

Leadership Insight, by Nancy J. Adler. Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2010, 184 pages, hard cover.

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We live in a world today of unparalleled access to data, information, and new opportunities, but we also live in a world of increasingly complex and urgent challenges and crises. The landscape is marked by rapid change, ambiguity, uncertainty. It demands curiosity, innovation, ongoing learning, integration of diverse perspectives, and insight. Leaders' effectiveness will be determined increasingly not only by the solutions they provide, but by their courage in daring to ask the most difficult questions, along with their discernment and wisdom in understanding what is truly needed. More than ever, leadership education and development need to include opportunities to enable its students meaningful reflection to synthesize a full range of perspectives, distinguish alternatives, and imagine truly creative possibilities. *Leadership Insight*, by Nancy J. Adler, nurtures this kind of essential leadership in unique and inspiring ways.

Leadership Insight is a journal, beautifully showcasing Adler's watercolor paintings and ink drawings, that includes pages with leadership and wisdom quotes and questions, and plenty of blank space, inviting users of the journal to reflect, write, and explore. Adler is well known for her scholarly work on global leadership, senior women leaders, and cross-cultural management. *Leadership Insight* integrates her more recent contributions in the area of arts and leadership (Adler, 2006, 2010, 2011), her calls to reexamine the significance and

evaluation of management research (Adler & Harzing, 2009), and her work as a visual artist, including recent exhibitions of her paintings at The Banff Centre in Alberta and in Montreal during the 2010 Academy of Management Annual Meeting. Adler's journal is based on the premise that "the challenges and yearnings of twenty-first century demand . . . levels of inspiration and creativity that, until recently, have been more in the sphere of artists and artistic processes than the domain of most managers" (back cover). It invites readers "to enter into the quiet and contemplation it takes to be wise." The quotes and questions accordingly address the importance of self-awareness and self-reflection, the essence of extraordinary leadership, and the urgency of courageously using our work and lives to contribute something meaningful.

Some quotes are classics (George Bernard Shaw's "You see things and you say 'why?' But I dream of things that never were, and I say, 'why not?'"), while others may be surprising (Warren Buffet's "I am not a businessman. I am an artist"). The most important quotes and questions are challenging and provocative, the kind that some of us prefer to avoid, but are essential in responding to the challenges and opportunities of management, business, and the world today. It is impossible to read Oliver Wendell Holmes' observation that "Most of us go to our graves with our music still inside us" without considering what we have left unexpressed and underutilized, and the consequences for a world that desperately needs and deserves nothing less than the best we have to offer. True education is often provocative, dislodging us from our comfort zones and calling us to consider new questions, narratives, and possibilities. *Leadership Insight* challenges us, and yet the artwork is serene and soothing, offering us the stillness needed to discern true priorities in our increasingly frenetic world.

There is no doubt that *Leadership Insight* is beautiful, and yet it is by no means simply a pretty journal. It significantly contributes to management learning, education, and practice because it is aligned with current priorities and trends. First, it offers an opportunity for meaningful reflection and self-awareness, cited as a critical foundation of leadership (Cashman, 2008; Drucker, 1999; Gardner, 1995). Gardner found that a daily practice of reflection was a distinguishing feature of leaders who made an extraordinary impact in their fields, whether in business, politics, arts, science, or education. A regular practice of reflection facilitates leaders' capacity to learn from experience, synthesize input, transform information into insight, distinguish meaningful from trivial data, and identify values

and a sense of purpose that underlie action. While these are necessary ingredients to navigate, contribute, and lead in today's world, executives and management students might not initiate this sort of reflection on their own. *Leadership Insight* encourages the sort of reflection that is most needed.

