Leading in Wicked Times:
A Shift to Inquiry, Humility, and Fairness

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Humanity is facing an increasing number of wicked problems. The COVID pandemic is a telling example. Wicked problems are novel, complex, without a single "right" answer. They provide an ultimate test of leadership, as distinct from management. We suggest that effective leadership in the face of wicked problems calls for a set of virtues that differ from those traditionally associated with "strong" leadership. These virtues also need to be balanced as they may at prima facie appear contradictory. They include confidence and humility, decisiveness and curiosity, honesty and empathy, courage and patience. We discuss specific behaviors through which leaders can enact these virtues. We emphasize that especially in the face of wicked problems, distinct leadership behaviors are required at each of the successive stages of effective decision making. These stages include framing the problem, exploring alternatives, "taking" a decision, executing the decision, and learning from the decision outcomes. Fairness permeates the five-stage process. The proposed five-stage framework for effective leadership in crisis equally applies to problems that are not wicked. We thus provide a common framework for both crisis and more "normal" times, bridging leadership and management.

Keywords: Wicked Problems; Leadership Behaviors; Leadership Virtues; Decision Making; Leader Humility; Fair Process; Question-asking.

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Introduction

The COVID pandemic generates unexpected outcomes and remarkable insights. The strong calls from the Black Lives Matter movement for ending racial bias and social injustice is undoubtedly one. Another is how COVID exposes the ineffectiveness of so-called strong leadership and its fundamental unfairness. At country level, Brazil and the US come to mind as negative examples, while Germany and New Zealand offer contrasting positive leadership examples. The current events are likely to re-shape modern leadership theories.

New figures have entered the leadership Hall of Fame for us to aspire to. Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, has gained gold medals in sequential crisis "Olympics" (i.e., Christchurch attack in 2019, early eradication of COVID in spring 2020), with childbirth in between. Leaders taking tough measures typically experience a backlash at the subsequent election. In contrast, Ardern's Labour party had their strongest showing since the overhaul of that country's electoral system in the mid 90's (Cave, 2020). German Chancellor Angela Merkel came back from political sunset in her typical low-key, factual style. Gretchen Whitmer, governor of Michigan, and Charlie Baker, governor of Massachusetts, had the courage and foresight to take a series of preventive decisions early to manage the COVID outbreak in their states. Andrew Cuomo's leadership provides a stark contrast with that of POTUS, who keeps diverting attention from his failure to deal with COVID. Confronting own errors with authenticity significantly enhanced Cuomo's political status, notwithstanding a sanitary catastrophe that could have ended his political career. Each has a story to tell. Taken collectively, these might describe the "new normal" of leadership in the 21st-century.

The leadership lessons that COVID exposes so vividly have started to be addressed by the academic community. One thorough example is a recent special issue of the *Leadership* journal (Tourish, 2020b) that presented multiple comments and as many angles on the question. In this article, we propose a unifying leadership framework that applies across what Grint (2005, 2020) refers to as tame, critical, and wicked problems. We use this framework to spell out distinct leadership behaviors required at different stages of decision making. The framework allows to shed light on the dualities characterizing desired leadership virtues and behaviors, particularly in the context of wicked problems. As such, this article answers the recent calls for a critical perspective on leadership theory and for more work on positive leadership (Tourish, 2020a), as well as for a greater focus on specific leadership behaviors constituting the "building blocks" of leadership styles (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Leaders facing wicked problems

In an unprecedented way, the COVID pandemic now stands for a chain of crises: health, medical, economic, social, and political. It has all the characteristics of a *wicked* problem, as opposed to a *tame* one (Grint, 2005; Rittel & Weber, 1973; West, 1967). It is novel in its emergence, complex, without a single "right" answer or known protocols to be followed. Potential solutions to wicked problems can only be described as "better" or "worse" in particular aspects. Together with climate change, racism and social injustice, COVID probably establishes an unfortunate gold standard amongst wicked problems.

