

BOOK REVIEW

THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

John Antonakis, Anna T. Cianciolo, Robert J. Sternberg (eds.). (2004). *The Nature of Leadership*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. 438 pages.

Advances in both the understanding and the practice of leadership ask fundamental questions worthy of examination:

1. What is leadership?
2. How is successful leadership defined?
3. Can leadership be measured? If so, through what means?
4. With over one hundred years of research, can various “schools” of leadership be identified?
5. In this turbo-changing contemporary world, what emerging issues that will require greater attention than leadership?

The preceding questions comprise the focus of *The Nature of Leadership*. After assessing current leadership literature, editors John Antonakis, Anna T. Cianciolo, and Robert J. Sternberg identified the four most important areas of leadership research and used them as the framework for the book. An introduction that provides the history of recent leadership research and a conclusion by research veteran Warren Bennis bracket the chapters.

The editors’ purpose, “to present high-impact and comprehensively researched perspectives of leadership to separate the wheat from the chaff and science from myth” (p. xx), serves as the central objective of the book. Their fulfillment of that purpose allows me to identify significant factors relevant to church leadership and research while providing a brief overview of the four divisions of the book.

Part 1 introduces the content and structure of the book. The editors frame the four divisions within the historical stream of leadership research. Beginning with the turn of the twentieth century, they categorize leadership research into eight different schools of thought and describe how these schools have developed and interacted throughout time. The schools include better-known trait, behavior, and transformational theories as well as lesser-known information-processing and relational theories of leadership. The Introduction serves as a synopsis of the subsequent chapters of the book.

In Part II, the authors examine the challenges and complexities of measuring and assessing leadership. Leadership is embedded within a web of dynamic complexity (chapter 2) composed of a variety of factors, such as

the nature of reality, stakeholder perceptions, and levels-of-analysis issues. Direction in the practice and the study of leadership may be derived from how one conceptualizes leadership. Such conceptualization ultimately influences research methodology (chapter 3). Because the variety of conceptualizations contributes to confusion within the leadership field, knowledge of leadership must be based upon solid research that uses a number of methods. Such methods, in turn, provide the basis for the wide variety of instrumentation now available both to scholars and to practitioners (chapter 4). These instruments derive from theoretical underpinnings that guide what is assessed and how it is assessed. To conclude this section, the authors provide a select, detailed summary of the most frequently used assessment tools, as well as their accompanying modes of measurement.

Part III contains summaries of four major schools within the research community. *Trait theory* (chapter 5) identifies the stable and consistent patterns of behavior that make a leader a leader. The authors summarize six traits that have received wide empirical support over the past decade: cognitive capacities, personality, motives and needs, social capacities, problem-solving skills, and tacit knowledge. Rooted in social and cognitive psychology, the burgeoning field of information-processing identifies how perceptions and ways of constructing reality influence leadership (Chapter 6). Specifically, this information-processing identifies how leaders and followers share a dynamic relationship in which perceptions and implicit theories of leadership are generated through interaction. These implicit theories guide in leading and following. This relatively new school-of-thought maintains a dual focus as a means of understanding how reality is created and how decisions are made.

Situational and *contingency theories* of leadership (chapter 7), which are perhaps more widely known than the others are, attempt to define leadership by the demands of the situation. Leadership success is defined by whether or not the leader can adapt a particular style to a particular circumstance. The relationship between leader characteristics and leader outcomes depend greatly on the situation. Finally, *transformational, or charismatic, leadership theory* (chapter 8) seeks to integrate information-processing, situational, and contingency theories of leadership into a cohesive theory addressing the organizational contexts of leadership. Transformational leadership, in which relationships are based upon the organizational change, is distinguished from *transactional leadership*, in which relationships are based upon exchange of behaviors).

