

Book Review

Leadership Insight

Going beyond the dehydrated language of management

by Nancy J. Adler

Routledge, U.S. \$ 49.95, 190 pages



Leadership Insight is a collection of artwork (27 beautiful watercolors by Nancy Adler herself), over 30 meaningful quotes by Aristotle, Confucius, and other famous and not so famous people, augmented by 13 transparent pages with questions, mostly by the author, to inspire leaders to examine their own beliefs and attitudes. The book is meant to be a journal for leaders to reflect, collect their own thoughts, and write them down on the 84 blank pages provided for that purpose, to foster creativity and leadership. I'd like to accept Nancy Adler's advice and take the book as an invitation, "... an invitation to enter into the quiet and contemplation it takes to be wise." So, let's abandon all attempts of objectivity and follow some thoughts inspired by the book.

For centuries, art — and art alone — was regarded as an act of creativity. Only in the last decades we have started to understand creativity as a basic human ability, a fact proven by neurophysiology, locating creative thinking in the middle prefrontal area of the *neocortex* — the area where thinking of the highest level of abstraction takes place. Creativity ranks among the most advanced human activities and, as so many pointed out, seems the only way out of the terrible problems we cause for ourselves. To deal with the challenges of our age our leaders — as much as anyone — need creativity alongside with a deeper understanding and empathy in order to bring about the necessary transformative change. Creativity is a non-linear process with an uncertain outcome. It cannot be measured, it cannot be planned, and it can be messy

at times. People, managers in particular, find that hard to accept. Most of us are still caught up in 19th-century thinking with romantic notions about art and beauty. But, the way of the artist is usually hard and uncompromising. It is this unyielding determination that we need in our leaders — the will to embrace creativity and to accept the uncertainty that comes with it. However, the transition from the traditional linear thinking to a more holistic, creative approach is not an easy one and we should not pretend otherwise.

In creativity, quantity breeds quality. The more input we give ourselves, the easier it gets to generate new ideas, concepts, and associations. Keeping a creativity journal is a good way to collect impressions, ideas, and insight. It should contain pictures as well as text, and be as personal as possible. After a while it will become a source of inspiration itself. *Leadership Insight* provides exactly that, inspiration and space for collecting thoughts and ideas. Seeing a renowned scholar such as Nancy Adler practicing art alongside her academic work and sharing it is encouraging. Her book seems almost too beautiful to mess it up with one's own scribbles. The reader might want to use it for inspiration only and start a creativity journal on their own. It would be interesting to see the blank pages filled with more of Nancy Adler's thoughts in her own hand and to follow her visual thinking. That would add a new dimension and make the book even more valuable and inspiring.

Reviewed by Axel Wendelberger

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