Wicked problems severely test a leader's ability to cope and deal with issues that have no obvious solution and keep changing. As such and following the classification of Grint (2005, 2020), wicked problems provide an ultimate test of *leadership*, as distinct

from *management*. Leadership involves taking the initiative in resolving *novel* problems, changing the status quo. Management deals with *known* problems and is required to set up routines and procedures to maintain the status quo. Managing a hospital, ensuring sufficient stocks of PPE and ventilators, and ensuring people remain healthy attest to the importance of management, which is key to sustainably solving what otherwise would turn into as many crises. Leadership comes to the fore in times like the COVID pandemics, when uncertainty, collective anxiety, and human tragedies abound, all begging for innovative answers to a level of wickedness not seen before.

Beyond wicked and tame problems, Grint (2005) defined a third category, which he refers to as *critical* problems. These require fast decision making and instant action to avoid catastrophic outcomes yet contain little uncertainty about what should be done. Construction of a problem as critical justifies the application of a military-style "commander" solution whereby one individual is in charge and imposes a solution on all parties involved.

We propose a common framework that allows for a unified view of leadership, management, and command. We thus underline that there is also a "management" aspect to crisis leadership, resting on a repeatable process. Successful leaders and commanders might be distinguished from their less successful peers by the extent to which they involve their teams in adopting and further refining this process. Grint's "commander" metaphor suggests that the latter might not engage this teams before deciding. The same might be said about "managers" who vary in the extent to which they involve their teams in framing the problem and exploring solutions prior to making a decision, and the degree

to which they share fame and notoriety in case of success. We argue that when dealing with wicked problems, such approach comes at a severe risk of a loss of effectiveness.

The framework we propose here builds on the decision-making literature (Russo & Schoemaker, 2001) as well as on the innovation literature (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The latter reflects the fact that wicked and crisis contexts call for creativity, and hence diverse perspectives and talent. The framework, in the form used here, was presented by Van der Heyden, Blondel, and Carlock (2007) in the context of family businesses, which are a fertile ground for generating crises and "commanders". The article followed Kim and Mauborgne (1991) in underlining the fundamental role of fairness (in terms of fair play rather than fair share) in ensuring collaboration and contributions of people in the processes described by the framework. An application to the economic crisis settings in the context of the relationship between governments and financial institutions was presented in Nathanial and Van der Heyden (2020).

The framework consists of five stages that need to be followed in their sequence: framing the problem, exploring alternatives, "taking" decisions, executing these decisions, and learning from outcomes. These steps appear to be common-sensical. What is remarkable, however, is how often in practice, one or several steps are poorly applied if not skipped altogether, resulting in performance issues that can be severe. Black and Gregersen (1997) described a close variant of this framework as a formalization of participative decision making (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Courtright, Fairhurst, & Rogers, 1989). They also provided empirical evidence that individuals with above-average involvement at all five stages exhibit higher satisfaction and performance than individuals with below-average involvement at these stages.

Describing the leadership process as organized in five decision-making stages allows us to neatly conceptualize an important challenge in the face of wicked problems: *distinct leadership behaviors are required at different stages*. The key for leaders is thus to be able to adapt their behavior accordingly, depending on the stage of the process they are in. Taken together, these leadership behaviors embody a set of virtues that at first sight may appear paradoxical: confidence and humility, decisiveness and curiosity, honesty and empathy, courage and patience. While all these virtues are crucial, the necessary "dose" of each varies across the stages. These qualities, taken together, become a requirement for effective leadership, and especially so in the face of wicked problems. They also differ from the virtues traditionally associated with strong crisis leadership (Tourish, 2020a).

The extent to which following the five-stages process is important and how critical these leadership virtues are for the effective execution of the stages differs between wicked problems, crises, and more "normal" managerial contexts. Commanders might be skipping the first two stages, which are devoted to problem framing and exploring alternative solutions. They are also more likely to execute these stages largely by themselves, which may result in performance and motivation issues as shown by Black & Gregersen (1997).

Table 1 summarizes the leadership behaviors and main virtues by stage of decision making.

