the environment. For example, an externally funded developmental project may put a sub-set of locals (e.g., women or certain regions) in an unequal position in relation to other locals. The result is that well-intentioned aid can exacerbate conflicts between communities and people. Peacekeepers are obliged to balance the internal tensions between the local people to avoid the unintended and harmful consequences of quite ordinary behavior.

Functional complexity: Tensions created by blurred agency boundaries

Functional complexity refers to increases in the number of local actors and their action logics. People immersed in a conflict have different roles and identities, and their motives are multifaceted and variable. The actors can have political, economic, religious, social, and cultural dependences, and their attachment to such networks varies according to the situation confronting them. The boundaries of their agency are blurred, dynamically intertwined, and non-linear, which hampers the peacekeepers' engagement in the planned activities and efforts to build trust. Consequently, ensuring the success of a peacekeeping mission is an art rather than a science: the art is in engaging a community of peacekeepers to deal with complex issues, of which they are a part themselves, thus making them one player among others (Grint, 2014).

The blurred boundaries of agency create challenging security issues. First, the routine work is demanding because the role of officials is often ambiguous. Identifying security personnel, usually based on their uniform, can also be complicated; civilians can carry weapons and impersonate security personnel, and hostile parties and their sympathizers cannot be identified by their physical demeanor. Hostiles are not visibly organized but form fragmented networks that can mobilize considerable support. Blurred boundaries can also be indirect, as in the case of interpreters, whose language skills and cultural knowledge are utilized to establish contact with locals. Interpreters' indeterminate position can emerge from issues that represent an orientation in the area of operation. The peacekeeping environment can give rise to a wicked social mess (Warn et al., 2012) in which knowledge and understanding of cultural and political diversity and their root causes (Piccolino, 2019) can be extremely important. That knowledge helps leaders build trust among the locals and adapt their activities to local circumstances.

In sum, the functional complexity is based on political, economic, religious, social, and cultural *attractors*—organizing principles with their own logic that limits a system to a behavioral pattern (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Such

attractors can, in the appropriate circumstances, intertwine and co-evolve toward simultaneously compelling logic. This interconnectivity can emerge rapidly into the unknown. The CLT perspective indicates peacekeepers must carefully balance stabilization and change logic.

Security-related complexity: Tensions created by the variability of threats

The operating environment is something between war and peace, in that it is both asymmetric and complex. Working in such an environment forces peacekeepers to be prepared to face a threat arising at any time and from anywhere. They must remain constantly alert to safeguard their own security and that of the local population. The tensions on the boundaries of security and legacy create a context that peacekeepers must adapt to.

Peacekeepers must prepare themselves for military threats, such as roadside bombs or suicide bombers. Moreover, such threats can be posed by non-uniformed combatants and can even arise within the boundaries of the peacekeepers' base. The threats can be politically and ideologically motivated in ways that are difficult to identify. New technology and disinformation can be effective means to promote various intentions. But more traditional means, such as acting at the gray interface of the rules of engagement and leaking information to outsiders, are also used. Threats are posed on many levels and change constantly, so peacekeepers are obliged to innovate ways to adapt to those changes (De Coning, 2016). Tactics frequently employed include pre-deployment, training in situ, and training to read the environment to detect unusual circumstances and decipher their meanings. Furthermore, peacekeepers need to anticipate the impact of their actions on the local population and constantly reassess those actions to ascertain if they pose a security risk.

Because of the variability and ambiguity of situations, the rules of engagement peacekeepers must adhere to do not necessarily match the threat faced. Legal rules create complexity, which requires self-organization and adaptation. The rules define the legal norms tailored to each mission, its mandate, and the perceived threat level, and those rules set the legal boundaries of peacekeepers' activity. Generally, the rules are clear, but there are situations where existing rules cannot be followed without creating a security threat. Peacekeepers must interpret the rules of engagement and ensure their subordinates remain safe and can find themselves in complex legal situations with serious repercussions.

Professional complexity: Tensions created by differences in task execution and planning cultures

Professional complexity relates to tensions over cooperation that is based on a variety of stakeholders being

involved in promoting security and maintaining peace. Mitleton-Kelly (2003) states that diversity creates disorder but also helps establish a new order. Diversity is the prerequisite source for unpredictable self-organizing and the emergence of novelty which Mitleton-Kelly (2003) describes as “without diversity, there is no difference that makes a difference.”

