How a Charismatic – Destructive Leader Falls: A Dramaturgical - Rhetorical Analysis of Travis Kalanick’s Leadership Lifecycle at Uber

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ABSTRACT

Destructive Leadership is a fallout of the leadership continuum where a leader can’t be purely destructive or charismatic all the time. Adopting Gardener’s and Avolio’s dramaturgical approach to charismatic leadership along with Padilla’s Toxic Triangle theory of destructive leadership, we review the recent ouster of Uber ex-CEO Travis Kalanick. In the process we identify that Kalanick’s rhetoric closely aligns with Padilla’s triangle and also show distinct instances of inter element interactions. Further we assess the dramatis personae of Kalanick and his customization and thematic stances on leadership rhetoric to followers and environment. Also metaphorically analysed is the leader’s charismatic sway by adapting and comparing against the key ingredient of every successful dramaturgical act as defined by Christopher Nolan’s in his 2006 film ‘The Prestige’, based on the book of the same title by Christopher Priest.

Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called “The Pledge”. The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course... it probably isn’t. The second act is called “The Turn”. The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you’re looking for the secret... but you won’t find it, because of course you’re not really looking. You don’t really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn’t clap yet. Because making something disappear isn’t enough; you have to bring it back. That’s why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call “The Prestige”. – Christopher Priest, The Prestige.

1. Introduction

The recent ouster of Travis Kalanick from the position of CEO of Uber is a classic case of derailed leadership bringing procedural and outcome based calamity for an organisation. Apart from reviving interest in the concept of destructive leadership it also points to the rhetorical competence/incompetence level of the ousted leader. Although leadership has been explored much as a concept, its positive side has got disproportionate attention than the darker side (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Kalanick’s charisma is undoubtable but how his leadership style unfolds as he progresses from the nascent stages of Uber (Honeymoon) as a start-up, to scaling up (Parenthood) and organisational expansion and chaos (Divorce) at later stages, qualifies as a rich phenomenon to explore.

The relationship between charismatic leaders and followers has been studied in the past under the broader aegis of leadership and through the lens of impression management (Harvey, 2001; Gardener and Avolio, 1998). Gardener and Avolio’s (1998) dramaturgical model of the charismatic relationship marks an important chapter in this paradigm. They arrive at the premise that leaders are dependent on impression management techniques to shape their identities. Gardener and Avolio further subdivides the efforts by the leaders to do so into four phases: framing, scripting, staging, and performing.

‘Framing’ is an account of evolving meaning out of the leader’s communication style for the followers and himself. ‘Scripting’ is the rhetorical method used by the protagonist along with non-verbal behavioural cues to define events in the organisational and external environment.

‘Staging’ is representative of a cohort, of items including symbols, physical appearance, performing arenas and stage settings (Padilla et al, 2007). The final act of ‘performing’ captures the ‘actual enactment of scripted behaviours and relationships’ principally through exemplification (making an example out of one’s own deeds); self and organisational promotion (promoting the individual and the organisation he/she is representing); and facework (justifying actions with negative evaluation potential). The role of audience in this whole ‘drama’ is not confined to being mere passive spectators, rather they are involved actively with the leader in his/her performance. This gives them an implicit veto exercisable towards the dramaturgical discourse adopted by the leader (Gardner and Avolio,1998; Harvey, 2001). Sharma and Grant (2011) further built on Gardner’s model by stressing on the importance of narrative and storytelling as elements in built into the leader’s impression management strategy.

Though Heracleous and Klaering (2014), outlined the importance of rhetorical competence and how customization to audiences and continuity of themes in the leader’s rhetoric propagated his/her charisma further, there is a visible dearth of studies which addresses how the rhetoric incompetence of a leader fails him/her short of being an effective leader or leads to destructive leadership behaviour. This paper attempts to bridge this research gap through the proposed study. The discourse-
text analysis used in this paper towards the interpretation of Kalanick’s rhetoric competence and impression management tactics, is an attempt to qualify the richness of data available in the secondary sources about the ex-CEO. In the course of the discourse text analysis and resultant findings, this paper has improved upon the model of Sharma and Grant by incorporating the backstage and front stage switching process which Kalanick has abjectly failed to execute.

