The Arts of Leadership
An Executive Book Sumary

Professor Keith Grint

Keith Grint is Professor of Public Leadership and Management at Warwick Business School, Warwick University, England. His post at Warwick University is only the most recent of Professor Grint’s successful academic career. Some of Grint’s most notable academic achievements include: Professor of Defence Leadership at Cranfield University; Deputy Principal (Leadership and Management) at the Defence College of Management and Technology within the Defence Academy in Shrivenham; Professor of Leadership Studies and Director of the Lancaster Leadership Centre at Lancaster University Management School; as well as Director of Research at the Said Business School and Fellow in Organisational Behaviour, Templeton College, University of Oxford, he remains an Associate Fellow of the Said Business School and of Green Templeton College, Oxford. Professor Grint is also a Visiting Research Professor at Lancaster University, a Fellow of the Windsor Leadership Trust and a Fellow of the Sunningdale Institute.


Are leaders born or made? Do they have particular traits or are we all potential leaders? Do traditional approaches help us to pick and develop leaders or are there alternative ways that advance our understanding? These are all questions that Keith Grint explores in his insightful book, The Arts of Leadership, Oxford University Press, 2000.

“Keith spent 10 years in industry before switching to an academic career and has been variously employed as an agricultural laborer, a factory worker, an industrial cleaner, a removals worker, a freezer operative, a swimming pool attendant, a postman, a clerical worker, and a part-time karate teacher”

The Arts of Leadership

Introduction: The Arts of Leadership

In his book, The Arts of Leadership, Keith Grint argues that the reason we have such difficulty in studying, understanding, explaining and imitating leadership, is because we often adopt perspectives and models to study leadership that obscure, rather than illuminate, exactly what is involved in leading towards, and achieving, success.

Most leadership research, according to Grint, “has tended to be either a review of successful leaders or grounded in survey approaches. Either way, the results are often informative but not definitive” (Grint, 2000, 4). In his book, The Arts of Leadership, Grint identifies four paradoxes that have hindered the understanding of leadership: “it appears to have more to do with the invention of analysis, despite claims to the contrary; it appears to operate on the basis of indeterminacy whilst claiming to be deterministic; it appears to be rooted in irony, rather than truth; and it usually rest on a constructed identity but claims a reflective identity” (Grint, 2004, 6).

In The Arts of Leadership, Grint argues that leadership should be considered as “an array of arts, more than a science” (Grint, 2000, 6). According to Grint “we can better understand the four central features of leadership by considering leadership as an ensemble of arts. The four central features of leadership, as identified by Grint include: “the invention of identity, the formulation of strategic vision, the construction of organizational tactics, and the deployment of persuasive mechanisms to ensure followers actually follow” (Grint, 2000, 27).

By examining the leadership of famous business, political, military and social leaders, Grint suggests and demonstrates how we might adopt the metaphor of art as a way of studying, understanding and explaining the phenomena of leadership.

Philosophical, Fine, Martial, and Performing: Leadership Arts

Grint argues in his book, The Arts of Leadership, that “leadership is critically concerned with establishing and coordinating the relationships between four things: the who [an identity], the what [a strategic vision], the how [organizational tactics] and the why [persuasive communication]” (Grint, 2004, 27).

The Philosophical Arts:

Study of Identity

Leadership is not simply about leaders: “it is an essentially social phenomenon; without followers there are no leaders” (Grint, 2004, 6). The need for followers means that leaders have to construct a community that followers can feel part of (Grint, 2000, 6). According to Grint, collective identity is imagined. Because members of the community hardly know each other “they have to imagine the similarities that apparently bind them together [...] identity is constructed not discovered; it is imposed upon an population rather than emerging from one [...] it is not an event, it is a process” (Grint, 2004, 8). These communities can be held together “by love of the leader or of the community, by hate of the ‘other’, by greed, or by honour” (Grint, 2004, 7).

One of the essential tasks of leaders is to motivate people to do what needs to be done (Grint, 2004, 409). Money can be used to motivate people, but as Grint, points out, money has severe limitations as a mobilizer (motivator) of followers for a variety of reasons (Grint, 2004, 409).

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The Arts of Leadership: Book Critique
Who are you?

Identity:
“Identity is constructed out of the amorphous baggage of myth and the contested resources of history; it is not a reflection of the world but a construction of it. It is rooted in the philosopher’s stone not the scientist’s microscope” (Grint, 2004, 27).

What is the vision?