Multinational peacekeeping forces work with the local security forces to establish a secure and stable environment. Differences in skills and working culture between external parties and local ones cause tensions that must be considered. The absence of mutual trust is also a source of tension. From a non-local viewpoint, the fragility of trust results from the lack of common rules and information leakage. Trust can promote interaction processes and only when trust has been tested can the social system process meanings (Luhmann, 1995). Similarly, locals do not always trust peacekeepers' capability to cope with tasks. The peacekeepers might have to earn trust by establishing that they have considerable experience in difficult situations in the local context. From a complex viewpoint, the trust between peacekeepers and locals is continuously threatened by the emergence of evil. King et al. (2002) suggest that evil may emerge even when good people come together to do good things in good faith. While it is implicit that peacekeepers avoid doing harm, the evil may emerge out of the dynamic interactions based on competing interests and goals and power imbalances (cf. Johannessen, 2018). Peacekeeping operations can fail in such scenarios, but no one is to blame.

Although multinational forces usually form a single entity, there are differences in leadership culture that can spark tension. Such differences can affect planning, information sharing, cooperation, and decision-making. If cooperation is not to be undermined, these issues must be overcome by adapting to different leadership styles. The diverse military cultures exist within their own environment, and when the environment changes to a coalition with multinational forces, adaptation ensures the best fit. The change in one entity is partially dependent on the changes in other related entities (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003).

Steering-related complexity: Tensions created by being in charge but not in control

Steering-related complexity refers to tensions caused by duties and responsibilities that lead actors in different directions and by widespread expectations of what peacekeepers will do. It is a dimension where a traditional military actor is at one pole and a humanitarian aid worker at the other, with many roles between the two.

From the traditional military viewpoint, the impression conveyed by peacekeepers in the local environment should not be overly militaristic; being so can jeopardize the flow of information from contact with the local

people. Especially when on UN missions, peacekeepers should remain ideologically neutral, but that can often be challenging. The locals might recognize equipment or hear peacekeepers listen to radio channels that they associate with their enemies, which can induce non-linear behavior and disproportionality between cause and effect; in other words, small events can have large impacts (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Furthermore, peacekeeping can encompass humanitarian aid work to address conflicts in the local area alongside tasks that would normally be the responsibility of local government, such as building bridges.

Peacekeepers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) cooperate in an area of operation to lay the foundations for sustainable peace. However, from the peacekeepers' viewpoint, NGO activity and values are not always aligned to support the mission, and actions can become decentralized to reflect the interests of each organization. For peacekeepers, coordinated, fast-paced action would ensure that the basic needs of the local people are supported, which would also enhance the confidence of the local citizenry in local government, which is the third important element alongside security and development in the process of stabilizing societies. Nevertheless, the non-governmental actors must maintain their values and ideologies and respect their supporters' principles. Values and ideologies steer action in different directions, and coordination becomes difficult or even impossible.

Peacekeepers should also seek to establish credibility (Newby, 2018) and legitimacy with the locals. However, the local people might reject the idea that peacekeepers have a right to interfere in local activities. They might have expectations of the peacekeeping role that do not align with the mission directive. They might reject the peacekeepers' role in general or be skeptical about their accountability. Such a situation would jeopardize achieving credibility and legitimacy, and then the success of the operation will in turn be jeopardized. Somewhat paradoxically, it seems that peacekeepers are in charge but not in control (Shaw, 2002).

In sum, peacekeepers' responsibilities, tasks, and attitudes pull in different directions. Hence, they try to connect to different roles and attitudes to adapt to diversity. All this means constant re-organizing to find the best fit with the environment.

DISCUSSION

This article reveals five dimensions of complexity in peacekeeping that impact leadership (see Figure 2) and contributes to leadership theory by developing an analytical framework for complexity arising from a crisis (see Figure 3). First, the structural, functional, security-related, professional, and steering-related complexity dimensions are not seen as dualities (Murphy et al., 2017) but as

resembling DNA chains comprising strands. These strands wind around one another and have different constituents. Each dimension and its elements may conjoin at any time and in any place to create something new or unexpected. The dimensions also incorporate uncertainties, have blurred boundaries, and overlap. Accordingly, the dimensions combine to spawn problems that interact with each other and create a need to embrace dynamic tensions. Second, the findings show that specific tensions exist within the dimensions and between one dimension and another that affect the actions taken. The dimensions reveal boundaries between systems where the interests

and needs of different actors meet (De Coning, 2018; Loode, 2011) and which create the adaptive space for enabling actions (Cilliers, 2001; De Coning, 2016).