Insert Table 1 about here

Begin with framing the problem right and beware of being wrong (Stage 1)

To address wicked problems, proper framing of the problem is most critical. Nothing may be worse than purposefully executing a superb answer to the wrong question. Taxation of carbon fueled cars might be one such instance. POTUS framing his overarching issue as getting the economy restarted and minimizing the COVID threat on the same economy is another. Cutting costs and investments to restore profitability but ignoring their impact on revenues is another example of dangerous diagnosis.

What are the emerging problems we should address now? And if we do, where are we headed, in the medium run? In the long term? What will happen if we do not act now? Who needs to be involved? Who can be affected or help? Who has seen something like this before? Who are the experts on specific questions? Furthermore, when the problem is wicked, regular revision of the framing is the name of the game. More information and knowledge will reveal that the problems we identified (e.g., respiratory in the case of COVID) are symptoms of deeper problems (e.g., infection of the blood system), which were hidden before and once identified help build better solutions (e.g., bolstering patient immunity earlier so as to avoid intubation).

The first and possibly most critical task of a leader is thus to zero in on framing the root of the problem in a clear and succinct diagnosis. The COVID pandemic is a problem for sure, but what is the specific underlying issue that needs addressing first? What are our objectives, and most importantly, what are our *fundamental* objectives as opposed to mere means to achieve these higher-level objectives (Keeney, 1994)? Effective leadership starts not with barking out a bunch of orders, but rather with patiently framing – with plenty of help by qualified experts and experienced advisers – what is truly at stake, and what might happen if we do not address the issue thoroughly and early enough. Jacinda

Ardern, Gretchen Whitmer, and Angela Merkel did precisely that in the outbreak, when none or only a handful of cases became identified (Friedman, 2020; Mahler, 2020; Miller, 2020; Wilson, 2020). So did Taiwan where a National Health Command Center was set up following the SARS outbreak (Duff-Brown, 2020). That is what Bolsonaro and Trump got so wrong. The point is so beautifully made by Spector (2019) who refuses the generic term "crisis" in favor of "claims of urgency", which could be either legitimate or deceptive, bogus, and even reckless – when the leader's claim is inaccurate yet plausible.

When framing, engage broadly and prioritize ASK over TELL

Good leaders in wicked times realize they cannot solve the problem alone and that everybody can contribute. These leaders practice plenty of asking and listening to experts who know more about the problem. They also engage those who will be key to successful execution – and who possess the operational knowledge to navigate the terrain best. These leaders understand that wicked problems require a great deal of commitment and alignment, including by those who could stand in the way of successful execution (e.g., some people behaving recklessly in COVID times). It is never too early to build awareness as commitment requires time and plenty of argumentation. The continuous engagement of individuals amounts to a partial outsourcing of one's leadership and requires building an entire community engaged in solving the problem. As a business leader told us recently, it is about "YOU and I" committing to be one chain of leadership fighting the predicament.

At its core, solving wicked problems requires prioritizing ASK over TELL, especially early in the decision-making process, namely at the stage of problem framing. The magic – and the paradox – is that with the use of questions, one both outsources *and*

exercises leadership, effectively dealing with the problems while building collective commitment, individual trust, and learning, all at the same time (Cojuharenco & Karelaia, 2020; Marquardt, 2014; Schein, 2013; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Asking questions also allows leaders to enact their curiosity about the problem at hand. "What would you do in this situation?" or, more simply, "What do you see or know that could help us? How do you frame the problem? How do you see our main objectives in this situation? Why?" are examples of the guiding questions at this stage. The patient exploration of alternative frames through distinct lenses improves one's understanding of a particular situation and, equally importantly, may reveal the unexpected opportunities any crisis offers.

Combine humility with justified self-confidence

Leading by ASKING is as basic as it is subtle. However, it is quite uncommon among so-called "strong" leaders who love to TELL what they believe the problem and the solution are, and what it implies for followers, revealing only the good part and omitting darker sides. The danger of such approach is exploring and executing solutions based on a partial and misguided frame. This is why autocratic leaders are bound to cause lots of damage when fighting wicked problems, even if they may genuinely think that their delusional ways will lead their flock to the "promised land".

