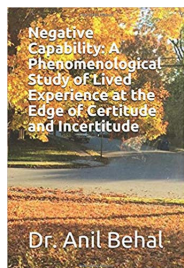


Negative Capability: A Phenomenological Study of Lived Experiences

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The author in this book, explores the lived experience of the leaders from different fields when they are in the state of “Negative Capability”. Introduction chapter begins with explaining the term ‘negative capability’. The term ‘negative capability’ was first used by the English poet, John Keats. It refers to introspection wherein a person is able to stay in a state of ambiguity, mystery, doubt and uncertainty without reaching for facts, logic and reason. The author points out those leaders often find themselves in difficult situations of uncertainty and ambiguity. The author comprehensively engages with the existence of this phenomenon called “negative capability” among leaders in different areas like academia, private practice and business organizations, to help gain an understanding of how leaders experience negative capability when there is conflict or uncertainty in their workplace. The authors explain very well with clearly the existence of this phenomena using case scenarios and schematic model of measuring leader’s competencies.

In the second Chapter, the author also tries to look at the existence of this phenomenon by doing review of various literature, drawing from many studies from the field of organizational psychodynamics,

dialogue, contemporary theorists linking with concept of servant leadership to literature from poetic works of Keats, 1817, Batchelor, 1990, 2000; Eigen, 1998), and dialogism and dialectics (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996. In third chapter on methodology the author interestingly describes the method used in exploring and understanding these experience of negative capability among the different leaders recruited from academia, private practice (self-employed practitioners), and business organizations, using and highlighting the significance of qualitative research method of inquiry known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) . Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was made use for understanding experiences of negative capability in fourteen leaders forming the sample for the study. Since this study was done in the USA, the author also describes certain selection criteria which were followed in the selection of participants for the study: Like the participants had to be US citizens, between 35 to 65 yrs of age, employed at the time of study or having a minimum of 5 years of work experience. Having familiarity with the phenomenon being studied and willing to share their experiences of it, among other things were also part of the criteria of selection. Interviews, later transcribed and analysed, were used for data collection.

The Chapter on Data analysis was done at two levels of interpretation: the hermeneutics of meaning-recollection (participants’ account of how they make sense of the phenomenon) and hermeneutics of suspicion (researcher makes sense of the phenomenon based on the participants’ account). InQ-Scribe software was used for transcription and analysis.

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The author also brings to fore that the researcher plays a rather intimate role in every aspect of an IPA study, as was done in the study undertaken by the author too. The process of bracketing was undertaken to avoid personal biases, notions and prior knowledge from interfering with objectively studying the phenomenon.

Analysis was done at another two levels: individual and group. Four steps were followed here: 1) identifying and listing recurrent themes, key phrases and metaphors; 2) clustering related ones to form group level themes; 3) identifying superordinate themes from group level themes; and 4) group narrative. The author has clearly explained about the use of levels of interpretation, using the expression “hermeneutics” to refer to the theory of interpretation, bracketing, assumptions and group analysis. Some of the group themes identified were: exercising servant leadership; intermingling personal and professional lives; and experiencing discomfort managing polarities (in which case, one of four actions are taken: problem solving, consulting others, shutting down and dispersing).

The chapter on finding and discussion, the results obtained in the study the author argues that leaders have diminished capacity to engage in negative capability in situations of uncertainty when faced with paradoxical dilemmas and adopt ways like problem solving, consulting others, shutting down, and dispersing as a means of defending against the uncertainty. Being leaders, they were action-oriented and took various steps to come out of conflicting and ambiguous situations. One deviant finding obtained was the association between negative capability and obsessive compulsive disorder. The author based on his research work, introduces the phenomenon of Negative capability and relates it with leadership in this book which is his doctoral thesis work.

This book is very rich in content; it also introduces the reader to the different methods of collecting data using qualitative research. The author describes in details the use of Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) and this surely offers a lot to the readers interested in IPA. This book also provides the readers with a very easy understanding of the use of bracketing, group analysis and narratives in a study. One also gets an idea of how to use “hermeneutics” as a form of collecting respondents and also the art of collecting information even from unwilling or a leader who is not able to express easily. In brief, a good reading especially for research schools, students, counsellors, behavioural scientist and of course for anyone interested in IPA!