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[Introduction to] Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era

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LEADING
ORGANIZATIONS

PERSPECTIVES FOR
A NEW ERA

SECOND EDITION

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$SAGE

Introduction

The fast pace and rapidly changing environment in which new era or postindustrial organizations function require leadership that is substantially different from Max Weber's solitary executive at the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy. Organizations require leadership that is fluid, not simply positional, dispersed rather than centralized, and agile not inflexible. Current organizational leaders know this mantra well, but are often reluctant in practice to distribute genuine leadership below managerial levels. Despite this reluctance, the external environment and continuous advancements in technology are major driving forces underlying change in organizational leadership. A single leader or leadership team rarely has enough knowledge, information, expertise, or ability to understand and respond quickly, effectively, and ethically to the dynamic changes in the environment and adapt or transform the organization and its participants.

This book focuses on concepts and practices that facilitate shared responsibility for leadership and fluid roles among leaders and participants (employees, followers, or associates) in organizations. A primary assumption underlying the book is that new era organizations can become better able to meet the challenges of their environment by developing the capacity of participants to share responsibility for leadership of the organization and implementation of its mission. A further assumption is that leadership of these organizations can become increasingly more trustworthy, concerned about the effect of their decisions or actions on others, and more resilient when leaders and participants base their decisions and actions on a foundation of ethics and shared values. A final assumption is that organizations will need to align their leadership, vision, mission,

values, and social responsibility to respond effectively to changes in the external and internal environment.

Given these assumptions, organizational participants will need to choose and cultivate their leadership philosophy thoughtfully and deliberately. An organization's leadership philosophy is more than a style. It is the essence of the organization's integrity—a clear demonstration of its beliefs in action. Determining the tenets of organizational philosophy requires the combined efforts of leaders and participants. Accordingly, leadership concepts and theories are incorporated in the book to advance purposeful creation of leadership philosophy and beliefs.

Figure 1 depicts a holistic framework for understanding and analyzing the role of leadership in new era organizations. The first two components of the framework identify the leadership role with regard to accessing changes in the external environment and adapting the organization to these changes. The center of the Venn diagram represents core leadership processes and actions that permeate and guide all components of organizational life. As depicted in the framework, shared responsibilities for leadership by organizational participants consist of generating and advancing the organization's vision, ethics/values, culture, inclusion, change, capacity building, and social responsibility, among other aspects. The content, processes, and practices of these areas shape how participants implement and adapt the organization's mission, management functions, and structure.

Robert Kelley points out that leaders and participants play different but equal roles in carrying out these core processes and actions; yet both leaders and participants do leadership.[1] Though executive leaders are

Figure 1   Leading Organizations Framework
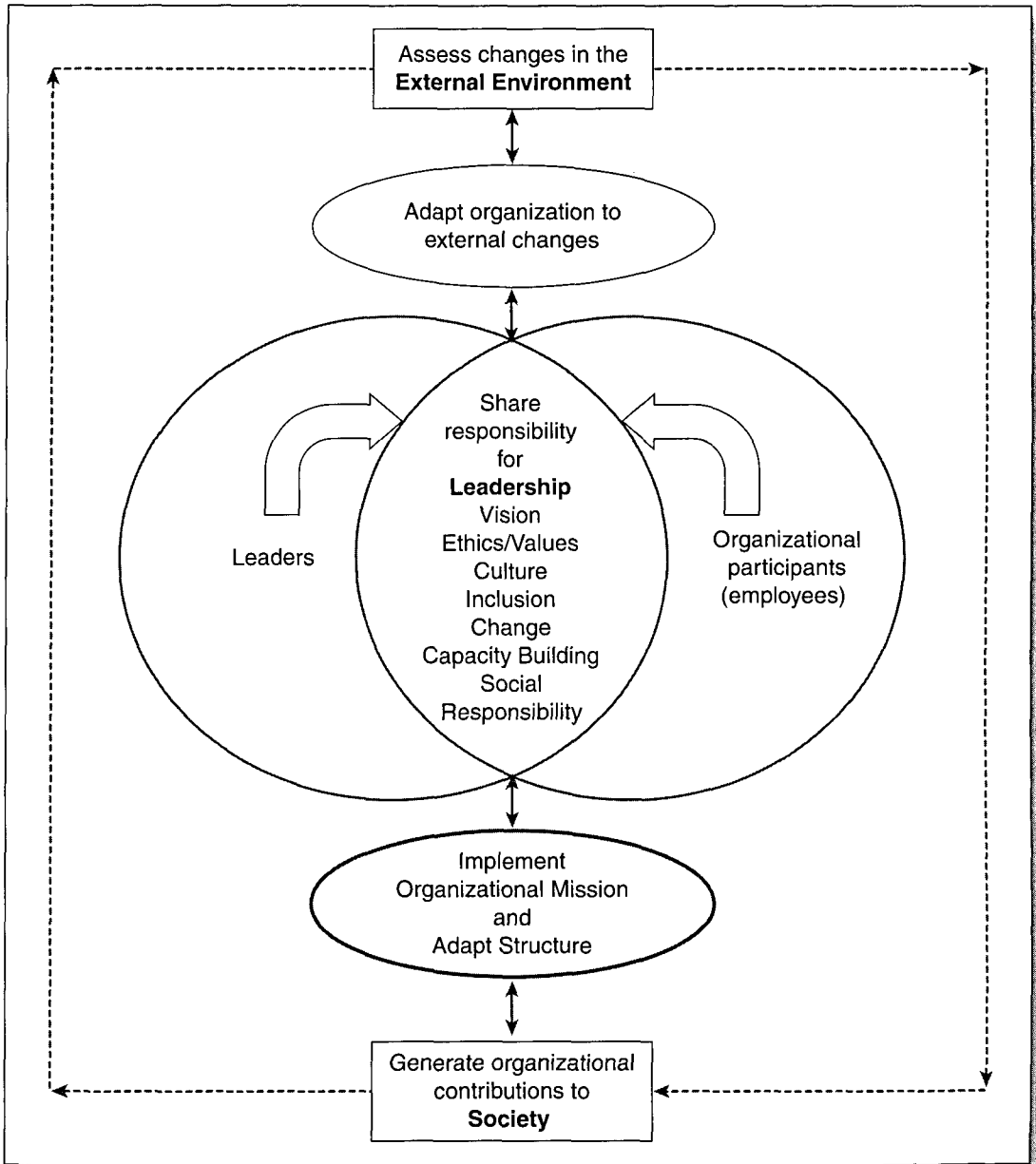
designated formal responsibility and authority by a board of directors or government regulations—that is, legitimate power to act on behalf of the organization, responsibility for accomplishing the organization's purpose, accountability for performance of its members to meet organizational goals, financial and resource accountability, and organizational structure or design— the complex realities of contemporary organizations call for leadership roles that are more fluid than in past eras. The fluidity of these roles is a fundamental shift in the philosophy and functioning of leadership in organizations. The concept of leadership as a process of initiation

and involvement does not negate formal authority. Participants share formal authority broadly in contemporary structures. Individuals move from participant to leader or leader to participant based on capabilities, expertise, motivation, ideas, and circumstances, not solely on position or formal authority. In new era organizations, leadership can start with formal leaders (appointed authorities) in concert with other organizational participants and stakeholders, *and* leadership can originate with participants without formal authority.

The next component of the framework—implementing the mission—is the primary reason for an organization's existence. Leadership processes, functions, and actions are directed toward identifying and achieving this ultimate purpose. To accomplish the mission, leaders and participants must design and adapt new organizational forms or structures that facilitate maximum performance, foster knowledge sharing, and increase interaction. The final component of the framework emphasizes the organization's responsibility to contribute to the well-being of society.

In its entirety, the framework provides an approach to conceptualizing and guiding leadership in new era organizations. The book follows this framework throughout and the selected readings provide meaning and depth to each component. The text contains several parts with an overview by the editor on leadership and organizational issues for each segment. Part I examines the impact of major changes in the external environment on new era organizations and features several approaches used by organizations to deal with these changes including peering or collaboration and alliances. Part II examines classic theories of leadership that remain viable in many contemporary organizations. Part III begins with a historical perspective on one of the primary themes of this text—shared leadership. Chapters in this section examine issues of responsibility for shared leadership in new era organizations. Part IV emphasizes the influence of vision and mission on the passion and engagement of organizational leaders and participants and the importance of effective organizational design on implementation of the organization's purpose. Part V considers the essence of an organization—its culture. This section examines the effect of leadership on culture and the vital component of ethics and shared values. Additionally,

various ethical leadership challenges are assessed in an effort to discourage harmful or damaging forms of organizational leadership. Part VI explores inclusion of leaders and participants in organizations that represent a wide range of cultural, national, gender, racial, religious, and generational pluralism, among others. It also examines issues of work-life balance as a component of inclusiveness. Part VII looks at capacity building as a means of developing organizational members' abilities to adapt, change, collaborate, cultivate democratic processes, and use conflict constructively. Finally, Part VIII explores the new responsibility of organizational leadership to contribute to society through social activism. Even though organizations in previous eras were expected to generate contributions to society, the expectations of new era organizations are more challenging. Society requires more than job creation and employment. People want organizations to give time, human capital, and monetary resources to advance the well-being of society. Organizational leaders and participants are expected to take activist roles to tackle issues such as education, the environment, health, and housing in addition to traditional forms of philanthropy. They are in highly advantageous positions to facilitate unprecedented advances for society and resolve complex problems based on their collective capacity to mobilize human, technical, and economic resources.

Most of us spend a large portion of our lives in organizations. Face-to-face or electronically, we are educated in and work for organizations that matter a great deal. Leadership makes a meaningful difference in every aspect of these organizations. We want and expect leadership that is purposeful and intelligent, effective and competent, caring and moral. This book strives to provide more than a collection of engaging readings. Its intent is to provide an integrated perspective for facilitating good leadership of organizations so that they are well suited to meet our expectations and the demands of a highly complex and changing environment.

Note

1.   Kelley, R. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review, 88*(6), 142–148.