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BOOK REVIEW

THE LEADERSHIP INSIGHT JOURNAL BY NANCY ADLER: Beauty for every day life...

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Review by: Dr. Beatriz Acevedo, Lord Ashcroft International Business School, Anglia Ruskin University (Cambridge, UK)

The days get shorter and the light flees ever earlier in the afternoon. A glorious autumn paints fields vermilion and gold whilst wobbling lines of trees whistle in chorus to the north wind. We find shelter in crowded offices, class-rooms or packed into commuter trains only to be squeezed out like a black blue and pink puree onto subterranean concrete conduits. While the landscape outside parades its seasonal farewell, indoors the situation can be somehow different. The year is ending and there is still so much to do. Tight deadlines seem almost impossible to achieve. With the pile of documents, mounting emails and appointments accumulating for the end of the semester, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and sometimes depressed. The tiny details, the administrative overload, one's own volatile mood, amplified by stressful environments, all make us a bit blind to the kaleidoscopic morphogenesis of nature.

It is precisely in moments like these that it is imperative to look through the window and find in ourselves a moment to reflect, to breathe, and to garner strength in our inner core for the challenges ahead. In those moments of crisis, the only answer is 'beauty'. The new publication by Professor Nancy Adler: *The Leadership Insight Journal* is a daily reminder of the possibilities of having such a moment of peace. Based on an extensive work of many years, Professor Adler regales us with a novel approach to inspiring leadership. This is not an academic (sometimes dry and hermetic) article, although it follows the author's dynamic (and not at all boring) publications in distinguished journals. It is not a 'managerial' book, preaching and praising unattainable actions, only possible for those who are already in positions of power.

The Leadership Insight Journal is an invitation from the realm of beauty and painting into a world of creativity, reflection and inspiration. It strikes a chord with our inner dreamer, the artist that is capable of resolving situations with creativity and flair. Professor Adler suggests that all of us are artists and echoing the assertion of businessman: "I am not a manager, I am an artist" (Warren Buffett, CEO Berkshire Hathaway). This Journal talks to all of us (invisible artists): the multi-tasking entrepreneur dealing with different pressures, finding alternatives, creating bridges; the dedicated analyst, transforming tables, figures and data into informative graphs; the maverick marketer, inventing new worlds and possibilities in visual languages; the busy manager, keeping her sights on the horizon, inspiring her people towards unknown adventures; or the committed lecturer, balancing several courses while offering hopeful scenarios, insightful questions or simply by providing a patient ear for the students' queries... Because, as Professor Adler has been arguing, the challenges of our contemporary world require radical and different sets of skills and attitudes: in which motivation is replaced by inspiration; planning must give place to creation; and authority shifts toward leadership (Adler, 2006; 2010; 2011). All of us are looking for possibilities, either in our jobs or lives, for our families or communities. Our contemporary "society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, innovation and beauty than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism (Adler, 2011: 208)

In tune with the most advanced developments in business schools and successful enterprises around the world, the *Leadership Insight Journal* addresses most of the preoccupations proposed by

Professor Adler's in her long standing career. In 2006, she published a ground breaking article titled: "The Arts and the Leadership: Now that we can do anything, what will be do?" In this reflection she collects the latest approaches in prestigious universities about the use of arts in business and innovation: from the collaborations with theatre directors at Harvard Business School and Cranfield School of Management, to more recent experiments using visuality in education for sustainable development at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She shows that there are many examples paving the way to an exploration of the cross-fertilisation between arts and business.

The author identifies some important trends for businesses and managers: Firstly, the rapidly increasing global interconnectedness, where change is a 'constant' requiring innovative options beyond the analytical or the planning skills taught in traditional MBAs; Secondly, the increasing domination of market forces and the increasing awareness of the problems that humanity deals in environmental and social terms. In this sense, Adler quotes artists Benjamin and Rosamund Zander: "The radical shift in the structure of the world begs for creativity; it asks us to rethink who we are as human beings...It may be that writers, painters and musicians have an unprecedented opportunity to be co-creators with society's leaders in setting a path." Thirdly, we are living in an increasingly turbulent, complex and chaotic environment, where the traditional products or services are giving way to "new what's" (Hamel, 2000: 12-13), something in which the late Steve Jobs was a master: Who could have imagined that now we 'need' an iPad or that we read books in portable tablets. These are not the outcomes of continual improvement; instead these innovations involve radical changes as the creation of new necessities that we did not suspect we had before. As the current exhibition of Leonardo Da Vinci in National Gallery shows, good artists are ahead of their times, and thus, "the present manager must learn the same artistic discipline, they must learn to respond or conceive of something that will move in the same direction in which the world is moving, without waiting for all the evidence to appear on their desk." (Whyte, 2001: 241-242). As consultant and opera singer David Pearl says, we must remember that Shakespeare was both a manager and an artist, creating wonderful literary works while keeping his theatre company in the market (quoted in Adler, 2006: 488). The fourth trend is an acknowledgement that we need more dreamers than managers... Nancy Adler suggests that like artists, business people today need to be constantly creating new ideas, and as we enter the 21st century, organizations' scarcest resource has become their dreamers, not their testers (2006: 492).

In developing some ideas in relation to these trends the Leadership Insight Journal presents an gracefully designed book. It weaves both sharp quotations -expressed through the sacred art of calligraphy- with Nancy Adler's delicate and vibrant paintings. It is a beautiful object to be exhibited with pride in meetings, or simply to work with it in private; but most of all, it invites to a dialogue between the reader and the Journal. Although a beautiful object, the idea for this Journal stems from two practical questions: "What do managers need to do to strengthen their capacity to lead wisely and creatively in the 21st century? How can executives best envision and implement initiatives that matter?" Drawing upon Confucius admonishment for perspective and wisdom through reflection, contemporary writers (or management gurus) like Peter Drucker and Howard Gardner advocate reflection and silence. Nancy Adler's Journal gives us the time to reflect and to return to the quiet and contemplation it takes to be wise. It is a vital space for gaining perspective and it includes blank pages for our own ideas in reaction or echoing a number of insightful comments. The Journal seduces us to dreaming and aspiring to exceptionally exciting opportunities. Overall, this Journal is an original way of expressing a holistic understanding of leadership as inspiration. Each of the paintings and pages invite us to dream and envisage richer images and feelings involving leadership. The Journal can be used as a sounding board: It opens (almost magically) the necessary time to reflect on what makes you a good leader. The materials included in the Journal are also a theme of sensitivity and sensuality: the almost transparent pages entertain tactile experiences; the

colours and motifs stir subtle passions and feelings, encouraging to think about your own journey and the prospect to make sense of the world by ourselves (since this is not a recipe book or a code, the Journal actually aims at creating an intimate dialogue with yourself, a necessary realm in an over exposed world of images and information, that at the end, does not seem to make us happier or wiser)

The Journal is not easily described by words (and I have already used enough of them). It is a sensual and spiritual experience. It is both a beautiful object and a useful tool. We think that the Journal would make an exquisite and relevant souvenir for these seasons to be used throughout the year to come.

We welcome the publication of this Journal as a clear example of how leadership and business can benefit from the insights from artists and creators. Its publication actually anticipates our Special Issue in Arts and Management (contributions are all welcome!), as well, as the Sixth Art of Management and Organization Conference Creativity and Critique, September 4-7th 2012, University of York UK (

http://www.york.ac.uk/management/research/research-areas/organisation-theory/art_of_management/

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