Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

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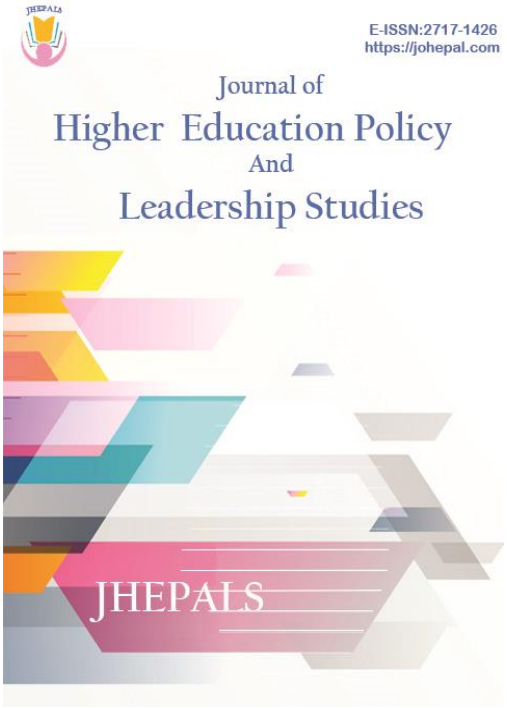

Book Review: **Foundations of Leadership: Principles, Practice, and Progress**

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Book Review Received **2024/12/11**
Book Review Accepted **2024/12/19**
Published Online **2024/12/31**

Cite book review as:

Drummond, M. B. (2024). [Review of the book *Foundations of leadership: Principles, practice, and progress*, by K. L. Guthrie, & B. Devies]. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *5*(4), 131-136. https://dx.doi.org/10.61186/johepal.5.4.131

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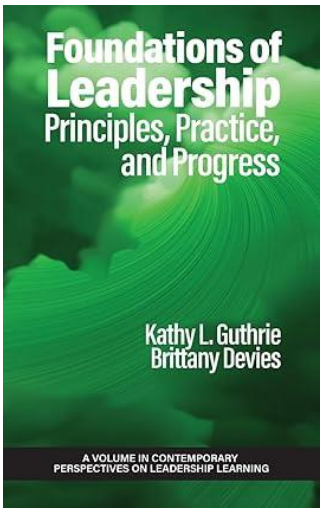
[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.4.131]

Foundations of Leadership: Principles, Practice, and Progress

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 5 Issue: 4
pp. 131-136
DOI:
10.61186/johepal.5.4.131

Author: Kathy L. Guthrie & Brittany Devies
Publisher: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
Country of Publication: United States of America
Year of Publication: 2024
ISBN: 979-8-887-30697-1
Pages: v-103



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Keywords: Leadership Development; Leadership Education; Leader Efficacy; Self-Leadership; Higher Education

Introduction

Foundations of Leadership: Principles, Practice, and Progress, the eleventh volume of the *Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning* series, offers readers an approachable yet comprehensive overview of leadership with an eye towards self-reflection and increased understanding of one's personal ideas about leadership and leaders. The work introduces readers to leadership first as a flashpoint of discussion and later as a process by addressing common language, assumptions, and concepts from inside and outside academia. The text

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acts as both an introductory work and workbook of sorts, with the authors taking on an almost conversational tone, addressing and encouraging the reader to reflect on, define, and consider leadership not exclusively as a set of actions or a hazy concept, but as a real-world, complex process shaped by context, culture, and continued study of what defines a leader.

Analysis of Work

Each chapter builds leadership knowledge around a set of topics or a "role" of leadership. Chapter one addresses the difficulty of defining leadership, provides the scope and purpose of the text, and addresses common assumptions about leadership, including tackling trait-based theories and assumptions of leadership through the introduction and explanation of leadership learning. One may notice that while the chapter poses questions about what leadership is or who the reader may think of when they consider terms like leader or leadership, the authors do not ask the reader to recall a time they were a leader themselves. This distinction early in the work makes space for leadership learners who may not think of themselves as leaders or do not know how their prior roles or actions demonstrated leadership. Such considerations support three central ideas in the text: that anyone can be a leader, leadership can be learned, and there are many ways to lead. This stands out as a positive practice that both leadership learners and educators can implement when approaching conversations about leadership with others.

