Enhancing Organizational Leadership Practice
Enhancing Organizational Leadership Practice:

*Western and Eastern Interventions*

By

Alan Fish and Xianglin Ma
Paraphrasing Plato

The price we pay for indifference towards how our organisations are managed, is to be led by people with an inadequate human capital profile.
Dedications from Alan Fish

To my daughter, Rebecca Anne Fish (8 December 1997 – 13 November 1999), who was never afforded the learning opportunities which I have been so fortunate to experience.

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DIAGRAMS

1. Organizational Leadership Practice – Balancing Relationship Responsibilities

2. Organizational Leadership Practice: Thinking-Behaviour (mindset) Map

3. Organizational Value Orientations (Western)

4. Organizational Leadership Individual Virtues (Confucian)


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Chapter One: Professor Jan Selmer – PhD, Aarhus University – Denmark

Chapter Two: Professor Robert Leigh Compton - Litt.D. Adjunct Professor, University of Newcastle – Australia

Chapter Three: Professor Jack Wood PhD, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor CQU, Australia

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Chapter Seven: Emeritus Professor Roger R. Collins PhD, University of NSW - Australia

Chapter Eight: Graham Buchanan - B.Sc (Hons), NdipM, PGCE, CMgr, FRSA, Chartered Manager, Previously Honorary Visiting Professor London Metropolitan University, and Patron – Master of Strategic Leadership.
Problems in the leadership and governance of organizations internationally are profound. This is exemplified in a world, that in the final quarter of the 20th century appeared to have settled on a particular consensus, but one that in the first quarter of the 21st century has exploded. This is an explosion involving, literally, the detonation of ordnance, drawing in transcontinental combatants often fighting proxy wars, or the metaphorical blow-up of currencies and other forms of property. The accompanying global panic manifested itself in the face not only of these, but other potentially existential crises, associated, for example, with the climate, health pandemics, and the socio-economic fall-out that accompanies them.

However, there are plenty of individuals in prominent positions prosecuting their agendas as to how they think things should be done. In Silicon Valley, billionaire corporate patriarchs vie with one another to impose their philosophy on what counts as important, freezing out dissent, and holding the cash reserves and networks of acolytes to draw on, to aid their causes. Across the world’s governments there are those either pursing partisanship ahead of the popular interest, or reinforcing their grip through a single institutionalised political ideology, to assure contemporary dominion, and a legacy they aspire to. In all cases, these leaders have amassed the means to ensure their scribes will write the historical account in their favour.

The volume before you, the accumulation of decades of research and reflection, underpinned by practise, offers a portal through which to understand these issues in all their stripes. It exposes contradictions, foolishness, and plain double-dealing; offering a clearly argued way of framing so as to understand them. From the outset, Dr. Fish, and other experienced, principled thinkers, and accompanying travellers on this journey, challenge the reader. Indifference to organizational leadership practice will not do.

Ideas and evidence from sources, Eastern and Western, illuminated with apt vignettes, are laid out systematically, and provocatively, to encourage everyone with access to the volume to think deeply about the strategic choices before all those of us with a stake in enhancing leadership; looking
ahead over at least the next seventy-five years, before another century dawns.

Take up the invitation: to engage, to reflect, and to accept a call to arms to make things better!

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Vignette

What is the most important thing for an expatriate in adjusting to a foreign location? It is not to undergo a lot of pre-departure training about the culture in the host country, and how it may impact thinking and behaviour of host country nationals.

That may help, but far more important, is to know yourself, before you can understand others. To understand why host country national, react as they do to you, you must know yourself; your own culture.

Many organizational leaders fail to even notice or reflect about their own culture; it is just life as they know it. It is not until you become exposed to other ways of living that you realize that your way is not unique; there are other ways.

These days, with increasing cultural diversity in many countries, you do not need to be an expatriate to encounter different cultures. But the secret is the same; to understand why people react to you the way they do, you must learn how your own culture shapes your thinking and behaviour.

