RECENZIE / BOOKS REVIEW

THEODOULIDES, L., KORMANCOVÁ, G., DAVID, C. Leading in the Age of innovations: Change of Values and Approaches.

[Vedúce postavenie v ére inovácií: zmena hodnôt a prístupov]. New York City, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 2019. 250 pp. ISBN: 978-0-815-37903-4. eBook: 978-1-351-11942-9.

Another book review? Of yet another leadership book? There are and continue to appear so many books on leadership from so many angles, including innovation, creativity and artificial intelligence. And yet, what makes this particular book special and entices readers to pick it up and read it are first of all the authors and the region they chose to deal with. The book in discussion is "Leading in the Age of Innovations: Change of Values and Approaches" by Lenka Theodoulides, Gabriela Kormancova and David Cole, published by Routledge, 2019, in the Routledge Studies in Leadership Research Series.

The authors are all researchers and teaching staff at Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica in Slovakia. Their professional and life backgrounds are relevant as they have studied in various Western universities. Cole grew up and was educated in the USA, but got his PhD at Matej Bel University, has Slovak citizenship and has been living in Slovakia for 15 years. Kormancová studied in Slovakia and at Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in France and Theodoulides studies in Bratislava, at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia and at the Cyprus Institute of Management. Together the three authors have a valuable pool of Central and Eastern European (CEE) life and professional experience filtered through Western research methodology and business studies. The authors are themselves aware of their special expertise and underline it in the Preface to the book by pointing out their interdisciplinary approach to the issues of leadership they researched in the companies from CEE.

CEE orientations

The authors state that their book is the result of primary research conducted during 2013 -2018 in the CEE region and through it they put forward a framework for Reflective Leadership as a possible solution to the challenges brought about by the era of innovation, creativity, digitalization and artificial intelligence. This is important and significant because Central and Eastern Europe represents a unique place and research opportunity for those interested in social evolutions and transitions. The definition of the region that the authors chose to use is the one of the OECD and the countries included are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The authors rightly point out that those countries offer a good point to research and document the transition from socialism to capitalism and EU membership.

The book is made up of three parts: the first, Leadership Perspectives with three chapters and a case study (The CEE Cultures in Transition), the second, Complexity View on Leadership, with two chapters and a case study (Generational Changes in the Workforce Within the Socioeconomic and Political Context) and the third, Focus on Change and Innovation with three chapters, a case study (The CEE as the Catching Up Innovation Region) and a round up chapter with critical views, implications and future actions.

The three case studies are arguably the most interesting parts in the book as they refer directly to the CEE region, mainly and somehow naturally however to the Visegrad countries and particularly to Slovakia and Czechia and only peripherally to the rest of the countries in the region, including Romania.

Case studies

The first case study predictably uses Hofstede's dimensions with a touch of Trompenaars to describe the region as characterized by high power distance, masculinity and particularism. The authors correctly try to raise the readers' awareness to the kaleidoscopic landscape of the region in terms of culture and, therefore, values and attitudes. They draw the attention on the general tendency of some Western Europeans and North Americans to consider the people behind the Iron Curtain as a block probably due to the World War II influences. Even the younger generations see "Central Europe as a place of Slavic languages with the oddity of Hungarian thrown in." This is a point the authors make mainly to explain what they call the "language divide" and the pressure on the people in the region to learn English, German or French without the reciprocity of Western students to learn the local Central European languages. It would have been also useful to point out that most Central European countries used Russian as a lingua franca before 1989 and therefore the perceptions of the Western Europeans and North Americans are, to a certain point, quite well grounded. The language of the COMECON, as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was better known in the West, and also of the Warsaw Pact to which the CEE countries belonged was clearly and undeniably Russian. This is probably why the British Council organized language and methodology courses in the region to convert Russian teachers into English teachers in the early 1990s, while in Romania this was not the case as Russian was then and still is a relatively "exotic" language. The point of cultural diversity in the region that the authors raise is nevertheless valid, but only partially covered.

The case study also offers relatively predictable explanations of work ethics in CEE, due to the influence of Communism and state ownership, and the general expectation of homeownership in the region as compared to a lower similar percentage preference in the West.

The second case study looks at the Generational Changes in the region with the authors giving us their own interpretation of the Western generation names as follows: late baby boomers – socialist generation; generation X – go-west generation; millennials/ generation Y – transition generation and generation Z/iGen/Centennials – tethered generation. There follows an interesting presentation of how these generations have evolved and interacted in the region affecting in various ways the managerial and leadership decision making processes of businesses and organizations.

In its various chapters the book also offers a quality critical review of the most important and topical literature on leadership and this is obviously a useful and fascinating exercise in making sense of a huge and highly fragmented field. The purpose is to develop a new and relevant model of leadership to foster and enhance organizational innovation by looking at and reflecting on the complexities of today's societies and at the larger organizational ecosystems.

The questions that have guided the authors' research and quest for a new leadership model are looking mainly at the challenges of today's world: (how) does leadership respond to the digital era? (How) do organizations meet the challenges of the

digital era? What is the role of diversity in creativity and innovation? (How) does leadership support change and innovation? What are the values and approaches of the new leadership process?

Based on this massive research effort the authors put forward The Reflective Leadership Model which they present as a complex set of actions which empower people to participate in all the processes and functions of the organization. The idea being that innovation and change will be possible only with the full participation of the followers/co-workers and their understanding of their roles and functions in their business and the larger system. In other words, leaders and followers need to have a shared knowledge base and also a deep, personal need to innovate.

The book is easy and friendly to read though it is clearly an academic endeavor. As such, it has all the common methodology and research infrastructure that such a publication is expected to have: an explanation of the research philosophy and strategy, a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis, a solid and relevant bibliography given at the end of each chapter, appendices and an index of names and subjects. In the three appendices to the book the authors offer more details and a good further discussion of their choice of methodology of research and of the sample studied to those interested.

Conclusion

I strongly recommend this book both for the practitioners who deal with the complexities of today's world in terms of leadership and management and to the students in various programs of study and training. It is a useful book for leaders and followers alike as it opens up the perspectives of reflectivity and critical and creative thinking which are abilities that we cannot even hope to be able to survive without in the rapidly changing age of innovations in which we live. It is a book that all those interested in the subject should read and have on their professional book shelves.

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https://doi.org/10.24040/eas.2020.21.2.128-130