Leadership

Book Review

KG Schuyler, JE Baugher and K Jironet (eds.) *Creative social change: Leadership for a healthy world*, Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2016; 360. ISBN 9781786351463

Abstract

In the book entitled "Creative social change: Leadership for a healthy world" which was published before the novel Coronavirus pandemic, there could be lessons that organizations have neglected. Its main argument implies that health together with effectiveness could help leadership sustain their organizations for a healthy world. Correspondingly, this actionable book review aims to provide implications that could help organizations become or stay healthy during the pandemic. A critical analysis of the book's contents reveals that it could be reasonable to start with gender equality for women before everything else in order to have healthy organizations during the pandemic. Health could improve through gender equality, trust-based partnerships, adaptation to environment, and involving in organizational (and entrepreneurial) activities. This contribution is intriguing for three reasons. Firstly, it provides actionable recommendations during increased uncertainty. Secondly, it prioritizes a sustainable development goal. Thirdly, it is an attempt to strengthen the sustainable development goals that are under challenges. Therefore, the link among health, leadership, sustainability, and organization in the book and the above road map in the book review could be inspiring.

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Introduction

The argument

"Creative social change: Leadership for a healthy world" integrates perspectives on health, leadership, and sustainability at the organization. It criticizes the disappearance of health from the goal of organization development. It argues that health could reclaim its equal position with effectiveness to transform leadership and help leadership sustain organizations. The book communicates that although there are unhealthy aspects of organizations and communities, there could be something that willing persons could do to mitigate this problem; however, solutions are likely to depend on their intrinsic motivations.

Timeliness

In 2016—before the novel Coronavirus pandemic—Emerald Publishing published this book that highlighted organizational health. The editors of the book were also inviting readers "to continue the conversations and start new ones" (Chapter 14). Currently, the pandemic as a public and organizational health crisis questions if organizations are healthy. Therefore, this book could have had implications for organizations during current challenges in organizational health. It could be timely to reconsider the main message of the book.

The contribution of the book review

This book review highlights ways organizations might become or stay healthy. It discusses the implications of the book's contents against "the novel Coronavirus pandemic." It extracts five phases from this pre-pandemic book which the book did not communicate as a specific road map for improving organizational health. Therefore, the contribution of the book review is different from the contribution of the book.

Structure

Interviews with authors of classic texts (Peter Senge, Robert E. Quinn, Ed Schein, Otto Scharmer, and Margaret Wheatley) provide the conceptual foundations due to their major contributions to leadership, management, organizational culture, and systems thinking (Chapter 2). They freely discuss what makes an organization healthy, the role of leadership, supporting and opposing forces, making the world a healthy place, educational and developmental requirements, their contributions, and recommendations. The second part of the book examines the impact of leadership on health. The final part contains international case studies which exemplify ways to improve health. Correspondingly, this book review includes: (1) a critical analysis of the book's contents, (2) highlights from the book with respect to implementation, (3) implications of these contents and a road map to help organizations navigate "the novel Coronavirus pandemic."

Critical analysis

Integrating health, leadership, and sustainability at the organization

The book does not employ the widespread medical understanding of health. It considers "the broadened concept of health" with organizational, societal, and planetary dimensions. In this book, health is a continuum and the book examines how this continuum functions during challenges against sustainability. "A rich quality of human life" is the main measure. When such quality sustains through generations, health is present. The book suggests that if organizations support such effort, their contribution could be "organizational health."

Correspondingly, Peter Senge highlights a leadership definition: "leadership is the capacity of a human community to shape its future" (Chapter 2, p. 67). Therefore, the capacity notion is a key to comprehending the book. This definition applies a strategic approach to leadership. It reveals a current position, an imagined position or future, and an effort to get there. It highlights neither leaders nor followers but relationships. However, some concerns against this approach could be: the basis (e.g., interests, etc.) to shape the future; multiplicity of communities and conflicting futures; and gaps between available resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, etc.) and the imagined future.

A main goal in the book is sustainability. The book considers sustainability as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The interviews reveal a path towards sustainability (Chapter 2). Leadership drives these organizations towards sustainability. Since these organizations are living systems, how organizations, communities, and persons work for that future with their stakeholders in ecosystems should be healthy.