For example, functional complexity differs from but is not separate from structural complexity. The research of Christensen and Lægheid (2011) would indicate structural complexity materializes as a vertical specialization in peacekeeping tasks, whereas functional complexity arises from horizontal specialization. Though specialization typically increases professionalism, it may also produce tensions between function and professionalism. The situation arises because the functions of peacekeeping operations are defined in strategic plans and controlled by commanders responsible for the mission. The peacekeeper's professionalism, in turn, is a result of the combination of military education, work experience, and interactions with peers. As a result, individual experiences do not always match the expectations set by the mission. The dilemma is that while the majority of peacekeepers presumably reflect the mission focus in defining the mission functions, other parties, such as NGO staff or local people, may seek to pursue their own idea of legitimate peacekeeping when they carry out their professional roles in local circumstances. The tension between mission functions and professionalism also relates to different forms of accountability. Our findings reveal that mission actions can be justified based on both military and humanitarian logic. Different logics also challenge the steering practices. While actions following military logic can be effectively steered through the command-and-control approach, humanitarian tasks demand-responsive interaction processes between the backers of NGOs and local people. Underlying the responsive interaction process is reflexivity, which is based on accepting and

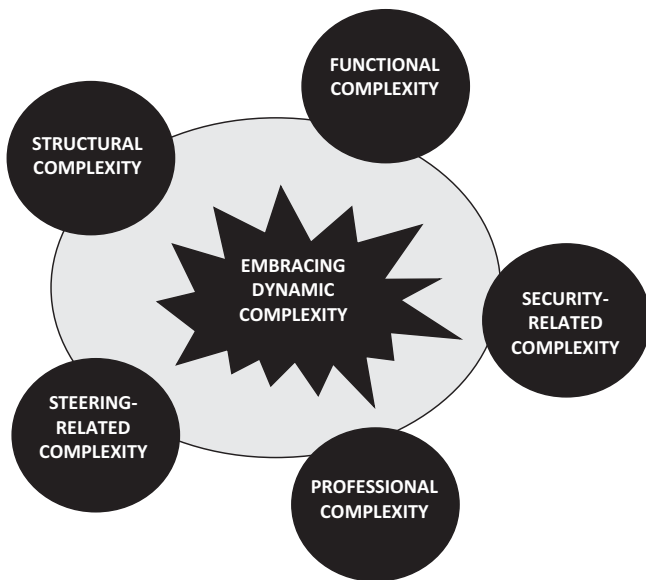


FIGURE 2 The dimensions of complexity in peacekeeping

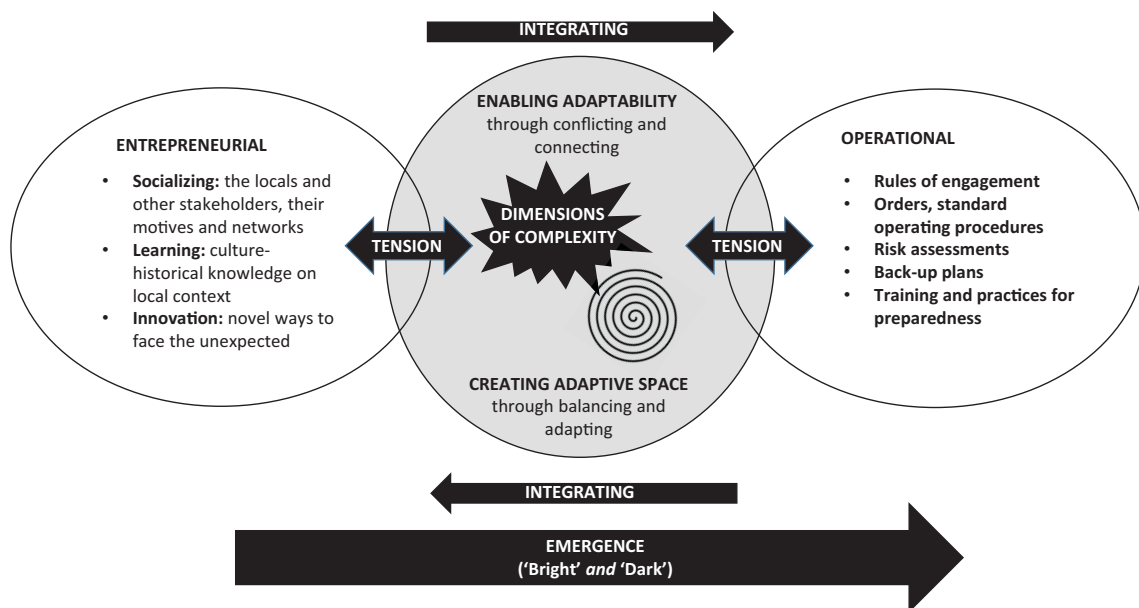


FIGURE 3 The framework for complexity in peacekeeping

understanding that there are many truths and related solutions (Stacey, 2010) and which requires political astuteness from leadership (Hartley, 2018).

