

## Understanding a leader's behaviour:

### Revisiting the role of reputation management in leadership research

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#### Abstract

This paper argues for the adoption of reputation as a conceptual prism to discern patterns in political leadership behaviour. The author intends to reach a judgement about the concept's value for our understanding of leadership by offering a fuller appreciation of reputation itself that is grounded in a recognition of its role in managing followers and entrenching power structures, which makes it critical both to the incumbent leader and challengers. Methodologically, for this analysis both theoretical and descriptive material has been selected and discussed in order to fully appreciate reputation's applicability in leadership research.

In light of the evidence reviewed one may infer that what renders a leader decisive or passive is essentially a reflection of reputational strength or weakness. In turn this leads us to conclude that concern with reputation engenders and shapes activity we observe in leaders and at the same time guides our interpretation of political decisions and phenomena. Eventually, we may come to see reputation as a concept that serves as a lens through which we view leaders' responses to challenges. The rationale for this approach is leaders' own focus on their respective reputation that may at times incentivise action or, alternatively, administrative and political immobility.

*Keywords: Reputation, leadership, politics*

## **1. Introduction - Reputation and leadership research**

The starting point of this paper – which makes the argument for adopting the concept of reputation as an instrument that helps understand and predict leadership behaviour – is grounded in the assumption that the success of political leaders is inextricably linked to their ability to maintain a certain level personal popularity, generate majorities in support of their political goals and translate this backing into endorsement of legislative proposals. Neustadt (1980) and Barber (1992) suggested that this supportive alliance of stakeholders a politician can draw on in society is only in part a function of the kind of policies that are pursued and equally the result of personal reputation - bearing in mind, however, that to some degree the latter in turn hinges on the former. While there is apparently an understanding of the link between public perception and the demands of exercising political power, there is as yet no consideration of reputation's role as an instrument for the interpretation and prediction of leadership behaviour, which is at the core of leadership research. This is an omission this paper seeks to address.

Concerns of perception and communication – both at the heart of reputation management – have traditionally featured in leadership research: For Neustadt, writing in 1980, who investigated the American Presidency, the perception of the incumbent and the judgements passed by citizens are a critical buttress of power. Those intent on wielding political clout are dependent on the skills and abilities the wider public ascribes to them and while reputation should not be confused with persuasion, the former is a precondition for the latter and critical to anyone who seeks to persuade audiences (Neustadt, 1980). MacKenzie (2012) takes this further by reminding us how leadership success is linked to the followers' willingness to follow, which is not only a recognition of the leaders' policies but also in MacKenzie's view related the traction of personal popularity and trust in the leader to succeed and deliver.

Political leadership is of tremendous relevance and keenly debated among political scientists for obvious reasons: Inferences and preliminary outcomes are issues of ongoing contention: Do leaders shape the course of history or are they the products of historical processes beyond their personal control? Are attitudes and decisions made reflective of leaders' personal values and to what extent are these values the product of the social and cultural context the leader uses as benchmark and guide (King, 2002, Post 2004). The discourse is predicated on the significance of underlying causes leading to decisions which are core to our comprehension of the subject and it is argued here that careful attention to reputation management and its ramifications may help unearth these very driving motives of leadership behaviour.

Arguably, the power asserted by leaders constitutes a justification for scholars to explore the notion of leadership and consider it an instrument to alter the direction of events and direct the course of a political entity (Wildavsky, 2006). A fundamental set of questions leadership studies is addressing relates to power and the reflection on the causes and means that allow political leaders to attain a position of authority in a specific organizational or societal context. Likewise the sources of power are being discussed just as are the tools leaders draw on to wield it (Blondel, 1987).

A core question political scientists are grappling with is the exploration of the reasons as to why followers accept someone's political authority and the leader's position of command. Max Weber, referring to charismatic domination, preempts in part notions that decades later in management literature are conceptualised as personal reputation (Weber, 1986). Weber presupposes that the leader's charisma is aligned with society and its sentiments. To the man trailblazing research into charismatic leadership it mattered little if authority emanates from actual abilities recognized in the leader by the public or, alternatively, fabricated images of ascribed qualities and skills (Weber, 1986). In other words, actual performance does not necessarily correspond with popular standing and indeed the former may at times bear little semblance with the latter.