2. Literature review

Leadership is seldom absolutely effective or entirely destructive: most leadership results in both desirable and undesirable outcomes. Leaders, often in a symbiotic trade off with his/her followers and environmental contexts, contribute to outcomes distributed across a destructive–constructive continuum. Moreover, it tends to largely focus on the leader’s personal vision and goals, which may fall short of aligning with the best interests of all the organisational stakeholders. (Rosenthal & Pittinskya, 2006). Destructive leadership also draws extensively from the conducive environment manifested by followers and conducive environments (Padilla et al, 2007). Most research on destructive leadership, paralleling the studies on leadership, is biased towards leader as the pivot (Yukl, 1999) and the roles of inter element interactions between followers and environmental contexts have not received adequate attention (Padilla et al, 2007). In their paper on the destructive-charismatic leadership nexus, O’Connor et.al. (1995) argues that leaders by their action are not always contributing to the organisation and its followers, but maybe operating from a personal outcomes-based value system.

Gardener and Avolio (1998) in their seminal paper mentions about framing, scripting, staging and performing phases as a base a charismatic leader leverages for effective impression management towards his/her general environment and followers, from which subsequent organisational outcomes follow. However, the absence of delineation between the preparatory phase the leader and his team work on to produce the ideal narrative and the outward delivery of the charismatic leader’s actual performance shows. Thus in this lack of specificity between the boundaries, they miss out on expressing the outside onstage experiences that shape the leader-follower relationships. Thus, when there are incursions from the audience in this transitional zone, slip ups by the leader while on the stage or when one of his crew fails to retain key information or leaks information privy to this in-group, the leader-performer’s social act takes a hit (Goffman, 1959), which he may then have to be repaired by exemplary usage of facework (Gardener et. al., 1998).

In their model of dramaturgical performance by a leader, Gardener and Avolio doesn’t delineate this performance region aspect of Goffman’s model, but confines it to the broader canvas of “environment”. Here Sharma and Grant (2011) suggests that the term environment be replaced with that of ‘scene’, a more dramaturgically relevant reference (ref fig.1).

![Fig.1. Gardener-Avolio impression management schematic (1998) modified by Sharma-Grant (2011)](image-url)
In the Sharma and Grant model, there are three performance regions; the back end, the transitional phase and the front end. The “potential disruptions” in this model are the faux-passes which can happen as leaks and incursions from the crew’s side or as slip ups from the leader’s side (dramaturgical indiscipline). Thus the on stage and off stage management of the leader’s performance attains imperative to maintain his/her charismatic aura. In the four stages of impression management, framing and scripting can be considered to be the formative components shaping the backstage elements of the leader’s performance while the staging and performing aspect is the front end part. The delineation isn’t a strict black and white process as incursions may spill over with the dynamics of the particular ‘scene’ setting the leader maybe subject to at a particular moment. The arrows mark a directional sense of the continuous and dynamic relationship shared by the leader-follower dyad leading further to organisational outcomes out of this charismatic relationship. Thus, it overcomes a few drawbacks of the Gardener-Avolio model. It eliminates the binding nature of the ‘scripting’ element which limited the narrative richness of the impression management tactics of the leader to merely rhetorical earlier. Sharma and Grant thus establish the narrative story telling impression management connect which is paramount to the charisma leader gets associated with.

The narrative in its essence is a story telling tool which addresses and tries to capture the temporal aspects of the social and natural environment constituting the real time world

(Gabriel, 2004). According to Gabriel (2004), there is an implicit ‘psychological contract’ that shapes the relationship between the leader and followers / audience through the narrative discourse. Thus, a leader may have to walk a thin line of delineation between the preceptor based and content-based versions of the narrative story as to retain the realism element while being simultaneously relevant from a charismatic point of view as well to the followers and audience.

Heracleous and Klaering (2014) came up with rhetorical discourse analysis of the late Steve Jobs to empirically analyse the usage of rhetoric as a strategic tool by the former CEO. They found that Jobs’ rhetorical competence in engaging customisation as a tool to cater to the three different audiences, while sticking to key themes and metaphorical roots as a repeating theme in each of his three separate discourses; was the key to his overarching success as a charismatic leader. Thus, the ability of a leader to engross and arrest an audience with powerful rhetoric skills is one of the major underscoring capabilities of charismatic leadership (Shamir et.al, 1994; Sharma & Grant, 2011). This paper attempts to do an in depth narrative discourse analysis of Travis Kalanick and his rhetorical competence across the three different leadership growth cycles of his stint as the Uber CEO to identify what went wrong from a rhetorical perspective in the charismatic-destructive continuum of leadership he displayed.

