Book Review : Leadership: The Key Concepts

The Reviewers

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This gallery of essays by 42 international authors responds to the ever-current need of a *vade mecum* of leadership. A guide of leadership to be used critically, this collection realistically portrays the multiplicity of perspectives on key issues in the field.

On the shelf of leadership scholars and students, this volume can serve as a readily informative resource. The book includes 53 summaries of as many concepts salient to leadership. In line with the editor's aims, the book contributes some synthesis to the broad field of leadership theory; at the same time, it portrays the field's intricate and fertile ground. A first deliberate choice by the editors was to avoid an a priori systematization of the concepts treated, on the basis that no objective criterion is available that can encompass such variety. Consistently, the editors have chosen to privilege ease of consultation and organize entries by alphabetical order. A second explicit choice was to grant ample latitude to individual authorial voice.

Single essays engage in articulating the current understanding of leadership concepts that are often of controversial definition. Essays also provide references to specialized bibliography and point out overlaps with other areas. The more value-adding entries know how to unveil breadth and historical derivation of key ongoing dialogues while proposing the author's original framing.

To experts engaged in dialogues of leadership, this book offers stimulating inputs. To doctoral students of leadership, as experienced by the reviewer, the book offers a navigational toolkit. Not all entries, however, are equally apt to both uses. By a scholarly audience, contributions might not be perceived as consistently thought provoking: several entries emphasize their function as guides of leadership and thus prioritize a review of the subject. To a student audience, entries might not offer uniform clarity and comprehensiveness. Across articles, issues are often framed with different lenses: as a guide, the book could perhaps prove more beneficial if individual philosophical and field choices were made explicit. Finally, through the book, a few themes recur at an eye-catching rate. These emerging patterns suggest that a deliberately coordinated treatment of concepts that do cluster together is possible and might be beneficial. For instance, followers and power are involved in the definition of leadership concepts in the great majority of the articles. As a second example, topics of change and transformation are discussed in over two thirds of the entries.

The book includes 18 main entries on core concepts of leadership and 36 shorter articles on peripheral or emerging concepts. Contributions, spanning from 1,000 to 1,500 words, are organized alphabetically. Cross-referencing to related concepts, available after each entry, is helpful if not impeccably consistent with the content of the related entry or with the terminology used in other parts of the book. The content of the 53 entries was identified by the reviewer to span across five main types of concepts:essence of leadership (for instance "leadership definition" and "philosophical approaches to leadership");theoretical

lenses (for instance "great man theory" or "contingency theory");specific leadership constructs (for instance "distributed leadership" and "transformational leadership");processes of leadership (for instance "delegation", "influence" and "impression management"); andother constructs interlinked with leadership (for instance "followers" and "organizational culture").In reviewing single articles, attention was given to three qualities deemed central given the aims of the book: the qualities of effective synopses, of original contributions and of sources of critical references.

Entries that communicate richly and neatly on all three these dimensions are exemplified by Rost's central piece on "Leadership Definition". In a survey of leadership definitions up to the twenty-first century, Rost illustrates a paradigm shift towards a "post-industrial" understanding of leadership. Such understanding attributes to leadership an essence that is collaborative and multidirectional (compare, in the volume, with Ladkin, Bolden and Axelrod), change oriented (compare with Price) and situational (compare with Barbour). Rost doesn't omit to acknowledge current controversies and competing views. Bolden's essay is also at once an effective synopsis, an original contribution and a source of critical references. Bolden provides the theoretical foundation and a comprehensive definition of the construct. He reasons over a generalized "call for a more collectively embedded notion of leadership" (p. 42) across the field; he also discusses the implications for leadership development.

Particularly effective as a synopsis is McNutt's piece on "Delegation": a well organized review of definitions, benefits, caveats and principles of delegation. Also Pfeifer and Jackson, in the entry on "Cross-cultural Leadership", provide a concise and effective historical framing, outlining both the merits and limitations of the constructs.

Notably original contributions are offered by Dunn's framing of "Power" and Ciulla's entry on "Ethics". Dunn starts by presenting a classic taxonomy of interpersonal power (French and Raven's, 1959); he then links interpersonal power to constructivist thoughts on leadership and discusses the role of symbolic mobilization of power in shaping follower's perceptions. Ciulla frames the discussion of "ethics" along three dimensions: the ethics of leaders themselves (who leads), the ethics of leading (how a person leads) and the ethics of the end values of leadership (why a person leads).

"Leadership development" by Allen provides a good coverage of critical references, especially given the span of the discussion and the variety of sources involved. He points out, among others, the increasingly central strand of literature that links leadership development to adult development.

The introductive comment by Marturano and Gosling, the editors, establishes the aims of the book and describes six specific trajectories along which the field of leadership has developed. The editors underscore the diffused effort to define leadership, the increasingly recognized contingent nature of leadership and the increasing distinction between description and prescription of leadership styles. They also highlight the concern in the field with the qualities of leaders, the inter-linkages with power and politics in organizations and the slippery connection between leadership and organizational performance.

Thinking of this book as a gallery, the theme might have been entropy and patterns in leadership theory. The proliferation of different topics and diverging views is purposely made very visible; at the same time, recurring patterns become evident in the issues that are called upon in defining different processes of leadership.

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