These initial paragraphs were intended to vindicate the agenda of a paper that seeks to illustrate how political leadership research needs to draw on the concept of reputation as developed and applied in marketing and public relations writing, which suggests it may be an appropriate tool in the interpretation and prediction of

- a. Leadership behaviour
- b. Rapport between leader and followers
- c. Support for the leader and the erosion of support
- d. Recognition of leaders at the apex of the political echelon
- e. Leaders' options to retain and safeguard leadership

It is said that the behaviour - actual and recommended - of a leader depends on the kind of group he or she is leading (Forsyth, 1990). This underlines the need to connect with audiences and to reflect their perspective and expectations. As reputation results from strategic communications with audiences, one may assume that the management of reputation entails control over both messages and behaviour. The exploration of the consequences of this assumption constitutes the thrust of this paper: If it is assumed that protagonists in a political system act in ways that generate images which in turn promise to increase their respective support and approval, a leader may choose to be the agent of his or her followers' values by attempting to advocate the preferences voiced by key audiences and in return enlist their support (Fiorina and Schepsle, 1989). This perspective allows us to use our knowledge of and experience with strategic behaviour and messages instrumental in building reputation to understand better the rationale for and motivation of policies pursued and decisions taken by a leader.

In the following paragraphs it needs to be fleshed out how notions of reputation management and leadership behaviour may form a symbiosis the identification of which is indispensable in understanding leaders and their relationships with the public. In a nutshell, the question is raised here as to reputation's usefulness for discerning particular patterns in political leadership behaviour. The author's attention is not so much on discovering something about the social world, but instead on

reaching a judgement about the concept's value in understanding leadership. Methodologically, for this analysis both theoretical and descriptive material were selected and discussed in order to fully appreciate reputation's applicability as an interpretative prism in leadership research.

## **2. Literature review**

### **What is leadership?**

Former US President Harry S. Truman came up with a formula to define leadership that perhaps does not do justice to the subtleties of our discernment, but reminds us of how powerful and relevant the phenomenon is in politics. Truman thought of a leader as a man who gets other people to do what they initially did not want to do. (Elcock, 2001). Greenstein's (2004) view is by no means less sweeping. Indeed, he acknowledges that leadership is a multi-causal process that has the potential to bring about and affect outcomes such as election results. As the relevance of leadership is undisputed, it is critical at this point to discern the questions raised in leadership studies to identify if and how the concept of reputation can contribute to the discourse and help observers arrive at inferences.

It has long been understood that leaders recur to communications strategy and tools as a means to achieve their objectives. Leaders and indeed any individual of authority use symbols, arguably not because of any perceived inherent value, but as a tool to direct images and guide perception, without which there may not be leadership at all. Weber (1986) mentions for example the police officer's uniform as a sign of social standing that should command respect. In a similar vein, the newly elected Prime Minister's formal gesture to kiss the Monarch's hand is a visible sign of legitimacy extended to the head of government (Brazier, 1997). This iconic gesture of prime ministerial loyalty paired with royal approval may at some time in history have augmented the leader's social prestige and political standing. Yet, leadership studies do not primarily limit their remit to observing and analysing communicative tools. Instead they intend to ascertain the connection between the agent (leader) and followers. Current research seeks to formulate and provide recipes to address

national and international phenomena which originate from insufficient quality in leadership practice which arises either from poor decision making or sheer incompetence (Greenstein, 1982; George and George, 1998; Byman and Pollack, 2001; Greenstein, 2004; Lauren et al., 2007).”

The concept of leadership has been at the centre of comprehensive research which aimed to understand and discern as well as predict the behaviour of leaders, search for possible patterns and infer how our view of leadership may help establish a normative framework that would prescribe best practice in the design and implementation of leadership action (Tyssen et al. 2013; Day, 2014; Longenecker 2014; Fullagar, 2015; Sharma and Kirkman 2015) In their analysis and in order to arrive at tangible prescriptions researchers have looked into cultural context as well as belief patterns and power relations, digged into ethical factors and given attention to the historical context of leadership practice (Nye, 2008; Hopen, 2015; Wattie, 2015; Bird, 2016).

Leadership research rightly emphasises the exchange between leaders and followers and the focus is directed at a causal relationship between the former and the latter (Wildavsky, 2006). It appears that scholars show a sustained interest in how leaders generate goals and visions that meet a sympathetic chord with followers (Galloway, 2015; Griffith et al. 2015; Simons et al., 2015). Yet, one may wonder if one angle is missing that could assist in elucidating the subject matter: The recognition that a leader’s values, attitudes and ethics in their own right may not be the critical factors research needs to concern itself with – but instead the very perception and anticipation of these features. If an audience of potential acolytes is prepared to ascribe to a political candidate or incumbent personality traits that in turn inspire publics, the resulting popular traction may allow the leader to accrue significant clout without actually being in possession of any of these desirable characteristics. In a similar vein, his or her ability to entice audiences with myths and vision – another core theme in contemporary leadership research - clearly hinges on the amount of trust followers place in a leader. The success in weaving such a vision is ensured by the reputation of the individual one considers placing trust in. (Bourne, 2015; Chughtai, 2015; Scheider, 2015).

