

Leadership Lessons in the Yijing



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01

Xiang Thinking : Systemic & Complexity Leadership



Evolution of Modern (Western) Leadership Theories

- **Trait Era** : Great Man Theory (1840s) & Trait Theories (1930s-1940s) - Focus on the innate characteristics of a leader & identify the personality traits & other qualities of leaders
- **Behavioural Era**: Behavioural Theory (1940s & 1950s): Leaders are largely made & particular behaviours can be learnt to ensure effective leadership.
- **Situational Era** : Contingent & Situational Theories (1960s)-Recognition that environment plays a significant role in the leader-follower dynamic.
- **New Leadership Era** : Transactional, Transformational Theories (1990s) and Others (2000s) : Response to rapid technological changes & globalization.

- **Transformational leadership** involves leaders encouraging, inspiring, motivating, followers when the organization is being revitalized/undergoing significant change/change in direction.

-**Transactional leadership** involves the leader exchanging reward for follower effort & punishment for failing to meet goals.

-**Systemic Leadership** :Success is dependent on co-ordinated leadership throughout the whole system, Servant leaders empower followers to become leaders.**Complexity Leadership** takes a whole system view considering interactions that occur across the whole social system.



The Reverse Approach of the Chinese


At the heart of the Yijing are 64 hexagrams, derived from 8 trigrams & xiang (image) thinking.

Here humans & the affairs of humans, are seen as sandwiched between heaven (forces that heavenly bodies exert on earth) & earth (that absorbs these forces & is controlled by them), being influenced & influencing them.

So, from earliest times, Chinese have the tradition of theorizing in a Systemic way, considering interactions that occur across the whole social system & more.

The focus is on pairs & relationships, systems & the context/environment, rather than just the leader or organization even.

This is very similar to the contemporary Western theorizations, born out of attempts to grapple with the challenges brought about by changes due to rapid technological advancement & globalization.





02

Qian-The Leader





Hexagram 1 :Qian

-Heavens/Sky
(Celestial Bodies)

-Origination,
Smooth Progress,
Advantage &
Perseverance



The Chinese Concept of Leader & Leadership

Xiang thinking of the Yijing involves use of imagery and analogies to elucidate concepts.

Hexagram 1-Qian represents leader/founder & the Chinese conceptualization of leadership can be understood by grasping its virtues/instincts.:

- **Origination/Creation** (As the heavens/celestial bodies set the whole of creation in motion, brilliant sunlight at sunrise which arouses all life and stimulates prosperity & the hexagram Qian itself with Kun gives rise to the rest 62)
- **Smooth Progress** (All creatures coming into existence is smooth progress as is all 6 masculine lines of Qian marching in a straightforward way to the end where Kun appears)
- **Advantage** (All creatures follow the rule of Heaven to mature & develop their own unique feature as well as live together in symbiosis & harmony, so too Qian will act as Heaven to establish appropriate environments for all concerned, so that all lines can live together peacefully with their individual characters & destinies. This is it creating benefit)
- **Persistence** (As the celestial bodies circle round the ground where all creatures live, day & night, season after season, year upon year, without slackening or neglect, maintaining what has been created & moving toward what is intended. Starting from the bottom, the 6 solid, masculine lines of Qian display themselves strongly and firmly up to the top, indicating that Qian behaves as perseveringly as the heavens)




The Chinese View on Leadership Development

To the Chinese, the dragon is a sacred animal, that represents mighty prestige like the powers of nature & is traditionally used to denote a king. It's believed to live in the water but flies in the sky. The fish scales on its body are associated with the showering rain from the water it inhabits & its snake-like body with raptor's claws comes from the zigzag image of lightning.

