Qeios

Peer Review

Review of: "Agile Management as a Virtuous Practice: Integrating Ancient Greek Philosophy into Contemporary Organizational Theory"

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Agile Management as a Virtuous Practice: Integrating Ancient Greek Philosophy into Contemporary Organizational Theory

Review

The attempt is laudable. It is indeed all too common to believe that recent theories of management have been designed out of the blue. They all have roots deep in history, and linking “Agile Management” to ancient Greek philosophy can shed light on and give inspiration to management today.

I will begin with some formal remarks:

1.

The structure of the paper should be announced in a synthetic way at the end of the Introduction, so that we know where we are going. In the paper as it is, it only appears in § 3 about Research Methodology, that is 6 pages into the paper.

2.

The references to the ancient philosophers are made through some edited book (e.g. Crisp R (Ed.) (2014). Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics. Cambridge University Press) and not directly to the original text, so we don’t know, reacting like a Philistine!, when the work was written. It is true in many cases, we do not exactly know when the opus was published, especially when several versions with addenda appeared over time, which is especially the case with Aristotle, but we have reasonable, albeit rough, estimates.

3.

Sometimes, we have the name of a concept in Latin script, most of the time, sometimes in Latin and Greek scripts, rarely. Both for clarity and understanding, it is advisable to have the Greek words both in

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Latin and Greek scripts, and to have Latin words and phrases in Latin with a (I say a and not the because there are always problems of translation) translation in English. We can expect that readers of such papers have a reasonable knowledge of Latin and Greek, and if they do not, they have a translation, with some explanation as needed to understand the meaning of the word. I just take one example: φρόνησις is clear when you know Greek and Aristotle, but various translations are possible; you choose 'practical wisdom' which is a good one (be careful, in the Conclusions you write prudence, not wrong, but why do you change?). Nevertheless, it should go with a little comment about the meaning. Why 'Practical'? This obviously means that there is or are other 'wisdoms'; which is indeed the case with Aristotle. The latter makes a significant difference between φρόνησις and σοφία. So, they should be, shortly, contrasted for clarity of each concept.

4.

In a nutshell, the format and presentation should be streamlined, 'standardized', for consistency and clarity.

I come now to some comments on the matter of the paper:

1.

First, from a global point, although I appreciate the rapprochement between 'Agile Management' and Ancient philosophers, I think that it is a little far-fetched. And so, that the authors are trying hard to 'push' Agile Management into ancient philosophy to prove their case. However, there is nothing quite evident to do so.

2.

It is true that Agile Management, the presentation of which does not call for particular remarks from me, can be a response to a VUCA environment. But the idea of VUCA, as far as I am aware, is nowhere to be found in Plato or Aristotle. Both are in favour of a stable, and hence sustainable, 'environment', which is the (only?) one that can ensure the wellbeing (εὐδαιμονία) of the πόλις.

3. You refer to Appelo and the rejection of the 'machine' (mechanistic vision). But then, this should be linked to Aristotle, in your perspective. It is true that this is not Aristotle's conception, hence his famous phrase ζῷον πολιτικόν. Man is a ζῷον but destined to live in the πόλις. His approach is in opposition with Descartes' approach of 'dualism' (although we

must be careful with the meaning and understanding of this dualism), and more bluntly with Leibnitz later.

4.

About the idea of adaptability and acting accordingly, reference could be made to N. Taleb's two books

“Antifragile” and “Skin in the game”.

5.

When you refer to muda (無駄), you should state that it is part of what is commonly known as Toyotism and publicized by T. Ohno. And it refers to the waste of time and resources, and so, that it has a wider scope than just waste in a production process.

6.

You contrast empathy and sympathy (Empathy vs Sympatheia, § 4.1.3). You render sympatheia -συμπάθεια by « mutual interdependence », which is pleonastic. It literally means “suffering with”. But you say nothing about ‘empathy’ in this paragraph. ‘Empathy’ (Εμπάθεια) is more about understanding others’ feelings. So, there is a difference between ‘syn’ (with) and ‘en’ (in). Actually, the modern use of the word comes from the German ‘Einfühlung‘. That is why ‚‘ empathy‘ is preferable to ‚‘ synpathy‘

7.

In the same way, ‚‘trust‘ is opposed , to philia and homonoia (Trust vs Philia and Homonoia, § 4.1.2), but although philia and homonoia are explicated, there is not a word about ‘trust’. So, why this opposition? There seems to be an erroneous use of the word ‘versus’ (idem in 4.1.5)

8.

There is no ‘self-organization’ in Plato’s Republic. This is a very dubious interpretation. The State (to use a modern word) is ruled by philosophers, not by the people themselves. Plato was often accused of advocating a totalitarian regime.

9.

Similarly, in 4.1.1 (Self-Organization vs Phronesis), ‘self-organization’ is opposed to ‘phronesis’, but the whole paragraph tries to show that they go together (This logic corresponds directly to Aristotle’s concept of phronesis). And, like with Plato, though in a less marked way, this phronesis - self-organization association is dubious. Aristotle argues that everyone has a place in society (men, women, slaves, etc.) and that harmony reigns when everybody acts according to one’s place in society (Πολιτικά). Even if all men are free, and the people are sovereign, this does not mean that they self-organize. Society is structured according to the ‘constitution’ and a number of laws.

10.

I quite agree with your argument about the importance of ‘virtue’. But where is the study of this virtue? It is only mentioned in 4.2.2, but in no way explained. There is no reference to Aristotle’s αρετή and what it means, in particular in relation to the ‘Golden Mean’, which is the source of the famous Latin phrase ‘In medio stat virtus’ (medium meaning equilibrium).

11.

It is quite surprising not to have any mention in the references of the key opus of Aristotle about the whole subject, that Πολιτικά.

12.

Concerning stoicism, it is unavoidable not to mention Marcus Aurelius, but he is not Greek, he is Roman. So, this is in contradiction with the title of the paper (Ancient Greek Philosophy). And it is surprising to have no reference and use of Seneca (also a Roman albeit from Hispania), who is the best (known in any case) Stoic philosopher. Cicero could also be of some help.

13.

It would be interesting to highlight (real) contrasts to make also use of other approaches of ancient Greek philosophers such as the Sophists, with whom Aristotle had fierce discussions, and some pre-Socratics. I particularly think of Heraclitus.

Synthesis:

This paper is a quite interesting attempt to link a recent management approach known as 'Agile Management', which has been rather fashionable these last years, but whose results in terms of efficiency have yet to be largely proved, with Ancient Greek (and Roman) philosophies, notably Plato, Aristotle, and, to a lesser extent, the Stoics, where roots, at least some of them, of today's agile management principles can be found.

The paper has got a number of valuable references and comments. However, we are not convinced that the association between the Greek and Roman philosophers used and agile management can be self-evident. The dispute, in its Latin meaning (disputatio), needs to be deepened, showing of course the similarities but also the limitations.

Consequently, the paper needs some strengthening of its structure and logic.

There are some shortcomings and dubious interpretations about Greek philosophy, which may be due to a not explicit enough writing, or probably in some cases a certain lack of knowledge of the works of Plato and Aristotle, maybe because of the use of second-hand sources instead of the original texts.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.