Bearing in mind its critical function in defining a leader's role and operational success, the absence of the concept both of reputation and reputation management in conventional leadership research is all the more astounding (Peele, 2005). A conspicuous gap we are reminded of by Peele's review and summary of areas leadership research grapples with:

- A leader's personality
- The culture of the followers
- The opportunities challenges a leader is faced by
- The societal context of leader and followers
- The agenda of issues leaders and followers need to deal with
- The means leaders recur to in order to interpret and define phenomena in the public discourse
- The means leaders deploy to achieve their aims.

This list feeds partially into what is referred to as typologies of leadership which intends to categorise, address and make sense of issues related to leaders, their audiences and publics, goals, tools and the context they operate in (Thepot, 2008; Krasno and LaPides, 2015). This approach should allow some sort of mental marshalling of data and more specifically distinguish between perspectives leadership behaviour is predicated on. The bottom line of is to arrive at variables that allow us to relate both cultural features and personality traits on the one hand to leadership behaviour as well as the nature of the relationship between leaders and their followers on the other (George and Post, 2004; Hollander, 2012) This framework of variables also takes social features and psychological dimensions into account and assesses the impact of leaders on society. These typologies are instrumental in the researcher's quest to explore the leaders' behaviour and their ability to entrench and expand their position (Blondel, 1987). Which variable is deemed core for the construction of an interpretative framework comes down to a

judgement that varies between authors: Nye values a category that reflects the use of hard and soft power (Nye, 2008), while for Greenstein (2004) personality traits are key to understanding leadership (Greenstein, 2004; Kellerman, 2008). Another classification category raises questions about the relationship between leaders and publics (Kellerman, 2008; Burns, 2003). For Tucker (1995) a leader's ability to discern challenges and raise public interest is a key concern that merits to be integrated into this framework of classifications. In the view of Bennis (2003) the key to understanding leaders can be found in their ability to implement long term policy visions. Other proposed and deployed variables to guide the study of leadership revolve around the capability to motivate (Lane, 2003), an individual's charisma, an acknowledged propensity to pragmatism (Weber, 1986), and ultimately a consideration as to which leaders are well positioned to leave their marks on historical developments or, alternatively, become themselves the subject of historical circumstances (Hay, 2002).

In order to understand the demands on and activities of leadership more fully one needs to draw on the broader cultural, historical and political environment and cast a light on the institutions that mould the leader's operational conditions and scope (Greenstein 2004; Greenstein 2006 Bose 2006; Nye 2008). Leaders that strive to attain the helm and retain it apparently become exposed to demands and aspirations voiced by their followers and an expectation to adapt accordingly. It appears that regardless to variations in this mutual relationship between leaders and their respective environment, what does remain constant is the social process that takes place between leader and led. When defining this phenomenon it would be appropriate to talk of co-determination which extends to the claim that followers construct and form their leaders. Or in different terms, leadership only exists through those who agree to be led (Mant 1999, Kellerman, 2008). This relationship between leaders and followers is widely conceptualised in leadership research. It is seen as an interactive process, in which both sides are mutually influenced and beliefs as well as needs of followers are shaped by leaders, just as the latter's style and policy is moulded and transformed by the expectations raised by the followers. (Tucker 1977; Blondel 1987; Rousseau 1987; Hay 2002; Tucker 1995; Wildavsky 2006).



We may assume that in order to maintain and nurture this relationship leaders need to connect with the cultural context their followers are imbued with. Russian audiences for instance are not thought to be promising launching pads for culturally sophisticated individuals who flaunt their background as prolific writers and well-read men of letters in the shape of those one encounters in France among the highest echelons of politics and among the mainstream contenders for the Presidency. By contrast, people of this cultural disposition may find themselves side-lined by protagonists who are more in tune with Russians' alleged liking for coarse outdoorsmen who give in to the odd bout of romantic sentimentality. (House et al, 2004; Wildavsky, 2006).