Strategic vision:
“Strategic visions are designed through the imagination not the experiment, they are the equivalent of the fine arts not physics, for they involve imagination rather than experimentation, they are paintings, not photographs (Grint, 2004, 28).

How will you realize the vision?

Organizational tactics:
“Organizational tactics are rather better envisaged as martial arts than mathematics, for here the leader must evaluate the organizational forms and manoeuvres suitable for competition and must take account of the likely indeterminacy of outcome” (Grint, 2004, 28).

Why should followers want to embody the identity, pursue the strategic vision, and adopt the organizational tactics?

Persuasive communication:
“Persuasive communication can certainly be supplemented by scientific knowledge, but fundamentally this is the world of the performing arts, the theater of rhetorical skill, of negotiating skills, and of inducing the audience to believe in the world you paint with words and props” (Grint, 2004, 28).

Grint argues, that “although money may act as a basic mobilizer for followers, it seldom operates at the extreme-edge, where success depends upon the willingness to take personal risks [...] that kind of mobilization is often [...] associated with the identity of the followers or leader or organization (Grint, 2004, 409 - 410). According to Grint, “the success of leaders is dependent upon the extent to which they can construct and articulate an identity that pushes followers further than money can pull them” (Grint, 2004, 411). In other words, “it may well be that whichever leader can most successfully ‘construct’ [...] the identity of his or her followers in a way that generates maximum effort may also be the most successful leader” (Grint, 2004, 12)

When examining identity from a constructivism approach, the approach suggest that “[...] what the identity (or situation, or leader, or whatever) actually is, is a consequence of various accounts and interpretations, all of which vie for domination” (Grint, 2004, 10). Grint argues that “the only essential element of identities is that they are essentially contested, and that contestation is the context within which leaders vie to impose their own version of identity upon populations” (Grint, 2004, 9). Thus, what we know about a particular leader, or a situation, is the particular version of him or her, or it has secured prominence with us. Identity is not essentially embodied by leaders’ actions and words. Instead, “it is constructed by themselves and those around and after them” (Grint, 2004, 12). “There is no single final truth, only different interpretations that construct, rather than reflect, the phenomenon” (Grint, 2000, 12). The challenge is to persuade others that your own version of their identity, as well as your own, is legitimate.

The trick, according to Grint, is “to convince them that they have not been convinced” (Grint, 2000, 12). “We may regard the construction of identity both as a crucial element and task of leadership [...] it is in philosophical endeavours that one’s identity is constructed and it is through philosophy that we begin to answer that slippery question: who are we? (Grint, 2004, 13).

The Fine Arts:

Studio of Strategic Vision

“Leadership is an invention [...] leadership is primarily rooted in, and a product of, the imagination [...] to imagine ‘what is not present’ is to concern oneself both with what may be and what was but is no longer. It is to look at the what – the content of the vision – but also to consider where this will be achieved, when it will be achieved, and why it should be achieved” (Grint, 2004, 13).

All leaders, regardless of level of power or stature, “face the same form of problems, which are all problems of the imagination: who are we, how did we get here, where do we want to go, why should we go there, and what do we need to do to get there?” (14). Leaders have to dream up new strategies and tool device plans.

According to Grint, imagination is crucial in the construction of “the community narrative or myth [...] a myth in the sense of narrative that roots a community in the past, explains it present, and conjures up a preferred future. A leader without a persuasive account of the past, present and future is unlikely to remain a leader for long” (Grint, 2004, 14).

As noted, leadership is not simply about leaders. The imagination of followers is also relevant. Followers need to “interpret events, gestures, speeches, texts and so on to mean something similar to that which the leader implies” (Grint, 2000, 14). There is, of course, no way of ensuring that followers interpret a leader’s actions or words in precisely the manner the leader intends. But, as Grint points out: “there are methods for trying to limit the discrepancy between the two, and it is this discrepancy, this gap of the imagination, upon which leaders need to concentrate” (Grint, 2004, 14).
The Martial Arts:

Dojo of Organizational Tactics
“There is more to leadership than constructing an identity [who] and imagining the future [what]. To achieve the what [future], leaders need to consider the how as well” (Grint, 2000, 16).