While basic and subtle, leading in the ASK or inquiry mode is not simple. It requires a good mix of self-confidence and humility. Lacking humility, leaders become self-centered and turn into TELL mode, inviting confirmation and punishing contest out. It leads to the classic "Right, Pence?", leaving the latter with the only option to acknowledge yet another set of unverifiable or untrue "facts," if not outright lies.

The global world is complex and interdependent. The insistence on simplistic answers, if not slogans, creates its own wicked dynamic, leading execution too far in the wrong direction, and bringing loyal followers into the tragic inferno fueled by the leader. This tragedy unraveled in front of our eyes when certain US states reopened too early after the first wave of the pandemic. Napoleon's leading his Grand Army into Russia followed the same dynamic.

Maintain and build credibility based on process, hard truths, and admission of mistakes

Successful leaders facing wicked problems know that framing the problem wrongly or failing to recognize the real problem early enough can be fatal. The best answers to the wrong question are extremely dangerous because they may amplify the wickedness itself. Realistic leaders know that they will likely need to revisit the initial framing and that retaining their credibility throughout this revision is essential, as it is the core of a leader's "license to operate." They thus speak not of decisions, but of a *journey* towards a solution. This journey can also be called *a leadership process*. It involves many choices, some right, others wrong. Honesty and humility are core virtues for revisiting and refining the initial framing of the problem. They allow the journey to continue with the trust of those one leads.

In the face of wicked problems, leaders who cannot see or admit that they have been wrong will soon fall short of credibility, and the world will eventually pass them by. In contrast, effective leaders, not afraid to share hard truths and admit to not knowing, will be followed, even in a context of increasing doubt. Admitting to not knowing the answer is fundamental to leadership when dealing with extreme uncertainty. While it has

been largely absent from the traditional mainstream leadership theories (Tourish, 2020a), it is taking a prominent place in many recent writings on leadership (e.g., Marquardt, 2014; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013; Schein, 2013; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Effective leaders do not need to invent hoaxes or fake enemies to motivate their troops, as the wicked reality offers plenty to focus upon and requires all energy. As we stated earlier, wicked problems change over time, so challenges shift with them. Sometimes, new challenges require engaging new leaders, as is the case when incumbents burn out, or burn their teams out, by doggedly pursuing the wrong course of action. It takes humility and self-awareness to confront the "stay or leave" decision.

Engage the world in creatively searching for "better" options (Stage 2)

Having framed the problem's real roots, leaders can start looking for solutions, lines of defense, and options. In the face of wicked problems, jumping to the first solution thought of or heard risks making things even more vicious. One must give some time to the exploration of alternative solutions. Patience is as important at this stage as it is at the first, framing stage.

This second phase of the leadership process is thus devoted to the generation of alternate options. Effective exploration typically also provides a deeper understanding of the nature of the problem and possible solutions. Many of other behaviors and virtues needed at the first stage of problem framing also apply at this second stage. These are the virtues of humility and curiosity, yielding openness to different views.

Technology allows a much richer contribution "from the world" through, for example, "solution tournaments" where leaders engage others for answers (Morgan &

Wang, 2010). An excellent example of this is the current global race for a COVID vaccine.

Have the courage to "take" a decision when not all is known (Stage 3)

Then comes the third phase, one that Russo and Schoemaker (2002) refer to as "coming to conclusions". This is where a decision does not so much need to be "made" or single-handedly designed, but rather "taken" amongst the many options generated. This is where the French talk about "*prendre la decision*." This "decision taking" is entirely at odds with the picture of "heroic" leaders "making" their decisions without the knowledge or buy-in of their team. It also contrasts with the "commander" metaphor of Grint (2005). Effective leaders will, in contrast, encourage their teams to challenge them in order to gain awareness of the issues in front of them and to avoid falling into "black holes".

