LEADERSHIP & LOGOLOGY:
A SCRIPTIVE READING OF LEADERSHIP WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Leadership theory has developed alongside management theory since the early twentieth century. The writing of management theory has been subject to critical interpretation as evinced by 'guru' theory. In comparison, the development of leadership theory has received scant critical attention. My inquiry moves into this 'gap', explores it and then asks 'What does a critical reading of leadership writing tell us about where leadership theory is heading?'

My thesis argues that leadership theory has moved from the naming of 'managers' to the designation of 'leader-managers' and in the analysis of Drucker's writing, suggests that the 'leader of leaders' has already arrived. I also highlight the multiple meanings attributed to the term 'leadership' and predict that it is becoming a 'god-term'. These observations were the result of several stages of research.

Firstly, the literature on leadership indicated two trends that signalled the direction of leadership theory. One trend pointed to the rising 'image' of the manager / leader and the other to an expanding concept of leadership. Burke's theory of logology suggested that these trends were part of the nature of language which inherently tends towards hierarchical 'perfection'. In order to test Burke's theory, several of Drucker's texts were selected for analysis as they spanned more than 50 years of management and leadership writing.

Applying a 'scriptive' approach to reading and critically analysing Drucker's texts, I traced the development of the manager/leader and the concept of leadership. I also discovered the concept of knowledge is closely aligned with leadership.

In the final analysis, I acknowledged the alternative perspective logology brings to leadership theory and anticipate the exciting possibilities for further research such a perspective provides.

INTRODUCTION

My inquiry began when I started reading the myriad of leadership texts produced for popular consumption. It seemed the claims of each successive text tried to outdo the preceding one. I found I was not alone in my dissatisfaction. In a review of publications on leadership, Huey (in McGill & Slocum, 1998) scathingly observed:

> Leadership books fall into one of three categories: boring thoughts of great men; motivational books by people who are in the business of selling their wisdom to executives; and honest-to-goodness novels masquerading as business books (p. 45).

Popular management theory texts have received similar censure and have been subject to much attention by critics such as Huczynski (1993), Micklethwait & Woodridge (1997), Collins (2000) and Jackson (2001). A body of critique, termed 'guru theory', has been established and it reflects the scrutiny popular management theory has received, especially the writing of management theory. Similar scrutiny of leadership theory has not occurred and it is into this 'gap' that my research enters.

While surveying the field and research surrounding leadership theory, I found there was no consensus regarding what constituted 'academic' theory and what was regarded as 'popular' theory. Consequently, I looked at the leadership theories that were considered 'significant'. The literature surrounding leadership theory also alluded to two intriguing trends. The first was how the ambiguity of leadership as a term allowed it to acquire new meaning. The second trend suggested the development of the 'image' of the manager/leader. These trends, observed through the development of leadership theory, hinted at the future direction of leadership theory. In that regard, I wanted to find out more and I believed a close reading of leadership writing would provide the answers.

Thus I looked to 'guru theory' to provide a stepping stone for critically analysing leadership writing. The most frequently cited methodology in developing 'guru'

theory and for studying management texts was rhetoric (Clark & Fincham, 2002). Hence I turned to literary theory as well, to find an appropriate methodology for my research.

In the field of rhetoric, the work of Kenneth Burke, under the rubric of 'New Rhetoric' stood out for two reasons. Firstly, his work on rhetoric included the notion of 'identification' which expanded the traditional ideas associated with Classical Rhetoric. 'Identification' highlighted the response of the reader (in the case of texts) in the process of making texts meaningful, and not just the techniques of persuasion. Another reason for selecting Burke was his theory of logology. If his theory could be substantiated, it would indicate the direction leadership theory was taking and explain the trends in leadership theory that I had noticed.

The theory of logology says that language inherently reaches for 'an ultimate', a 'god-term' that covers every other category within its domain of meaning. If, as logology suggests, the nature of language is 'a process of entitlement leading in the secular realm towards an over-all title of titles' (Burke, 1961, p. 25), then the naming of 'leaders' (and attendant leadership terms) would move in this same direction. To test Burke's theory would require an analysis of a series of texts authored by the same theorist over a period of time on the subject of management or leadership. In this respect, the writings of Peter Drucker stood out as the most suitable for analysis as Drucker has been writing about managers and leaders for more than 50 years.