Limitations

Some sections of the book include personal political leanings, questionable assumptions, and negativity against marketing. Readers might not take these perspectives for granted or memorize these perspectives as generalizations. Therefore, this book is not a pure scientific text. However, its weaknesses do not overshadow its main message. Before the road map, this book review continues with highlights from the book's contents and particular cases which could inspire organizations in their current challenging environments without overestimating or underestimating these limitations.

Highlights

The selection of key topics to meet the above conceptual foundations of "organizational and societal health" in order to facilitate sustainability starts with Chapter 3 which recommends to move systems from dominance to partnership in this post-industrial era. This is not a pure dichotomy. There could be multiple positions away from dominance. These systems start with a solution to gender issues by empowering women and without stereotyping genders. Chapter 4 highlights "the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development" against the ecological crisis in order to switch from unsustainability to sustainability. Chapter 5 considers development and implementation of, for example, health and healthy practices within the largest scale and suggests members of the United Nations share common concepts and act accordingly. Chapter 6 states that indicators of such societal and environmental health could provide orientation, direction, and navigation. They highlight leadership instead of management or command to help address adaptive, critical, or wicked problems that challenge "a" greater good as non-financial capitals help measure how health

progresses towards sustainability. Chapter 7 is the final chapter in this part and it states that partnering for the sustainable development goals would require healthy relationships.

The cases about implementing these ideas start with Chapter 8. There is a case about "sustainable community development" that aimed to protect environmental health in Mexico. This perspective highlights learning and being open. As persons learn, they accept uncertainty, function within uncertainty and evaluate themselves in an "evolving system." In doing so, these persons do not act like authority figures. This is because they consider (these) roles as challenges against healthy communities. Instead, they consider themselves as change agents that change themselves and that lead a community in order to reveal relationships, ideas, possibilities, and solutions. This is an application of "deep democracy" which depends on "interdependence and shared future" with its theoretical bases in the theory of adaptive systems and evolutionary systems thinking. For example, the actions of a person affect the health of others during uncertainty. Correspondingly, a healthy person should improve relationships with unfamiliar persons to stay healthy.

Chapter 9 is a qualitative case study in Ecuador which exemplifies how indigenous women could lead by wisdom at grassroots organizations "in unstable conditions." While contributing to sustainability, they aim for "good living" and "agree with" environment, social responsibility, and well-being. Their inspirations include local culture, "societal health," and their understanding of what "good living" is. Although they highlight their local conceptions, they also adapt to foreign cultures.

Chapter 10 is a case study which states that observational data in New Zealand imply that behaviors of some leaders are inconsistent with how they describe themselves. There were inconsistencies between what is said and what is done in unhealthy organizational cultures. Chapter 11 is a case about a music festival that aimed for healthy communities and a healthy society through art programs and education.

Chapter 12 aimed for developing large-scale leadership in entire communities or throughout a country. This case highlights that ordinary people could be more powerful than authority figures in this century of technological advancements that influence social structures. They consider that "adaptive leadership" has become more suitable to develop such leadership capacity. In these cases about education in the U.S.A. and Bangladesh, these persons or organizations identify needs and problems in their communities. They personally develop leadership capacities, establish entrepreneurial organizations, and generate and implement solutions.

Chapter 13 is a case study where women and the Rwandan society aimed for a society of healthy persons. This case showcases how women advanced, after extreme difficulties in 1994. They healed themselves by connecting with their emotions for the past and by channeling this connection to achieve something positive. They acted in memory of the past or in favor of the future. So, personal healing and activities to achieve something coexist. These activities include educating women and sustaining the family conception. They also engage with music. Mainly, these wise women leaders employed "adaptive leadership." As women grew as persons, women leadership took off. This case study implies what could be the most meaningful take-away from this book: addressing problems and requests of women is a priority. Overall, these highlights could offer implications for organizations (and persons when viable) during the pandemic.

Implications and a road map

This section introduces the implications of the above contents in the form of a road map to help organizations navigate "the novel Coronavirus pandemic." The above conceptual foundations, key topics, and cases imply that if the largest scale for "organizational and societal health" that aims sustainability is the world, the United Nations is a main organization. What intersects the book,

sustainability, the United Nations, and the pandemic are the sustainable development goals (SDGs) which the United Nations sets. The overviews of all sustainable development goals either directly mention the negative effects of the pandemic on these goals or state that these unmet goals are crucial during the pandemic, except for the 7th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th goals (United Nations, 2021). "Years, or even decades, of progress have been halted or reversed," (United Nations, 2021).

Therefore, a starting point for a road map could be to secure congruity between common concepts and activities of the members of the United Nations (Chapter 5). Inconsistencies between communication and action in unhealthy organizational cultures (Chapter 10) challenge trust. Trust (Chapter 4) among partners could secure relationships within a trust-based partnership system. Developing healthy relationships is a requirement while partnering to address the sustainable development goals (Chapter 7). So, partnership among the members of the United Nations is crucial. In order to develop partnerships, Chapter 3 suggests us resolve the problems that women face, firstly. Prioritizing gender equity is more reasonable than rationalizing the political leanings in this chapter. In doing so, role-free democratic structures (Chapter 8) could be beneficial. Role-free perspectives and gender equity could ease solutions to seemingly unrelated problems. Therefore, "gender equality" (SDG 5) might come before to strengthen "partnerships for the goals" (SDG 17). So, the first two phases of a road map could be: (1) Do not neglect any potential contribution, (2) Do not emphasize roles but trust-based partnership.

What could develop after these two phases include powerful ordinary people (Chapter 12), wise women leaders that face "unstable conditions" (Chapter 9), and wise women leaders that overcome extreme challenges (Chapter 13). These persons and their organizations employ "adaptive leadership" and take responsibility to overcome challenges in organizational and personal lives. Additionally, arts are instrumental to have healthy communities and societies (Chapter 11). Overall, the responsibility to think about the problems of the world has been crossing over to "non-leaders" that are not dependent on leaders. Therefore, the later phases of a road map could be: (3) Adapt to your environment and motivate others to do so, (4) Engage in organizational or entrepreneurial activities without waiting for others to solve problems, (5) Recognize how health improves through these phases. To ask "Where are we?", "Where should we go?", and "How do we get there?" (Chapter 6) could provide guidance.

Recalling the main argument of this pre-pandemic book during the pandemic implies that some organizations might not have sufficiently addressed these questions: (1) Could an organization contribute to sustainability without organizational health and with only organizational effectiveness? (2) If not, why has not organizational health regained its equal position with organizational effectiveness? (3) How could an organization support sustainability through organizational health? Correspondingly, this road map offers phases that not only organizations but also persons could implement.

Is this road map new or critical?

There was a need for "self-critique and re-evaluation" in leadership to make the best of problematic occasions (Mabey and Morrell, 2011). Since increasing uncertainty during the pandemic challenges leadership theories, practices, and decision-making, there is also a need for: actionable recommendations, critical perspectives, debates, and big questions without clear answers (Tourish, 2020). Another gap was "the lack of prioritization for sustainable development goals 5, 8–17" (Van Norren, 2020). Thirdly, as the pandemic challenges most of these goals (United Nations, 2021), gender inequality has endured (World Health Organization, 2021). This road map prioritizes "gender equality" before other goals. Until "gender equality" is secured, prioritizing and communicating it

could count as a new topic to fill a persistent gap against health. Increasingly unfavorable conditions might either regenerate this issue or make an existing problem worse.

Conclusion

The book offers inspiration for readers that might take responsibility to improve health of themselves, communities, and organizations. The editors conclude that being whole (personally or organizationally), relating to others, inclusivity, rebalancing after toxicity, and how the new emerges could be among the factors of a model for "organizational and societal health" (Chapter 14).

The road map in this book review offers an actionable and cumulative (organizational or personal) path that could ease activities during "the novel Coronavirus pandemic." The pandemic places concerns about health into daily routines. How an organization approaches health and effectiveness could regulate how it becomes sustainable during and after this pandemic or before the next one(s). While facing challenges for a better world either in the now or in the future, health could improve through gender equality, trust-based partnerships, adaptation to environment, and involving in organizational (and entrepreneurial) activities.

Because the book emphasizes creativity, there are also other questions for future research. How does creativity improve health (of the creative ones and their target audiences) and how does creativity sustain with significant phases?

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Author note

The author dedicates this piece to his father whose favorite author was Peter Drucker.

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Author biography

Bilgehan Bozkurt is a researcher in marketing. His book entitled "Debates in Marketing Orientation" is a critically acclaimed contribution to the marketing concept and to marketing strategy.