Furthermore, the dimensions create an additional element for the adaptation process within CLT (see Figure 3). In CLT, the adaptation to complexity is characterized by tensions between operational and entrepreneurial aspects, and leaders can create an adaptive space to form adaptive responses to address them (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The findings of this study show that the operational aspect of peacekeeping consists of risk assessments, backup plans, rules of engagement, and training and practices to counter the unexpected. The operational system demands order, standardization, and control if it is to be efficient and productive (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017), but in the peacekeeping context, it also increases predictability to help handle unforeseen and fast-paced changes. The entrepreneurial aspect combines socializing, learning, and innovation processes with a drive for change (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The findings indicate that socializing refers to the capability to understand the key actors and their motives and networks. Learning points to the broad culture-historical knowledge of the crisis and local context, enable the adaptation to local circumstances. Innovativeness highlights novel ways to address surprises. Our findings reveal that in addition to the dimensions of complexity, tensions around the entrepreneurial aspects (as opposed to the bureaucratic or operational aspects of leadership), create a need for adaptive solutions (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016, 23). Further, the enabling processes are reflected in the routine work of peacekeepers being adapted to a range of situations and used to balance those situations to maintain peace and prevent conflicts from escalating (De Coning, 2016). Moreover, although the findings demonstrate the use of parallel interventions on a large-scale (e.g., security, good governance, and development), complexity entails continuous and co-evolving innovations that are continuously assessed and refined (cf. Zweibelson, 2015). Accordingly, CLT would benefit from parallel interventions, co-evolving adaptation, and ongoing organizing (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Our findings also show that adaptive processes demand balancing actions. Complexity Leadership Theory highlights the deliberate construction of adaptive space and focuses particularly on the acts of conflicting and connecting (Arena et al., 2017), which were also present, if not explicitly mentioned, in the mindset of adaptive peacebuilding. When working in an adaptive space, boundaries serve as arenas for both conflicting and connecting. Both external influences and local approaches coexist, and the adaptive response to these tensions is balancing. Both CLT and the adaptive peacebuilding approach stress how leaders should not deny, or retreat from, the pressures in complexity (Craps et al., 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Instead, they should resist the temptation to simplify the problems at hand (Joosse &

Teisman, 2021; Maher, 2014). Therefore, a complex situation requires a shift from trying to manage the change to stimulating the local system so that self-organization can build the necessary resilience to manage itself. Hence, the parties should consider boundaries between the external and the local as enabling, rather than constraining (Cilliers, 2001; De Coning, 2016).

Nevertheless, if the level of conflict is too high or low (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017), or coordination leaves a gray area that is not authorized by anyone (Christensen et al., 2016), or the actors do not have a shared goal, people have no reason to collaborate to achieve the necessary adaptation (Rosenhead et al., 2019) and might even prefer to stay within their own bubbles (Autesserre, 2014). Conflicting also needs trust and support to be constructive. Without psychological (Edmondson, 1999), or physical safety, leaders will not be willing to take risks (Schulze & Pinkow, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Consequently, *the operational adaptive response* encapsulates routine work. Further, the emergence might have both bright and dark sides (Bella et al., 2003), and involve successful and harmful, distorting and unsafe outcomes (Linstead et al., 2014). Therefore, *the entrepreneurial adaptive response* in which peacekeepers capitalize on their professionalism is an issue for safety-related complexity. As a result, the aspect of *emergence in the form of a new order*, that is, *lessons learned* can be integrated into the operational system. That integration signals that the adaptive process is accomplished (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