Chapter two provides operational definitions of leadership, leader, leader identity, capacity, and efficacy. By taking the definition of leader beyond a common understanding, the authors provide language for the familiar yet nagging and often ineffable feeling of not being "leader enough" in a given situation or environment. This exploration also allows readers who may have consigned themselves to "not leading" to think about ideas like potential, capacity, and efficacy, and the impact each concept has on one's ability to grow, learn, and believe they are capable of leadership. The chapter also provides a broad overview of the history of leadership as a study, beginning with Rost's work in the early 1990s, and how leadership models and theories assist with explaining the phenomena of leadership (Rost, 1993). The authors strike a balance between context and concepts that allows the reader to frame their learning without losing key ideas or language. The election of the authors to provide multiple definitions of leadership alongside a chart of leadership models illustrates to readers that leadership is not a discrete topic that exists in an "is leadership or is not leadership" binary, but a complex process explored through philosophy, competencies, and shifts in attitude, thinking, and behaviors, centered around and deeply impacted by context, power, and change.

Chapter three focuses on followers, exploring historic and present-day negative connotations, followership as a practice, and how followers can enhance leadership through co-construction and collaboration others in the leadership process. Shifting the focus of the text to followers in the second content-centered chapter messages the importance of followers and followership to the reader. While the later emergence of formal research on followership usually places the concept further into most introductory texts, placing followers in lockstep with leaders signals the role and work as equal and significant in the leadership process. Before exploring the power followers can yield through leadership

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centered around a common purpose, the authors confront the many incorrect, yet popular, assumptions that followers embody less-desirable traits or lack some essential competencies, preventing them from taking on the "preferred" role of being leaders. Throughout the work, pragmatic explanations of leadership assumptions reflect a level of awareness in the authors; often, the authors will open a topic or chapter by naming typical ideas or assumptions directly, putting actuality at the forefront to open readers to recognize both what is and what can be when thinking about leadership. All too often, leadership as a field of study, in an effort to champion stronger practices and higher levels of understanding, fails to recognize the very basis of why leadership captures the attention of society: leadership is hard- it is easy to get wrong. Throughout history, and even still today, people have shielded themselves under the guise of leadership to defame, dismiss, and devalue others. In its most depraved forms, leadership has been weaponized as a tool of exclusion and mistreatment. In part due to this context, leadership as a concept is experienced differently by everyone. The authors continued recognition of these challenges frames this "leadership journey" as a difficult but worthwhile pursuit. As a result, the request of the authors for readers to grapple with the elements of leadership feels genuine and tenable, like a team project in which all individuals are equally prepared and committed to execute the task at hand.

Chapters four through six encourages readers to apply earlier concepts and expound upon them to consider what leadership looks like in action. Chapter four defines and explores collective leadership; the chapter moves the focus of the reader towards collective leadership by first recognizing and defining self-leadership and self-knowledge and each concepts' important role in preparing a leader for collective leadership. This chapter revisits the concepts of leadership and leader as introduced in chapter one and reestablishes the difference between the individual within the process and the process itself. With this, the authors then recognize the various contexts of leadership, and how all leadership and leaders exist not within a vacuum, but as participants in a larger space or context, where actions and inactions have implications that move beyond oneself. Exploring self-knowledge and self-leadership opens the reader to another definition of leadership; while some readers may not be able to cite an example of leading others, they can likely identify a time where they motivated themselves to action and implementation of a task. This broadens the conversation around leader identity and engages readers that otherwise may not see themselves in such work yet. From there, the chapter expands previous definitions of leader identity, capacity, and efficacy to collective leadership. These definitions draw the reader to the idea that collective leadership is not only about the common purpose of the work, but that collective leadership identity, capacity, motivation, and efficacy are also based on the collective whole. Each individual leader's self-perception, individual ability and belief in themselves and the other members of their collective to enact lends to the co-creation of each element of collective leadership. The efforts made by the authors to help readers see collective leadership beyond exclusively shared motivation prompts the reader to pay attention to their unavoidable influence and regard it with deference. The chapter continues to call forth the reader to think about influence as a tool to impact the collective culture through accountability and recognition. Though not explicitly stated, accountability can be perceived as both a public action and a private work, like calling "in" an individual who is not

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executing an agreed upon expectation, or through self-improvement and investment in one own's leadership competency development. Commitment and accountability to oneself is, in collective leadership, an act of accountability to the entire group. This continues to stretch the reader's understanding of leadership as it relates to followers and others.

