Book Review

Northouse, P. G. (2016). Leadership: Theory and Practice (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Leadership theories continue to evolve as the sociocultural, economic, and political environments change. Understanding this evolution and exploring the current models informs the practice of leadership across organizations. In his seventh edition of Leadership: Theory and Practice, Northouse (2016) presents an expansive exploration of leadership theories and their applications to the current realities of leadership. This book provides readers with a broad overview of the field of leadership and insight into how these models are relevant in practice; Northouse contends that the volume is suitable for use as a text for undergraduate and graduate classes. This reviewer concurs with that contention, but would argue that the expansiveness of this volume would be more suited for the depth of information within a graduate class.

The layout of each chapter is similar, and allows the reader to examine each model or theory in great detail, including an historical overview of the theory`s development and the seminal authors who are connected with that particular theory. The first part of each chapter describes the leadership theory and any supporting research, whereas the second half critiques the theory, pointing out the strengths and limitations of the theory. Each chapter then concludes with a summary. This format lends support to the use of this book as a text for coursework and is, as Northouse (2016) contends, user-friendly. Furthermore, for each chapter, he applies the model to several case studies, and includes questionnaires, figures, and tables that further explain the practical applications of the theory. Northouse posits that theories of leadership have been conceived as leadership as traits, or leadership as process; this conceptualization explains his approach to the organization of the text where he groups the theories within these broad categories. Northouse presents an overview of previous approaches to understanding leadership, including the skills approach, traits approach, behavioural approach, and situational approach. However, Northouse notes that for the purposes of this volume, leadership as process is the focus. To that end, he describes a number of theories and models that can be placed within the category of leadership as process. Specifically, Northouse elaborates on path-goal theory and leadership-member exchange theory. Northouse then describes a number of more current and emergent theories of leadership, including servant leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and, new to this volume, an expanded examination of psychodynamic leadership and adaptive leadership.

In the introductory chapter, Northouse (2016) traces the evolution of the definition of leadership and then presents his own definition. Specifically, he defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016, p. 6). He also identifies that within this book, the "people who engage in leadership will be called leaders, and those toward whom leadership is directed will be called followers" (Northouse, 2016, p. 7). The relationship between leaders and followers is a necessary element for leadership to be enacted. He also notes the difference between assigned and emergent leadership and contends that the theories presented in this volume can apply to both types of leadership. Northouse concludes the chapter by delving into the somewhat contentious dichotomy of management and leadership and notes that management theories were really only introduced in the 20th century, but forms of leadership have existed since the time of Aristotle, according to Northouse. The goals of the two approaches are different; management is focused on order and consistency whereas leadership is focused on producing change and movement. Even though there are clear differences, Northouse acknowledges the overlap between the two constructs.

Northouse (2016) begins his exploration of specific leadership theories in Chapter 2 with the trait approach. Northouse posits that no other leadership theory has been researched as extensively. Despite the identification of many desirable leadership traits, there are some outstanding criticisms of this approach

that Northouse presents. Arguably, the biggest drawback is the emphasis on the inherent personality traits, rather than the learned skills, of the leaders, and a focus on the great man approach. Furthermore, a definitive set of optimal leadership traits has yet to be identified.

The skills approach presented in Chapter 3 on the other hand, identifies particular skills that leaders should develop or learn. Using this approach, leaders start with individual attributes, but then engage in professional development opportunities to learn a core set of competencies that are critical for a particular leadership role. This approach may be appealing to organizations because it assumes that leadership can be developed; a major drawback though is that it also relies on some individual attributes, therefore implying that only some individuals can be trained to be leaders.

The behavioural approach described in Chapter 4, focuses on leaders and their behaviours. These behaviours can be categorized as task behaviours and relationship behaviours, and as Northouse (2016) points out, the balance of those behaviours is key to strong leadership. Although this approach has been extensively researched, evidence that links particular behaviours and improved organizational outcomes has not been produced to this point. Furthermore, a common critique, according to Northouse, for all of these approaches is that a particular set of skills, traits, or behaviours is not equally effective across all situations.