How are we going to achieve the strategic vision that reflects our identity? The problem with determining the how, Grint argues, is that leadership is indeterminate. There is no guarantee that a certain type of leader, or certain style of leadership, will lead to success. There is a gap between theory and practice—“between the issuing of orders/request and achieving appropriate action. The orders/request may appear perfectly logical to the leader but not necessarily to the followers, and even if they do appear to be logical that is not sufficient reason to expect them to be carried out” (Grint, 2000, 16). Logic is seldom sufficient to persuade followers to follow (Grint, 2000, 16).

Grint also argues that follower “may comply with leaders’ requests for their own reasons and in pursuit of their own interests” (Grint, 2000, 18). Thus undermining the “direct link between the request and the act; the leader and the led” (Grint, 2004, 18). Followers need to be devoted to the leader (who) and/or the cause (why).

“All leaders err, but the most successful leaders are those who lead an organization that is empowered to compensate for his or her errors” (Grint, 2004, 414). In other words successful leaders are those who enable their followers to take action and to compensate for their mistakes. This does not mean that followers take the blame for leaders’ errors; instead, it means that followers are capable of correcting the error by preventing it or by compensating for it. “The success of leaders is crucially dependent upon the extent to which followers’ competence can compensate for leaders’ incompetence” (Grint, 2004, 417).

According to Grint, the sporting arena is a useful way of thinking about the different forms of organizational tactics, (overpowering, neutralizing and resource inversion), especially if we adopt the idea of Martial Arts. “Thinking about organizational tactics as different forms of martial art encourages us to move away from the assumptions, in karate or boxing, for example, that the leader who accumulates the greater resources will, in most cases, be successful. By reconsidering the utility of aikido we can better appreciate how the greater resources of an opponent can be neutralized to even out the contest or even swing the resource balance in a different direction. And by considering the metaphor of T’ai Chi we can perceive how the resources of an opponent can be utilized to undermine the opponent” (Grint, 2004, 417).

Karate
Grint argues that “karate’s traditional reliance upon the development of sufficiently overpowering strengths and technique to deliver a single strike to a pressure point of an opponent that will effectively terminate an attack” (Grint, 2004, 18) can be used to study and understand organizational tactics.

Aikido
Aikido, another of the martial arts that that can be useful in studying organizational tactics, tends to rest upon the tactic of neutralization – the intention is to neutralize the attacker and prevent further attack. “[Aikido] is inherently a reactive system designed solely for personal protection and promotes a version of moral action intended to minimize damage to an attacker” (Grint, 2004, 19).

T’ai Chi
Resource inversion, also an organizational tactic, can be compared to T’ai Chi, “a ‘soft’ martial art where the aim is to use the opponents’ strength to defeat him or her rather than attempting to stop him or her head-on, as in much of karate, or neutralize his or her efforts to continue the attack , as in Aikido” (Grint, 2004, 22).

The Performing Arts:

Theater of Persuasive Communication
Once a leader or organization establish who they are, what their vision is, and how to achieve that vision and overcome opponents, they should consider the why question – why should followers follow? Without followers there is no leader” (Grint, 2004, 22).

Grint argues that “leaders can be successful only if their followers come to believe in the collective identity [who], the strategic vision [why], and the organizational tactic [how] of the leader” (Grint, 2004, 23). That is why persuasive communication is so important to leadership, “for without a persuasive why there is little to mobilize followers further than you can push them (Grint, 2004, 27). So, followers need to be sufficiently motivated to ‘get there.’

According to Grint (2004), “motivation is partly constructed through the envisioning of an identity [who], a strategic vision [what], and a set of organizational tactics [how] that enhances the chances of success and reduces the risk of failure, but is primarily achieved through the fourth form of leadership art: the performing arts” (Grint, 2000, 23). “Having a persuasive message, delivering it effectively, and deploying negotiating skills to achieve movement” (Grint, 2004, 23), is crucial to achieving change and it is a critical element of leadership. Persuasive communication is necessary to motivate and mobilize followers and it
is “derived from the skills of rhetoric and the skills of negotiation” (Grint, 2004, 23).

“ [...] leadership is a performance, an inventive display, and we can summarize this by suggesting that successful leadership depends upon the extent to which leaders ‘perform’ the words and deeds conventionally associated with leaders – but it also requires followers to believe in their performance” (Grint, 2004, 419).

The Arts of Leadership:

Book Summary

The Arts of Leadership is divided into two parts. The first part of the book focuses upon four instances of ‘parallel leadership’ to try and establish whether leadership is itself crucial, what difference leadership makes and “whether there are resemblances between its formation and different walks of life – in effect, whether leadership is similar in political, social, military, and business environments” (Grint, 2000, 28).

