

Leading with Values: Positivity, Virtue and High Performance by Edward D. Hess and Kim S. Cameron. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 238 pages, paperback.

Reviewed by **Leslie E. Sekerka**, Menlo College

The impacts of Positive Psychology have taken off in the 2000s. Academics and practitioners in management have leveraged this movement to advance research and application through their work in Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) and Positive Organizational Behavior (POB).

As a discipline, POS seeks to advance our understanding of what creates the best of human functioning in organizational contexts (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). The latter, POB, constitutes the study of positive human strengths and competencies, how they can be facilitated, assessed and managed to improve performance in the workplace (Nelson & Cooper, 2007).

Contributions to this collective effort use inquiry to discover what it looks like to thrive in the world of work and organizations. This focus on the good, the positive, and optimal functioning is no short-term fad. I say this without hesitation because the output produced by this community has instilled fresh dialogue and has edified our understanding of how to do and be well, and to learn how to support others in doing the same. One of the latest editions to this compendium of scholarship is *Leading with Values: Positivity, Virtues, and High Performance*, by Ed Hess and Kim Cameron. The self-proclaimed goal of this book is to “inspire, to inform, and to affect behavior” (p. 3). In this review I consider how the authors move to accomplish this.

Leading with Values presents eleven chapters, with the preponderance setting forth their message via narratives that, with one exception, describe leaders who have engaged in exemplary values-based actions. In the on-going shift from control to values-based management (O’Toole, 1996), Hess and Cameron assume that extraordinary organizational effects result from an emphasis on virtues, values, and positivity. While the case studies tend to focus on

individuals, the authors frame their purpose in a macro context, stating that the fundamental message is that “businesses can act ethically and treat all stakeholders with respect and dignity, without sacrificing profits or performance” (p. 2). By putting the spotlight directly on leaders, they plan to demonstrate how this can be achieved. In so doing, this becomes the means to magnify and amplify the beneficial affects of elevating the positive. By implication, this will help to guide those in positions of authority to make full use of their role as exemplars, stewards, vision creators, and sources of motivation for others. The authors are quite clear about identifying their audience to those who “are inclined toward the good and the true” (p. 3). Who can say no to that? In this sense the book should have wide appeal. But because the case selections tend to reflect people who currently hold positions of leadership in the US, they target a more discrete audience. Nevertheless, there are plenty of nuggets worth pursuing in each chapter, which stir reflection and are likely to prompt additional discourse, application, and future research.

Robert Drazin, Ed Hess, and Farah Mihoubi begin the collection of articles by modeling how values are taught through stories. Offering one of their own, they explain how a family extended its values and perpetuated them through servant leaders within an organization. In Chapter 1 they show how their values became fully adopted by employees, becoming part of routine behavior through leadership promotion and ongoing reinforcement. The key point for this reader was to never take a values-based culture for granted, that to create this kind of workplace environment requires continuous development and support. Gary Bouch affirms this point in Chapter 2, describing the efforts that FedEx Freight has undergone to create a people-centric culture.

Here we experience the pensive moments of leaders involved in an organizational change event, and how it ultimately contributes to a renewed commitment to people. The effort led to a

“People First” approach to management, helping to promote self-knowledge, personal development, and education. This included a robust list of assignments for leaders, including instructions to mend relationships, select accountability partners, find a mentor, and other explicit means that put values into measurable actions. To his credit, the author reported the strength of the top-down aspects of the leaders’ efforts, but was also candid about his concern regarding the bottom-up plan. This suggests that the intervention may have been more productive had it been all inclusive, inviting workers along with external stakeholders to become fully engaged as equal partners in designing the corporate strategy. While this suggests a separation between leadership and workers, the realization that the program is "a new beginning that must be maintained for a lifetime" affirms that FedEx leaders are aware that values-based leadership must continually be renewed, rejuvenated, and is evolutionary.

Karl Weick takes the issue of values by targeting high reliability organizations (HRO). Drawing on his classic work examining responses to crisis situations, he looks at how leader alertness, issue framing, and hubris come together to impact organizations. He describes how the values exercised by leaders in daily workplace routines must be complemented by continuous learning and attentiveness or complacency will prevail. Weick takes us through the example of a wildland firefighter leader who manages crisis as an unfolding problem in sensemaking, continually updating and revising his response to the problem with transparency and a self-correcting rationale. We learn that HROs “work backward” in their efforts to avoid and prevent mistakes. In so doing they demonstrate mindfulness in each present moment. A memorable point from this chapter is that values need to be taken very seriously, which means being clear about the mistakes you don’t want to make. This suggests that leaders need to be wary of those who pay too much attention to success, simplicity, strategy, anticipation, and hierarchy. As per usual,

Weick leaves us with a sense of having learned something. He helps us take a step back and see how we view things, and how this can influence our decision-making. He masterfully pulls his work together to show us that being wary, mindful, and developing the capacity for recovery from setbacks are invaluable assets in value-based leadership.

Chapters 4 and 11 address values-centered leadership in the US Marine Corps; specifically, the key role of spirituality in leadership and how values are developed within their organization. In the first of these two contributions, Dan Yaroslaski and Paolo Tripodi explain that their success is inextricably linked to their personal values in a Higher Power, which are tied to group commitment. This shared faith helps leaders demonstrate excellence in combat operations through the presence of extremely powerful group bonds. While this chapter provides an interesting historical description of the Corps, emphasizing its Asian heritage and collectivist approach to shaping men of right action, such strength and confidence is still subject to the influences of hubris, which we know must be explicitly managed. In part, Michael Parkyn addresses this concern in Chapter 11, describing the means for how the Corps goes about building values within their organization, one Marine at a time.