Moreover, adaptive space is a network structure, in which the rich interconnectivity of interactions (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017), or integration of emergent and planned networks (Comfort & Zhang, 2020) enable adaptive processes. Our findings illustrate that these interactions are not only confined to organizational members across organizations or interorganizational spaces, or between leaders and followers (Uhl-Bien 2021a, 2021b), but instead, the extent encompasses the local populace (De Coning, 2018) and show the interconnected nature of relations (Kaufmann, 2013). Our findings also show that dividing the key actors into two categories, interventors and locals is too restrictive. The interventors in the peacekeeping context can be representatives of the military, police forces, and international NGOs from contributing countries, and today also private security services providers. The locals can include representatives of a national military and police service, disruptive agents, and people from different communities and related commitments. For example, violent conflicts affect the choices made by ordinary people in their daily life, and they have to protect themselves and their families from poverty and violence (Kalyvas, 2012), especially in fragile states where the structures of the society are incomplete (cf. structural complexity). Therefore, both CLT and adaptive peacebuilding can be criticized for having an overly positive perspective in overlooking power relations (Denis

et al., 2012) and the dark side of their emergence (Bella et al., 2003). Unpacking the categories of interventors and locals into their constituent various groups reveals the interconnectivity of the groups and helps to outline the adaptive responses necessary in conflicts.

Finally, our findings confirm that CLT is a relational leadership theory that puts relational dynamics at the core of the understanding of leadership (Denis et al., 2012) in peacekeeping, especially in relations outside a person's unit. The findings also suggest that adapting to complexity demands parallel innovations taking into account local ownership (De Coning, 2018), new leadership (Fraher & Grint, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018), and the content of the complexity that all participants face in peacekeeping operations. Equally, these dimensions of complexity need processes of their own to be handled.

CONCLUSION

This article has developed an analytical framework for peacekeeping in complexity and contributed to CLT by unpacking the complexity into dimensions, and the actors into groups and communities with commitments. A further contribution is rooted in considering the role of power relations and the dark side of their emergence. To advance leadership practices beyond the military and peacekeeping context, this article offers the following three implications.

First, unpacking complexity into distinct dimensions and acknowledging the source of tensions can help leaders to create a vocabulary for interpreting their environment. This kind of naming and framing process prompts developing a mindset that enables leaders to embrace complexity as it happens around them. The question is how the leaders' mindset guides them to take concrete action and how they can avoid the allure of attempting to tame complexity. Doing so is critical in a complex world where quick fixes may unwittingly contribute to the very problems the leaders want to solve. Second, adaptive leadership must be translated into practice. Our analysis suggests that an adaptive space for beneficial emergence can be supported through *balancing actions* targeting various contradictions and competing tensions. Instead of following one optimal formula, operating in an adaptive space requires an ability to accept the simultaneous presence of opposing contradictions. While balancing actions must be constantly worked on and assessed (De Coning, 2020), the dimensions identified in this study provide general guiding principles for applying them. The findings here highlight the following balancing actions: emphasizing the co-evolving relations between local needs/resources and global missions/prescriptions, recognizing the promises and challenges associated with the diversity of agency, investing in trust-building by making use of culture-historical knowledge,

and utilizing situational awareness in combining operational and entrepreneurial leadership. Third, deeply held mindsets influence how leaders perceive problems and what kind of balancing actions they will deem appropriate. While these balancing actions are intentional, they are simultaneously enabled, restricted, and influenced by situational factors that cause them to evolve. For example, supporting local self-organization requires refraining from exerting external pressure and a local system and/or local interactions that create order. As our findings have shown, that is not always the case. The leadership mindsets and balancing actions are always contingent. Therefore, the crucial actions are to acknowledge the presence of and draw out complexity, rather than seeking to resolve or simplify it (Rosenhead et al., 2019).

Crucial issues that remain to be addressed in the future include determining the innovative means required to bring about change without losing sight of the challenges involved (Boin & Hart, 2003). Furthermore, a wide range of security aspects has intertwined effects on peacekeeping. Consequently, effective peacekeeping demands a holistic understanding, innovativeness in practice, and expertise in areas beyond traditional professionalism. How such innovativeness can be applied to bolster theorizing on enabling leadership, especially with regard to peacekeeping, warrants further research.

Any study has its limitations, and, in this case, the main limitation concerns the ability to generalize the findings. Each peacekeeping operation has objectives aligned with internationally agreed mandates. In addition, every country has its own politically determined national guidelines that create their own complement of issues and tasks to be undertaken. These political decisions frame a wealth of experience from which military leaders can derive their subjective meanings. Each peacekeeping operation is also unique, and therefore, the dimensions of complexity vary in different settings. Missions are long-standing, cyclical, and area-specific. The kinds of temporal, local, and specific situations in which leaders are involved during their deployment affect the viewpoints they might hold about the complexity involved in any operation. Accordingly, the research findings reported here must necessarily be largely indicative and serve to prompt further investigation into the topic. One potential avenue for further research would be to use ethnographic or participative methods (Watson, 2011) to help leaders to draw complexity-informed analogies and metaphors from their messy environment.

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