
Creative Social Change: Leadership for a Healthy World by Kathryn Goldman Schuyler, E.B. Baugher, and K. Jironet (Eds.). Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2016.

This volume, in a series of edited books called *Building Leadership Bridges*, offers a path to bettering the world. The editors begin by interviewing distinguished thought leaders, systems thinkers, and social scientists around seven open-ended questions, creating a primer for what leadership can or should be. This is followed by a review of the literature, building on theoretical constructs for a healthy society and finishing with case examples. In the introduction the editors aptly demonstrate their positionality through story, developing a hopeful yet practical view of “humans” and the possibilities for a healthy world. With an expression of shared values, they hope to plant “seeds” (p. 7) of action within the text. They offer an ideal, one in which people manage equilibrium between humanity and nature for the benefit of society by being internally reflective and externally practical. The authors have expertise in relevant areas of focus in this book, including organizational development, leadership, psychology, and sociology. Focusing on systems thinking, the content relates to organizational development, organizational psychology, and sociology. The book’s strengths are in its design, quality, and selection of sources.

The authors did not explicitly recognize limits to human capacity in collective action for the good of the whole, yet contributors appropriately mention such common limits in their own ways. For example, Peter Senge refers to “systems leaders” and the problem of people trying to balance their own needs with acting collectively (p. 71), while Quinn recalls a story about students of differing religions, each perceiving their unique beliefs as resonating with the commonality of his leadership class (p. 64). The focus of this text is to generate leadership thinking about healthy systems, which Senge sums up nicely with his favourite notion of leadership: “Leadership is the capacity of a human community to shape its future” (p. 67). *Creative Social Change* achieves its main objective in part because it highlights the possibilities for the future and a path towards it.

The editors open the book with “The Ground: Foundations from Thought Leaders”, which interviews five “weighty” (p. 19) scholars—R. Quinn, O. Scharmer, E. Schein, P. Senge, and M. Wheatley—giving the book an undeniable richness and direction. The authors start by defining the term health, not from the lens of “effectiveness” for society, but from “heart and consciousness” (p. 15). This idea of world health is then reduced to a more cognitively accessible and practical frame of diverse organizations and communities—holons within a greater system—giving the text a tangible balance between idealism and pragmatism for community practitioners.

The fundamental questions asked here include probing what the state, direction(s), and components of a healthy organization are, and what best practices can be modelled and investigated (pp. 25-6). In part one, the interviewed thought leaders generate knowledge around themes. Part two addresses “fundamental conditions necessary for individual, organizational, societal, and ecological health and what it means to be a cultivator of such health as a leader” (p. 100). Part three explores six case studies set in local contexts where a community’s vitality

is improved through groups and organizations. These diverse cases offer lessons on leadership and deal with topics including the arts as intervention, stories of leaders and leadership in service to community, and examples of policy creation through grassroots organizations. One such illustration of the latter is the “Ecuadorian legislation [that] favors the indigenous notion of *sumak kawsay* (‘good living’) and grants rights to Mother Earth” (p. 243).

I find the editors’ and authors’ appreciative and hopeful approaches reassuring, making this a pleasant yet knowledge-packed read. As a student of scholarship, I do not find this hopeful approach too idealistic, given the book’s well-considered design, skilled contributors, methodological descriptors, and superb flow of content. The development of thinking in the first part of the book is complemented with more structured approaches in its second part and by relevant and diverse examples in its final third, lending itself as a useful reference for supporting action.

The writing generally avoids recognizing cognitive or myopic limitations of the human brain in understanding diversity and the social messiness that to-date has eluded the whole of human society. Challenges to the book’s focus on groups and organizations could come from the Olsonian hypothesis, understood by *The Tragedy of the Commons* or *Prisoner’s Dilemma*, in which individuals are selfishly motivated, small groups are self-serving, and societies cannot effectively collaborate. My own cynical concern regarding the totalitarian idealism of a “healthy world” (as articulated by Joshua Greene’s *Moral Tribes* and Mancur Olson’s *The Logic of Collective Action*) were tempered early. This was particularly the case when the authors referenced Schein (2000), whom they paraphrase by saying, “Health is not an end state...but instead an ongoing capacity to remove toxins from a living system” (p. 17). Further removing a *silver bullet* solution, when Margaret Wheatley was asked if leaders should “retreat” (pp. 35-6) to gain greater perspective on human health, she noted that a healthy world is “one that never existed” (p. 38).

Creative Social Change is intended for leaders, specifically those motivated to exercise change and development within their organizations and networks impacting the greater community. Scholars, government agents, and those interested in community economic development and sustainability will find support because of the approach to micro-level action, specifically at the organizational and municipal levels. The editors note a specific intention for leaders of “companies, consultancies, and university programs” (p. 40) to help create new leaders.

The implications for practice one can take from this book include the underlying values of systems thinking, as well as the theoretical constructs of healthy organizations, and the roles of collaborative leadership, shared values, and sustainable activities in helping support a healthier society and world. Policy implications would favour an impact on local community health.

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