

Fellow Traveller: The Age of Rule-Based Behavior

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ABSTRACT: *People reminisce in awe at the feats of our forbearers, but they themselves are no longer capable of such deeds: art becomes conventional, and science is suffocated by the respect for established authority. We can read about what people who saw Steve Jobs and what people who had never seen him think about him. We can see certain end products, such as an iPhone or an iPad, but we can never see the thinking of the leader that went into running the company. In general we can see that we have seen leaders and we have heard about their decisions, but no one has ever seen the process of thinking that goes into making a decision. In the era of rule-based behavior, the leader will be a fellow traveller of Yuccies in the glocal village. In this essay, or rather 'view-point' writing, we examine leaders through a transdisciplinary lens. Three models of the leader of the future are presented; a conceptual, a logical and an identity model.*

Keywords: *leadership, decision-making, transdisciplinarity, rule-based behavior, knowledge-based system*

I. INTRODUCTION

We know nothing about nothing. This is a question of philosophy, but better put, I can say that philosophers formulated the greatest problem of humanity [1]. Let us think about 'nothing'. If we know not what nothing is, then how can we know what something is. Well, so much for that. Let us stick our heads in the sand, and have a closer look at 'something'. Along with my students, who are now university lecturers, we have often written about the disappearance of decisions. Decision makers readily accept identities whose rules are easy to follow, and organizations even reward this behavior. They are even willing to make some sacrifices to ensure they do not breach the identity expected of them. They are less likely to accept attitudes that would question previous rules, preferring instead those that reinforce them [2]. Great thinkers of the past had already written on this subject, but today, it is more valid than ever. "To say that individuals and organizations follow rules and identities, however, is not to say their behavior is always easily predicted. Rule-based behavior is freighted with uncertainty. Situations, identities, and rules can all be ambiguous. Decision makers' use processes of recognition to classify situations; they use processes of self-awareness to clarify identities; they use processes of search and recall to match appropriate rules to situations and identities. The processes are easily recognized as standard instruments of intelligent human behavior" [3:61].

As Peter Drucker said, when they translate plans into action, executives need to pay particular attention to decision making, communication [4]. It was based on these that I taught at the turn of the millennium. I always received criticism, to which my answer was yes, of course they do other things as well. They drink coffee and visit the restroom, but other people do that, too, and so these do not differentiate them. A concept should never be trivial. When something does not make complete sense on the first skim-read, it means that the concept has not found an image to hook onto in your memory. If you have never seen a train station, a flashed image of one will mean nothing to you.

The laboratory experiments of cognitive psychologists often neglect ecological validity, and so they are not able to know reality through artificially created experimental situations. The understanding of complete freedom does not come from artificial laboratory environments, nor does it come from artificially created workplaces or the dinner table. We would need to find the reality of the yearning for freedom. It will become necessary to have cognitive psychologists commit to examination of ecologically important variables, as opposed to the easily accessible ones [5]. It seems so easy to state that the opposite of freedom is servitude. How much more difficult it is to know the world through the concept of 'total freedom' vs. 'zero-freedom'. As Bertrand Russell had pointed out, so many things we hold sure and evident in everyday life, once held up to the light of scrutiny, will turn out to be filled with so many obvious contradictions, that it is only through great mental effort that we can uncover what it is we truly believe [6].

Understanding the ideas and concepts of company leadership is a cognitive process just like getting to know everyday things. If a picture of a train station is flashed for you for a fraction of a second, and you have seen any kind of train station before, you will immediately know that the flashed picture is one of a train station. You do not remember the details, but you remember the overall picture. Those who have only seen rule-abiding decision-makers will not recognize the conceptual model of leadership. There are more and more people, especially in multinational subsidiaries or organizations that mimic multinationals who have never made a decision and have never even seen one. Just because you have seen project management does not mean you will

recognize a train station. We will have similar problems with understanding a charismatic leader. If we have never seen a person who had a followership, and a few books unworthy of mention also say that it is a bad thing, then you will never recognize the overall picture of leadership. A negative public opinion can also have hindering effects on understanding the overall picture.