Fittingly, Northouse (2016) follows these approaches with a discussion of situational leadership; he highlights one particular theorist in the discussion as well as in the questionnaire presented at the end of the chapter. These theorists believe that leaders need to adapt their style of leadership based on the situation and that leadership has both a directive dimension and a supportive dimension. How much of each that is required is dependent on the situation as well as the followers.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Northouse (2016) introduces leadership as process theories. Path-goal theory focuses on the role of leaders in motivating followers to achieve organizational goals. As Northouse points out, this theory is complex and includes processes such as defining goals and engaging in leadership behaviours; however, these theorists also identify the need to examine the characteristics of the tasks and of the followers. Because of the complexity of this theory, Northouse suggests that it is not commonly used in leadership training and development. Leader-member exchange theory that Northouse presents in Chapter 7, on the other hand, is based on the interaction of leaders with in-group and out-group members en route to achieving organizational goals. Interestingly, theorists recognize that not all group members will be treated the same, based on their relationship with the leaders. Northouse noted that high–quality exchanges between leaders and followers produces more positive outcomes for organizations but the explanation for determining what is meant by high quality exchanges, and how context affects the outcomes, need further examination.

Northouse (2016) then explores what he describes as the New Leadership paradigm. This group of theories, covered in Chapters 8 – 12, includes more recent additions to leadership theory. For example, transformational leadership, as described in Chapter 8, focuses on the human dimension including relationships. Northouse presents a detailed comparison of transactional leadership and transformational leadership and argues that transformational leadership results in improved outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations. However, the description of a transformational leader is very idealistic and wide-ranging, and includes a number of personality traits, rather than learned skills. Indeed, a transformational leader is often conceptualized as a heroic leader who establishes the direction and vision for the company; this contention implies a less democratic approach and places the onus on the leader to motivate followers to achieve organizational goals.

Northouse (2016) then examines authentic leadership in Chapter 9 and presents this theory as one of the newest areas of leadership research. Authentic leadership emphasizes the relational element of leadership. Authentic leadership theorists contend that leaders can develop authentic values and behaviours, and essential skills and attitudes over time. Northouse notes that there is a lack of explanation regarding the moral component of leadership. One other major critique of this approach is its lack of commentary on positive organizational outcomes. However, this model is in its very early phase of development.

Servant leadership, as described in Chapter 10, has a longer history, beginning in the 1970s. The model is articulated in detail in this chapter and the definite focus on the "others" in the organization is emphasized. Therein lies the tension of this model, the dynamics of leader and follower and the balance of fulfilling the needs of the stakeholders, or putting the needs of the followers first. However, this model is a very popular model in practice and is incorporated into many organizations as a desirable model of

leadership.

Adaptive leadership, presented in Chapter 11, focuses on the leaders' activities in the process of moving the organization towards a change agenda. As Northouse (2016) noted, this theory is in the early stage of development. However, the elements of the theory are becoming well-articulated; adaptive leadership examines the situational challenges, leader behaviours, and the necessary adaptive work required to respond to those challenges. These theorists recognize the reality of changing environments and the adaptation required to respond to these external changes and pressures. According to Northouse, this approach also offers a very prescriptive approach to dealing with these challenges. One critique of this model is that it requires further refinement and support from a research standpoint.

The concluding chapter in this section of new approaches is Chapter 12 focusing on the Psychodynamic approach. These theorists use a clinical paradigm as a framework for examining organizational behaviour. Interestingly, this approach is related to the psychoanalytic work of Freud. The relationship between organizational life and the interpersonal dynamics is a foundational piece of this theory, and furthermore, the approach connects the relation of individual actions to the context in which they exist. However, this theory rests on the early work of examining dysfunctional relationships; this focus runs counter to attempts at organizational development aimed at improving the organization as a whole.

The last four chapters of the volume focus on current issues and tensions in the field of leadership. Chapter 13 focuses on ethics, and examines leadership ethics, values, and morality. Additionally, the concept of the dark side of leadership is examined. Northouse (2016) points out that organizations recognize that ethical behaviour is important but do not usually invest in ethics training for their leaders. As the current global leadership dynamics unfold, the relevance of leadership ethics may be especially relevant.

