Revisualising Image in Leadership and Organisational Studies

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Abstract
Research in leadership and organisation has produced several important streams of literature on image, including work on the social construction of leadership images; on constructed external image; on organisational identity and image; and on professional image. These approaches invoke visual metaphors — including vision, visibility, snapshots, mirrors, eyes, pictures, and portraits — all defining image as an abstract, invariably collective cognitive schema. Paradoxically, this work neither analyses actual visual images, nor refers to visual theory, nor explores the centrality of visual images to the construction of “image” in the abstract sense. Drawing on an ongoing investigation into the role played by portraits and photographs of CEOs and top executives in the visual construction (and deconstruction) of business leadership, an argument will be made that attention to visual images can both supplement and challenge the key assumptions underlying the concept of image as it has developed in leadership and organisation studies. The seminar will outline the empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions such research has to offer and will lay out a research agenda for analysing visual images in this field.

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