BOOK REVIEW

Fu, Pingping (Ed.) (2024). *Humanistic leadership practices: Exemplary cases from different cultures.* Palgrave Macmillan XVIII+328 pages. ISBN: 978-3-031-34368-1. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-34366-7

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The edited volume under consideration reflects a remarkable attempt at defining humanistic leadership's research agenda in the field of contemporary organization studies. In this respect, the eleven contributions in this volume employ a working definition of humanistic leadership grounded in the extant literature. In organizational settings, humanistic leaders are conceptualized as embodying the following core attributes:

> *they adopt a holistic view, by displaying a profound respect for people as holistic human beings, through a genuine concern for their followers' needs*
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> *they espouse a developmental perspective, in terms of both self-improvement and helping subordinates cultivate and unleash their full potential* and third,
>
> *they seek to reconcile and harmonize goal setting of different societal actors and promote the common good by properly considering all stakeholders' interests. The common good construct encompasses the three main pillars of humanistic management: affirming human dignity, nurturing ethics and securing stakeholders' legitimate interests* (Fu et al., 2020; Gotsis & Grimani, 2021, 2024; Melé, 2016).

A common thread in this book is that, unlike conventional leadership styles that focus on typical leadership behaviours and leaders' social influence, humanistic leaders strive to continuously cultivate themselves and develop subordinates' psychological capital through social learning and role modelling. Humanistic leaders are expected to provide humanistic care and humanistic education to their followers, *thus fostering responsible attitudes that transcend the scope of mere profitability.* In so doing, they encourage employees to engage in appreciating life, promoting happiness,

undertaking helping and pro-social behaviours and protecting the environment.

In a nutshell, humanistic traditions emphasize *the intrinsic value of human interactions*, the development of other humans; the enrichment of individuals within and outside relational interface, the need for actions that are right for the actors affected by them, as well as on relations that positively influence the material and social conditions of those in the relational interface (pp. 112-113). The authors in this volume endorse the view that humanistic leadership principles *are applicable universally, yet specific practices are contextual, varying across cultural geographies*. Although people around the globe tend to assume differing interpretations of humanism, humanistic leadership shares a set of basic principles that remain identical across cultures, rooted in the need to treat people as holistic human beings. However, the specific forms of caring behaviors and practices are dependent upon a variety of societal contexts, and deeply influenced by native cultural values. This encounter of globality and locality, construed through the complicated entwinements between universal principles and indigenous normative systems, remains the primary research objective of this book.

The book consists of 11 chapters. The first chapter entitled "Faith, family, and firm*:* A case study of Bob Chapman", introduces Bob Chapman, CEO of Barry-Wehmiller companies, who was inspired to adopt a humanistic leadership style, initiating and implementing substantial changes within his organization. Chapman accredits his commitment to the Christian faith as a cornerstone of his overall endeavour to adopt those attributes from which his understanding of humanistic leadership practices was derived. Interestingly, such a faith-based humanistic leadership could be expanded to address current issues engendering a DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) agenda, thus alleviating human vulnerability and mitigating perceptions of discrimination and social exclusion in the workplace (pp. 32-34).

The next chapter "Humanistic leadership in the Amish Community: Leading from the edge" considers humanistic leadership in the context of organizational change. Amish leaders in a faith-based community facing the challenges of modernity and advanced capitalism are responding to disintegration processes by stressing the need to focus on real human beings in organizations, in conformity to the premises and basic tenets of humanistic leadership, by treating each one with equal dignity and respect (pp. 49-52).