During more than two decades as an expatriate academic, mostly spent in Asia, that was probably the most important lesson I learnt. It resulted in a book, Vikings, and Dragons: Swedish Management in Southeast Asia, and a handful of academic articles. In the process, I learnt some fascinating details about Swedish culture, and became better equipped to adjust as an expatriate anywhere, since knowing yourself is about you, not them.

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Chapter One

Background and Introduction

A vignette precedes each chapter, to enhance the perspectives we have brought to the material addressed. Each vignette is presented by an acknowledged academic, or professional, in organizational leadership and/or human resource management.

This book is then formatted as a set of perspectives which are presented in essay style, as distinct from a traditional textbook, and then formatted as chapters. Each chapter can be read separately, but each chapter follows on from its predecessor.

The book began prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, when I (Alan Fish) was approached to contribute to a book of readings on leadership. My thoughts at that time focused on problematic, dysfunctional, and unethical, leadership practice in Australian organisations, and in the process, proposing potential human resource management interventions to enhance the practice of organizational leadership.

Whilst the original reading reflected examples of problematic organizational leadership practice, the focus has changed here. The original reading was shelved, as that book did not proceed. Subsequently, my reading has morphed into this book.

A set of five frameworks (Diagrams 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) propose how organizational leadership practice can be enhanced. One framework (Diagram 5), shows what can happen when the necessary organisational leadership practice is absent.

Each framework has been designed to redress problematic issues surrounding organizational leadership practice, in and across a diversity of locations and circumstances. Consequently, a cross-border approach, or a Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界) perspective, has been employed.

Critically, the term cross-border, or Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), is employed from different perspectives, not simply cultural and/or geographic.
Principles underpinning Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界) have their foundation in my research on expatriate management, international HRM, and cross-cultural management, and also in the work of my co-author, Xianglin Ma.

To emphasise Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), my own work on expatriate management and international HRM, and certain Eastern perspectives have been employed. Hence, the involvement of an important professional colleague from the Peoples’ Republic of China, Ms Xianglin Ma, has been central to explanations.

Ms Ma and I have employed the term Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), in order to address a critical element in the proposed frameworks; i.e., organizational leaders must cross a diversity of borders - cultural, geographic, etc - to address their ‘relationship responsibilities’ appropriately and effectively. Hence, to emphasise the need to think and behave within and across the needs of diverse circumstances, Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), is employed.

Consequently, the ‘thinking-behaviour duality,’ tied to the way organizational leaders choose to practice as leaders of their respective organisations, is of core importance to the framework and ideas presented. Professor Selmer raises this issue in his earlier vignette; which helps us to think about how each one of us, whether simply an organizational member, or in an actual leadership role, chooses to respond to enhancing ourselves and our organisations when operating in and across different contextual borders. Charles Handy also highlights the issue when highlighting “The Four Cultures of Leadership; where four Greek Gods – Zeus, Apollo, Athena, and Dionysus – in turn reflect a particular thinking-behaviour repertoire. Consequently, how organisational cultures are likely to play out.

“These … gods do not amount to definitions, for the cultures cannot be precisely defined, only recognised when you see them.” (Handy 2020, 11)

Critical amongst borders are our own mindsets, and those of the multiple stakeholders we confront. Mindset is the basis of our thinking regarding our role responsibilities, and what we choose as a behavioural response. The thinking-behaviour duality then, has become an important consideration in addressing why, and how, we choose our various directions.
Consequently, issues surrounding due diligence, organizational values, and individual virtues, including an investment focus towards the human element in our organisations, play critical roles.

To deal effectively and appropriately with each border (in whatever form), organizational leaders need to pay particular attention to their organisation’s relationship responsibilities; i.e., first, their organisation (mission, objectives, strategies, operational practices); then secondly their multistakeholders (Shareholders, staff, externals); and thirdly, their ecosystem (cultural, environmental, governance), as per Diagram 1.