II. CONCEPTUAL MODEL: OUT OF THE CAGE

Unlike in the sciences, those who think about person-person relationships focus on the clear articulation of concepts and on inner consistency. “Let us try to grasp the implications of the following ancient passage: The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field. Today we still grapple with the classification of reality, for we can only think about what we have a concept of. A simple example is enough to demonstrate. It would be foolish to say that there was no gravity in reality before the 17th century. Newton was merely an observer who understood and named it. Ever since that moment, however, we can think, debate and teach about gravity. If an observer realizes something new, then it is dangerous to give it an old, taken name; it has to be given a new one so that we may think about it” [7].

The realization of conceptual models is not the domain of those who shape public opinion. This is not completely accurate, because public opinion does have an effect on teaching. Students will reject thinkers who go against public opinion, and so the establishment of business education will clear out those who think differently. This statement in and of itself is worthy of a separate essay, but for now, let us settle for the examination of leadership through the restrictive lenses and cages of cognitive psychology, philosophy and cultural anthropology, using the concepts and methods of these disciplines as shown in figure 1.

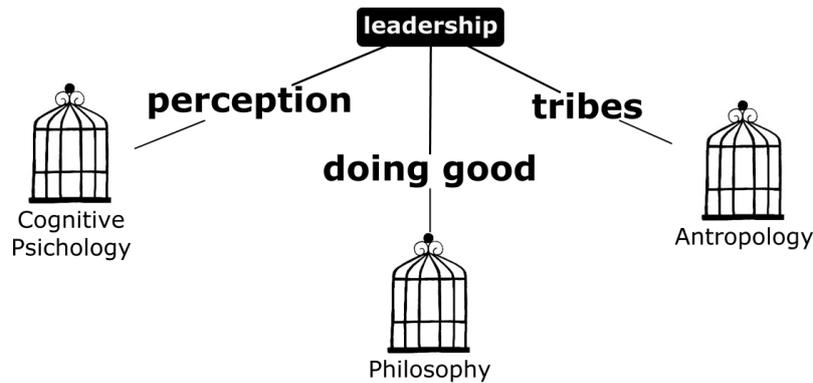


Figure 1. From the Cages of Disciplines

Cognitive psychologists study the perception of leaders, philosophers study the ethics of leaders, and anthropologists study their followership, which is their tribe. What can we see when we are not restricted by the rigid frameworks of the cages (disciplines)? The free observer, if sufficiently, but not too distanced from reality can get to know the leader as a good global neighbour and fellow traveller, whom they quickly recognize as someone who grasps the essence of things. A free observer might be able to slip out of the cages of disciplines, and might be able to see the leader as shown in figure 2.