3. Methodology

Narrative research from a research paradigm point of view comes under the epistemological dimension of social constructionism, under the broader aegis of an interpretive-constructivist scheme. The narrative process of research embodies this spirit of relativism, subjective approach and multiplicity than accepting one reality. This is in further sync with the study here as the stories and rhetoric of the leader in contention, all assume due importance from a narrative analysis point of view. The final narrative result, then becomes an assimilated pot of views with the multiple dimensions of the story teller, researcher and being represented in a multidimensional manner.

3.1 Why narrative approach

Before zeroing down on a particular approach, it is important to see why Travis Kalianick’s life stories play a pivotal role in the shaping of his leadership odyssey. These stories find a vent through and get propagated by his follower’s (immediate and in the environment) buying into it, how they perceive and formulate it. As an argument one can always state that traits can’t be observed directly, and thus perceptions become the alternative available, based out of the available information the follower has access to. Followers, thus with lack of access to full set of leader’s behaviour, end up tapping the indirect sources of information he or she can tap into (Shamir, 2005).

Here for instance, the nugget on how Kalianick shaped up as a child to race ahead of others, a testimonial to early conviction and will power, can lead to followership. Thus the ‘build ups’ a leader like Kalianick may accumulate over a period of time with his followers can either enable him to suggest changes, dismantle norms and challenge the status quo of the broad environment within which his followers are situated or it can also deride away his base of supporters if these stories and rhetoric doesn’t strike a chord (when the ‘dramatis personae’ of the leader fails to engage the follower). Thus, the key to this study is to examine these rich story narratives, from the told perspective of Kalianick’s biographers, employees and partners, public institutions of USA, media and from the angle of the lay customer who are partners or customers of Uber. It helps to characterize Kalianick’s interaction continuum on a leader-follower-environment model and to investigate the twists in the plot where his dramatis personae mask slips.

3.2 Sources and participants

The study is based on the secondary data sources of two biographical accounts of Kalianick, a court deposition, four public media interviews and conference addresses by Kalianick and two publicly available employee accounts on working at Uber by an ex-staff and current staff. The rich data access and cohesive accounting of narratives make a valid case for the selection of biographies while the deposition is a valid and recent document and has much relevance with respect to the leader’s impression management tactic towards formal institutions. The additional employee accounts data form a vital ingredient of gauging the leader’s dispositional attributes towards his followers. The primary data came from participants who were totally eight in number. They composed of a mix of people, who can be constituted under the umbrella of ‘environment’, including partners/drivers (two), customers (five) and a customer care representative employee. A purposive
The biographies were read iteratively to look for passages which were rich in capturing formative and engaging vignettes of Kalanick across the different phases of his lifecycle; both personal and leadership. Similar reading, re-reading and extracting preliminary data procedure was followed for sources of other secondary data as well. This helped to funnel down to the emerging patterns and core concepts and was in line with the content-categorical narrative approach used by Zilber et al. (1998). There was a rich amount of data in the form of first person accounts (totaling more than 30,000 words) thus parsed from these sources and it was further refined by editing for repeating ideas and phrases, and retaining those with direct implications for Kalanick’s leadership.

For each research participant an interview was held in person or over telephone (35 minutes average duration) and they were encouraged to speak about their lived experiences with respect to Uber (Kalanick’s organisation). The interviews were all audio taped and transcribed verbatim. For interpretive purposes, observed behavioural data of participants (pitch of voice, body language, gestures, hesitation), were accounted for as well. A preliminary exploratory analysis of this data revealed emerging codes, and these were coded using ATLASTi version 8.0. Further, some of these codes were grouped to emerging broad themes; to develop a set of axial codes. This led to the formation of thirty-six open codes, which were further categorized to three axial themes.

### 4. Analysis and findings

The analysis of the text data produced majorly three themes (leader characteristics, leader-follower dynamics and leader-environment dynamics) mapping towards the confluence of environment follower leader confluence structure proposed by Padilla. It establishes the charismatic-destructive leadership behaviour continuum and explains by the unchanging rhetoric stance/impression management technique adopted by the ex CEO led to the organisational fallout outcome.

