



TRACK 47: Philosophical thorns in the side of Leadership Studies

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Abstract:

Leadership is a diversifying topic in management studies, drawing on concepts from root disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology and, to a limited extent, moral philosophy. Many scholars celebrate this hybridity and the apparent freedom it confers to work from diverse epistemological assumptions. For a number of reasons (including the developmental, prescriptive and consultancy oriented focus of much research) these assumptions are seldom openly debated beyond a justification of research methods; thus ontological questions about the definition of leadership are overlooked or reduced to post hoc descriptions of behaviour – i.e. are assumed to be based in psychology. A second effect of this behavioural orientation is that potential contributions from philosophy have been largely overlooked – at least in the more recent flurry of new journals and the avalanche of popular and scholarly publications on the topic.

On the other hand leadership is not a “young” discipline. For instance, Plato is seen as one of the forerunners of leadership studies, it was a philosophical topic for Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Karl Popper. Many of them not only talked about “great men”, but also about how to manage organizations, limits of leadership, and leadership crisis, to name just a few, still relevant, topics. Where contemporary leadership studies have shown any interest in philosophy it has been on its ethical dimension, missing the potential contributions of intellectual tools offered by modern philosophy (such as philosophy of language, philosophical logic, analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, and process philosophy).

In this track we encourage papers focusing on rethinking leadership from a philosophical point of view. We believe that a philosophical approach would cast a new light on epistemological weaknesses in leadership, and in understanding leadership concepts in a more precise and clear way.