

Review of: "Adversarial Leadership in the Data Era"

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This piece offers interesting thoughts on a scholarly definition of the term “adversarial leadership”. While it starts in a very proverbial way, the author takes us through real examples of existential crises we’re going through as populations, and as societies struggling to keep up with the post-war, post-modern, post-sustainability pace of change. Rather than use examples based on the big topics of our time; the challenges to democracy and unity in developed nations, climate change, energy security etc..., Graham uses *data* as the boundary object through which we can develop definitions of leadership that challenge the status quo that led to today’s crises. Graham expertly takes us through the defining characteristics; using *data* and *who controls that data* to question established policies, practices, and trends - though not to create conflict such as antagonism would. I agree with Graham’s construal of adversarial leadership, and its benefits, however, I would argue that it’s neither new, nor limited to the digital world and its associated economy. Disability theorists would add that there have always been adversarial leaders in the context of equity, diversity, and inclusion battles in society. Here I point out Tesla’s hard-headedness, McClintock’s ‘fieryness’, and Benjamin Banneker’s ‘championing’ of equity as key figures who demonstrate the benefits of the ‘adversarial-ness’ of autists; with today’s most widely recognized adversarial leader, arguably, Greta Thunberg. It’s just that now, there is the data to prove the inequities and the political processes and organizations to seek resolutions to inequities. The other characteristic of adversarial leadership I would add to Graham’s knowing place and purpose, is the goal holding up ‘accountability’ to the greater good instead of the richest stakeholder (richest in terms of any resource, i.e., money, land, population, privilege, power, etc...). This is where Graham’s definition is expertly woven - intangible assets we create and own; that is, our data, is a new currency. While it is increasingly frustrating for individuals to take on so many roles in ensuring their safety in society (i.e., the great downloading of responsibilities onto individuals instead of lifting up the social safety net), in the case of our own data and analytics, I hope we all take on Graham’s challenge of voting in, and upholding adversarial leaders.