Part 1: Parallel Leadership Situations

Crash-Landing and Take-Off

The first case of parallel leadership Grint examines in his book, The Arts of Leadership, is that of “two contemporary business leaders [Freddie Laker and Richard Branson] whose fortunes appear quite different but where the particular business [Skytrain and Virgin Atlantic] is almost identical” (Grint, 2000, 29 – 30). By examining the successes and failures of these two leaders, Grint “seeks to explain why the fortunes of these two similar individuals should have turned out so radically different” (Grint, 2000, 30).

Nursing the Media

Grint examines the life of a social leader, Florence Nightingale, in Chapter 4 of his book, The Arts of Leadership. Instead of parallel leaders, facing parallel scenarios, this chapter focuses on “one leader involved in parallel circumstances” (Grint, 2004, 30). In the first instance, Nightingale manages to gain “enormous influence on the public, and the politicians in Britain”, however, after Nightingale return to Britain from the Crimea, her efforts were “markedly less successful” (Grint, 2004, 30).

The aim of this chapter is to explain Nightingale’s initial success and the ultimate failure of her efforts. Grint argues that Nightingale was unsuccessful in her attempt to bring about reform in
Part 2: Situating Extreme Leaders

In the second part of *The Arts of Leadership*, Grint focuses on the four critical issues and the central features of leadership (identity, strategic vision, organizational tactics, and persuasive communication) and explores these four features of leadership by deploying them against extreme cases of leadership.

Henry Ford

In Chapter 6, Grint examines the success and failures of Henry Ford. According to Grint, the successes of Ford can be attributed, in part, to Ford’s ability to “seduce colleagues, employees and customers alike” (Grint, 2000, 189). Ford’s failures, on the other hand, can be attributed, in part, to the fact that “Ford removed all those people who had a talent equal to his or the temerity to argue with him” (Grint, 2000, 191). In the end, Ford sacked all those people who “could have stopped him from making many of the mistakes he made” (Grint, 2000, 191). Unlike Richard Branson, Ford did not “generate an open organization where followers were encouraged to compensate for his own errors or were free to criticize him when necessary” (Grint, 2000, 221).

Scarlet and Black

In this chapter, the last of the first part of the book, Grint examines “the British army’s defeat at Isandhlwana at the hands of the Zulu army, and the repulse of the latter by the former at Rorke’s Drift” (Grint, 2004, 30). Through his analysis of events, Grint describes why the first encounter went so badly for the British and the second so badly for the Zulus. Grint ends the chapter by concluding that, even though neither the British nor the Zulu armies consciously adopted the tactics of resource-inversion, these tactics “provide a significant explanation for the fortunes of the various parties” (Grint, 2000, 182). Also, “critical was the demonizing of the Zulu identity by the British and the misunderstanding of the British strategy by the Zulus. It was not simply the rifle that won the war; it was leadership and the lack of leadership that proved critical” (Grint, 2000, 182).

Horatio Nelson

Moving away from the business world, Grint returns to the world of military as he considers the case of Horatio Nelson, England’s greatest admiral, in chapter 7.

According to Grint, “a great part of Nelson’s leadership skill was in recognizing and aligning the particular skills and competence of his own followers with organizational tactics that made the most of such skills and competences [...] and it was in his performing arts, for in many ways he was foremost in promoting his own career, his own version of events, his own successes, and his own heroic death” (Grint, 2000, 229). Nelson was also able to “align his personal ambition to the strategic vision of the Admiralty” which enabled him to portray his “demand for their [his crew’s] sacrifices [death in battle] as offerings for their nation rather than as stepping stones for their admiral” (Grint, 2000, 279).

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler is the topic of chapter 8. Grint argues that Adolf Hitler “embodied the four arts of leadership and took them to levels seldom seen before or since” (Grint, 2000, 289).
Hitler’s leadership demonstrates that “identity is constructed; it is the product of imagination rather than a product of history” (Grint, 2000, 289).arguing that King’s greatest leadership art was the art of persuasive communication.

His success was due in part to the fact that he was able to construct a German identity that many adopted, but Grint argues that it also laid in the fact that many said nothing or did nothing to stop him: “The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved by indifference” (Kershaw, 1983, 227 as quoted in Grint, 2000, 335).

