**Raelin, J.A., (ed) (2016) Leadership-as-Pactice: Theory and Application. Oxon. Routledge. 296 pages.**

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**Reviewed by:** Alan Johnston, York Business School, York St. John University, UK

This book sets out to take a fresh look and approach to the concept of leadership. In the editors own words it is designed with the intent “to shake the foundations of the very meaning of leadership”.

The book starts with an introduction to the concept of Leadership-as-Practice and provides a compelling explanation for what is referred to as the “practice view”. As such the introduction identifies how this approach differs from traditional forms of leadership which most practitioners and scholars have come to accept. One interesting element is that the editor describes this new paradigm as a movement suggesting the approach is still developing and as such the leading authors (to which this book claims to draw on) approach the subject from different perspectives.

The book (which is an edited collection) is split into four sections consisting of twelve chapters (three in each). Each section is a theme; background to leadership-as-practice; embodied nature of leadership-as-practice; social interactions which underlie the practices of leadership; applications of the leadership-as-practice approach.

Section One provides the background to leadership as practice and is split into three chapters. The chapters provide a well thought through focus on the key aspects to the principles of the movement. This starts initially with an overview of the leadership as practice landscape and provides a key understanding of how leadership is viewed from a leadership as practice standpoint. The chapter also recognises contrasting ontological stances consistent with different perspectives of the movement. The second chapter of this section of the book looks at the philosophical basis of leadership as practice from a hermeneutical perspective. This chapter lays a crucial foundation of the key to leadership as practice approach and highlights the phenomenological discussion around leadership, thus providing a discussion of key focus of practice and the living of leadership. The final chapter of this section continues the discussion of the philosophical basis of the movement. This chapter argues that leadership must be considered within the context of the structures and the practices of the organisation. Crucially it is imperative for the leaders to understand themselves and others and the aspect of relationships.

Section Two draws on the need to appreciate the environment as a key influence of leadership alongside an understanding of the individual and their ability to process information for their experiences. The first chapter of section two considers identity as a key aspect of leadership. This chapter considers the aspects of false and real identity and the positioning of the leader in order to promote the image which they wish to portray in their organisation. The second chapter adopts a critical perspective of the traditions of leadership and considers the concept of materiality in understanding approaches to leadership and the activities found within it. The final chapter of the first section links with the second chapter of the first section and adopts an approach which seeks to consider how we see the world and therefore our perception of leadership within it. The chapter notes the importance to not have any preconceived framework to work from. Similarly key elements of this are discussed in The Art and Science of Leadership by Nahavandi (2009).

The third section of the book focuses on the social interactions which underlie the practices of leadership. In particular this section distinguishes between the types of interactions that occur between leaders and followers i.e. individuals. The first of the chapters considers agency and its role within leadership as practice. In particular the chapter considers the role of agency in three contexts; firstly, leadership as self-action, secondly leadership as inter-action and thirdly leadership as trans-action. Fundamentally it suggests a focus of leadership as practice as leadership as trans-action given the dynamic nature of practice. The second chapter of this section supports the previous chapter, however it identifies the interactive nature of leadership as “Dialogic Practice”. In other words the chapter is concerned with the dialogues of the interactions between leaders and their followers and the development of relationships that occur. The section concludes with a chapter that focuses on Conversational Travel. In this chapter the author considers the use of language and conversation as the development of leadership practice. This builds on some of the ideas portrayed by Clawson (2009) who discusses the language of leadership and in particular makes reference to the ‘interpersonal dance’.

The final section of the book concentrates in the application of leadership as practice. The opening chapter reviews the concept of diversity and in particular gendered relationships. The second of the chapters considers research approaches to leadership as practice and identifies key issues around methodological approaches to researching in the field. In particular the chapter considers challenges to the field and also potential directions for future investigation and development. The final chapter and the section, and subsequently the book, considers leadership development. The chapter identifies the leadership development process which concentrates on the individual and their situation, with the focus on competencies and skills. This chapter puts forward an alternative approach within the context of leadership as practice.

Throughout the book the different authors draw on practical examples and reference to a range of different organisations and situations which makes for a compelling and interesting read. In particular the book opens up a new and challenging paradigm for considering the concept of leadership. In doing this the authors and the editor develop a rebirth of leadership as a contemporary and innovative study area. Many would consider this book as a challenge to traditional themes and constructs of leadership opening up a new agenda and opportunity for discourse. At the outset this review it was identified that the Editor of the book suggested that the book was designed with the intent “to shake the foundations of the very meaning of leadership”. And to a large extent it will. In particular this book breaks with tradition and offers a new explanation for leadership in the 21st Century.

From a readership perspective this book provides an interesting addition to the literature and I would commend colleagues to add it to their collection. For me, the text is best suited to the postgraduate market and will provide an interesting read for many MBA and other postgraduate programmes with significant leadership content. In addition strong undergraduate students will also be challenged by many of the ideas and the book will be a useful addition to the reading list for my honours level students.

References

Clawson, J.G., (2009) Level Three Leadership: Getting Below the Surface. 4th Ed. London. Pearson.

Nahavandi, A., (2009) The Art and Science of Leadership. 5th Ed. London. Pearson.