



UGSM-Monarch Business School Doctoral Thesis Proposal

A Framework of Leadership Applying the Theory of Purposeful
Human Action of Ludwig von Mises

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INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership began with the perspective of leader roles and ideals; looking at leadership in terms of the mythological leader type or role in the social structure. The concept of leadership often revolved around the idea of the charismatic leader. However, one can say that it is unlikely that a person is charismatic all the time, or transformational, or acting according to ideals all the time, or for that matter in all contexts. In addition, one might find that people get results in spite of being rather low on the formalized or idealized leadership traits as identified in the literature. (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005) This makes the traits approach to leadership study seem too generalized and too idealistic. To make up for such weaknesses some researchers developed theories based on behavior, and subsequently, ventured to identify what behavior a leader should engage in within different contexts and situations. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 6-10)

To further compound the confusion, there is skepticism as to whether or not there is such thing as a “leader person.” In reality, in almost all conceivable cases, a person is sometimes a follower, sometimes a leader, and at yet other times merely going about his personal affairs. This realization has made modern theories more inclined toward studying leadership as shared identity, and led to the growing study of the “leader–follower” paradigm and how people become identified as followers or leaders in different situations. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 6-10)

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All of these approaches are useful, and accordingly, scholars are increasingly working toward a more universal or unified theory of leadership. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004; Chemers, 2000) One approach to this would be to go back to the basic element, or building block, of leadership being the purposeful human act and begin from there. By elucidating all the necessary properties of the human act of an individual both in its structural and dynamic context it is believed that one should be able to include all of the essential factors involved in leadership while also being able to account for individual and circumstantial idiosyncrasies. It is precisely the above that Ludwig Von Mises accomplished with his theory of Praxeology within the domain of economics. And it is this theory that will be used and applied for the purposes of identifying a possible candidate for the unified theory of leadership within the proposed thesis. (Rothbard, 1976a)

What Professor Mises had in mind for his theory of Praxeology was that it be the general theory of human action; “irrespective of all environmental, accidental, and individual circumstances of the concrete acts.” (Von Mises, 1996, P. 32)

Accordingly, this scientific approach is most appropriate to the discussion at hand and has the potential to yield important and significant insights to the domain of leadership-follwership studies. However, the application of Professors Mises’ theory of Praxeology to the domain of leadership has yet to be done elsewhere.

Based on Praxeology, the primary purpose of the contemplated research is to shed light on the concept of leadership as a subset of human action, rather than as an abstract ideal. Moreover, the research seeks to present a general

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framework for analyzing leadership action as it relates to any particular person or role under any given context. This is a useful approach, since it is believed that there cannot be leadership without purposeful action, and thus an elucidation of all the properties of purposeful action in a leadership context should be capable of providing a meta-framework that in turn would contain within it all possible leadership theories.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Ludwig von Mises is generally recognized as the scholar who first elucidated the logically necessary implications of the phenomena of a conscious human act, such as: ends, means, scarcity and cost, uncertainty, time, preference, and volition. He held that all theorems of phenomena that involve purposeful action must be grounded upon these concepts, or as he called them, "categories." He called this approach to human science "Praxeology".

Keeping the above definition in mind along with the desire to use the theoretical pillars of the theory of Praxeology as an example for a meta-framework for leadership, we are able to fashion a generalized research question that will provide focus for further exploration of the phenomenon of leadership:

"What is a possible meta-framework and methodology of a leadership theory based on the concept of 'purposeful human action' as elaborated within the theory of Praxeology as originally developed and elucidated by Ludwig von Mises."

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In order to show the benefits and practical use of such a meta-framework, it is necessary to first elucidate its philosophical and epistemological foundations, answer common objections, and clarify widespread misunderstandings. Second, we will need to delineate the methodology of Mises, and show how he applied it to economics, in order to get a firm grasp on how the theory of praxeology may be applied to other areas. This is an important exercise, since praxeology in the Misesian sense, has never been applied systematically to any other area other than economics. Third, in order to get a better idea of how to apply praxeology to leadership, we need to review the main existing theories of leadership and see how they in turn relate to praxeology. After this, we will be able to present how praxeology may be applied to leadership as a framework and methodology.