Martin Luther King
Martin Luther King and his I Have a Dream speech is the focal point of chapter 9. In this chapter, Grint looks at the significance of rhetoric to leadership. Keith Grint argues that “speeches are the product not of gifted individuals but an entire corpus of supporters, human and non-human, who between them render oppositional accounts of the speech, illegitimate, or at least less legitimate than their own version. Speeches therefore are contested processes not merely objective events. They are contingent but not arbitrary- speeches do not mean anything the listener likes but neither do they necessarily mean exactly what the speaker intends” (Grint, 2000, 179). Grint conclude chapter 9 by deeds conventionally associated with leaders – but it also requires followers to believe in their performance” (Grint, 2004, 419).

Keith Grint compares leadership to a talisman (an object thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck or success). He argues that “we can never be sure whether it works – but only a brave individual” dares to go without one (Grint, 2004, 419). Thus, Grint argues whether leaders “actually works miracles or not is irrelevant, because, as long as followers believe they need leaders, leaders will be necessary” (Grint, 2004, 420).

The End of Leadership?
Grint ends his book, The Arts of Leadership, with a chapter entitled, The End of Leader Ship?, in which he summarizes the issues and conclusions from the various case studies and he sets out what the analysis has to say to leaders in the twenty firsts century.

According to Grint, “the success of leaders is dependent upon the extent to which they can construct and articulate an identity that pushes followers further than money can pull them” (Grint, 2004, 411).

Further, Grint argue that “the success of leaders is crucially dependent upon the extent to which followers’ competence can compensate for leaders’ incompetence” (Grint, 2004, 417).

Also, “leadership success is dependent upon the extent to which leaders are sufficiently and inventively inconsistent to wrong-foot their more conscious opponents” (Grint, 2004, 413).

And Grint suggests “that successful leadership depends upon the extent to which leaders ‘perform’ the words and

The Arts of Leadership:

Book Critique:
Keith Grint has been a leader in the field of leadership and has actively studied leadership since 1986. He’s professional resume is extremely impressive and he has held various prestigious academic titles such as Professor of Defence Leadership; Deputy Principal (Leadership and Management); Professor of Leadership Studies; and Director of the Lancaster Leadership Centre. Grint is also a founding co-editor of the journal Leadership published by Sage http://lea.sagepub.com/, and founding co-organizer of the International Conference in Leadership Research. Grint has also published various books exploring leadership in all its forms. And his research interests include the practical implications of contemporary management theory; the comparative analysis of managerial innovations; organizational theory; technology; leadership and re-engineering (http://books.google.ca). Keith Grint is thus well informed on the topic of leadership, his area of expertise, and the ideal person to write a book that investigates the notion of leadership.

Keith Grint argues, in The Arts of Leadership, that leadership should be considered as an array of arts, rather
than a science: “if we abandon the infinite quest for scientific certainty and seek out the help of philosophical, fine, martial, and performing arts, we might go some way to resolving that most perennial of human questions: what is leadership?” (Grint, 2004, 420).

In *The Arts of Leadership*, Grint successfully demonstrates how the arts can be applied to study the successes and failures of leaders, and how the arts can be used to analyze the phenomena of leadership in his book *The Arts of Leadership*. Through his analysis of the leadership of notable leaders, Keith demonstrates that the capacity of leaders to make mistakes is one of the limits of leadership. He argues that to achieve success “followers must play their part and cannot rely upon the leader, or leaders, to secure success alone, both because that success is a social not an individual achievement and because followers carry the responsibility of compensating for leaders’ errors” (Grint, 2004, 5).

According to Grint “one of the greatest ironies of leadership” is that “while we traditionally look to leaders to solve our problems, it would seem that leaders are most likely to be successful when they reflect the problems straight back to where they have to be solved – at the feet of the followers” (Grint, 2004, 5 – 6). I agree.

Since Grint’s book, *The Arts of Leadership*, was published in 2000, various other leadership experts have published various books that look at leadership as an array of arts, rather than a science. These publications include *The Art and Discipline of Strategic Leadership*, by Mike Freedman and Benjamin B. Tregoe (2004); *Art and Science of Leadership*, by Afsaneh Nahavandi (2008); *Leadership: The Warrior’s Art*, by Christopher Kolenda (2001); *The Art of School Leadership*, by Thomas R. Hoerr (2005); *The Art of Leadership*, by George Manning (2011); and *Leadership Is an Art* by Max Depree (2004). These authors and books were not necessarily influenced by Grint’s work, but it does show that studying leadership as an array of arts, rather than a science, does have some legitimacy.
Source: