Book Review

The Myriad of Leadership Theories and Practices Reviewed

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In the book, Leadership: Theory and practice, Northouse introduced different perspectives on leadership, taken by numerous authors and their research enabling the reader to have a glimpse of the broadness of leadership studies. From the start, the author clarified that, even though there have been many attempts to theorize about leadership, there seems to be no consensus regarding its definitions. For that reason, in every chapter, he straightforwardly described leadership theories, favoring the readability and understanding of each perspective presented. He outlined the background for the development of each approach, citing prominent research and studies that contributed to the theories on leadership.

At the end of every chapter, Northouse presented the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, allowing the reader to ponder on successful cases that support the development of the theory and on their limitations. The strengths and criticisms presented stem from evidence based on leadership practices. Case studies were also presented to exemplify how leadership approaches are applied in actual organizational settings, illustrating theory in practice. Besides, the readers can assess their leadership skills through instruments based on what each chapter described.

The introductory chapter explained the central elements of leadership describing that it is often a process that involves influence and occurs in groups that pursue a common goal. He distinguished basic concepts, such as leadership as a trait from leadership as a process. While the first considered that only a selected group of individuals is born with the desired qualities to become a leader, the latter envisioned leadership as a phenomenon, a process that can be progressively learned by anyone. Northouse differentiated between assigned and emergent leadership, while the former refers to the leadership based on formal positions in an organization; the latter relates to a person's influence over a group, despite hierarchical status. Also, the author clarified that leadership and management are not synonyms; one complements the other for the benefit of the organization.

In chapter two, the author outlined the traits approach over time listing the characteristics that one should possess, cultivate, or develop to be perceived by others as a leader, such as determination, intelligence, self-confidence, and sociability. Northouse mentioned a recent trend in emphasizing leadership as a trait due to the emergence of the concept of charismatic leadership during President Obama's candidacy.

Chapter three, about the skills approach, emphasized the belief that leadership abilities can be learned. Its model sprung from research sponsored by the U.S. Army and the Department of Defense which aimed to explain the key elements of effective leadership performance in an organization. Results revealed that leadership could be developed over time through educational, career, and life experiences.

In the following chapter, Northouse explained that the behavioral approach was centered on the leaders' behavior to help their subordinates achieve the organization's goals. Its most significant and widely used model was Blake and Mouton's (as cited in Northouse, 2016) who stated that the "secret" to master leadership would be to find balance through circumstances where the leader should be more task-oriented or more relationship-oriented.

The situational approach, outlined in chapter five, is based on the premise that leadership styles are contingent to different situations. That is, it focused on the leader's ability to adapt to the circumstances. Its practical and prescriptive nature made it a reliable model for training programs, serving as guidelines easily applied in a variety of organizational settings.

In chapter six, Northouse discussed the path-goal theory, based on how leaders can motivate their subordinates to attain organizational goals. It stressed the importance of the leader's style, the followers' characteristics, and their work setting. Also, it discussed which leadership style leaders must choose to meet their subordinates' needs to perform a task.

The following chapter was about the leader-member exchange theory, centered on the leaders-followers' interactions to promote organizational effectiveness. It demonstrated that high-quality relationships result in better performances, more promotions, increased commitment, fewer turnover, improved attitudes towards work, and faster overall career progress.

Next, the transformational theory was defined as a process that requires people's transformation through leadership to accomplish organizational goals. Northouse also brought light to the concept of pseudo-transformational leadership in which leaders are concerned with their interests being "self-consumed, exploitive, and power oriented, with warped moral values" (as cited in Northouse, 2016, p. 163), instead of focusing on the greater collective good. Despite not having an explicit measurement model and not being able to prove how the leader can transform individuals and organizations, it provided a comprehensive perspective of leadership, valuing the subordinates' needs, values, and morals.

Chapter nine presented an approach that had not been fully developed as a theory when the previous edition was published. The authentic leadership approach resulted from an attempt to identify genuine leadership. It arose in times of uncertainty due to the 9/11 attacks, corporate scandals, problems involving the banking industry, and other events that had society demand for a more precise and "real" leadership. It is characterized by a search for trustworthiness, transparency, moral groundedness, and responsiveness to people's and society's needs and values.

In chapter 10, Northouse discussed an intriguing theory due to its name: the servant leadership describes a leader that puts his or her followers first, empowering them to reach their potential to work for the "greater good of the organization, community, and society at large" (p. 226). Servant leaders' behaviors are vital because they carry a social responsibility to abate inequalities and social injustices. However, followers must be open to this type of leadership, so that they can benefit from it by growing as professionals and individuals.

Following, Northouse presented the adaptive approach based on Heifetz's studies (as cited in Northouse, 2016) which focuses on how leaders influence their followers in different contexts, encouraging them to effect change not only in themselves, but also in the community they live and work, in the organization, and on society. It understands that the leader is not "a savior who solves problems for people, …[but] one who plays the role of mobilizing people to tackle tough problems" (pp. 257-258). Therefore, it is a follower centered approach that focuses on leaders' behavior to encourage followers to confront problems to achieve their goals.

Chapter 12, about the psychodynamic approach, has been modified since the sixth edition when Northouse had not presented a single model or unified theory; instead, he explained that its starting point was Freud's psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1926/1980) which was the foundation for scholars identifying personality types required for specific leadership positions or situations. He explained that personality was deeply rooted in family backgrounds and prior experiences that are unconsciously repeated in every situation, impacting in the way people act and behave. Thus, Northouse emphasized that families represent people's first experience with leadership in the relationship with their caregivers which explained why the family model is reproduced when a leader is paternalistic, and when the organization is described as "one big happy family" (Northouse, 2007, p. 320). However, the present edition, written by Kets de Vries and Cheak, added a thorough explanation of the psychodynamic theory, its history, and clinical roots. The authors explained key concepts applied to leadership situations mostly related to the relationship between leaders and followers. For instance, they described the influence of social defense mechanisms related to anxiety management, and exemplified mirroring, idealizing, and shared madness situations in which the leader-follower relationship can become collusive bringing self-destruction to members and the organization.