What leaders strive for is thus a symbiosis with their followers. This form of alignment between leader and follower is – as will be detailed in the next paragraphs – a constituting element and indispensable feature of reputation management. Reputation management's role as a strategic instrument genuinely serves to align followers' expectations with leadership behaviour. In this capacity a well-managed reputation can ensure equilibrium between leaders and stakeholders (Hodgson, 2004; Feldman et al., 2014). Yet reputation is – as pointed out above - conspicuously and surprisingly missing in any typology of leadership research.

Taking reputation as an analytical lens helps us understand and decipher the rationale for leadership behaviour that may at times be directed towards the fabrication of images in reflection of an effort to align a political protagonist's public perception with audiences' demands and expectations. Leaving this consideration out of the equation would deprive us of insights and limit the explorative scope of leadership research. Therefore, in the concluding paragraphs of this paper the case will be made for reputation to be added to the current typology that characterises leadership and explains the motivations and constraints underlying leadership behaviour.

## **What is reputation?**

The following review of literature and clarification of the varied purposes reputation can serve will subsequently allow us to use the theoretical concept as a prism that refracts scenarios leaders operate in and guide observations as well as analysis of leadership behaviour. Its established origins in business literature prevent us from applying the notion of *reputation* in politics without careful consideration and prior clarification of its definition which is somewhat blurred owing to the range of academic disciplines that lay claim to the concept (Barnett et al., 2006).

Bromley's (2001) definition of reputation as "the overt expression of collective images" ties in well with Shenkar's (1997) earlier more instrumental perspective that ascribes to reputation an "uncertainty resolving mechanism". A view shared by Dowling (2008) who in his survey of Australian corporations reminds us of reputation's function to reassure internal and external stakeholders – an observation that is particularly pertinent in the service industry (Fombrun and Rindova, 1996; Roper and Fill, 2012), where the assessment of quality is excessively complex. Both with regard to the service sector and political leadership reputation provides cues about content, quality as well as performance and establishes associations that attract and retain customers or allay particular publics' concerns (Omar 2005).

There is broad agreement that the reputation of an organisation or individual is the result of a cumulative judgement, expressed through a number of transactions and contacts stakeholders may have had over a period of time. (Harrison, 1995; Fombrun, 1996; Black and Carnes, 2000; Argenti and Druckemiller, 2004; Fill, 2009; Maarek, 2011). As a result it appears to be less flexible, yet much broader a concept and arguably more enduring in comparison to fickle images which it serves to integrate (Fombrun, 1996). Murray and White (2004) add to this definition the recognition that a public's appreciation of consistency in behaviour and message over time inform reputation which in turn provides publics with cues that are sufficiently distinct to render an entity recognisable and set it apart from its competitors (Fombrun, 1996; Schweizer and Nachoem, 1999). If reputation is to be

conceived as a multi-disciplinary idea bound to the essential strategies and aims of an organisation or individual and consistently reflective of its mission, values and vision - in short, its identity – it equates to an instrument that staves off competition (Fombrun, 1998; Schwaiger, 2004).

Caruana and Chircop (2000) consider the origin of reputation and in particular its emotional potential which they regard contingent on the overall esteem, that is defined as a function of an organisation's or individual's performance (Erickson and Nasanchuck, 1984; Hutton et al., 2001). Another source of reputation is power as an ability to control resources, assume responsibility and render services to stakeholders (Babchuck et al., 1969; Edwards, 1969).

Once reputation is well entrenched there is an expectation for a trade-off with stakeholder loyalty which adds to the individual's standing or the organisation's equity (Cameron and Whetten, 1981; Cretu, 2007). While Kay (1993) advises to invest in the build-up of reputation fairly early on in a corporate or professional life cycle, there is acknowledgement that during the initial phase reputation cannot yet be traded into other resources, but is still needed to enter a market (Weizsacker, 1980; Falkenreck, 2010). This consideration extends to reflexions about a more mature stage when reputation appears to immunise a system against outside risks and therefore acquires a pivotal role in dealing with difficult environments. (Howard 1998; Gabay, 2015; Sohn and Lariscy, 2015). A scenario that self-evidently entails a message of relevance both for corporate organisations and political leaders. This observation chimes with Eisenegger's (2000) view of reputation's function in controlling publics and the management of support for a political hierarchy. Central to our consideration of reputation's role in leadership studies is this underexplored aspect, which conceptualises reputation as an instrument to buttress the position of a political elite in a way no other means – such as force - could to the same degree or just as effectively. Eisenegger accords a legitimising function to the acquisition of reputation – a process he sees as a strategy that results in a gain and long term preservation of political power. In concluding, one may concur with Seymour-Ure's (2003) view whereby it becomes critical for political leaders to manage reputation and control its sources which their authority and power hinge on.

