Book review

LEADING FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

This university textbook is part of the four-book Sage series 'Transforming public health practice: meeting the core competences of the Public Health Career Framework', of which Vicki Taylor is also the Series Editor. The Career Framework was published in 2008 in a joint collaboration led by the Oxford–National Health Service-based 'Solutions for Public Health' team.

The book is firmly targeted to public health students in the UK, rather than to public health leaders or people who research leadership. It has a polytechnic textbook flavour, and I do not mean this in any disparaging way. It is clearly written, doesn't assume too much previous knowledge, includes numerous boxes with reflective tutorial and self-learning exercises, and systematically builds quite a sophisticated understanding of the subject. I don't read many textbooks these days, and this one impressed me with the logic of its structure and presentation. The content should work quite well for Australasian masters students, although the specific references to the Career Framework do not translate.

Taylor begins the book with various definitions of leadership (versus management) and analyses of the related processes. She supports a situational understanding of what leadership is, and leans toward processes that involve shared and distributed leadership. In summary, she distinguishes between leadership and leader, and brings the book down on the side of the former. In reviewing the evidence, she frequently notes the paucity of leadership literature that specifically discusses public health (John Catford excepted).

The book moves on to consider how leadership functions within and between organisations. It outlines Weber's analysis of how bureaucracies operate internally as machines, and shows students how to analyse the external influences on an organisation by considering the PESTLE factors: political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental. There are sensible discussions covering leadership by objectives, appreciation of organisational culture and how to hone emotional intelligence.

Then follow chapters on partnerships and negotiation. Although the analysis of power is unsophisticated (power is your ability to get things done), it pushes a useful message that power grows through the alignment of what actors want ('getting people to *want* to do what you want them to do' p. 87) at both personal and institutional levels. There are nods to game-playing, coercion, interference and the like that budding middle managers will relate to.

I enjoyed the chapters on leading community development and local initiatives, by Susie Sykes and John Harvey respectively. Sykes is a fan of 1970s pinup Paolo Friere, and Harvey runs a consulting business. Their two chapters give complementary perspectives on how to get things happening at a local level. Sykes provides a nostalgic review of the literature defining 'community' and runs with Taylor's theme about leadership through collaboration. Harvey's chapter comes closest to the aphoristic school of leadership writing, offering pith about 'knowing the business, knowing the team and especially knowing yourself' (p. 142).

The final chapters are by Taylor again on project management and leading change. 'Leading and managing projects' takes a graduated approach, starting with a discussion on the time–budget–quality trade-off in simple projects. It moves on to the five phases framework of Vivien Martin, the six-stage project model of Elbeik and Thomas, the seven questions approach (Martin again) and culminates with a quick look at the UK standard PRINCE2 ('PRojects IN Controlled Environments') process for managing complex large-scale projects.

Throughout, the book references many mnemonics, acrostics, frameworks, conceptual diagrams, models and the like in a fairly non-judgemental way. This alone would make it a useful resource for the many lecturers and students who like that sort of thing. The concluding chapter on leading change covers Lewin's force-field analysis and three-phase model, Bullock and Batten's four-phase model, Kotter's eight-step model and General Electric's seven-step change-acceleration process. Although this is a handy summary of the literature, it does call to mind the adage in medicine that whenever we come across a wide choice of treatments for a particular condition, it is usually because none of them work very well.

The book sets out to be easily understood and evidence based where possible. It is not a charismatic call to leadership as a vocation, but for those of us who are not natural leaders it does a good job of presenting it as something that can be learnt in digestible chunks. Nevertheless the 157 cross-references (I counted them), to the knowledge and skills required by the UK's Career Framework, National Occupational Standards and Public Health Practitioner Standards, are a little dispiriting. The Weberian iron cage of competency-based education is as hard to argue against as it is uninspiring.

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