The chapter entitled "Confucian humanistic leadership: Social influence processes and trickle effects" introduces the founder of a Taiwanese company as a typical Confucian humanistic leader who promotes humanist virtues through direct and indirect actions. A Confucian humanistic leader internalizes *Junzi* (the noble person) virtues, thus claiming greater social influence. The core attributes of humanistic leadership in a Confucian context consist of long-term orientation and proper conduct (virtue of *yi/righteousness*), emphasis on collective welfare (virtue of *Ren/ benevolence*), moral influence (virtue of *li/propriety*), virtue cultivation (virtue of *zhi/wisdom*), and honesty/ accountability/transparency (virtue of *xin/trustworthiness*). Humanistic leaders are in a position to promote socially beneficial outcomes through both social learning and social exchange pathways (pp. 83-86). Implementing Confucian humanistic leadership throughout the organization forges bonds of social respect boosts the company's reputation, and nurtures harmonious relationships with all stakeholders (Gotsis, 2022).

The chapter on "Humanistic leadership in Africa: A relational ideal of Maat" underscores the importance of *Maat*, an inclusive cultural category emerging in ancient Egyptian civilization, to illustrate how such underlying principles pertain to humanistic leadership. Humanistic leadership is perceived *as a function of decisions and actions of African traditional orientations that stem from Maat philosophy* (pp. 108-111). The chapter integrates established historical, anthropological, and philosophical dimensions of African humanism because of situating humanistic leadership in modern African political cultures (pp. 113-116). Three eminent leaders who epitomize distinct indigenous principles are mentioned: Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and James Mwangi of Equity Bank of Kenya. Whereas Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu substantiate the Ubuntu principles of African humanism, James Nwangi exemplifies Maat humanistic principles. Maat philosophy is grounded in a tendency to influence others because of a deeper respect for, and inherent dignity of, all as human beings. Humanistic leadership from an African perspective is commensurate with the fundamental values of African culture: it is conceptualized as the process by which individuals in leadership roles influence followers positively based on worthy actions and conditions that enrich and make them thrive (p. 116).

The chapter entitled "Are hidden champions humanistic? A reflection on humanistic leadership in Germany" explores the degree to which leaders of hidden champions in Germany, which are less-known companies

that excel in their specific areas, should be regarded as humanistic leaders. The authors seek to investigate issues of whether leaders can be deemed humanistic if they engage in humanistic practices, primarily for performance purposes. The authors conclude that more empirical research is needed to "clarify the extent to which a focus on profitability and an a priori commitment to human dignity and well-being can coexist and be harmoniously integrated" (p. 146).

The chapter on "Humanistic leadership: A UAE perspective" addresses various dimensions of humanistic leadership in the United Arab Emirates. As an Arab country complying with moderate Islamic principles, UAE is famous for incorporating its human-centric initiatives in UAE's National Agenda encapsulating actions intended to implement humanistic values such as tolerance, generosity, and well-being. Human-centric values emerging in the UAE context include respect, dignity protection, fairness/justice, care and kindness, generosity, humility, responsibility, and leadership development (p. 164). These values are entrenched in long-held Arabic traditions and moderate Islamic principles informing the UAE National Agenda. UAE government's presence in societal affairs is strong and the government initiatives are purposeful, result-driven and active, aligned with Islamic and Arab cultural values (p. 175).

The following chapter entitled "Caring for employees and society: Exemplifications of humanistic leadership values in Japan" examines typically Japanese humanistic leadership style deeply embedded in Japanese cultural traditions. The chapter focuses on two exemplary leaders, Konosuke Matsushita and Kazuo Inamori, who achieved financial success by embracing a people-centric perspective. Leaders' humane values and beliefs support the need to consider societal welfare and followers' well-being in the decision-making process. In so doing, humanistic leaders make decisions based on fairness and do not pursue profit maximization (p. 203). The authors consider Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931) and Ishida Baigan (1685-1744), the two most influential scholars with profound impact on Japanese leadership, as the pioneers of modern humanistic leadership ideas in a Japanese cultural context shaped by a process of continuity with native spiritual traditions (pp. 195-200).