Diagram 1 – Organizational Leadership Practice – Balancing Relationship Responsibilities (Source: the authors).
Consequently, and to address relationship responsibilities effectively and appropriately, especially within the context of *Chaoyue Bianjie* (超越边界), five mindset elements are proposed to underpin the role responsibilities of organizational leaders. Each mindset element, both separately and in combination, is proposed as critical to effective organizational leadership practice, and effective attention to, relationship responsibilities.

The five mindset elements (Diagram 2) are:

(i) Situation-transformation, decision-making and execution;

(ii) Ambicultural learning agility and communications;

(iii) Multistakeholder and ecosystem transactions (why, and what issues);

(iv) Multistakeholder and ecosystem interactions (with whom, and where issues); and,

(v) Human capital investment (HCI).

Given problematic examples of organizational leadership practice outlined in this book, each mindset element appears to be either unknown, downplayed, misunderstood, or simply ignored, when an organizational leader’s relationship responsibilities are addressed.

Most especially, and especially within the context of the five mindset elements outlined in Diagram 2, each organizational leader requires the human capital to support effective analysis; moreover, to transform their organisation’s mission, objectives, strategies, and operational practices (when and where necessary), to enable effective adjustment and adaptation, not simply to situational circumstances, but critically, to support the adjustment and adaptation of all staff to new circumstances.

None of the elements in Diagram 2 will be effectively addressed, without attention, to the thinking-behaviour duality, and an investment focus by organizational leaders, through possession of an effective and appropriate human capital profile.
Diagram 2 – Organizational Leadership Practice: Thinking-Behaviour (mindset) Map (Source: The authors)
Ms Ma has made a critical contribution to this book, through her explanations of important Eastern philosophies, i.e., Tao and Confucianism, most especially to the Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界) perspective, and to the Yin-Yang perspective, which underpins the proposed frameworks.

Each framework seeks to address the increasing need for balance amongst the relationship responsibilities of organizational leaders, when dealing in and across diverse circumstances, and to acknowledge the importance of ‘Ambiculturalism’ (Chen 2010), which is also employed extensively throughout this book.

Consequently, the proposed frameworks have their foundation in a combination of Western literature, as well as Eastern philosophies, some of which are new to the way organizational leadership is practiced in Western contexts, and need to be enhanced. To this end, the book seeks to blend Western and Eastern themes, with the intent to support balance amongst the pathways and players, which inform and enhance organizational leadership practice.

Importantly, the term ‘organizational leadership’ is employed throughout this book, as distinct from simply leadership. Why? Like borders, leadership can be addressed from a number of perspectives, and is reflected in this book through the application of the five mindset elements which have been highlighted in Diagram 2.

The term ‘organization’ is also employed, rather than, for example, ‘business’, ‘company’, or ‘corporation’. In this sense, organizational leadership practice is addressed in this book based on what is deemed to be relevant to organizations in general, i.e., issues which are not necessarily tied to any particular type of organization, i.e., public, private, community, or even charitable.

Consequently, the elements highlighted in Diagrams 1 and 2 are proposed as core elements to support effective organizational leadership practice towards dealing with role relationship responsibilities in and across all organizational types. The approach taken supports the perspective from Prahalad, who came to his work through a particular perspective:

“[…] to me, the problems of greatest interest are things that you cannot explain with current prevailing theory” (Prahalad 2010, 1).
Key terms and theoretical perspectives are explained in the glossary to this book, which is found prior to the bibliography. Prahalad’s (2010) focus gains further support from ‘ideation’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, Basadur 2004, and Stiller 2009), which forms a core underlying perspective in designing the proposed frameworks, especially, in seeking new ways.

In this sense, ‘ideation’ and ‘ambiculturalism’, play critical roles, within the context of the frameworks highlighted in this book, vis-à-vis effective organizational leadership practice.

These perspectives are also reflected by Rowley and Paul regarding the value of Zhong-Yong (中庸) (decision-making). Whilst this perspective is originally linked to research practice, it is readily linked to organizational leadership practice, and:

“[…] provides ideas and directions for researchers to undertake novel work, instead of doing replete and recycled types of research” (Rowley and Paul 2021, 146).