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#### Table 1: Themes and sub-themes of Travis Kalanick’s leadership discourse across his Uber CEO tenure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leader Characteristics</td>
<td>Aggressive Manner towards subordinate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distorting facts to fit own version</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coercive style of conflict resolution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Growing drive to achieve at any cost</td>
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<td>Pacesetting style of working</td>
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The leader characteristics capture the display of leadership behaviour by Kalanick across his tenure as the CEO of Uber. He was in charge from early 2010 up to mid-2017 and the open themes reflect the abrasive and take no prisoners serial entrepreneur attitude by which he thrived and perished. Leader follower dynamics is representative of the effect of his leadership on Uber employees. The driver/partner segment of Uber is not included in the list of followers as Uber technically delineates this segment from their registered employee list. They are further captured, along with investors, regulators, customers and other stakeholders in the Leader - environment dynamics which is indicative of the relationship and effects the leader has on his immediate operating environment. Here the paper attempts to bring these themes alive by juxtaposing them within the leadership cycle stages of Kalanick at Uber and comparing how he fared across these different stages i.e. Honey moon (2009-2012), Parenthood (2012-2015) and Divorce (2015-2017).

4.1 Honeymoon

This is when the start-up had evolved from an idea in the minds of Garrett Camp (co-founder) and Travis Kalanick, and captures the journey from being established as a single city firm in San Francisco, US and to first global expansion in Paris, France. Here’s an excerpt from the biography ‘The Upstarts’ (Stone, 2016).

It was the first of countless times that executives at Uber would face government officials to discuss the legality of their company’s service. Graves says they were nervous. “We didn’t know what to expect,” he says. Beforehand, the Uber team agreed on a respectful, inquisitive, cooperative, and confident tone. Somehow, things fell apart anyway. Kalanick later said the PUC officials were reserved and asked for more information but that Hayashi “was fire and brimstone, deep anger, screaming.”

Hayashi says that she was strident, not screaming, and remembers the Uber execs as “obnoxious” and Kalanick in particular as “arrogant.” “You can’t do this!” she told them. “You can’t just open a restaurant and say you are going to ignore the health department!” She says that nothing was decided at the meeting and calls it “totally pointless.”

Here it shows a typical leader – environment fracas and how Kalanick fared up to it in his aggressive and retaliatory manner.
with conscious oversight of the environment elements. Following the petty tyrant (Ashforth, 1994) concept of destructive leadership, he self-aggrandizes and personalises the PUC official as someone at war with Uber. In the following excerpt, Kalanick’s horse vision when it came to setting up his own ideas and ideals is captured by the words of one of the early investors in Uber.

Travis didn’t understand that we had made a mistake” in backing Scour, Ovitz told me in 2015 at a tech-industry conference. “We didn’t realize we were creating enemies in the world of intellectual property. If you got sued by every angry music and movie company and everyone in the world who has IP, you’d notice. That didn’t bother Travis. It sure as hell bothered me.

Here the abrasive leader characteristics of Kalanick come through as a clear example of how gradually he had set himself on a journey of lost confidence with the immediate and distant investor community.

4.2 Parenthood

At this stage Uber is now more than 100 employees and growing rapidly. It has also attracted considerable funding from investors worldwide. Kalanick is a brand name and is invited at conferences worldwide as a keynote speaker. But his impression management style is oriented still at the self-promotion and fails through at the facework mode.

There was no shortage of animosity between the companies and their wilful execs. Around that time, Kalanick and John Zimmer got into a heated and puerile battle on Twitter, accusing each other of having inadequate insurance and ineffective background checks; “@Johnzimmer, you’ve got a lot of catching up to do... #alone,” wrote Kalanick, angling for the last word.

Kalanick always believed that by the way of his first comer advantage, investor backing and confidence that Uber was a superior product. It is a reflection of his personality and leadership where being abrasive and burning bridges to get ahead at the cost of long term organisational goals over self-promotion and self-aggrandizement is plainly evident. It’s further illustrated by the following excerpt.

Uber ‘s year would become only more contentious from there. In February, a feature in the men’s magazine GQ described Kalanick as a “bro-y alpha nerd” and quoted him observing that Uber had amplified his appeal to women. “Yeah, we call that Boob-er,” he said. In May, speaking at the Code Conference, Kalanick had even more trouble elevating his tone to a level befitting a high-profile CEO. I was in the audience that year when he attacked incumbent cab companies so forcefully that it made the taxi fleets look sympathetic. Uber, he said, was engaged in a political campaign where “the candidate is Uber and the opponent is an asshole named Taxi. Nobody likes him, he’s not a nice character, but he’s so woven into the political machinery and fabric that a lot of people owe him favours”.

Here he doesn’t manage to bridge the Leader vs Employee conflict for the lot of women employees in his organisation or for that matter his women customers in the environment as he falls for the glorification of self-promotion with respect to his attractiveness amongst the opposite sex and self-conviction that the days of taxi industry and drivers were numbered, thereby alienating his partners/drivers. This is another instance of Kalanick failing across the facework tactic of impression management.