Part IV consists of a discussion of two questions: defining successful leadership and, based on that definition, developing successful leadership. More often than not, researchers ask, “What are the _____ of successful leaders?” (chapter 9)— a question that can penetrate the more formal roles

of leadership in order to discover the less formal roles. A number of constructs can be identified among the wide range of studies to fill the blank. Such constructs include characteristics, skills, behaviors, thoughts, actions, and competencies. The author provides descriptors of success as defined within each theory. When successful leadership has been defined, the natural progression is for those identifiers to be reproduced. How an organization develops its leaders becomes the focus of chapter 10. Central to this development is the congruence between personal and organizational goals. The authors examine the needs, processes, and outcomes that contribute to the continuity of leadership within an organization. Then, using the results of a variety of studies on the topic, they outline guidelines for practitioners, consultants, and researchers.

Emerging from this host of research, Part V forecasts the leadership questions emerging from the ever-evolving world of organizations. Beginning with the issue of increasing globalization (chapter 11), the question of the triadic relationship between national culture, organizational culture, and leadership is examined. Drawing from cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, the authors focus their attention on the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (see Wolfe's review). This triadic relationship demonstrates that the question of leadership incorporates general components (those that transcend culture) as well as distinct components (those specific to a given culture). One general issue—that of gender (chapter 12)—is examined within the context of how gender-based social expectations may inhibit leadership behaviors. The confining role of cultural stereotypes serves as the central theme of this chapter. For example, such characteristics as negotiation and team-building traditionally have been considered to be feminine characteristics. Increasingly, however, these characteristics are identified as desirable leadership traits for everyone. And, ironically, women who exhibit such characteristics as confidence and task-orientation, which traditionally have been considered male characteristics, find themselves less than well-received. Oblique to both of the emerging issues of culture and gender is that of ethics (chapter 13). Written from a philosophical foundation, the author examines leadership in light of philosophical and ethical considerations. What if, for instance, unethical means are employed to accomplish ethical ends? What about the reverse? How does motivation, behavior, and the leader/follower relationship reflect ethical norms? What are those norms? Four dimensions are considered under the rubric of what a leader does and how it is done.

Part V (chapter 14), written by veteran researcher, thought-leader, and author Warren Bennis, examines the “crucibles” of leadership and discusses what kind of leaders are needed in a post-9/11 globalizing world. His essay

challenges leaders to understand our current world as itself a crucible from which better leadership can emerge. According to Bennis, such leadership requires the highest involvement of the adaptive capacities of individuals who are leading in order to navigate through an increasingly hostile yet opportunity-rich world. Leaders are required to move rapidly, without having all the facts and without certainty. Contextual demands invite leaders to engage the imagination and creativity of the people whom they lead. Bennis also suggests two areas where more research is needed: (1) the relationship between globalization and leadership, specifically the forces of tribalism reappearing throughout the world, and (2) the relationship between leadership and the media. Regarding the second issue, greater scrutiny must be given to “how the competitive pressures of the media affect the reputations and the behavior of public officials” (p. 341). Governmental response to Hurricane Katrina substantiates the question.

For readers who are interested in the question of ecclesiastical leadership, from either the standpoint of the practitioner or the researcher, *The Nature of Leadership* makes four contributions to improving the practice and knowledge-base of leadership. The first two points are somewhat general in nature; the second two, more specific.

First, if Christian leadership is to advance, serious research and study within the confines of different Christian environments must be done. Educational, medical, missional, and denominational of Christianity, for example, must be examined. *The Nature of Leadership* makes it apparent that although leadership-oriented research has occurred relatively recently, it has been strong. This work, which contains more than twelve hundred references, attests to the amount of the research being conducted within the non-Christian world. Such research is largely absent within ecclesiastical structures. If those of us who profess Christ are committed to leading within ecclesiastical environments, it is vital that we begin to investigate the contribution that the Christian community makes toward the understanding and practice of leadership.

Second, it may be argued that perhaps our greatest contribution not only is the philosophy of servant-leadership but also is the practice of it. As is demonstrated in Flaniken’s article, the Christian influence of Robert Greenleaf cannot be extricated from his understanding of servant-leadership. Biblical images support his philosophy and likely guided him as he engaged the questions of leadership within the marketplace (see Frick, chapter 4). Although the work of the Greenleaf Institute seeks to advance both the practice and study of servant-leadership, it also can be useful for a wider study of how servant-leadership can become increasingly effective within ecclesiastical models. The launching of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* demonstrates a bold attempt to further servant-leader-

ship in the wider community. But how can we study and advance servant-leadership within the context of a professedly Christian environment? *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* is an important step in this endeavor.