This "decision-taking" phase is the time for the decision to become apparent in the leader's mind. A high number of intense debates at prior stages of decision making equips the leader with an increasingly profound understanding and a deep rationale for the decision, sharpened by the comparison with the alternatives not chosen. In contrast to previous stages of decision making where humility and openness to others' opinions were key, now it is the time to close the discussion and show that the leader remains inclusive, yet is decisive, as we expect leaders to be. It is the moment for the leader to announce transition to the next phase, where decisions will be executed.

The decision stage of the leadership process is the time of big pronouncements, with a convincing and robust TELL, built on plenty of previous ASK and discussion. Churchill (1940), in his remarkable "we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender", is a noteworthy example of this clarity

and courage in the decision. It is also the time to set the expectations for success that "we, the people" can legitimately hold in the contract that binds us with our leader. It is a time for brutal honesty, Merkel or Cuomo-style (Ashgar, 2020). Tempered with plenty of empathy and compassion, so as to not terrorize, but to engage and motivate, to generate hope and commitment grounded in a creative and thoughtful framing of the problem and a thorough testing of options. It is the grounded hope that many of Jacinda Ardern's and Cuomo's public addresses over the last months so gently and at the same time so powerfully conveyed. There is no place here for delusional or reckless hope or one based on ideology or charisma, two sure paths to destruction in the face of wicked problems.

Commit to full and purposeful decision execution (Stage 4)

Good leaders know that in the face of considerable uncertainty, one should give the decision finally taken the best chance to succeed. They will continue to encourage those involved in the decision execution, by patiently reminding them, and particularly the doubters, of the decision taken and the rationale for it, as well as of what should be expected next. With a missionary zeal, they will remind all involved that the time for discussion has passed, and that it is now time to put all energies into "doing what we have decided".

Full and unhesitant commitment to execution is needed at this phase, fueled by a recognition that if we fail, it will not be because of a lack of responsibility, not trying, or incompetent execution, but because the decision was not the right one, or circumstances changed and new information requires to revisit framing and planning. Great leaders do not hesitate to take on responsibility for retreating and changing the decision, a possibility that they evoke already at the planning and decision stages. Cuomo excels in this phase

and is not shy of showing numbers to back up progress while admitting it is still a gamble ("*but then there are other solutions we may have to turn to ...*"). COVID has shown this with the masks: countries that adopted them with discipline did well, while others met fates proportional to their indecision or their inability to recognize early enough they were wrong. Late recognition of mistakes severely damages trust that could be difficult to recover.

Conversely, one may have framed the problem well, explored many alternatives and identified a particularly valuable one, decided and explained the expectations, yet success may elude. At the end, success obviously requires successful execution. What is less obvious is that the only problems that truly suffer from execution failure are those that successfully implement all other stages of the decision process, and then fail truly at this fourth stage. In other words, many crises arise not as commonly stated due to execution failures, but due to failures at earlier stages of the decision-making cycle.

Evaluate, learn the lessons, and adapt as needed (Stage 5)

We come to the final step in the leadership process: the need to review outcomes once results have been achieved or when it is clear that anticipated outcomes can no longer be expected or are not worth waiting for (e.g., because doing so would be too costly). Wicked problems allow for plenty of mistakes. They require nearly instant learning as more information becomes available, and the context changes. Merkel excels here. Her scientific background proves a real asset, as she drives a disciplined evaluation of results and progress achieved, with a predominance of data over opinion or ideology. This is also where the leader must adopt a scientific posture, chasing spurious or fake learning.

"Pit-stops" or "progress reviews" will allow a comparison of performance against objectives (stage 1) and the expectations announced at decision time (stage 3). If the "promised land" is not reached, it may be time to admit that the decision taken was either wrong or poorly executed, or that circumstances changed. It is the time to evaluate what went well – and should be maintained – and what went wrong – and should be changed. This ability to hold oneself responsible, particularly for defeat, defines great leaders. Great leaders also see or sense failure before others, leading them to convert "near misses" into successes as a result of fast evaluation and learning from failures. Autocrats and narcissists may have great difficulty to do so when their oversized egos convince them that their original decision was the right one all along, and that error or failure can only reside with others.