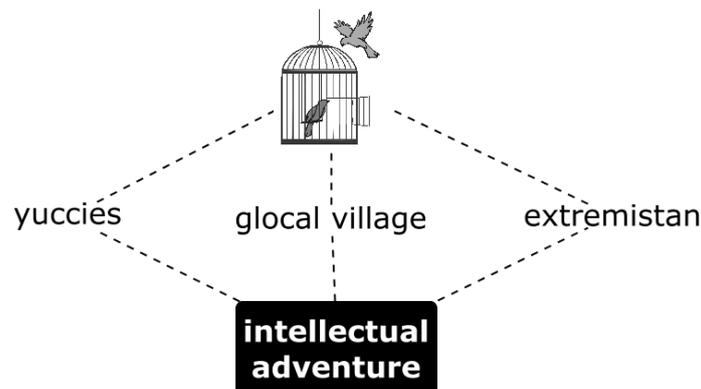


Figure 2. Out of the Cages of Disciplines

A free observer can see the leader as someone inviting them on an intellectual adventure, as a person who sees the place of Yuccies (Young Urban Creatives), in the glocal village, and can understand the world of Extremistan. Yuccies are the mavericks of the age of rule-based behavior. “Our empirical findings have two important implications for practicing managers and HR professionals. First, our research demonstrates that learning and personality go hand in hand, such that our results indicate that while personality is a key predictor of maverickism, considering an individual’s learning processes is also important” [8]. In every day and age, a Requiem was played for the free thinker, but the world extremistan never went extinct. There were never many of them; perhaps this is how many can survive. Who are these Yuccies the new mavericks? How do they differentiate themselves? (1) We don't want to have to be overpaid accountants (2) We don't want to have to be poor if we do what we love and do it well (3) We don't want to have to be free and work in an open space. I can only see them partially. Perhaps they do not need to be led! For Yuccies, who stay outside the gates, reachability is more important than writing emails, and so the spaces and coffee houses of big cities have become more significant. They too, just like other tribes in the village, speak a secret language, a slang that tells them if another is one of them or not. Everything is fine, we are okay, we are simply different from others, we usually say. If we were the same, then one of us would be superfluous. It is dangerous if the rules are interpreted in the same way in every village. Laws created by humans are in fact invitations to behave a certain way, and we can decide whether or not we want to behave in that way. The laws of Nature are in fact simply descriptions of how things behave, and we cannot choose whether or not we want it to be that way. The understanding the reality of human behavior cannot come about in the same way as the understanding of Nature. We don't all have to become Yuccies, we can choose to be well-paid accountants.

The leader as fellow traveller, whom we can only see without disciplines, travels together with their followership on an intellectual adventure, and the followership does not report to them. There is as many different kinds of knowledge as there are people. Knowledge is only objective in the sense of its connection to reality. Personal knowledge is inseparable from the subject. It is impossible to think that a group has knowledge. This, however, does not mean that personal knowledge is the same when that person functions in another group. Then and there, a group affects personal knowledge, but it still remains personal.

The basis of the conceptual model of the fellow traveller leader is the transdisciplinary approach that is observation beyond disciplines.

III. LOGICAL MODEL: YUCCIES STAY OUTSIDE THE GATES

'Glocal' as an expression did not become a commonplace concept, and has thus remained a fun play of words. No one really immersed themselves in the research. This is a very complex system. What is even more embarrassing is that non-locality is a phenomenon studied by quantum-physics. Non-locality is about tiny systems that are distant from each other in space and yet behave as if they were part of a whole. New research is being undertaken by biologists focused on this phenomenon based on the assumption that living organisms are in a way macroscopic quantum-systems. Even architecture sees experiment excursions here and there. We would need to immerse ourselves in the study of non-linear complex systems far from equilibrium, which created self-organizing, self-(re)generating, autopoietic systems. My intuition tells me that the term 'glocal' should be kept alive.

Newly introduced concepts can be validated by checking their internal consistency. The logical links between the glocal worldview (autopoiesis and Yuccies) and the global worldview (hierarchy and organizational zealots) have to be modeled. For the fellow traveller leader to be able to go on adventures together in Extremistan, they must switch their global worldview to a glocal one. These logical connections can be created with the DoctuS Knowledge Based System that we have developed. “The DoctuS Knowledge Based System is based on the classical rule-based reasoning, topped with inductive reasoning for the situation where the expert has enough experience (cases). With the help of inductive reasoning those attributes and rules can be extracted, that give the same decision proposal as provided by the rule-based reasoning. According to our experience in business decision-making, this means that 20-25 attributes and 1500-2500 rules can be reduced to 5-9 attributes and a dozen of purified rules” [10].

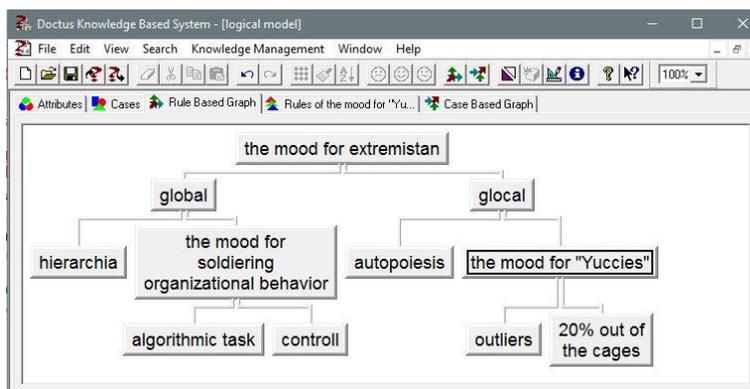


Figure 3. Logical model

If there is any kind of disruption during the modeling, it is dangerous to focus solely on averting the event causing that disruption - the entire process has to be rethought instead [11]. The discernment of logical connections between concepts is a learning process. "There is knowledge (disciplines) that can be taught and learned. Decision-making is one of them. The sciences can be turned into disciplines, but this does not work the other way around. One cannot make decision making into decision science. At the heart of soft disciplines lies the definition of the conceptual framework and model" [12]. Based on this model, the leaders of the future can be examined to see if they are ready to become fellow traveller leaders.

