

The Experienced Practitioner Trap

When we take on any role in any group, we soon come to realise we need to 'become' that group or activity i.e. regard it as an organism and think for it. If we don't do that, who else will? Who else can? Who else has the authority? So, we become the brain and voice of whatever it is we have taken on. We take control and back our own judgement. If we don't do that, we aren't leading. Doing that brings success and reinforces our belief and confidence in ourselves. That's all well and good and necessary.

But the trap is in thinking that the context we found ourselves in is 'the world'. It's tempting to think that whatever approach or technique I developed must have universal application everywhere else, because it worked so well here. I might be right. It might be universal. But I could also be wrong. The world is figuratively full of failed frameworks - things that seemed to be great ideas at the time but flopped badly from unintended consequences, in different, unanticipated contexts.

So, there is danger in the hubris of falling in love with the elegant 'perfection' of whatever mental framework we've developed to explain our own success in our own context. Our tendency towards confirmation bias may further blind us to wondering if there might be any contexts where it might not work. We can easily become over-confident, accidentally setting up the necessary conditions for our next failure (hamartia). That will happen if we accidentally stumble into what turns out to be a completely different context and don't recognise that.

Our confidence can even draw us into becoming moralistic, making sanctimonious value judgements on others who are obviously not so 'skilled', 'enlightened' or 'developed'. We may even feel morally impelled to 'call out' contrary behaviour when we see it. This overlooks the possibility of others with their own deep experience in their own context regarding things differently, finding this offensive, objecting and consequently diminishing our ability to lead.

Leadership is the ability to show the way and to induce others to follow. We aren't leading so well if no one is following or if people are turning away.

The extreme end of such an approach can even be labelled as a 'God complex', with an associated presumption of infallibility and unquestionability. I may well see this as simply accepting and fulfilling my responsibility, taking care of my charges, leading for their benefit because someone must do it. But others will readily recognise when my ego has suckered me in, inducing me to step outside my remit.

If we are neither megalomaniac nor narcissistic, we will also tend to focus on the responsibility we have taken on - its gravity, importance, urgency, need to perform, fear of failure, etc., etc. That makes it easy to forget, ignore or not even realise the power we hold relative to others who are not in the position of leadership that we have taken on. They will have a view unencumbered by the preoccupation we will need to have with the detail of what we are doing for the group. Difficulty emerges when the direction we are heading starts diverging from others who may well consider themselves highly experienced in and may also have similarly immutable views on the principles we are advocating, having come from their different context that they were successful in. This can again easily lead us to adopt attitudes and approaches these 'others' will find objectionable - like the 'contradict and condescend' approach.