

Chapter 2

(Re)constructing Leadership: Complexity and Flexibility

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ABSTRACT

This chapter elucidates Keith Grint's model of leadership as a viable dynamic option in our complex world. By locating the model within a social constructionist frame, this chapter demonstrates how far we have come in the evolving stream of leadership research. Seven main characteristics of the Grint's model of leadership are discussed to demonstrate how the model can help us to understand wicked problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. The author also identifies two weaknesses of Grint's model: (1) organisational culture and (2) followership. Lastly, to address the two weaknesses, the author proposes an integrated model of leadership that combines the understanding of an adhocracy culture based on the competing value framework and Kelly's effective followership model. In conclusion, the integrative framework of leadership offers leadership researchers a model with more explanatory power in understanding the leadership phenomenon within the social constructionist supposition.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to leadership, if things go badly, people tend to judge that leader's behaviours and other factors in very negative ways, regardless of what the leader has achieved in the past. In other words, leaders are blamed for the negative results, whether causes can be traced back to the leader or whether it was caused by an external factor outside the leader's influence. This means the outcomes "make" the

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leader. In fact, we attribute leadership as accounting for up to 40% of the changes in performance of an organization (Day, 2014). This considerable effect indicates that a better understanding of the concept of leadership can be an effective lever to move the organization (to borrow a phrase from Archimedes). The ancient Chinese literature understands the value of naming correctly to facilitate successful outcomes.

Tzu-lu said, “If the Lord of Wei left the administration of his state to you, what would you put first?”

Confucius said, “If something has to be put first, it is, perhaps, the rectification of names.”

Tzu-lu said, “Is that so? What a roundabout way you take! Why bring rectification in at all?”

Confucius said, “When names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success...” (Adair, 2013, p. 9-10)

When a crisis arises, the good leader must be decisive, demonstrating an intense desire to concentrate on the challenge while ignoring detractors. This hinges on correctly identifying (naming) the problem as a crisis. However, the correct naming of a problem is not a matter of just the correct identification of the nature of the problem. Indeed, Grint (2005) suggests that whether or not naming a problem as a crisis is in actuality the right response seems to rely less on whether the situation supposedly “is” a crisis, rather than on how best the situation should be better addressed. This is not to neglect that there is an “is” to the problem, but to recognise that there is manoeuvre room for those in leadership roles when it comes to persuading others as to the advantage of naming a problem a crisis or as something else. This chapter aims to provide a robust model of leadership (i.e., Keith Grint’s model) that acknowledges this factor in understanding leadership.

To build up to that stage, first, the author reviewed the evolution of leadership research to gain an appreciation and understanding as to how we arrived at where we are situated now in the stream of leadership research. A broad survey will provide a bird’s eye view on the state-of-the art trends in leadership research. About a century of leadership science has resulted in many paradigm changes and a great deal of ambiguity. Scholars in leadership have been disappointed by the vast number of false starts, modest scientific developments, and inconsistent results, on many occasions. Nevertheless, it was a three-steps-forward-two-steps-back situation, a slow, uneven progress. Second, we moved on then to develop a better understanding of leadership