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

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LEADING ORGANIZATIONS

Perspectives for a New Era

THIRD EDITION

Edited by

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Introduction

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. The purpose of this book is to provide an integrated perspective for facilitating good (effective and ethical) leadership of organizations so that they are well suited to meet our expectations and the demands of this new era.

The fast pace and rapidly changing environment in which current 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. The external environment and continuous advancements in technology are major driving forces underlying change in organizational leadership. A single leader or executive 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.

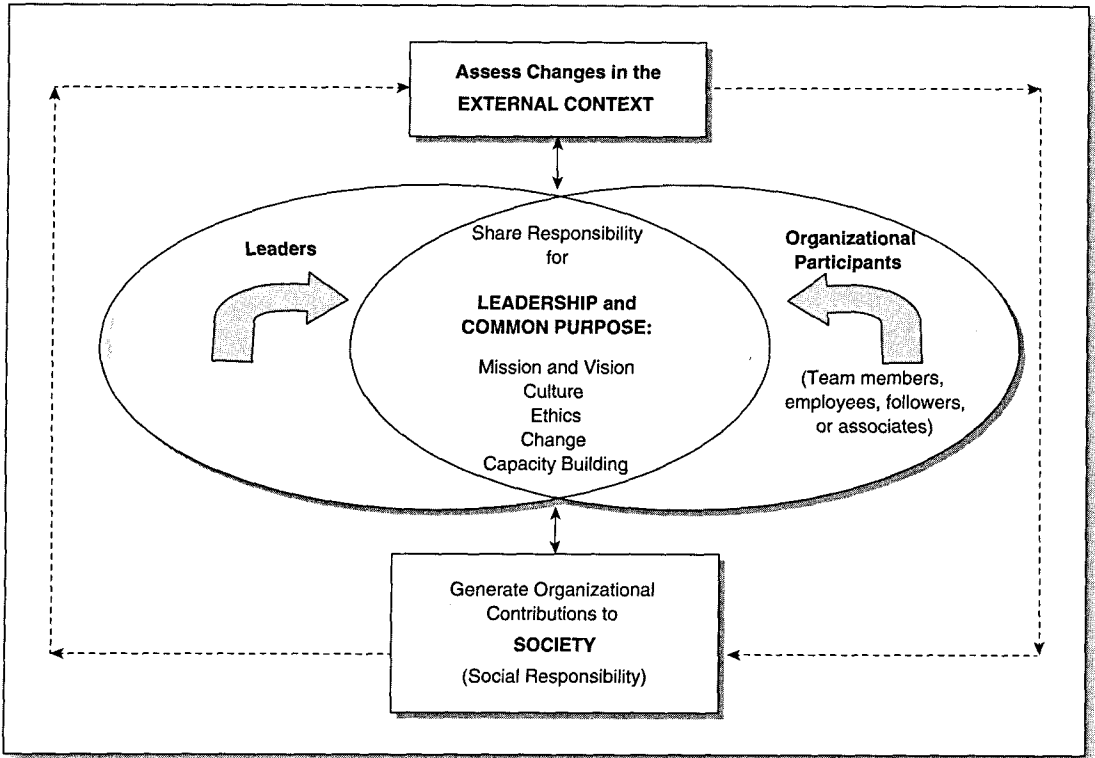
This book focuses on concepts and practices that facilitate shared responsibility for leadership and fluid roles among leaders and participants¹ in organizations. A primary assumption underlying the book is that new era organizations can become better able to meet the challenges of their environment through dedication to a compelling and

deeply held common purpose by the organization's members and the development of their capacity to share responsibility for leadership of the organization. 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. A final assumption is that organizations will need to align their leadership and organizational processes 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, processes, and actions 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 choices of leadership philosophy, concepts, processes, and practices.

Figure I.1 depicts a holistic framework for understanding and analyzing the role of leadership in new era organizations. The first component of this framework represents the larger external context in which organizations function. Leaders and members must understand and access this external environment for the purpose of transforming or adapting the organization to a rapidly changing context. The center of the Venn diagram represents core leadership processes,

Figure 1 Leading Organizations Framework



practices, and actions that permeate and guide all components of organizational life. As depicted in the framework, shared responsibilities for leadership by organizational leaders and members consist of generating and advancing the organization’s common purpose, vision and mission, culture, ethics, organizational change, capacity building, and social responsibility.

This shared responsibility for leadership and the fluidity of leader and member roles represent a fundamental shift in the philosophy and functioning of leadership in organizations. Robert Kelley points out that leaders and participants play different but equal roles in carrying out core processes and actions; yet both leaders and participants do leadership.² Though executive leaders are 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 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 final component of this framework emphasizes the organization’s social responsibility to contribute to the well-being of society. It emphasizes the

organization's commitment to care for people, communities, and the physical environment as an integral part of its double or triple bottom line.

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 identifies several major changes in the external context that effect 21st century organizations and provides perspective for the long term. Part II examines current theories and concepts of leadership and followership that remain viable in many contemporary organizations. Part III focuses on one of the primary themes of this text—shared leadership. It begins with an emphasis on the organization's common purpose and presents some of the latest concepts and research on various forms of shared leadership. Part IV considers the central core of an organization—its culture. This section examines the effect of leadership on an organization's culture and the inclusion of organizational participants that represent a wide range of cultural, national, global, racial, gender, sexual orientation, and generational pluralism. Part V addresses an essential component of leadership in organizations—ethics. This section emphasizes the role of ethical leadership in shaping behavior and decision making in organizations and the challenge of averting or counteracting harmful or unethical forms of leadership. Part VI focuses on change; strategic leadership, including vision and mission; and structure or design in connection with the organization's external environment.

Part VII looks at capacity building as a means for developing the abilities of organizational members to advance their leadership capacity, work in teams, and share leadership in a rapidly changing global and local context. Finally, Part VIII explores the new responsibility of organizational leadership to contribute to society through social and environmental activism. Even though organizations in previous eras were expected to generate contributions to society, the expectations of today's organizations are considerably more extensive and 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 and protect the environment. Organizational leaders and participants are expected to take active roles to tackle issues such as education, the environment, health, housing, and poverty 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, technological, and economic resources.

This book strives to provide more than a collection of engaging readings. It intends to frame a way forward for the study and practice of leadership in new era organizations.

Notes

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1. This text uses the terms *participants*, *members or team members*, *employees*, *followers*, and *associates* interchangeably throughout.
 2. Kelley, R. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(6), 142–148.