The 13-chapter discussed ethical issues associated with leadership. It featured the Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLIS), based on utilitarian ethical theory (Craig & Gustafson, 1998), with the objective to "evaluate leaders' ethics by measuring the degree to which coworkers see them as acting in accordance with rules that would produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people" (Northouse, 2016, p. 355). The scale showed that integrity was positively related to transformational leadership, the leader and the organizational effectiveness. It has proven useful to identify the need for an ethics intervention in the organization (Craig & Gustafson, 1998).

The highlight of chapter 13 was Northouse's description of the dark side of leadership, comprised of unethical, destructive, and toxic leader behavior that brings up the worst in his/her followers, inciting actions that violate human rights, and plays with people's feelings (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Therefore, "lack of integrity, insatiable ambition, arrogance, and reckless disregard for their actions" (Northouse, 2016, p. 339) describe destructive leaders who usually walk side-by-side with conformers and colluders followers. While conformers go along because they lack self-esteem and maturity to discern for themselves, colluders respond to the destructive leader's actions out of ambition, opportunity to profit, and desire for status.

Chapter 14 presented the team leadership studies that emerged in the 1960s when scholars concluded that a change of mindset and in the organizational culture was necessary to integrate developing teams and leadership effectiveness as critical aspects to organizational development. In the 1990s, more sophisticated approaches were developed including leader-team interactions. Northouse explained the importance of building relationships in virtual teams to take advantage of the advancements in technology and communications. In this case, leaders must be sensitive to act upon slight changes, signals, or influence of electronic communications among members to grasp possible misunderstandings.

In chapter 15, leadership was analyzed through the lenses of gender by Hoyt and Simon. Before the 1970s this topic had been ignored by male researchers who were not interested in examining the differences and similarities between women and men leadership styles. The authors called attention to an invisible barrier that still prevents women from climbing the organizational ladder, despite their advancements in leadership. The reason lies in the widespread discrimination asserted by gender stereotypes such as "women take care and men take charge" (p. 404). Furthermore, women's potential to become leaders is hindered because they respond to gender-biased leadership stereotype by either

271

reinforcing it acting vulnerable or by counteracting the expected stereotypical behavior. Nonetheless, the number of women becoming successful leaders is rising mostly due to changes in organizations' structures and a more inclusive mindset, favoring women and diversity to reach top hierarchical positions.

Finally, in chapter 16, Northouse discussed the influence of culture on leadership studies. Indeed, globalization has brought profound changes in organizational design as interdependence among nations grew larger, sparking interest to understand the influence of culture on leadership performance. To that end, The GLOBE studies examined leadership in people from different cultural backgrounds, and the impact of cross-cultural interactions on leadership effectiveness. The results identified nine dimensions and ten clusters determined by similarities regarding geography, historical aspects, language, and religion. Consequently, six global leadership behaviors were identified and endorsed by 62 countries that were determined to identify obstacles to effective leadership.

On the one hand, the newest seventh edition published almost ten years after the previous one, did not mention an approach to leadership that should be key considering the challenges of the postmodern world: the sustainability leadership. Although often related to environmental issues, sustainability applied to organizations is understood as a necessary change of "ways of being and working collaboratively to create regenerative, interconnected, just, and thriving systems and communities" (Burns, 2016, p. 1). Thus, sustainability leadership is the result of understanding that people and organizations must be held accountable for the ecological and social impacts that they produce (Ferdig, 2007). As Elkington (1998) suggested, sustainability requires the balance of economic prosperity (profit), environmental quality (planet), and social justice (people). Furthermore, the concept of sustainability leadership conceives that the context in which leadership takes place is highly uncertain, adaptive, nonlinear, unpredictable, and interconnected through networks. As a result, a collaborative model became necessary to address the complex challenges of postmodernity. In fact, it is desired that leaders see the world from a systems perspective, ensuring a collaborative, empowering, and inclusive leadership, instead of the individualistic approaches proposed by the traditional studies on leadership (Burns, 2016; Ferdig, 2007). In valuing sustainability leadership in organizations, people transcend their individualistic needs and actions, praise a network of communication and relationships, understand, and are committed to change at every level, do not focus solely on immediate results but also in long-lasting outcomes, and work in collaboration to ensure the system quality (Burns, 2016; Ferdig, 2007; Fullan, 2005). In other words, the sustainability approach rose as a response to the devastating social and ecological trends to address climate change, pollution, and social inequities (Burns, 2016).

Comparing the book's current edition to the previous one, Northouse added essential features. Not only did he increase the debate about the dark side of leadership in chapter 13, but he also expanded the discussion about authentic leadership including recent research and a chapter about the adaptive leadership. Despite the existent approaches, the book provided an excellent overview and compelling insights into leadership, besides the description of the influence of gender and culture on leadership. Notably, Northousepaid tribute to various authors and their research, highlighted the most relevant and recent approaches to leadership, and helped readers from various fields of expertise understand the limitless possibilities as to what leadership can be. Ultimately, the different approaches presented proved how leadership is dynamic and evolving, developed to address diverse organizational challenges, particularly the relationships among its members to achieve goals and prosper.

272

To conclude, the book is a fundamental reading to students and professionals from different fields who wish to learn and deepen their knowledge about leadership. It provides a good overview of leadership, a subject that will stimulate interest in multiple fields of practice and study.

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