Beyond the general contributions that Antonakis et al. make toward leadership, two specific elements are applicable within global ecclesiastical communities. At the core of leadership stands the relationship between leader and follower. Within the context of leading in Christian environments, we must address the issue of how the socialization processes within professedly Christian environments influence the development of leadership prototypes. Chapter 6 helps to answer this question by examining the structure, content, and activation of what are known as *implicit leadership theories*, or ILTs. ILTs are constantly-changing imaginative prototypes that leaders and followers carry with them throughout life. ILTs begin early in a person's life, and they are influenced throughout his or her lifetime. How, though, are the structure, content, and activation of these ILTs shaped by Christian environments? And do these prototypes operate manifest themselves differently Christian and non-Christian settings? Adapted to the Christian context, the question can be asked: How does a person determine whether another person within a Christian community is indeed a leader? Within ecclesiastical communities, even the tendency to define leaders in primarily hierarchical terms begs the question of whether or not socio-historical forces exert more influence than we are sometimes comfortable in admitting. We often do we identify leadership within a positional framework. How does our particular Christian cultural context influence an ILT that identifies leadership as positional? What personal forces contribute to this process of attribution?

The focus of chapter 6 is the activity of the cognitive processes within the individual, of how an individual acquires, stores, retrieves, and uses information to function and adapt to a current context. Examining the cognitive mechanisms that Christians employ in mediating the dyadic relationship of leader and follower goes beyond the normal behavioral displays or definitions of leadership. The chapter outlines three elements within this cognitive process: (1) the structure utilized for storing information, (2) the content of that information, and (3) the catalyst activates that information. The question shifts not only to how these three elements may be particularly influenced by a Christian context but also to how the process of they contribute to the identification of "leader" within the Christian context. This schema assists us as people in interpreting and making sense of our surroundings. It guides perceptions, expectations, and activities within the ecclesiastical structure. But it also raises the question, How does the content and structure of a participant's knowledge configuration within in an

ecclesiastical structure affect leadership processes? The framing of such a quest serves as a primary contribution from this work to both the practice and understanding of leadership within ecclesiastical contexts.

Beyond the immediate Christian environment extends the question of the regional and national culture in the formation of an ILT. The increase of multiculturalism within the West, the nano-connectivity of an emerging global village, and the heightened post-911 anxiety all intensify the gravity of the culture question. This is why the editors identify culture as one of the emerging issues of leadership. The global church is not exempt from this issue. In his acclaimed book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Professor Philip Jenkins of Pennsylvania State University (quoting the *World Christian Encyclopedia*) forecasts the membership configuration of Christianity by 2025. He suggests that the number of Christians in Europe will fall significantly behind the numbers in both Latin America and Africa. If what Jenkins writes is correct, the question of culture can no longer be ignored. The influences of culture upon the creation of leadership prototypes as a continuous research process will become substantially vital to leading across cultures. Necessity may dictate that research shift from a primarily Euro-American-centered organism to a hetero-centered examination. This shift will require the participation of anthropologists, especially those in the area of cultural, or social, anthropology (Lavenda & Schultz, 2000). An ethnography on leadership within a specific group of people may become required reading for those interested in leading across cultures. This will no doubt invite missiologists from a variety of faiths to turn their attention to the question of leadership prototypes and culture, especially the question of how various non-Christian faiths influence leadership prototypes.

Possible implications for gender and leadership, ethics and leadership, and other issues will be better understood when the issue of culture is appropriated to such studies. The editors conclude their section of emerging issues by addressing the issue of gender. These issues of culture, leadership prototype, and even the theological question of female-inclusion converge within the ecclesiastical framework of organizational culture. Therefore, this question of national culture becomes crucial for the future of religious organizations seeking to grow across national and sub-national boundaries. This work can make a great contribution to that end when applied. While the work will benefit primarily professors, students, and scholars, practitioners will find many of the tables helpful for application within their specific context.

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