Chapter five, "Navigating the Complexity of the Both/And", recognizes the principles, key activities, and perceived and regularly debated parallels that exists between leadership and management. The chapter opens with examples of managers displayed in television and film; while it may seem minute, the tiles presented span genres and range in air and release dates. This detail reflects an effort to ensure the reader relates to the work, and sees their interests reflected in the examples given. Since this text could be used in various academic spaces and beyond, it is imperative that the book feels aligned to and salient for various readers, across age ranges and lived experiences. Small elements like this aid in this goal. The chapter reiterates the unique purpose and histories of both leadership and management and insist that while leadership and management are different, they do not exist in spite of each other, or at polar ends of a single spectrum. The authors delineate and explain the difference in form and function of each concept but assert that it is often necessary to develop both leadership and management skillsets to be a successful leader of others, which is not a simple, stagnant equation to master.

Chapter six connects the practices of critical hope, growth mindset, and generativity to the tensions that have long existed between individuals and the process of leadership and shares how each practice can impact leadership, from shifting an individual's mindset to operating with future-oriented concern and action. Critical hope is explained using Dugan (2017) definition focused on realism, resiliency and the impact of vision to drive purpose and continued efforts. The slotting of critical hope as the first idea explored to move leadership as a study and practice forward enables the reader to feel equip to progress in their own leadership development, as critical hope can exist as an individual practice. When a leader chooses to engage in critical hope, they hold space for what is and what could be, allowing themselves to take heed and courage in future possibilities while honoring and finding motivation in the challenges of today. The pragmatic, upfront naming of common leadership challenges that occur at the onset of many chapters, and explored in the summary of chapter three, reflects the practice of critical hope. This practice leaves room for those who grapple with the personal or cultural impacts of harmful leadership to both name the shortcoming and reimagine both leaders and leadership, creating better dialogues and practices of leadership holistically. Growth mindset focuses not on ability to learn new information, but on the perceptions of impact that learning may have on one's views and understanding of their context. The text balances the importance of having a growth mindset with the difficult truth that growth mindsets require a level of openness and comfortability with change. The authors center their generativity section using Erikson's (1950) work and Batchelder's (2021) synthesis, focusing less on examples of generativity and more about the motivation and key considerations of the effort. One motivation or consideration from Batchelder's list of five findings does not move the needle or create generativity on its own necessarily. For example, many people guide others without being future or other-oriented, and relationships can be mutually beneficial but not centered on guiding. The union of all five elements derived from Batchelder's work can differentiate non-

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generative leadership from generative acts (2021). Focusing on the key considerations of generativity provides readers with a guide-like narrative that they can consider their own efforts against to continue to develop generative leadership practices further.

There are numerous efforts to engage the reader in reflection, self-assessment, and discussion with others in their community throughout the text. Using sketch icons, the authors prompt the reader through chapter-opening discussion frames, presenting either questions regarding real-world applications of the chapter's key concepts, or content callbacks from other chapters. This allows the reader to gain a sense of familiarity with the upcoming material and provides information about the relevance of the next chapter early in the chapter. Each chapter ends with questions and activity prompts aiming to extrapolate and expand concepts to contexts outside those discussed within the narratives of the text. These prompts differentiate for reflection alone and with others. Further activities are provided and include fillable charts, grids, and other visuals that could be utilized within the text like a workbook or reproduced by the reader for use in notetaking or in-class activities.

Conclusion

Within the first chapter of *Foundations of Leadership: Principles, Practice, and Progress,* the authors state the purpose of the book: "to learn more about leadership and how to be a strong leader." (Guthrie & Devies, 2024) Readers are provided with ample opportunities to learn about various leadership concepts and are invited on numerous occasions to regard themselves as a leader, even if they had not before. When considering elements of the Leadership Learning Framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), the text presents the readers leadership knowledge and provides prompts to aid them in attempts of leadership engagement through interaction with others.

As a foundational text, the book achieves its goals in enabling readers to recognize leadership as a process and leaders and followers as those who engage in this process through exploration of foundational elements, prompting their leadership learning journey. However, the most impactful result of this work may be its service as a genesis in a reader's recognition of their own leader identity, a role that has been held away or placed on a metaphorical top shelf for so many, perceived as attainable and achievable through this work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding

The author received no financial support for this book review.

Human Participants

This is a book review and does not involve human participants. Other ethical considerations are observed in alignment with the journal's guidelines for book reviews.

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Originality Note

The author confirms this book review is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

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