How Philosophy can Inform the Study and Practice of Leading

This talk considers three different ways in which philosophy can inform the study and practice of leading. Firstly, we can draw directly from philosophers, such as Plato (who referred to the importance of ‘wisdom’ for the Philosopher King, or Foucault (who elaborated on the role of ‘governance’ in his later works) to consider their prescriptions and warnings about what sound leadership entails. Secondly, we can use philosophy to consider the ontology of leadership, including its phenomenological and aesthetic dimensions. Such explorations can offer new insights into what constitutes leading in particular contexts (even when the same actions may not be perceived to be ‘leaderful’ in other situations. Thirdly, and I will argue most importantly, the philosophical method of engagement offers both students of leadership and its practitioners with a powerful tool for extending possibilities for inquiry or action.

The aim of the presentation is to bring awareness to the different ways in which philosophy can be utilized in relation to leading and leadership. By making these distinctions and elaborating on the possibilities (and limitations) of each approach, the talk will enable scholars and practitioners to make more informed choices about how they integrate philosophy into their research or practice.

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