Second, Adler's journal is part of an increasing focus on the importance of aesthetic and arts-based learning in management and leadership education (Adler, 2006, 2011; Hatch, Kostera, & Kozminski, 2005; Nissley, 2008; Pink, 2006; Whyte, 1994, among others). Business leaders are looking to the arts, including the visual arts, theater, music, storytelling, poetry, architecture, dance and movement, not as entertainment, but as a source of insight into the processes of creativity and innovation, collaboration, and leadership itself. Artists inhabit the realm of creative expression, experimentation and risk taking. In collaborative arts, people build off of each other's contributions and create the conditions to bring out the best in each other, setting each other up for success. These are the fundamental tasks and responsibilities of leaders. Fifty fellows from the World Economic Forum, after assessing what would be most helpful in bringing about the types of changes they see as most necessary in the world, recently participated in theater training at Columbia University's School of the Arts. The curriculum, framing art and culture as components of social change, included voice, breathing, rhetoric, and improvisation as tools in decision making, communication, and leading global organizations (Cohen, 2010). In an art-based leadership program, health professionals view paintings and sculpture at the renowned Art Institute of Chicago, learning to identify assumptions and see details that enable them to be more accurate and discerning in their professional work. In organizations and executive education programs, managers and leaders study improvisation in theater and music to deepen their understanding of risk taking, collaboration, and leadership for use in their own jobs. *Leadership Insight*, drawing upon Adler's artistic and scholarly work, is part of a larger movement of aesthetics in management education, intended to complement management's traditional focus on reason and analytics, with the passion, creativity, values, and insight needed to equip leaders of the 21st century.

A third way that Adler's journal contributes to management learning and education is its relevance to recent discussions of the competencies most needed for effective leadership in today's world. The 2010 IBM Global CEO Study, including interviews with over 1500 CEOs, general managers, and senior public sector leaders around the

world, identifies complexity as the key challenge facing leaders today, and creativity as the most important leadership competence. CEOs are urged to “embody creative leadership” in which they invite innovation, take risks, and expand their styles (IBM, 2010: 10). In addition, reviews of business education identify some of the key “unmet needs” of MBA programs as acting creatively and innovatively, thinking critically and communicating clearly, and understanding the role, responsibilities, and purpose of business (Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2010: 8–9). Gardner (2006) describes five mind-sets for success in the 21st century: disciplinary (mastery of a major school of thought); synthesizing (ability to integrate ideas from different disciplines into a coherent whole); creating (capacity to uncover and clarify new problems, questions, and phenomena); respectful (awareness of and appreciation for differences among human beings); and ethical (fulfillment of one’s responsibilities as worker and citizen). Others cite learning agility, the capacity to learn from experience, as a predictor of high potential and an ingredient of effective leadership (DeMeuse, Dai, Hallenbeck, & Tang, 2008; Gardner, 1995). All require time for reflection and the abilities to focus, step back, and integrate. Leaders of the 21st century will not be able to lead effectively, let alone generate economic or social prosperity and sustainability, without opportunities for meaningful reflection, courageous conversations, and innovative approaches. As business schools and other educational institutions search for ways to embed reflection within more traditional pedagogy, *Leadership Insight* offers an important tool and step in the right direction.

Last, educational institutions at all levels are considering how best to design learning environments to prepare global leaders who will meaningfully and significantly contribute to our world. Stephanie Pace Marshall, educator and founding president of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, states that our institutions and society require leaders who can “discern, analyze, and integrate illusive patterns within vast amounts of unstructured and multidisciplinary data, . . . embrace ambiguity and uncertainty, . . . relentlessly ask “inconvenient” questions and seed and cross-pollinate “disruptive” ideas, . . . venture into unexplored and unconventional territory, [and] globally collaborate to wisely advance the human condition” (Marshall, 2006, personal communication). As business schools address the intersection and interdependence of business and society, they search for the curriculum, tools, and resources to transform the educational experience. Adler’s *Leadership Insight* not only reflects current priori-

ties and trends, but is a significant catalyst for the kind of reflection so deeply needed in the world today. It offers an opportunity to creatively reexamine what is most needed in management education to prepare and equip global leaders to navigate the challenges they will face and the possibilities they are inspired to pursue.

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