Using the imagery of the timeline from incubation (in the earthly domain of position 1&2), to the developing stage (in the human domain of position 3&4) to finally the developed stage (in the heavenly domain at positions 5&6) of the dragon, the lines of hexagram Qian are used to transmit the Chinese wisdom on leadership development,

Line 1-Hidden Dragon : Under the ground is not dragon territory & its ability is limited to that of a snake. It represents unfavourable circumstances & a state of not knowing how to act to achieve goals. It's the time to withhold one's ambitions & bide one's time (to avert precipitating a crisis)

Line 2 -The Dragon appears in the field, Its advantageous to see a great Lord. The situation still being less than favourable & having only limited abilities, if the masculine line acts in a feminine way as is appropriate in its position 2 i.e. loyally follows someone who has influence on their future & helps them ascend, (mentor) it's to their advantage. The hexagram that appears when this line changes to feminine is Tong Ren (13), which suggests building a network of friends





The Chinese View on Leadership Development Cont'd

Line 3 -A gentleman is doubly persevering for the entire day ,as well as vigilant & cautious at night,the status is of sternness & cruelty,but no calamity. - Transitioning from lower to higher society/power circles.

Line 4 -Leap over deep pond :Pursuing achievement must be done in a timely manner.There is no calamity or fault in seeking opportunity as long as one acts in a safe manner.

Line 5-Flying dragon in the sky.It's advantageous to see a great lord; Position 5 is the king's position & in the domain of heaven where line 5 acts as a dragon flying in the sky carrying out its aspirations.Through a virtuous courtier at position 2,the merit of 5 becomes manifest as achievements & its benefit reach those below ,alternatively 5 itself could act as a great lord benefiting those below.

Line 6-Arrogant dragon,with cause to regret :High ranking position with no support from below.





03

Qian & Kun vs B-Leader & Follower





Hexagram 2 :Kun

-Earth,Mare which
gallops on earth &
follows the Stallion

-Submissiveness &
Receptiveness,
Fidelity(persistence
of the mare)





The Chinese View on the Assistant/Follower

The Chinese use Hexagram Kun to symbolize the Assistant/follower.

- The whole of creation relies on Kun for nurturance and growth, in this way it sustains Qian. They (Leader & follower) have a **symbiotic relationship**.
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- Kun's sturdiness bears the load of all creatures & **its combined virtue with Qian is unlimited**.
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- Kun has the same virtues of origination & smooth progress as Qian but its appropriateness/ advantage must come from its persistence in remaining submissive to Qian.





Growing by Following

As the Qian hexagram can be used to grow as a leader, the Kun hexagram can be used to advance to being a highly valued assistant.:

Line 1- Tread on frosted ground, the hard ice is coming next: Learn to follow the path that unfolds

Line 2: Straight, Square & Large. Auspicious: Develop compassion, inclusiveness & understanding towards others

Line 3: Act like the duke serving the king ie have talent, but not boast. Fulfil duty, complete the job but not seek merit, as all achievement belongs to the king, to avoid facing peril.

Line 4: Be discrete in word & deed, like hiding a tied bag -Conceal one's intent and act submissively. The person staying next to the king & winning all people's support should take care to not get blamed when things go wrong.

Line 5: Yellow skirt, greatly auspicious: A person occupying a high ranking position, acting moderately & humbly, as is the norm of kun.

Line 6: Battling dragons :When followers no longer act submissively.






Qian & Kun vs B-Leader & Follower -Paradigms for Self-Actualization

The Yijing uses the metaphor of the instinctual nature of the mare to follow the stallion, to explain the impulse of Kun to follow Qian. Leaders & followers have a symbiotic relationship & each is able to grow following the advice contained in the 6 lines of the Qian & Kun hexagrams ,to self-actualize themselves by following the imperatives of their chosen way.

Maslow's conceptualization of B-leadership & followership ,allowing for greater self-actualization of all,is drawn from his observation of functional leadership amongst the Blackfoot who were very realistic about themselves & about each other & their talents,always choosing for a particular job ,exactly that person who was the best one for that particular job without getting sentimental about his being good or not good in some other job.. There was a kind of a mutual give and take between the group and the chosen leader because generally the chosen leader considered himself quite objectively to be the best one for the job and the group considered him to be the best one for the job.





04

Xugua Zhuan on the King Wen Sequence





Memory Aid to Anticipate Change


The yi consists of 64 hexagrams derived from stacking 8 trigrams. Xiang thinking using these trigrams & hexagrams provide ways for very sophisticated, multidimensional thinking about changes.