In this thesis, I explore texts authored by him over several decades. I selected *The Practice of Management*, published in 1955, as a starting point from which to make connections and comparisons. As Monin (2001) and Beatty (1998) have already analysed the text, I will build on their findings. The next book I selected was *The Essential Drucker* (Drucker, 2001). Two chapters from this book were of particular interest to me: Chapter 19 on 'Leadership as Work' and Chapter 23, which is titled 'A Century of Social Transformation – Emergence of Knowledge Society'. The latter

chapter was selected because it provided a social context for leadership. Moreover, it seemed that 'knowledge' was closely linked to leadership. It was not surprising that the topics of leadership and the 'knowledge society' were again discussed in Drucker's latest publication, *Managing in the Next Society* (Drucker, 2002). Again I selected two chapters from this book on the above topics for comparison: Chapter 6 on 'The CEO in the New Millennium' and Chapter 15 'The Next Society'. Reading both chronologically and topically across Drucker's writings, I sought to discover horizontal (standard) meaning that would both set in place, and reveal, the foundations of the hierarchical terminology that emerges in the vertical (embedded) meaning of later texts (Barthes, 1977).

In order to approach the selected texts from ground zero, I needed an accessible method of text analysis. With this in mind, 'scriptive reading', as established by Monin (2001) proved fruitful. Her method basically takes a critical reader through three reading phases: dominant, critical and reflexive. The dominant phase summarises the standard meaning of a text while the critical phase looks for underlying meaning. The reflexive phase then looks back on the other two phases acknowledging and recording the subjective process of interpretation inherent in any reading of texts.

Throughout the process of analysis, the main question I had was, 'What do the texts tell me about the direction of leadership theory?' By tracing the development of the notions of manager and leader in Drucker's texts over the decades, I hoped to surface the direction of leadership theory-building texts. According to the theory of logology, language inherently strives towards the 'perfection' of its use. If the use of language predicts the outcome, then leadership theory would move towards naming an 'ultimate leader' and 'leadership' would hasten towards becoming a 'god-term'. The development of my thesis was thus as follows.

Chapter One reviews the literature surrounding leadership in the context of management. Starting from the inception of the term 'leadership' as part of the concept of management, I followed notions of 'leadership' to the current perception that it is a term distinct from management. In the process, I went through the definitions of leadership, its ambiguity, the arguments for its similarities to management, and the arguments that leaders and managers are different. I then went on to an overview of leadership theory, outlining both 'academic' and 'popular' leadership theories and highlighting their strengths and weaknesses[1]. I read 'guru theory' as a basis for critically analysing leadership theory as leadership theory had relatively sparse critical literature.

From the literature review, I observed two trends in leadership. The first was the expanding concept of leadership in the context of management. Even as it acquired new meaning when placed in a work context, leadership also incorporated meaning from other contexts, thereby broadening its domain of meaning. The second related trend was the rising image of the leader. I noticed that as the meaning of 'leadership' expanded, the importance and expectations of leaders also grew. These trends indicated the direction of leadership theory hence I focussed on them. In order to make sense of the trends, I required a critical approach to examining leadership and what was said about it. Again I looked to 'guru' theory which suggested that a rhetorical inquiry would be relevant (Jackson, 2001) for examining leadership writing.

Chapter Two reviews the methodology involved in rhetoric. In this chapter, I review the tenets of New Rhetoric and Burke's notion of 'identification' in rhetoric. The theory of logology will is also explained in detail.

In Chapter Three, the method of 'scriptive reading' is delineated. It is an approach that has been developed by Monin (2001) and in adopting it, this thesis will be one of

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[1] I adopt Elkin & Inkson's (2000) view that the difference between 'scientific' and 'common-sense' theories, as they have characterised it, is nebulous.

the first applications of her method of text analysis. The method of 'scriptive reading' involves three reading phases and five interpretative stages. However, for this thesis, I will adopt just the three reading phases for the four selected texts as it would be otherwise too large an analysis.

The fourth chapter applies the method of 'scriptive reading'. Each text chosen from Drucker's writings is read for its standard or 'dominant' meaning after which a critical reading is applied. The reflexive reading is recorded as a response to all the texts as written by one author. The findings of these three phases of 'scriptive reading' are collated and discussed in Chapter Five in order that a collective image of the manager / leader may be formed.

Chapter Five applies a logological perspective to the findings from the previous chapter and makes observations from such a perspective. My observations are that the 'ultimate leader' has already arrived and is named in Drucker's writing as the 'CEO'. Furthermore, 'leadership' is increasingly becoming a 'god-term'. The answer to my original question is hence logological; leadership texts will continue to elevate the leader and leadership until their entelechial end. What happens after such a point is a consideration for future research.