The chapter "Organizational flourishing through the lens of three top executives in Colombia: How they relate to the inner Development Goals-IDGs" introduces three humanistic leaders in Columbia. The chapter embodies a qualitative study of three top executives from two awarded companies to identify competencies beyond those dictated by

conventional administrative philosophies. Among these competencies, openness and learning mindset, self-awareness, integrity and authenticity, empathy and compassion, and humility, are those that mostly prevail (p. 234). These competencies are viewed as akin to leaders strongly committed to facilitating their companies enact and implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, by substantially endorsing an inspirational and visionary leadership style.

The chapter on "Humanistic leadership and the paradoxical pursuit of sustainability and profitability: A case study of the Tata Group in India" explores Tata Group, a company founded in 1868 in pre-independent India, that evolved into an influential global enterprise through its commitment to the founder Jamsetji Tata's (1839–1904) conviction that *the community is not just another stakeholder in business but the very purpose of its existence*. The Tata Group upholds the core value that organizations can do good by being virtuous. The company has excelled in interventions supportive of corporate philanthropy, consonant with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. These achievements should be understood as the social corollary of the paradoxical goal of reconciling sustainability and profitability objectives, by adopting a unique approach to administrative ethics. This corporate vision revolves around three primary values: *wealth and profits are not a goal but an outcome*, *the virtuous circle of giving many times over*, and *an ongoing momentum of the founder's vision* (pp. 241-248). Accordingly, indigenous initiatives are integral to an industrialization process that ensures sustainability (pp. 255-258). In this manner, "the vision of the Tata Group and its founder to prioritize social and human welfare has contributed substantially to the national development" (p. 260).

The chapter "Engaging employees through cultivating habitual behaviors: Humanistic leadership practices at the Fotile Group" discusses the mechanisms by which Mao Zhongqun, founder and chairman of the Board of Directors of Chinese Fotile Group, fosters constructive employee behaviours by shaping a high-engagement organizational culture (pp. 276-279). Mao initiated the practice of the "Five Ones": *setting a goal to do something meaningful*, *reading a classic book over a period of time*, *correcting bad habits*, *espousing attitudes of filial piety*, and *performing a kind deed every day* (pp. 280-287). Not unimportantly, these changes necessitate humanistic leaders insofar as these principles can hardly be efficacious without being supported by humanistic leadership and a people-oriented culture (pp. 290-291).

The last chapter "Achieving UNSDG Goals through humanistic practices: The case of Good-Ark Electronics Corp. Ltd. in China" introduces the eight practices Good-Ark developed in 2009. This company remains a typical case of how an organization contributes to the fulfilment of the 17 UNSDGs. The company has developed eight educational units that involve *humanistic care*, *humanistic education*, *green practices*, *health promotion*, *philanthropic actions*, *voluntary services*, *publicizing humanistic practices*, and *Dun Lun Jin Fen* (the act of fulfilling role responsibilities). The company's founder, Wu, realized that these learning units are in a position to promote the UNSDGs through the critical role the company's family-like organizational culture assumes in designing and enacting humanistic practices (pp. 318-320). More specifically, "humanistic care, philanthropic actions, health promotion, voluntary services, and green environment are related to society's goals" (p. 321).

In sum, the book elaborates on humanistic leadership as a model that enables employees to thrive, businesses to engage in socially responsible initiatives and local communities to benefit from sustainability. The contributors proffer permeating insights into the process of implementing specific humanistic leadership practices across economic geographies, combining effectively the global and the local, universal principles and culturally embedded beliefs. The authors in this edited volume convincingly argue that the complex intertwinement between globally shared normative goals and contextually dependent values needs to be taken into meticulous consideration. In this respect, indigenous systems from East and South Asia, as well as from the global South (Africa, and Latin America) provide further impetus to endeavours fostering social responsibility, accountability and sustainability worldwide. These cultural experiences encompass an accumulated social and spiritual capital that is in a position to shape more humane, inclusive and resilient organizations, especially in the aftermath of the post-Covid-19 fluid and uncertain environment (Barrera et al., 2022).

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