4.3 Divorce

Travis Kalanick (before the impending resignation in June 2017) was still in a considerable negative spotlight as allegations of usurping intellectual property by Google was ripe. In the excerpt below it is observable how he tries to mellow down his combative rhetoric.

Kalanick also set about tempering his tone, and he introduced a more inspirational articulation of the company’s mission; it was no longer to destroy “an asshole named Taxi” but to offer “transportation as reliable as running water, everywhere and for everyone.”

Though he shows signs of improving his facework element of impression management he can’t resist falling back to his old ways.

According to Cheng Wei, Uber’s CEO wanted to invest in Didi Kuaidi. He asked for a 40 percent ownership stake in the company and, in return, promised to cede China to Didi. In a speech, Cheng Wei later said that Kalanick threatened an “embarrassing defeat” for Didi in China if he rejected the offer. “We could tell from the way they looked at us that they thought of us as just another local taxi app from Sichuan,” Cheng Wei said. “Foreign companies see China as a territory to be conquered.”

Jean Liu, a native of Beijing who spoke English fluently and who was Didi’s primary liaison to the global business community, said that Kalanick came off as a bully. “Imagine someone coming to your office saying, ‘Give me this much stake of your company, otherwise I will fight you,’” she says. Uber later disputed Didi’s account and characterized the meeting as “super friendly”.

Thus the study shows that a charismatic and skilful leader can falter along the continuum of leadership to destructive levels. Though studies so far stress on organisational outcome as a yardstick (Padilla et al, 2007), this study is pointing to the role of processes in shaping the outcomes. The cumulative strain of not maintaining a facework tactic of impression management across the organisational and leadership lifecycle proves to be too much in the end for Travis Kalanick. By the time he signed up for leadership help it was too late. A lot of the passengers never failed to notice as well. One of the interviewees I had a conversation about her three years history with Uber and finally leading to uninstalling the app as a customer, believed that it was too much of a moral price to pay for convenience. This is what she had to say.

I signed up as an Uber customer as the first from my family circles. I even remember promoting it (laughs) and being a poster girl for it in my office and friends network, referring and earning bonuses for that…but after a while I felt like it was all
too changing all the time..they got the peak time pricing and pushed it to us, I believe they took advantage of Ola being expensive, that’s not done you know, that’s day time robbery just because you are the only player with the reach and hold (pauses) yeah and all the negative things that as a woman one hears about this company is disgusting..as an aware woman I had trouble going with that, see if I use an app that is made by these sexist guys I can’t cry later and let them be responsible for my safety..it’s not going to happen..they say they give training..I bet they should dress up as a city woman from a Saturday night event and get into one of these cabs, they judge you outright it’s so ridiculous..I mean the radio cabs were better. Infact I go by them these days...at least I don’t have to share my CV in an app (laughs sarcastically) ...CV in an app to some unknown database and then get myself rated by a driver who judge me based on absolutely no basis than sitting at the backseat of his car...it’s not so done you know. I can’t live with it.

In the overall analysis, Kalanick comes across as having serious rhetorical deficiencies and almost egotistically immune to any suggestions to work on the same and mend his ways. Shamir et.al. (1994) had stressed on the importance of maintaining rhetorical congruence and in my analysis I find that Kalanick misses out on ‘switching’ to minimise faux passes and standardization for a uniform mode of rhetorical interplay between the followers and his environment of stakeholders.

5. Discussion and contributions

The message and the way it is delivered matters, noted Shamir et.al (1994) and it is on a similar basis that the rhetorical importance of delivery in the dramatis personae of a leader is paramount. It is inevitable for him/her to customize the same message for dissimilar audiences, without losing the essence and content of it. Sillince (2007) found that rhetorical congruence is a vital tool to align the stakeholders to the multiple goals of an organisation. He defined rhetorical congruence as a phenomenon which occurs when both the rhetoric and the different elements and customisations of it are in sync for a particular contingent situation(s). Leaders can and should always customize their outreach to all the stakeholders to delineate the different tactics and strategies an organisation may adopt to be competitive and sustainable in market and ensure that all of them are in the same page. Even though Kalanick attempts some sort of a reform in the case of
structuring the messages from his side towards the final stages of his divorce phase, the balance had shifted considerably away from him by then. Berger and Luckmann (1966) has catalogued this ability of a leader, to consciously and successfully integrate rhetoric customization and perspective continuity, as a necessity to be charismatic to his/her followers; thus helping in creating a favourable social construction of sustainable business environment for all stakeholders.