The Zhouyi consists of a particular arrangement of these hexagrams, called the King Wen Sequence. It's a simplified narrative of change used first for divination by the Zhou dynasty.

The Xugua Zhuan -The Sequence of the Hexagrams -is a Confucian Commentary /memory aid of the King Wen Sequence.

Before mastering how to thoroughly think about all the changing hexagrams, of the yi, this memory aid helps anticipate forthcoming changes, though in a vastly simplified, linear fashion.

It's a good check-list for use in a rapidly changing world to which people, organizations & societies must adapt to.





05

Cast the
Yarrow Stalks/
Do as Wang Bi






Ways to use the Yijing

Unlike most books, the yijing is not simply read in a linear fashion, cover to cover, or as outlined in the index.

“The I-Ching has served for thousands of years as a grimoire of the wisdom of the universe, a guide to ethical life and a manual for rulers”- Prof. Leo Sin Yat-ming

However, if divining by casting the yarrow stalks, using coins etc is not your thing for whatever reasons ranging from religious beliefs, mental blocks derived from culture or the seeming non-science of the approach, do as Wang Bi did.

Wang Bi regarded each of the 64 hexagrams as a discrete situation, with the uniqueness of each hexagram succinctly summarized in Tuan -one of the Ten Wings. As such, there is no need to strictly follow the hexagram sequence in reading hexagrams. A person can pick and choose hexagrams that appear to directly address questions in mind. Thus, the purpose of reading hexagrams is to reflect on one's situation. The six lines of a hexagram, even a bad one, offer options to respond to a situation. They represent the room to maneuver within a system.





06

64 Hexagrams & Taking History as a Mirror





Mining the Yijing for Insights & Wisdom born of Experience

The yijing is a book born out of the experience of kings, deeply studied, commented on & expanded, over the millennia, by successive generations of scholarly teachers & advisors to kings.

As such, having it read, makes a person feel very comforted-There's hardly any problem, others have not faced before. So, it's material ripe for mining for insights, advice & admonitions.

For example, in times of crisis, we can consult **Hexagram 29-Repeat Peril**, **Hexagram 39-Jian, Difficulty** & **Hexagram 47-Kun, Besieged**.

Hexagram Kan points out that one must take all available precautions to remove themselves from harm's way. Hexagram Jian explains that temporary obstacles are bound to occur when someone is trying to reach a goal or fulfill an ambition and any difficulties faced are conducive for personal growth and self-discovery. Hexagram Kun reminds people to stay hopeful even when faced with failures and to work on their inner strength during periods of adversity.





Mining the Yijing for Insights & Wisdom born of Experience

To grow a venture we can draw insights from Hexagram 3 -Zhun, difficult to initiate, Hexagram 4 Meng-ignorance, Hexagram 9 Xiao Chu-little storage & Hexagram 5 Xu-waiting, eating & drinking.

Specifically, hexagram Zhun describes the difficulties one may face at the beginning of a new venture or situation – just like a plant sprouting from the ground, but there will be great progress and success from staying firm and correcting one's path. Hexagram Meng reminds people to be aware of careless or rebellious attitude due to the lack of experience. Hexagram Xiao chu encourages people to stay positive even when their voices are weak and to remain determined to make progress. Hexagram Xu reminds people to be patient and proceed cautiously with their plans and their ultimate goal can be accomplished.





Mining the Yijing for Insights & Wisdom born of Experience


To bring about change in an organization we can draw insights from Hexagram 18 ,Gu - corruption ,Hexagram 49, Ge-reform/revolution & Hexagram 50 Ding -cauldron.

Hexagram Gu depicts a situation when something is rotting and it is time to repair the damage. Hexagram Ge describes conflicts that always occur alongside changes and the fact that to successfully implement changes, one must launch the change at the right moment and get support from people. Hexagram Ding– the hexagram that follows hexagram Ge, symbolizes rejuvenation. It describes the stage after revolution when people have fulfilled their dreams





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