Each element highlighted in Diagrams 1 and 2, address issues which organizational leaders need to include in their thinking, and their subsequent behaviour. Hence, they represent a perspective which is reflected through the thinking-behaviour duality, especially to redress how organizational leaders need to support their organisations’ intentions and activities, in and across the diversity of locations, and across diverse circumstances and diverse contexts. Consequently, Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界) is supported.

The five mindset elements incorporate what the extant literature has offered on organizational leadership in a variety of contexts, but are reflected here in a single framework, which the authors consider necessary to present an informed pathway to enhance organizational leadership practice.

Coming to terms with attempts to enhance organizational leadership practice, a diversity of theories and frameworks have been addressed. As each has been covered very well over the years by many quality contributors, explaining them again in this publication seems redundant. Consequently, the approach taken has been to address how the proposed frameworks can assist the enhancement of organizational leadership practice, where existing frameworks are not necessarily providing the required direction.
Critically, the relevance and application of the proposed frameworks, are reflected by Bhardwaj, Crocker, Sims, and Wang, whereby:

“[…] without a framework, it is possible, to fall into cognitive biases, and miss important factors in articulating the problem framework. Yet, how we framework a problem, affects how we think, what we analyse, the kinds of solution possibilities we create, the choices we make, and thus the outcomes we attain” (Bhardwaj, Crocker, Sims, and Wang 2018, 25).

Overall, the frameworks proposed, seek to redress the questionable quality of contemporary organizational leadership thinking and behaviour; and ultimately, the practice of organisational leadership.

The importance of the proposed frameworks also reflects the need for balance, which is clearly missing, but which is necessary, to effectively inform the role relationship responsibilities of organizational leaders, and which is reflected through joint application of Western and Eastern perspectives. Critically, balance is a key aspect of Eastern philosophy, especially Tao and Confucianism, which are employed extensively in the proposed frameworks.

Balance is clearly missing in many instances of interorganizational activity today, most especially, amongst the role relationship responsibilities of those in organizational leadership positions. Nevertheless, balance is clearly necessary, if positive changes are to occur, and in the process, enhance organizational leadership practice.

Addressing balance will help us to think more appropriately, about problematic win-lose and lose-lose circumstances regarding role relationship responsibilities. Balance also acknowledges that specific situational approaches need to be taken towards each multistakeholder, and/or towards each ecosystem, whereby an appropriate situation analysis can, and should, lead to transforming the manner in which an organisation leader goes about addressing their relationship responsibilities.

An example of the importance of balance, has been presented recently by McGregor (2022, 38) in The Australian Financial Review – How to Resume Talks with China, who, in referring to an interview with the Chinese Ambassador to Australia Mr Xiao, and to motivate the renewal of meaningful relations between Australia and China, suggests seeking pathways which reflect common interests, and to restore balance between the two nations.
Balance encourages each party to properly acknowledge each other’s needs and aspirations, which have traditionally dominated thinking and behaviour between the two nations, to one side.

The issue of balance presupposes that change from each party is necessary and can be addressed under elements highlighted in Diagrams 1 and 2, and through issues which are reflected in the application of a set of Western organizational value orientations, and Confucian individual virtues, which are proposed to effectively address organizational leadership practice (see Diagrams 3 and 4).

The potential way forward is also suggested by McGregor, to renew effective relations between China and Australia, and whereby Mr Xiao nominates climate change, as beneficial to both countries:

“Australia wants to export green hydrogen. China is desperately trying to find ways to net zero emissions” (McGregor 2022, 38).

Consequently, balance is achieved by reflecting Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), which is supported through ideation and ambiculturalism. The elements highlighted in Diagrams 1 and 2 reflect the need for attention to organizational values and individual virtues, which are highlighted in Diagrams 3 and 4.

The combination provides the potential to achieve win-win outcomes; consequently, to enhance connections, creative methods, and importantly, respectful processes. These elements can support recovering, refreshing, and reconnecting with, what were important and meaningful relations between two important nations, highlighting the real potential for win-win solutions, and not reflecting lose-lose, or win-lose circumstances, which too often occur.