### **3. Discussion**

Peele (2005) raises the question as to the choice of instruments drawn upon by leaders to achieve their objectives and address those of their followers. Tapping into reputation literature may lead us to an array of means used in communication management leaders avail themselves of in order to create images which in turn are intended to confirm an individual's suitability for the position and competence to satisfy expectations nurtured among audiences. A close match between a leader's images on the one hand and the set of publicly raised demands on the other is understood to be bolstering satisfaction and feed into a positive reputation which in turn – as was argued above - explains and justifies a leader's authoritative role and commanding position at the apex of a power structure.

This widely recognized status attained through a systematic build-up of personal reputation may allow to attend more effectively to tasks Tucker (1995) and Heifetz (1994) consider a leader's core duties, such as the interpretation of issues, the selection of objectives and means to address them, the advocacy of personal takes on subjects and solutions to problems as well as the mobilisation of support among followers.

Leaders' status is based on followers and indeed the process of exercising leadership implies a need of followers (Mant, 1999). The support and goodwill extended by followers is thought to play a decisive role in determining a leaders' career trajectory, potentially propelling them into positions of unassailable authority or alternatively eroding their powers of command (Hollander, 1998; Kellerman, 2008). This rapport between followers and leaders, one could argue, can be better conceptualized when viewed through the lens provided by the concept of reputation. This concept lends itself as an interpretative prism that assists the exploration of the relationship between leader and followers and facilitates the understanding of leadership behaviour and political decision making in response to audience demands. In previous studies this interpretative approach was applied to studies on Roman imperial history (Schnee 2011, Schnee 2014) which illustrates how emperor

Claudius' ability to command a following was the result of political and military actions that were specifically calibrated to conjure up images of competence and decisiveness. These in turn morphed into what was widely seen as an imperial reputation that commanded authority and good will among the three most critical stakeholders Claudius' authority hinged on - senators, the army and the populace (Schnee, 2014).

The theoretical concept and its application are grounded in an interpretation of reputation as an instrument that generates trust, goodwill and support for individuals whose success is tied to public approval. By appropriating this lens one could now proceed with critiquing current and recent political leaders' efforts to establish effective leadership, which is defined as the means selected by a leader intent to actuate specified results. The ability to achieve these ends is taken to be the criterion that allows us to measure the effectiveness of leadership.

Historical examples of politicians (strong leaders and weak ones) and their respective reputation and engagement with perception management techniques may evidence how politicians' career trajectories on the one hand and reputational strengths and demise on the other are interwoven. The most prominent implications deriving from the applicability of reputation as an interpretative prism are: First of all, it allows us to sharpen our ability to discern the causes of leadership behaviour, public reactions and political outcomes. Secondly, it serves as a guide to anticipate current and future leadership behaviour and venture predictions about success and failure in achieving outcomes. A historical analysis of cases may lead to the emergence of dichotomous typology that juxtaposes leaders' attributes and qualities on the one hand and the corresponding public perception among their audiences on the other: The former may be constituted of categories along the lines of efficient leadership (Greenstein, 2004), doing a good job or not (Kellerman, 2008; Aristotle, 1958) or level of formality (Tucker, 1995) to name just a few. However, categories may also be organized along ideological lines and the rigidity with which leaders adhere to them (Kissinger, 1974).

All of these categories that describe leadership behaviour hinge on perceptions that take shape as a result of the leader's response to the ongoing exposure to public judgement and media scrutiny. Therefore, public perceptions of leadership traits reflect to a significant degree conscious decisions by leaders and their support staff aimed at image making and reputation building. In other words, the value of this dichotomous typology of leaders' qualities is perhaps less its ability to direct attention on actual leadership personality or ideological make-up, but instead its recognition of more or less successful public relations efforts leaders engage in to fabricate images of qualities they hope to be associated with. In this case research into leadership attributes needs to come to terms with the concept of reputation and the process of reputation building that has been the subject of prolific writing among scholars of management and business.

This approach implies a recognition that the necessity for leaders to interact with followers to co-create their public perception requires behaviour and messages driven by a concern to satisfy the expectations of audiences, whose willingness to pass positive judgement is reflective of trust and an assessment of reputation. Reputation management therefore achieves such a central role in communications strategy as perceptions are nurtured among external stakeholders who are oblivious to the leader's true features which are shrouded in the mist of the great distance and thus lie beyond the audience's sight and understanding. This would in turn suggest that behaviour of leaders is steered by their need to protect reputational credentials that are critical for their political support and survival.

This insight opens up a new analytical avenue to explain, interpret and predict leadership behaviour: With a leader's need to preserve and build up reputation ascertained, a new interpretative lens suggests an alternative rationale for adopting specific behaviour and in this capacity adds to Heifetz's (1994) differentiation model that distinguishes between two types of leaders: innovative and adaptive. In his view the latter show a propensity to align themselves to changes in the environment and minimise resistance, the former type by contrast is willing to take on adverse contextual conditions with a view to bring about change and achieve objectives, regardless to the fallout among stakeholders. Which of the two alternative paths a leader pursues can be explained and predicted – this is the case made in this paper

- by the leader's need to preserve reputation. This necessity may at times either require leaders to be portrayed as steadfast, even ruthless and impervious to opposition, it may alternatively – depending on external and internal circumstances - encourage a leader to display the opposite extreme: Adaptive and subdued readiness to give way and compromise. Previously, Takala (1997) had suggested to deploy an individual's charismatic makeup as interpretative frame to understand and predict which behavioural paths leaders would adopt. By comparison to the somewhat fuzzy notion of charisma reputation is a more solid, palpable and well-defined concept that reflects phenomena which leadership studies attempt to grasp: The interaction between followers and leaders, the struggle for a symbiosis which does not only have an affect on the audiences, but directly reverberates with leaders and moulds their behaviour. It has been argued therefore in this paper that reputation is at the core of perception management and constitutes an incentive without which any relationship building activities with followers would lose out on strategic relevance and effectiveness. In other words, understanding leadership and leader's behaviour are enhanced by integrating a new concept into the discipline.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In brief the existing typology of leadership requires an extension to ensure its applicability and relevance as instrument to interpret past leaders and to predict future leadership behaviour. This paper was intended to demonstrate why the one antecedent to be added to the existing gamut of explanatory factors in leadership analysis is "reputation", whose nature, relevance and desirability constitute the core of a guiding framework for leaders in as far as it offers a rationale for their selection of policies, messages and actions. Leaders are driven by the need to establish and maintain relations with followers which is evocative of efforts engaged in by communication managers to retain and strengthen reputation. The latter is the underlying force those who hope to understand the rationale for leadership behaviour need to be aware of.

This enhanced understanding of leadership behaviour may allow researchers to revise past answers that aimed at making sense of and accounting for the causes of strong and weak leadership which relates back to a central debate about a core distinction raised by political scientists engaged with leadership research: The level of a leader's resolve and decisiveness, which may not exclusively hinge on the leader's natural personality traits (Brown, 2014). Insights into what renders a leader decisive or passive may therefore arguably be a reflection of the individual's reputational concerns.

In turn this leads us to conclude that preoccupation with reputation engenders and shapes activity we observe in leaders and guides our interpretation of political decisions and phenomena. The most recent and prominent case one may want to view through the prism suggested here is the strategy deployed by various European heads of government in dealing with the aftermath of the economic, debt and structural crisis that engulfs the EU. The widely criticised unwillingness or inability to tackle structural reforms and the tendency by some governments to procrastinate and delay votes on austerity measures may not be borne out of policy advice or ideological loyalties, but rather constitute a reflection of the likely damage controversial measures may have inflicted on leaders' respective reputation. The core fear pictured a rupture of relations with followers who constitute the leader's legitimacy and power base. In other words, the consideration of the kind of reputation leaders have, need to protect or aspire to therefore should be the starting point of any appraisal of leadership action or inaction.

Some further reaching ramifications of reputation are not discussed in this paper and may be returned to for further research: It is evident that the strategic significance that accrues from an established reputation stretches beyond what has been elaborated on so far and may well affect leaders' power to negotiate meaning and define issues their respective constituencies are confronted with. This is a pressing scenario at times when leaders find the views they set out immediately challenged



by competing interpretations (Michels, 1986) championed by critical elites and grassroots campaigners alike. Many hope for their respective interpretations to thrive and thwart the leader's agenda by questioning the individual's credibility any subsequent analysis of the situation, judgement or policy proposal hinge on (Scott, 2001). One could envisage a research project to explore reputation as a tool to prop up credibility of senior corporate and political figures associated with it. This in turn may help ascertain how leaders may gain communicative leverage that can be applied to assuage, guide or whip up followers, attenuate or eliminate competing interpretations and ultimately empower the leader to take on conflicting voices and hostile policy proposals.

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