This is also the time for the leader's "lonely night," for personal reflections as to whether "one still has it" and for finding in oneself the resources to address defining questions such as "What is the world telling me? What do I need to change?". Answered constructively, a new cycle of engaging and framing, exploring, deciding, and execution can be initiated, which will eventually conclude with another "pit stop". Answered negatively, it is time to quit and exit the leadership scene.

Fairness as the ultimate leadership virtue

The five-stage leadership cycle we have presented here has been called "*Fair Process Leadership*" (Van der Heyden, Blondel, & Carlock, 2005; Kim & Mauborgne, 1991). Wicked problems are terrifying because the outcomes can be so unfair, with winners and losers being determined more by luck and wickedness than by enlightened leadership and effort. Like in the COVID pandemic, or with racism and poverty,

outcomes of wicked problems depend more on the hand one was dealt with rather than on any action of one's own. The statement that "life is unfair" connotes exactly that. Children do not choose their parents, the district they are born, or a person that comes their way and harms them without reason. "Bad luck" of being at the wrong place and wrong time and encountering the wrong person is a greater explanation here.

This unfairness of outcomes is why leaders facing wicked problems have to rest their leadership on a fair process. Wicked problems do not guarantee merit-based outcomes advocated by distributive justice. Wicked problems produce more martyrs than heroes, and the latter often go unnoticed and unrewarded. Many leaders in COVID times, be they in hospitals or elsewhere, share a deep sense of public service and sacrifice. Fair process leaders are aware of the risk of brutal consequences, and that such outcomes will be accepted if – as in excellent court proceedings – they are the result of a fair hearing, and, more broadly, of a fair leadership process. A great court hearing is the result of a disciplined process – similar to the one we described here, and one that, unlike a Stalinist trial, is procedurally fair. Leventhal (1980) underlined the importance of procedural fairness far exceeding the legal context. He also identified the characteristics for procedures to be fair: consistency across people and time, absence of bias, clarity of information, correctability (e.g., through appeals), and, finally, what might be referred to as a general culture of ethics and morality, reflecting the values and outlooks of those concerned. Kim and Mauborgne (1991) applied these notions in their work on organizations, focusing on the relations between headquarters and subsidiaries. They established that fair processes in these contexts, generate trust and commitment at both individual and collective levels and ultimately enhance organizational performance. The

quasi-linear relation between the fairness of leadership process and the quality of resulting outcomes is one of the insufficiently appreciated laws of social science.

Abraham Lincoln was well aware of the importance of a fair process, having to deal with one of the most wicked problems in US history: a savage civil war and the end of slavery. The result was the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution, which introduced equal justice for all US citizens, winners or losers, black or white. It introduced a fair process: it did not guarantee equality of outcomes (some going to jail, others remaining free), but equal treatment and opportunity in the face of the law.

The Greeks and the Romans early on also understood that the notion of fairness in process and discourse was the key to happiness prevailing in their cities and empires. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a famous Genevan philosopher, later referred to it as *Le Contrat Social* ("the social contract"). The Founders cemented this in the US Constitution: it does not guarantee equal outcomes or equal wealth, but equal rights, and equal treatment and social opportunity, an unmet aspiration that fuels the Black Lives Matter movement today.

Because great leaders know they cannot guarantee a good result for all, they rely on the fairness of the leadership process to draw and sustain the commitment of people they lead. The repeated and prolonged violation of justice by autocrats ultimately leads to their fall, unfortunately not without having sown destruction. Crisis typically precipitates the fall, and often their fall results from crises they have themselves generated as a result of a prolonged and repeated unfair process.

Humility, honesty, and fairness are integral to genuinely strong leadership

Our final point is to comment on the persuasive examples of women leaders such as Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel, or Gretchen Whitmer. They are remarkable examples of great leadership, largely portraited so far as a male domain. This is quite a contrast with justice, where all statues of justice are women: namely, blind women, to eliminate bias in the application of justice. This practice dates back to the Roman Emperor Augustus, who introduced Iustitia as the goddess of justice, holding both a balance and a sword. Some have argued that men will instinctively go for the sword and start "executing", hoping afterwards to have done the right thing and have served the just cause.

Our point here is metaphorical. While there could still be some association between the typical portrayal of strong leadership and stereotypically male qualities, one should note that there is nothing "soft" or "unmanly" about leading fairly, with humility and honesty. On the contrary, doing so requires substantial doses of courage and self-confidence. We are convinced that going forward, these will become the characteristics – and the norms – associated with strong and effective leadership, for both men and women. This may be one of the silver linings of the current pandemic. The sooner leaders at all levels will have the courage to lead with humility, honesty, and fairness, the sooner humanity will, in our view, make a huge step forward.

Summing up

We have argued that effective leadership in the face of wicked problems calls for a very different set of virtues than those traditionally associated with strong leadership. These virtues include confidence and humility, decisiveness and curiosity, honesty and empathy, courage and patience. These virtues are neither male nor female. They are

ultimately universal human virtues, celebrated in the Roman and Greek Pantheons and followed by the western societies in their emblems of justice.

We have presented a five-stage leadership framework that helps to understand the specific leadership behaviors and virtues required to address wicked problems. These stages include framing the problem, exploring alternatives, "taking" decisions, purposeful execution, and ending the current decision cycle with great attention to learning. Distinct leadership behaviors are required at each of these decision-making stages. While we have argued that the proposed framework for understanding required leadership behaviors is particularly relevant for wicked problems, it equally applies to problems that are not wicked, thereby providing a common leadership framework for both crises and more "routine" times. Grint's "commanders" are well advised to follow the same five-stage process, as they risk acting on a wrong frame or implementing insufficiently explored decisions, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

The motivation for this article rested on a desire to characterize the leadership that is essential when tasked to resolve the wicked problems facing humanity today. Many recognized that the current context calls for a different type of leadership (e.g., Tourish, 2020a). It is the leadership exemplified by Ardern, Merkel, and Whitmer, amongst many others, for all to emulate, men and women. The global world will continue to generate wicked problems. We hope that the insights revealed by the current context will help all leaders address future problems more effectively.

We close with the observation that our emphasis has been on three interdependent elements: leadership virtues (where fairness reigns big), leadership behaviors, and process. There is no virtuous or fair process without the leader ensuring that the process

is and remains virtuous or fair. Leader character thus matters greatly to determine their ability to uphold both process and the virtues that are required in the implementation of the process. That makes honesty and courage to face the reality perhaps most primal leadership virtues.

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Table 1

Behaviors and virtues required at different stages of the leadership process

Stage		Leadership behaviors	Main virtues
1	Framing the problem	• Consider multiple frames to diagnose the root of the problem • Engage experts, advisers, and those involved in execution • Ask others what they see to be the problem, and how they experience it • Listen to all involved • Understand objectives and motives of all concerned	Humility, Honesty, Curiosity, Courage, Patience
2	Exploring alternatives	• Deeply explore multiple alternative solutions • Engage experts, advisers, and those involved in execution • Ask others how they would solve the problem • Listen to all who may contribute	Humility, Honesty, Curiosity, Courage, Patience
3	"Taking" a decision	• "Take" the best decision amongst alternatives considered • Explain with clarity why and how decision was "taken" • Set expectations for execution (success/failure, scenarios and contingencies, etc.) • Ask about understanding of the decision • Listen to objections and requests for explanations	Decisiveness, Confidence, Courage, Honesty, Empathy
4	Executing the decision	• Be purposeful, Explain, Take on responsibility • Oversee execution and monitor progress • Consider new information • Be ready to reconsider the decision	Decisiveness, Confidence, Courage, Honesty
5	Learning from experience	• Evaluate and analyze outcomes, compare with expectations and objectives • Celebrate successes • Admit mistakes and commit to improvement • Adapt as needed to avoid repetition of mistakes	Humility, Honesty, Curiosity, Courage, Empathy