Chaoyue Bianjie (超越边界), along with concepts from Confucianism, Tao, and Western theory, are important learning foci for both Western and Eastern organizational leaders. Each has the potential to enhance how the thinking-behaviour duality is addressed through a different type of border; the ‘border of the mind; a border with which organizational leaders appear to have difficulty.
Diagram 3 – Organizational Value Orientations (Western) - (Source: the authors)

Critically, without the appropriate investment in human capital to secure the necessary expertise, experiences, and personal attributes amongst the core leadership team, and staff generally, the effective application of the proposed frameworks, and most especially the thinking-behaviour duality, will likely be compromised.

That is, what we willingly included in our thinking, or choose to leave out. Consequently, what is dismissed, or not even thought of in the first place, can dramatically impact, the way relationships amongst organizational leaders, their multistakeholders, and their ecosystems, are addressed

This book addresses such issues as core elements tied to enhancing effective organizational leadership practice. Nevertheless, close attention to personal attributes is an issue which usually fails to grab the close attention of those
in senior decision-making roles, when organizational direction, and matters relating to HR are on the radar.

This may be due to the potential esoteric nature of personal attributes, when assessing who should be involved in an organizational leadership role. Equally, it may be due to a poor understanding by core organizational leadership teams, as to the importance of effective attention to the overall quality of the human element.

![Diagram 4 – Organizational Leadership Individual Virtues (Confucian) - (Source: the authors)](image)

The dismissive nature of organizational leaders, and the absence of an effective human capital profile, who then choose to ignore what is not fully understood, fails to reflect appropriate due diligence towards their organizations. Consequently, such organizational leaders are abdicating their core responsibilities towards enhancing their organizations; moreover,
they are failing to acknowledge the critical role that they have in addressing and enhancing their organizations’ relationship responsibilities.

Enhancing organizational leadership practice also requires an investment approach, towards enhancing the human element. Hence, the term ‘human capital investment’ (HCI) is employed throughout this book, as a proposed alternative term to human resource management. HCI is employed to place the human element on the same plane as an organization’s financial capital element; i.e., through due diligence, and duty of care. Thus, reflecting the critical relevance of the human element to any organization’s financial capital concerns; as without the appropriate HCI, traditional due diligence and duty of care are potentially compromised. The absence of an effective HCI approach, maybe a major contributing factor to the unethical behaviour increasingly found.

Concluding Comments

The perspectives presented in this book attempt to reframe organizational leadership practice through a set of frameworks based in concepts such as ideation and ambiculturalism. Each proposed framework explains and guides how organizational leadership practice can be more appropriately addressed, and supports and enhances how organizational leaders approach their relationship responsibilities, in and across a diversity of organizational types, situations, and circumstances.

Consequently, in seeking an appropriate pathway, this book has focused on three main sources: first, it examines recent articles on organizational leadership. Second, it examines the historical and extant literature on leadership in general. Third, it re-examines and refocuses historical and recent work by the authors of this book.

Each source has contributed to explaining the proposed frameworks. Nevertheless, existing perspectives tend to support a ‘silver bullet’ towards enhancing organizational leadership practice. The silver bullet is not supported in this book, nor is a ‘cure all’ approach, for a multitude of problematic circumstances. Nevertheless, the ‘silver bullet’ focus has come about, essentially, for two reasons.

First: each example of quality research, and quality scholarship on leadership in general, tends to foster a single perspective. Notwithstanding the various meta-analyses, the most favoured approach of recent times, e.g.,
Jones, Dunphy, Fishman, Larne, and Canter (2006); Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert (2011), and Jackson (2021) appears to single out the transformational approach to organizational leadership.

Consequently, the whys and wherefores, the pros, and cons, of a single approach, has tended to gain favour at different times, and for different reasons. Hence, whatever is offered as the latest manifestation of effective organizational leadership, is simply seen as supplanting those perspectives which have preceded it. In the process, ‘the baby appears to have been thrown out with the bathwater.’