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

The relevance of developing a framework of leadership study based on the theory of Praxeology, is that it provides a unique point of view and perspective for this field, just as the approach of Mises provided an unique point of view and perspective for the domain of Economics. It will be examined that the theory of Praxeology from the domain of economics may provide the essential foundation for the development of a meta-framework for leadership theory. As such, it provides a unique perspective on how to combine “a priori” propositions, logical deduction, subjective interpretation, theoretical modeling (system’s thinking), and empirical testing in a general theoretical meta-framework of leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will consist of three parts:

1. Apriorism and Subjectivism in Praxeology; this literature review elucidates and discusses the most important epistemological issues in this science.
2. The Praxeology of Professor Ludwig von Mises; this second part of the literature explains the methodology of praxeology in light of the methodological writing of Mises and its practical application to economics, leading the way to an application to leadership.
3. Major leadership theories and their relation to Praxeology; this section shows how a praxeological approach differs from the major theories of leadership.

APRIORISM AND SUBJECTIVISM IN PRAXEOLGY

In this section we will review the main propositions and principles of Mises's epistemology. They are all closely related, but shall be discussed under the following headings:

1. Methodological Apriorism
2. The Principle Of Methodological Individualism
3. The Principle Of Value Freedom
4. Methodological Subjectivism
5. The Subjective Theory of Value
6. The Role Of Empirical Testing, Probability And Forecasting

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Methodological Apriorism

Descartes, in the tradition of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle found absolute truth in the famous, "I think, therefore I am." Building upon this tradition, Patrick O'Sullivan proposed that philosophy must be the ultimate foundation of all critical inquiry, not science, because all scientific methodology must ultimately have its own justification from another source. This is because none of the theories are self-justifying, as they are not in themselves concerned with the questions of the conditions of cognition, let alone the ultimate nature of things. These are questions of epistemology, ontology and metaphysics, which are fields of philosophy. (O'Sullivan, 1987, P. 10-14)

All knowledge is fundamentally based on knowledge that must be taken for granted. Otherwise it would not be possible to know anything, because all propositions would need a proof, and anything presented as proof is just another proposition in need of a proof. Hence, no knowledge is possible, unless we take certain propositions for granted and as obviously true, and without need for further proof. Such propositions, along with any conclusion that can be deducted from them by pure reasoning, are called "*a priori*" truths. As defined by Webster's *a priori* means:

a : deductive b : relating to or derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions — compare a posteriori c : presupposed by experience.

(Merriam-Webster, 2011)

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The nature of *a priori* propositions and knowledge is the subject of much philosophical debate, but the meaning for the purposes of this research is what is self-evidently known, or known by deduction from what is self-evidently known. It is knowledge that is not in need of repeated experiences to be confirmed.

For reasons such as these, to be discussed further in our research, Professor Mises adheres to certain non-empirical *a priori* propositions in his theory of Praxeology. He holds that in “epistemology, the theory of human knowledge,” two things must be considered permanent, namely, “the logical and praxeological structure of the mind”, along with “the power of the human senses.” (Mises, 1962, P. 1)

The logical structure of the mind, and knowledge in general starts with “the very clear distinction between A and non-A,” for without it, one cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood. (Mises, 1962, P. 2) In other words, the fundamental *a priori* propositions of logic and mathematics are necessary for the formation of knowledge. The praxeological structure of the mind is a reference to the *a priori* of action; the affirmation that humans engage in cognitive and physical activities with a purpose. (Rothbard, 1976a) One cannot think of the purposeful actions of other human beings without referring to this *a priori* of means, ends and deliberation. This is therefore a given in the structure of the mind, and requires no further proof.

In addition to these propositions, Mises adds regularity and cause as an *a priori* category of the mind, because “No thinking and no acting would be possible..., if

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there were no regularity whatever in the succession and concatenation of events.” (Mises, 1962, P. 19) This statement shows that Caplan has misunderstood Mises, when stating, “he at best misspeaks when he characterizes this necessary feature of action as knowledge of “causality.” (Caplan, 2001) In fact, much of the criticism directed at Professor Mises’s Praxeological method of apriorism is believed to be based on misunderstanding, as will be shown in the research. In reality, Professor Mises rarely makes strong ontological commitments. Even about “cause” he states:

Whatever philosophers may say about causality, the fact remains that no action could be performed by men not guided by it. Neither can we imagine a mind not aware of the nexus of cause and effect. In this sense we may speak of causality as a category or an a priori of thinking and acting. (Mises, 1962, P. 20) (italics added)

The commitment to both cause and the teleology of action guided by the notions of ends and means, of course, reflects a dualist position. Mises states:

What the empiricism of the natural sciences shows is a dualism of two spheres about the mutual relations of which we know very little. There is, on the one hand, the orbit of external events about which our senses convey information to us, and there is, on the other hand, the orbit of invisible and intangible thoughts and ideas. (Mises, 1962, P. 115)

Despite this position, it should be realized that Mises is not making an absolute commitment to this position. It is a merely a practical matter for him:

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In referring to the free will we are pointing out that in the production of events something can be instrumental about which the natural sciences cannot convey any information, something that the natural sciences cannot even notice. (Mises, 1962, P. 58)

In fact, he goes as far as stating:

All that happens was, under the prevailing conditions, bound to happen. It happened because the forces operating on its production were more powerful than the counteracting forces. Its happening was, in this sense, inevitable. (Mises, 1962, P. 59)

A number of scholars have objected to Mises's aprioristic approach to purposeful human action, or more specifically, to economics. They do this based on stances rooted in the empiricist tradition, or in that of relativism. Common objections include that methodological apriorism teaches mere verbal tautologies and that it is "unintelligible," "dogmatic," or "unscientific." (Caldwell, 1984) All of these will be discussed in the research. It will be shown that the Praxeological approach to human science is not quite as rigid as commonly thought.

The Principle Of Methodological Individualism

This principle states that "all talk of nations, classes, firms, etc.," is for the social scientist a "shorthand for talk of individuals." (Smith, 1990) That is, "all actions are performed by individuals," and the way to understand a collective is through "an analysis of individuals' actions." (Mises, 1996, P. 42) The significance of this, is that explaining action in society begins with the individual.

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Some researchers have understood this to mean that there is no tendency toward regularity of behavior whatsoever. (Hodgson, 1986) However, this is not the position of Professor Mises, as shall be shown. It is simply the assertion that only individuals consciously act, and that no group of individuals are driven by another logic than purposeful action of means and ends -- not that society has no influence on choices made. The fact that certain ideologies are predominant in certain groups at certain times does not disprove this, because "it is the ideas held by individuals that determine their group allegiance, and a collective no longer appears as an entity acting of its own accord and on its own initiative." Moreover, "no scientific method can succeed in determining how definite external events...., produce within the human mind definite ideas, value judgments, and volitions." (Mises, 1962, P. 82) We can see then, that the principle of methodological individualism is closely related to the notion that purposeful human action cannot be studied in the manner of the natural sciences. In our research we will elucidate what is meant by methodological individualism according to Professor Mises, and discuss some of the arguments presented against it.

The Principle Of Value Freedom

Professor Mises uses the notion of value freedom in two different senses. The first is that Praxeology "is neutral with regard to the factors that determine the choice and does not arrogate to itself the competence to examine, to revise, or to correct judgments of value." (Mises, 2007, P. 271) The second is that the role of praxeological economics is to investigate "whether a measure 'a' can bring about

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the result 'p' for the attainment of which it is recommended." In other words, the economist merely states, based on "the point of view of those aiming at the goal 'p'", whether measure 'a' is appropriate or not. (Mises, 1996, P. 883)

The student of Mises, Murray Rothbard, is actually a main critic of this second notion of value freedom. (Block, 2005; Gunning, 2005; Rothbard, 1976b) In our research we will summarize the main arguments of this debate, because it has direct analogy to the possibility of value freedom in other branches of Praxeology.

Methodological Subjectivism

Closely related to value freedom, and a necessary companion to teleology as an implication of purposeful action, is the notion of subjectivism in the sense of inner experiences as an object of study. Purposeful action recognizes a number of inner experiences, including dissatisfaction, means, ends, uncertainty, and the subjective evaluation of these notions. It is by recognizing these that we make sense of the conscious behavior of others. This is the logic of Praxeology of which Professor Mises speaks:

It is not about things, tangible material objects. It is about men, their meanings and actions. Goods, commodities and wealth and all other elements of conduct are not elements of nature; they are elements of human meaning and conduct. He who wants to deal with them must not look at the external world. He must search for them in the meaning of acting men. (Mises, 1996, 92)

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In our research we will defend subjectivist methodology against common objections, particularly those of positivism, and elucidate its principles as elaborated by Mises's student Alfred Schütz: subjective interpretation, relevance and adequacy. (Gunning, 1991; Schütz, 1943)

The Subjective Theory of Value

The subjective theory of value being part of methodological subjectivism is of extreme importance to praxeology, and hence deserves special treatment. To illustrate its significance, it is worth quoting Professor Mises in full:

The transformation of thought which the classical economists had initiated was brought to its consummation only by modern subjectivist economics, which converted the theory of market prices into a general theory of human choice...***The modern theory of value*** widens the scientific horizon and enlarges the field of economic studies. Out of the political economy of the classical school emerges the general theory of human action, praxeology. The economic or catallactic¹ problems are embedded in a more general science, and can no longer be severed from this connection. No treatment of economic problems proper can avoid starting from acts of choice; economics becomes a part, although the hitherto best elaborated part, of a more universal science, praxeology (ibid.: 3). (emphasis added)

¹ This is Professor Mises' term for economics.

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Since the modern theory of value, and therefore choice, is subjective, it makes sense that the study of purposeful action follows a subjectivist methodology.

Professor Mises states:

Their [naturalists'] methods can deal only with events that are governed by a regular pattern. Besides, they do not have any room for the concepts of meaning, of valuation, and of ends. (Mises, 1962, P. 37)

Our research will include a complete examination of this theory and its importance in Praxeology in general.

The Role Of Empirical Testing, Probability And Forecasting

Mises explicitly states that praxeology is an *a priori* science, and further, that “economics is a deductive system derived from an *a priori* point of departure.” (Mises, 1962, P. 54; 2009, P. 110) He argues against the use of the methods of the natural sciences, such as attempted in econometrics, in the study of purposeful human action. (Mises, 1962, P. 47, P. 63) Some scholars hold, based on this, that Mises was wholly against the use of empirical methods in Praxeology. (De Soto, 1998) There is no question that Mises is skeptical to the use of empirical testing in praxeology, for reasons that shall be explicated in our research. However, we shall also show that his position is not absolute and how empirical data may play a role. (Leeson & Boettke, 2006)

THE PRAXEOLOGY OF LUDWIG VON MISES

The purpose of this section is to describe in detail the meaning of Praxeology and the workings of its methodology and theorem building. The section relies mainly on Mises's Magnus Opus, "Human Action", and some of Mises's other works.

(Mises, 1996) The reason for this is that Praxeology has not been developed significantly beyond the stage reached by Mises, and literature searches made show that it has not been notably applied to other fields other than the original field of economics within which it was developed. In fact, when searching for literature on Praxeology one finds the works of Mises, or those of his students elaborating on his theories, or one finds the critics of these theories, and little else. More specifically, this section will:

1. Explain the methodology of praxeology, in terms of how fields of study are bracketed and theorems are built.
2. Elucidate the categories of action, i.e. its necessary implications of means, ends, uncertainty, etc.
3. Show how Mises applies mental tools, what he calls imaginary constructions, or mental models, to build theorems tied to purposeful human action.

This section will also present other Praxeological theorems based on the Praxeology of Mises that are relevant to leadership, namely those related to entrepreneurship, the firm and non-profit environments. (Boettke & Leeson, 2003; Chamlee-Wright, 2008; Festré & Lazaric, 2004; Yu, 1999)

MAJOR THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

This section discusses the most important theories of leadership.

Definition of Leadership

There are a great deal of theories for leadership. It has “been defined in terms of traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position.” (Yukl, 2010, P. 21) It can also be defined in terms of being at the individual (micro), one on one (dyadic), group (meso) and organizational (meta) level. (Mintzberg, 1998; Yukl, 2010, P. 33) In our research we will mention some of the definitions, and provide some possible reason for this multitude. They are for the most part, however, centered around the notions of purposeful influence on others towards some objective. (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004, P. 300) Another useful way to group leadership theories is according to their emphasis on variables of leaders, followers, or the situation. (Yukl, 2010, P. 30)

Traits and Charisma Theories

These theories are based on perhaps the most conventional notion of what a great leader is, and were the first to be used in scientific study. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 6) The first researchers in this theoretical approach were Galton and Carlyle, and it has had a major reemergence since the 1980's. (Zaccaro, 2007) However, the role of personal traits as predictors of effective leadership is incomplete. (Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2010) In addition, there is a high level of correlation between the traits, which

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makes it difficult to draw practically useful conclusions from the research. (Yukl, 2010, P. 71)

Behavioral Theories

As early research on traits showed disappointing results, there was a shift of focus toward the behavior of leaders, both prescriptive and descriptive.

(Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 7; Yukl, 2010, P. 31-32) These enjoyed stronger empirical support, and also provided guidelines for practical application, such as the Managerial Grid Model, which prescribed leadership behavior along two dimensions: consideration for people, and initiating structure (task accomplishment.) Yet another was Douglas McGregor's Theory X, which states that people need extrinsic motivation through reinforcement, and Theory Y, which states that they are intrinsically motivated, and only need suitable working conditions, (Van Seters & Field, 1993)

Contingency and Situational Theories

After the emphasis on behavior and traits, there was growing recognition that environmental and social factors are variables that must be considered in leadership, along with those of personality traits and behavior. This gave rise to three major theories. (Van Seters & Field, 1993) The first was Fielder's Contingency Theory, which emphasized leader-member relations, task, leader power, and matching leaders to the situation. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P 7-8; Van Seters & Field, 1993) Another was the Path-Goal Theory of House et al, which held that a leader's job was to show the way to stated goals. (House,

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1996) The third was the Normative Theory of Vroom and associates, which emphasized decision making. (Van Seters & Field, 1993; Vroom & Jago, 2007) This latter model can also be classified as one that looks at the distribution of power and influence. (Yukl, 2010, P. 132-163)

Two further important theories in this category are the Situational Leadership Theory of Hershey and Blanchard, which emphasizes the maturity level of followers, and the Substitutes for Leadership Theory of Kerr and Jermier, which emphasizes situational factors that reduce the need for leadership. (Graeff, 1983; Howell & Dorfman, 1981; Yukl, 2010, P. 173-180) Contingency and situational theories emphasize the dyadic and group process relations between the leaders and followers, whereas traits and behavioral theories are mainly dyadic. (Yukl, 2010, P. 40)

Transformational Theories

Transformational theories integrate personality, behavioral, and situational variables to attempt to explain how charismatic leaders inspire followers to work for a vision of the greater good, beyond transactional leadership, which relies on punishment and reward systems. (Bass, 1990; Van Seters & Field, 1993) These theories have received substantial research attention over the last few years. (Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 10)

Interaction Patterns and Role Relationships Perspective

An important theory in this category is the Information Processing Perspective, which looks at how leaders reach legitimacy by matching expectations.

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(Antonakis & Cianciolo, 2004, P. 9; Shondrick & Lord, 2010) A more recent and complex model, is the Identity Based Process Model of Leadership Development, which describes how leaders and followers identities develop in a social setting. (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) Another perspective that can be included in this category is that of direct versus indirect influence, where attempts are made to explain influence without direct interaction, such as the “cascading” of CEO influence down the organizational hierarchy. (Yukl, 2010, P. 23-24)

A PRAXEOLOGICAL THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

In this section we will elaborate on a possible framework of leadership based on the theory of Praxeology. It will discuss leadership in terms of the Misesian categories of action, such as: means, ends, value, deliberation and uncertainty. It will also discuss the use of imaginary constructions and praxeological theorems in leadership.

RESEARCH PLAN

Research is to begin immediately upon approval of the research proposal. The general research, literature reviews, along with the development of the framework are estimated to take about 12 to 18 months. Writing of draft chapters, final chapters and manuscript printing expected to take an additional 12 months.

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RESEARCH BUDGET

It is expected that there may be some extra expenses to acquire literature not available from sources already free or paid for as part of the university fees. The estimated budget for this is approximately \$12,500 USD.

Research Budget	
Academic Journal Research Cost 100 x \$25 US	\$2,500
Economic Association Membership Fees	\$500
Travel & Conference Costs	\$2,000
Computer Equipment	\$5,000
Manuscript Printing	\$500
Office Costs	\$1,000
Miscellaneous Cost	\$500
Manuscript Proof Reading Cost	\$500
Total Cost	\$12,500

The cost of the research is presently funded and research may begin. No other grants or loans are required from outside agencies. No financial support is being requested of UGSM-Monarch Business School.

RESEARCH TIMELINE

The following represents the best estimate of the Research Timeline as it presently stands.

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Research Timeline	
Dates	Stages
March 1 – June 30, 2011	Finalizing proposal.
July 1 – December 31, 2011	Literature review: apriorism and subjectivism in praxeology
January 1 - June 30, 2012	Literature review on the praxeology of Ludwig von Mises
July 1 – December 31, 2012	Literature review on the praxeology of Ludwig von Mises
January 1 – June 30, 2012	Literature review on the major theories of leadership
July 1 – December 31, 2012	Development of the praxeological theory of leadership
January 1 – June 30, 2013	Finalizing the manuscript
June 30, 2013	Dissertation submission

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