The contribution thus made by this study is that Kalanick fails to toggle the switch (fig.3) to effortlessly translate the backstage preparation towards an effective dramatis personae a leader should envisage and portray, to reduce the leakages and faux passes (as identified in Avolio’s framework), to his immediate audience as a leader and chief magician of his organisation. He miserably fails to pull of the prestige in his trick despite being high in ingenuity and passion with the pledge and turn phases; thus failing to win over the unanimous imagination of his spectators, the followers and the environment. It is here that we would like to modify Avolio’s framework to suggest adding a switch across the potential disruption phase in the point of interaction between the dramatically charged leader and his follower-environment audience. It is important for this switch to be toggled on to recognise and enable seamless transition. This essential ‘re-emergence’ of a leader with the continued emphasis on a thematic consistency of ideals and vision for the organisation and its stakeholder can be managed by being ‘switched on’ and aware of the rhetoric requirements of a successful dramatis personae. Kalanick fails to live this and his imbalanced customisation juxtaposed with a faltering continuity of dissimilar and decentralized themes in messages contributes to his downfall as a destructive leader; for himself and for his organisation.

6. Limitations and further research

There is a key limitation to the study despite the strength of the findings it led to. The small sample size, lack of direct access to the leader and his immediate colleagues and followers (US level staff and investors) have been tried to be tided over with the rich data the biographies and other respondent interviews offered. Moreover, this is a study of one destructive leader with insights learned over the three distinct phases of his leadership career. Though it’s an exploratory study and its methodology of non-statistical sampling is based on past theoretical approaches, it may lack the power of generalization a more varied study could have offered. Future research can incorporate this into account and come up with comparative models featuring different leaders and more direct first-hand accounts from first degree connections. Further studies could also explore more to the aspect of switching and come up with more techniques by which this transition from the backstage to the front stage is managed by the leader.

7. Implications

The findings of the study are applicable to high growth organizations such as the gig economy based Internet of Things industry where the focus is solely or much on the product and less on the corporate governance mechanisms and institutional coexistence within the regulatory framework. Having an independent board right from the start of the organisation and a strong CHRO level intervention can keep aberrant and erroneous leadership behaviour at check here. It is relevant from a leadership practice point of view and can prevent negative organisational outcomes in the long run if the leader is taken through an executive coaching program across the phases of the organisational lifecycle. In order to prevent charisma from taking a destructive turn, organisations can advise their leaders to be a better dramatis personae by being effective and competent with their rhetoric and sharpening their switching skills. Future studies can also do a comparative analysis of how a similarly placed leader helming a global start up (Mark Zuckerberg for e.g.) fared vis a vis the challenges Kalanick faced. This would further help the future leaders codify a leadership playbook to tackle the challenging task ahead of them in today’s globalised business world.

8. Conclusion

This study has analysed and extended the previous literature on charismatic leadership by traversing the continuum of leadership and tracking the evolutionary pathways of destructive leadership as seen in the case of Travis Kalanick, the ex-CEO of Uber. With the help of available dramaturgical and rhetorical nomology, the study has extended the dramaturgical model proposed by Gardener and Avolio (1998) and revised by Sharma and Grant (2011) to account for the transient yet significant act of ‘switching’ over to a consistent style of rhetoric and thematic messaging which shall embellish a perfect dramatis personae of the leader to the followers and his/her environment. The extended model, emphasizing on this switching or successfully executing the third part of the act of the leader called “The Prestige”, has enabled to shed light on the inflection points on the charismatic-destructive spaces of the leadership continuum. Further the study through detailed content analysis and coding of research participant data, arrived at the importance of rhetoric and story telling a leader and his immediate crew should focus on, to translate and transcend their high level vision acceptably to the larger public and lesser private hoard of stakeholders. Narrative analysis of the data underscores the importance of this as brought about by the everyday lived experiences of stakeholders recounted to create the dramatis personae of the leader in their minds.

The generalisability of the findings may be in question, but the implications for organisations and especially similar technopaced institutions like that of Uber are pertinent and can be drawn from the study. Further studies could be taken up to do a comparative case based analysis of different leaders and researchers could also look up for alternative techniques to the one mentioned in my study for a seamless backstage-front stage integration for leaders. The study nevertheless showcases the sequential information networks within the larger framework as proposed by Gardener and Avolio (1998). The importance of sticking to this model on a continuous basis to be true to the thematic consistency a leader should project and ideally live, cannot be emphasized any lesser as seen from the data analysed.
References