IV. MODEL OF IDENTITY: BACON AND SCRAMBLED EGGS

Statler and Waldorf are the two grumpy elders of the Muppet Show who know all the jokes already and cannot laugh at them. They do, however, laugh at their own humor. Let us begin with metaphor that is new to the new-born: In bacon and eggs, the chicken is affected but the pig fully committed. The astounding thing today is not that they manage hospitals somehow, but the fact that there are those who are willing to manage hospitals.

Effective executives know that they have authority only because they have the trust of the organization [13]. We cannot expect complete commitment to the workplace from a professional doctor, teacher, actor or athlete. They simply work there, are fellow travellers. They do not need motivation. They need us to stop the destruction of their internal motivation [14]. The most well-known person of a bicycle factory is the manager. The most well-known people of a hospital or school, however, are the healers and teachers. Do any of the several million Mintzberg readers know who the dean of McGill University is? If you understand this question, then you understand that leading an institution and leading a company are two different things. It is possible that a hospital, a theatre company, an athletics club or a faculty will consist of several masters working parallel next to each other and only become part of a council team when they need to lobby for something. Once they have come up with the idea they wish to present, they will choose a spokesperson, but that person will not become a boss. The spokesperson will be different if they are looking for a guest surgeon, professor or actor for a short-term position, and different if they are looking for a patron. I am closer to the position that companies will have more to learn from hospitals and theatres. It will not be universities and sports clubs that will function as companies, as hasty management training would suggest. The new concepts surrounding organizations are direct opposites of the 'loyalty-conditioned employees' idea. The "smart boss" + "dumb, but loyal employees" version of organizational functioning is unviable. And there is a slim chance the solution will be "smart employee" + "dumb boss". Only trainers who are trying to ingratiate themselves with companies believe in this, or not even them; they just preach it. I believe in something like the theatre or university, where artists and masters do their job as best they can and care about each other. There are producers and impresarios and many other indispensable people, but they are not above or below the artists. They simply care about each other, the lighting technician about the acrobat and vice versa. They are not afraid of each other like in an office; they are simply fellow travellers. The global worldview, the atmosphere of hierarchy and organizational 'soldiers', is described very well by Samuel Beckett: "Well to begin with he should pull on the rope, as hard as he likes so long as he doesn't strangle him. He usually responds to that. If not he should give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible" [15]. Daniel Pink tells the story of a leader who is trying to switch his global worldview to a glocal one. He keeps his employees on a "long leash". As a leader, he says, his job is not to walk up and down and check if everyone is in their place. The job of a leader is to create the environment where people can perform best [16]. As Confucius said, if the leader himself acts virtuously and thus sets an example, he will not have to give orders, everything will be on its way. If he does not set a good example, however, then not even his orders will be followed.

V. DISCUSSION: I CAN SEE WHAT YOU SEE NOT FROM YOUR CAGE

I am somehow unable to convince myself of the importance of the fact that there are 15 747 724 136 275 002 577 605 653 961 181 555 468 044 717 914 527 116 709 366 231 425 076 185 631 031 296 protons and something of the like electrons in the universe. I am somehow unable to convince myself to believe that the publications of a few million scientists each year hold the key to my happiness. I am afraid of those whose every word is proven.

We would not speak our native tongue better if were to remember where and from whom we learned each word. A refined language always finds the right word for a situation. It is a trivial statement, but the consequences of accepting it are not. The "how do you know" question is only good for provocation. What can we know about learning in the digital age? "The new tools of social communication have necessarily brought an era where all of us (including those who are not using online social platforms) have to rethink learning, knowledge sharing and collaboration in a fundamentally different way than ever before. Instead of deeply thinking in a narrow area, having only superficial knowledge of many things will become more dominant" [17].

If we operate with incorrect concepts, then the question of a leader is simple: can I aspire to complete freedom? We can argue whether and how much the presented models restrict freedom. The only important thing is that this debate take place not between those sitting in the cages.

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