Northouse (2016) examines team leadership in Chapter 14. This chapter speaks to the emergent reliance on teams within organizations who can bring multiple perspectives to complex issues. Northouse presents several different models of team leadership, and describes in detail the types of actions required of teams to solve organizational issues. However, as Northouse identifies, one of the drawbacks to this model is the focus on individual skills that will contribute to the team dynamic. These skills may require focused and intentional development, and is contingent on organizations laying the foundations for these particular skills.

Chapter 15 examines gender and leadership, and articulates the historical work towards women's leadership within organizations. In the chapter, Northouse (2016) explicates the barriers to women's leadership, but also identifies the potential for improvement in this area. As noted in Northouse's critique of this group of theories, much of the research that examines gender and leadership is situated within Western contexts. Further research and application of these concepts is required.

Lastly, Northouse (2016) includes a chapter on culture and leadership. He examines particular cultural elements and he presents an overview of different countries' conceptualizations of leadership. He situates the different frameworks of desired leadership behaviours within varying situational and environmental contexts. For example, a particular style of leadership may be attached to a particular regional conceptualization of leadership and the desired characteristics of that model. Northouse refers to an extensive study that examined these differences among nations.

Overall, the presentation of the different models of leadership attempted in this volume is impressive. In addition, the case studies, discussion questions, and questionnaires support the practical application of these theories. For those reasons, Northouse's (2016) book should be considered for possible adoption as a textbook in graduate level leadership courses.

I do have several critiques of the book that instructors would need to consider and potentially address, including the structure of the text. Northouse (2016) contends that following a similar format for each chapter contributes to ease of use for interested audiences of leadership theory. Although the pattern for each chapter is predictable and moves from theory to practical application, I would argue that some theories do not lend themselves as easily to the same treatment. This critique is especially true of the inclusion of a survey or questionnaire that illustrates the underpinnings of each approach. This very structured approach and the inclusion of these surveys gives the text a very instrumental feel, and extends the volume of the book.

Perhaps more problematic is that the predictable format also emphasizes a more isolated look at each separate theory. Although each chapter identifies strengths and critiques of each theory, there is very limited analysis of the theories taken as a whole. Northouse (2016) does not expand on the comparisons among

the approaches, and does not ask students to examine a particular case study using multiple theories. Furthermore, this format suggests that a multi-theory approach to leadership is not possible, even though other theorists contend the complexity of organizations is best addressed through a multi-theory approach (Austin & Jones, 2016). For example, authentic and adaptive leadership are not examined together as a possible solution to the narrower viewpoints and limitations of the separate theories. A concluding chapter that presents Northouse's summary or overview seems to be absent, and with it an opportunity is lost for him to provide editorial commentary on the state of leadership theory and a prediction for the future.

I recognize that this book was not written with educational leadership as a specific focus. However, in terms of content, some theories or theorists may not be included, whereas others are included. For example, in the chapter on culture and leadership, Northouse (2016) includes a global research study but does not include a reference to several prominent organizational theorists such as Schein (2010) or Alvesson (2002). Whereas some chapters include a number of theorists who have researched one particular approach, some chapters, such as the situational approach chapter, focus on one prominent theorist. The reader is left wondering if there were other researchers who were intentionally disregarded, or if the theory has never been widely adopted. As another example, Northouse includes two emergent leadership theories: adaptive leadership and the psychodynamic approach. While these approaches may be gaining some popularity in education, there are other dominant theories in the popular discourses in the field. For example, distributed leadership (see Harris, 2008), a model not discussed by Northouse, continues to be presented as a model to follow within communities of practice in the educational field, whereas adaptive leadership remains a lesser known approach to dealing with the complex issues that are manifested in organizations today.

An underlying theme throughout this examination is that leadership is complex and continues to evolve as environments and external dynamics change. Understanding the development of the theories and the perspectives of multiple leadership approaches is useful for readers interested in leadership and especially for graduate students seeking to develop their knowledge of leadership practice and theory.

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