

## Book reviews

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**Gill Robinson Hickman (editor), *Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era***, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998.

Few concepts in business and management are as elusive, yet at the same time as vital, as leadership. *Leading Organizations* is an attempt to get to grips with this phenomenon to define leadership, its characteristics and its importance in personal and organizational terms and, perhaps more critically, to inquire into the role of leadership in the organizations of the future.

One of the fundamental problems of leadership has always been the need to achieve a critical balance between internal and external factors. Externally, leaders must define and spell out the organization's mission, and ensure that its goals are compatible with the needs of stakeholders and the wider society. Internally, leaders must then communicate that vision to the rest of the organization and ensure that the organization itself is able to reach its goals (a section here on 'leadership and capacity building' covers the often painful process of transforming organizations to meet new goals).

On top of this, leaders are now having to reinvent themselves. We are, it is suggested, in the middle of a paradigm shift; the business organization of a hundred years hence will be greatly different from that of today. The role of the leader must be adapted to fit these new models of organization. The problem here, of course, is that no one quite knows what these new models will look like; virtual organizations, network organizations, team-based management and so on are discussed, but hard information on how, or to what extent, these will change the leader's role is hard to come by. The book provides no definite answers, but it does suggest some possible scenarios.

*Leading Organizations* includes fifty-three contributions, organized thematically, and includes authors such as Peter Drucker, Alvin Toffler, Peter Senge, John Kotter and Michael Hammer. Individual articles cover the virtual organization, business ethics and leadership, the role of top management, and building individual learning and leadership in the twenty-first century. The articles are not all new – some are as much as ten years old – but most have not lost their bite. This is a complex mosaic of a book which offers dozens of different perspectives on leadership. Those looking for single

definitions and quick-fix solutions to the problems of leadership are unlikely to find them here; the book, like leadership itself, is sometimes disarticulated, sometimes fuzzy, and often less than certain about the future. However, those looking for a source of ideas and inspiration to take them beyond the millennium and into the new world of organizations will find plenty of food for thought.

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**Ng Sek Hong and Malcolm Warner, *China's Trade Unions and Management***, Macmillan, London and St Martin's Press, New York, 1998.

This book, based on extensive fieldwork by the two authors, is a scholarly and comprehensive treatment of an important topic. It provides in-depth analysis of the post-1949 evolution and reform of the largest trade union in the world – the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) – and its role *vis-à-vis* management. Trade unions in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan are also considered in some depth, providing, in addition to their intrinsic interest, a valuable source of comparison and contrast to the ACFTU.

The authors cover the full legal context for trade union activity in China, as well as in-depth analysis of the role of the ACFTU within both State Owned and Foreign Invested enterprises. Importantly, the authors also point to critical gaps in our current understanding of unionisation in urban collectives, privately-owned firms, and TVEs (the latter now employing 125 million workers, more than the state sector).

Overall this book provides the most up-to-date, single source of information on this topic and will be a valuable resource for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as teachers and researchers. Managers and HR specialists in enterprises in Greater China will also find much of interest here.

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