

***The Future of Leadership – An Explorative Study in Tomorrow’s Leadership Challenges.* By Daniela Eberhardt and Anna-Lena Majkovic (Eds.). Zurich, Switzerland: Springer, 2016. 66 pages. ISBN 978-3-319-31495-2.**

Eberhardt and Majkovic’s *The Future of Leadership – An Explorative Study in Tomorrow’s Leadership Challenges* (2016, Springer) attempts to investigate the current leadership climate during these globalized times and provide the reader with a better understanding of how emerging and sustaining trends in organisational management affect leaders. The book is based on first-hand accounts of leaders’ lived experiences and is written by corporate leadership experts for professionals whose main role is managing for-profit organizations.

Eberhardt, the current Director of Human Resources Management for the City of Zurich, and Majkovic, an academic at ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, seem an appropriate combination of experts to provide a brief description of current trends in leadership and study how organizational leaders deal with them. Both authors have histories in studying about and training for career development specific to organizational leaders and these themes radiate throughout the book.

The central focus of the book is to identify and analyze the reactions of leaders to five contemporary ‘megatrends’ – large, transformative global forces: Individualization, Transition to Flexibility, Demography: Aspects of Age and Gender, Rapid Social and Economic Changes, and Social Responsibility and Sustainability. These five megatrends are used as the conceptual framework of the study and lay the groundwork for interview questions posed to “20 leadership experts, senior consultants, outstanding leadership experts, [and] senior and top managers” (p. xi) who were all professionally based in the Silicon Valley/San Francisco Bay area. The authors then reflect on the responses from these participants and briefly discuss what current leaders may require to thrive in the future.

This very short book (54 pages excluding references, appendix, and content pages) is set up in three chapters with the addition of an introduction. The introduction outlines the purpose of the book and provides a very brief explanation of what each megatrend represents and why it is relevant to the leadership role. The first chapter defines these megatrends and how they might challenge and impact the future of leadership thereby setting up the importance of and motivation for the study. The authors explain why these specific megatrends were chosen to be a part of their study. While it cannot be argued that these five megatrends are not crucial to the field of human resource management, it is confusing why other factors were excluded. One such exclusion is any discussion about the effects of computer intelligence in the market of resource management, especially because this book is advertised as concerned for topics of the *future*. The exclusion of this trend is especially ironic considering that the Silicon Valley (and possibly even some of the experts interviewed in this study) is the global technological and economic leader in artificial intelligence.

The second chapter very briefly discusses the study methods. There is a considerable amount that is left for the reader to piece together and little is discussed in the book about the ‘how’ of the study. It seems necessary to justify the study context by describing San Francisco and the Silicon Valley as a place of innovation. A glaring concern is the lack of explanation as to why

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education, 2017, 12(2), pp. 53-55.

ISSN 1718-4770 © 2017 University of Alberta/Centre for Global Citizenship Education and Research
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

only particular participants were chosen to be included in the study. The authors chose only participants from the Silicon Valley and failed to mention why other experts in the field were left out. Including a broader context of participants such as organisational theorists or academics studying the social impacts of the megatrends in other areas of the world or country would help the authors reach a wider range of readers and help give more validity to the study.

The third chapter reports the responses by the participants in very useful tables and figures in a section on “condensed findings” (p. 24). This section provides the first-person accounts of how other leaders deal with trends in leadership in their specific professional lives. Readers coming from organizational leadership roles will learn from the experiences and perspectives of other leaders presented in this section and find both comfort and value in their individual responses. As a way to introduce the findings of the study, the authors asked the participants to describe current challenges they face in their roles as leaders. The findings suggest that creating a desired organizational culture is something leaders continually struggle with as “a growing mismatch between employees’ expectations and their workplace demands” causes leaders to move away from a “one size fits all approach to leadership” (p. 28). In order to not only co-exist with these changes but also to engage profitably with them, consultant and academic participants suggested that in combination with self-management skills, providing vision and direction for the organization by broadening their views of what leadership entails were important factors for leaders to consider. The authors found these topics emergent when considering the challenges expressed thus far: the ability to compromise or build trusting relationships bound with a certain amount of humility and vulnerability as flat hierarchies develop; to act more as a mentor and less as a boss; adopt a strategy of “try, error, and retry” (p. 32) as a reaction to the complexity of the leadership role in an age of ‘big data’; management of age-related resources of the “knowledge advantage[d]” (p. 35) young employees and encourage cross-generational teams; the acknowledgement of socially inclusive initiatives “aimed at a gender-balanced workforce” (p. 36) including the promotion of more females to leadership roles; the need for leaders to “maximize the benefits of diversity” by embracing “greater cultural diversity in the workforce” (p. 39) and intercultural sensitivity; flexible leadership styles in accordance with rapid economic, national, and political changes and; finding a balance between social responsibility, sustainability, and profit.

These findings offer significant concepts for current and future leaders to consider. The implications of these findings are important to readers who find these leadership challenges similar to their own. Of course, considering the limited context of the study, not all findings will be of utility to all leaders across the globe, especially those who do not share economic and socio-political influences that exist in the West. Aspects of the findings may not resemble what leaders in similar organizational leadership roles experience in areas such as India, Egypt, or Japan where all together different challenges exist and in that regard, these findings may not be as far-reaching as the authors may have hoped.

Finally, the authors briefly reflect and conclude on the findings in the third chapter of the book. As a result of the study, the authors conclude that “the most important and exciting leadership task of the future will be to connect different people with diverse skills, expectations, resources, motivations, national origins, talents, sexes and ages together!” and “the most important

challenge for the development as a leader will be resilience” (p. 46). These two conclusions and the restatement of the purpose encapsulate the entirety of the book concisely.

Many of the findings and conclusions seem poised to speak directly to managers of people in organizations and not necessarily to leaders of organizations. The distinction is important. The authors have assumed leadership as being synonymous with management and have overlooked scholarly work such as Bennis (1989), Heifetz (1994), and Wheatley (1992). These three authors have written on distinguishing the leader and the manager roles, portraying the leader as mastering the context and the manager as surrendering to it; a suitable point to be made in a book about leadership in current complex times and those to undoubtedly come.

This book lends itself to being enjoyed by administrators, managers, or human resource professionals in the corporate sector as economics and market-based topics are presented throughout. The brevity of the book should not understate its potential value as significant concepts that are important to consider for current and future leaders are portrayed in short form. This book will inspire individuals studying leadership to look into a topic that deserves more depth and breadth of discussion with more careful and thorough concern.

References

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