In defence, the needs and demands of research design, indeed access to appropriate research populations, and within such populations, and access to an appropriately sized and diverse database within a single study, have each, in their own way, prevented more informed and creative, if not extensive, research designs; each of which could incorporate the assessment of multiple organizational leadership styles within a single study. In this sense, researchers, and their important work, can be defeated before the start by the need to ensure appropriate research design and to address important questions. Consequently, research is potentially compromised.

For example, on many occasions, an isolated single country, or isolated specialist group samples, have been employed to assess various organizational leadership issues and style effectiveness. The reader is then informed how, for example, the application of transformational leadership in country X, and amongst MBA students in that country, is tied to enhanced organizational leadership practice. Such contributions are interesting, but extremely difficult to extrapolate to broader circumstances.

Second – perspectives based around quick and easy responses to the woes of organizational leadership practice, are, unfortunately, offered en masse, and in many instances by questionable gurus through expensive sessions, to those with considerable expectations of insight who are seeking guidance. Such approaches are considered inappropriate in addressing the needs of effective organizational leadership practice, in, and for, the modern organisation; as, seen through the focus of this book, effective organizational leadership practice, requires multifaceted-integrated approaches.

The approach taken in this book to enhance organizational leadership practice, is based on multiple perspectives. Each is detailed in the following chapters. In this respect, a single focus highlighting Xn steps to achieving
effective organizational leadership practice will not shine the required light. An integrated approach to organizational leadership practice is needed, supported by De Lacerda, who argues:

“[…] despite the highly creative and dynamic atmosphere experienced by researchers in producing new approaches for understanding leadership effectiveness, little effort has been made to create an integrative perspective on leadership theory” De Lacerda (2015, 1).

Consequently, a key intention of this book has been to present a set of frameworks which are designed to inform and integrate organizational leadership practice by enhancing how improved thinking and behaviour can help, and most especially, by incorporating an investment in the human element of organisations.

The process reflects the thinking necessary to effectively develop objectives, strategies and operational practices which are appropriate and suitable for the situation experienced; i.e., to clearly address relationship responsibilities on a situation-by-situation basis, and then to employ the necessary behaviour which transforms the organisation, within the necessary context.

Such an approach requires a well-focused human capital profile; not simply for organizational leaders, to appropriately address their relationship responsibilities, but critically for their organisations, to possess a suitable human capital profile, such that objectives, strategies, and operational practices can be dealt with within the context of supporting what have been referred to in this book as, ‘valued approaches’ and ‘beneficial outcomes’ (the authors’ terms) for all concerned. Such circumstances require support from an organizational culture which values such an approach, including due diligence towards enhancing the human element.

Critically, Diagrams 1, 2, 3 and 4 offer frameworks for organizational leaders to apply a situation-transformation perspective, in addressing their organisation’s needs within the context of their relationship responsibilities. Nevertheless, Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, and Senge (2007) question the efficacy of organizational leaders who try to be all things to all people.

However, those holding leadership responsibilities, must seek to transform both themselves, along with their organisations, in the process of their relationship responsibilities, and help us to think about a due diligence approach, and investment in the quality of the human capital which
organizational leaders themselves possess, and more critically, which they seek to attract, enhance, and retain, within their respective organisations.

The importance of such a process was noted in the opening vignette, from Professor Selmer. The process reflects the need for organizational leaders to ensure their due diligence towards the quality of their own human capital profile. Also, to invest in the quality of the human element within their respective organisations. ‘Rubbish In - Rubbish Out’ is so very true. Organizational leaders cannot simply rely on traditional approaches, just because a particular approach worked in the past, or because the organisation down the road supports it, or it is a ‘flavour of the month’ issue. The thinking-behaviour duality and a human capital investment focus, are central to such change.

Chapter Two follows, and addresses contemporary and emerging issues surrounding problematic organizational leadership practice, including an assessment of how and why current frameworks create potential problems for organizational leaders.