

Review of: "Navigating Complexity: The Role of Observation and Responsiveness in Agile Leadership"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The paper is good but needs improvement.

1. Value / Originality

The manuscript offers a novel perspective by blending agile leadership with complexity science. The integration of these two frameworks is relatively underexplored, providing significant value for scholars and practitioners interested in adaptive leadership and strategic management. The originality lies in conceptualizing leadership as a dynamic, emergent phenomenon shaped by complex interdependent relationships, a concept that distinguishes it from traditional leadership theories.

2. Introduction

The introduction effectively sets the stage for exploring agile leadership through the lens of complexity science. It introduces agility and its importance in the modern organizational context and links it to the concepts of complexity science, providing a clear research foundation. However, it could benefit from further clarification regarding the practical implications of applying complexity science in organizational leadership.

3. Literature Review

The literature review is extensive and integrates key theories like Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), agile leadership, and shared leadership. It connects these theories with existing studies, including notable contributions from Lichtenstein et al. (2006) and other related work on organizational complexity. The references are appropriately cited, and the use of a wide range of sources demonstrates a thorough understanding of the subject matter. However, it could benefit from a deeper exploration of empirical studies that support the theoretical arguments.

4. Methodology

The manuscript primarily presents a theoretical framework rather than an empirical study. While this is appropriate for the scope of the research, including a section on the potential methodologies for testing the proposed framework or conducting empirical research would strengthen the paper. Propositions for future research are included, which is useful for guiding further studies.

5. Results

Since this is a conceptual paper, there are no direct results or empirical findings. The theoretical framework presented is the main contribution of the paper. It outlines how leaders can use agile leadership strategies in response to complex

organizational dynamics. Including case studies or real-world examples could help illustrate how these strategies are applied in practice.

6. Discussion

The discussion provides a comprehensive explanation of the framework and its implications for agile leadership in complex systems. It effectively discusses the role of the observer effect and the significance of relational dynamics in shaping leadership behaviors. The paper could improve by clarifying how the suggested framework can be operationalized in real-world organizational settings and by considering potential limitations of the approach.

Recommendations for Major Revision

Clarification and Practical Application: The paper could benefit from a more detailed explanation of how to apply the proposed theoretical framework in practice. This could involve case studies or illustrative examples of organizations successfully implementing these concepts.

Empirical Support: While the theoretical discussion is strong, empirical data or references to existing studies that validate the framework could enhance the manuscript's credibility.

Future Research Directions: Expanding on the proposed research questions would be valuable. The manuscript should also consider the potential challenges organizations might face when adopting agile leadership practices and how these challenges can be mitigated.

References to Include

Incorporate the following references, which may provide further insight into the framework:

DOI: 10.1108/IJOA-08-2018-1518

DOI: 10.1002/joe.22269

These references align with the themes of complexity science and agile leadership, offering additional depth to the theoretical framework.

Challenge of Balancing Stability and Flexibility: One of the core challenges of applying this framework is finding the right balance between the flexibility needed for adaptive responses and the stability required to maintain organizational coherence. In some contexts, especially in highly regulated industries (e.g., finance or healthcare), too much agility could undermine necessary procedural consistency, leading to compliance risks or operational inefficiencies. Organizations might address this by implementing “controlled adaptability,” where agile practices are integrated within regulatory boundaries, ensuring that adaptations do not conflict with foundational policies.

Difficulty in Operationalizing Relational Interdependencies: The framework heavily relies on leaders' ability to observe and act on relational interdependencies. This can be challenging, as these dynamics are often subtle and may not be easily quantifiable. Leaders may struggle to interpret the complex web of interactions accurately, leading to misguided interventions. To counteract this, organizations could implement structured observational tools, like social network analysis (SNA) or real-time data dashboards, to identify and monitor these interdependencies, providing leaders with more precise insights to inform their decisions.

Observer Effect and Its Impact on Team Behavior: The observer effect, a core part of the framework, highlights that leaders' presence and observations can influence the behaviors of team members. While this can be advantageous, it also risks leading to "performative compliance," where employees alter their behaviors based on perceived expectations rather than genuine adaptation. This can limit the authenticity of feedback and hinder the adaptive potential of the team. Leaders could address this by fostering a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable sharing real-time feedback and innovating without fear of punitive repercussions.

Scalability Across Different Organizational Sizes: While the framework might be well-suited to smaller, agile organizations, it may face scalability issues in larger corporations with complex bureaucratic structures. The adaptability required for agile leadership can be restricted by hierarchical layers, slowing down response times and limiting leaders' observational reach. To mitigate this, larger organizations might decentralize decision-making processes and delegate agile leadership roles within smaller subunits or departments. This ensures that agile practices are practiced at manageable scales, allowing the framework's principles to function effectively within larger systems.

Resource Intensity of Observational Practices: Implementing the framework demands time and resources for leaders to continuously observe and interpret organizational dynamics. In resource-constrained settings, it may be challenging to allocate adequate resources to support this level of engagement. To address this, organizations could selectively apply agile leadership principles to high-priority projects or strategic initiatives, concentrating resources where flexibility and responsiveness have the greatest impact.

Good luck