Parkyn explains that this begins with recruitment, only selecting those individuals “who have the makings of a good Marines...like raw iron filings to a magnetized, polished steel sword” (p. 219). He goes on to provide an overview of the Corps’ stated values, training, mentoring, and other program requirements. The author explains the robust nature of the ongoing training and educational processes, including a reading list worthy of bookmarking for personal and/or classroom use. This chapter underscores the importance of screening, evaluation, and immersion in developing values-based leaders. Once again, the core theme of this chapter insists upon the essential nature of life-long learning in developing values-based leaders.

Chapters 5 and 6 tell stories of transformation that are fueled by interpersonal care. Ed Hess describes the role of spirituality in a firm's quest to become the country's most admired company. A process of organizational change that aligns high performance with a giving culture is a good story, but hearing a leader say "learn about our values by watching what I do," now that's worth reading (p. 107). Monica Woreline presents in eloquent prose the experiences of a hospital unit staff leader. Her reflections provide compelling insight into the nature of genuinely valuing others in the workplace, the epitome of values-based leadership. These two chapters demonstrate that helping people thrive is achievable and can build workplace performance. But to do so, leaders must provide purpose and meaning—honoring each person's work.

Kim Cameron, Maryann Glynn and Heather Jamerson examine principled leadership that is exercised or lost. In short, when leaders take action in tough times, but particularly when the challenging situation actually works against the application of their principles. These authors show how positive actions emerge from strengths, as well as from negative circumstances. This is an important contribution, as it begins to link disorder and dysfunction with achievement, aspirations, and performance (see Linley et al., 2006). In Chapter 7, Cameron's intensive case study helps us to see how hostility, negativity, and apathy can be overcome through leaders' exertion of values. He shows us how values-based action and monetary success can go hand in hand. This is especially compelling, not only because of the scholarly rigor, but because it shows how to overcome constraints within an institution as well as within a community at large. Cameron's work with colleague Mark Lavine (2006) in *Making the Impossible Possible, Leading Extraordinary Success: The Rocky Flats Story* provides greater insight into this research. While you may be familiar with this study, his restatement of the ten leadership principles in this chapter provides a concentrated reminder of the key findings.

Continuing on this theme of exercising values, Glynn and Jamerson take a closer look at Kenneth Lay, the former CEO of Enron. While most of us have had extensive exposure to articles on this subject, this piece is thought-provoking because it provides a broader context in analyzing the event, working to understand the societal and cultural factors that led to this corporate collapse. Peeling the onion of leadership character, they remind us to be wary of the environment, which includes political, regulatory, and economic changes. They suggest specific actions that can support internal awareness so that external pressures do not mindlessly influence leaders' daily routines, decision-making, and ethical acuity.

The foreshadowing of forgiveness was set forth in Chapter 2, with the value of "mending relationships." Bright's work carries this theme forward in Chapter 9, where he summarizes his findings from research examining forgiveness with managers, truck drivers, and dock workers. He explicates the concept and presents a framework for understanding why it may or may not occur in the workplace. A key take-away from this contribution is to show how forgiveness is based upon internal motivations and personal choice and can impact performance. This work is followed, quite appropriately, with an examination of how to respond to organizational trauma.

Edward Powley and Scott Taylor make an important distinction in leaders' response to traumatic events. They not only look at the actions, but how leaders go about deploying these actions during the crisis period. Given the occurrence of these kinds of events, coupled with increasing global tensions and societal pressures, the forecast suggests preparation is prudent. Values-based leadership implies readying oneself for trauma by practicing awareness and sensitivity. The authors provide a path for how to respond in crisis, which, in this reviewer's opinion is a salient read for anyone. Their work on recovery and resilience is at the center of values-based leadership and is applicable to every individual.

Over all, this collection of articles reminds us of why we are inspired to lead, and to help others through our shared values. It left this reader curious, interested to see how I can be more explicit in my application of values in organizational life. It refreshed my connection to what I perceive to be good; thus, left me motivated and informed. With further reflection, however, I was also thinking about what we still do not know. Let me explain what I mean, in an effort to further develop this dialogue and to help extend the authors' message.

For cases that focused on individuals, the main character is a man in a position of authority, typically in a hierarchically structured organization. One chapter and several support roles demonstrate values-based leadership from those not already in senior leadership positions. This same chapter was the only main story featuring a woman's experience. Thus, the implicit theory of "think manager-think male" seems to be reflected in this book (see Schein, 1973, 1975). In describing this concept, Ryan and Haslam (2007) highlight the prescriptive impacts of how spontaneous categorization of leaders, being male or female, can be diminished with the repeated pairing of masculinity and management (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Moreover, under representation of women can inadvertently legitimate inequality via absence (Ely & Padavic, 2005). In future POS contributions attending to this concern will likely help to deepen our understanding of values-based leadership.

In addition, while the Eastern culture was referenced, a Western understanding of leadership is dominant. This is not to say that leadership and values-based principles are completely different in other cultures, but the implementation of these values may differ given the context. Given the stories presented, we do not know what does or does not apply to different types of leaders and to other populations. Assuming that the values are largely universal, we still do not know if there are differences in how they are implemented given leader's gender and ethnicity.

Do these values apply to mixed populations, within different organizational structures, and across cultures? Even if the core principles are agreed upon, different interpretations of how to implement them may vary. Therefore, the development of this topic may benefit from a broader view, selecting cases that present more diverse populations, different organizational forms, and a variety of cultural contexts.

While these points go beyond the stated aims of this book, perhaps these thoughts will provide fodder for additional consideration when leaders think about the application of the ideas proposed in *Leading with Values*. As we move to consider **how** to apply values-based leadership in global contexts, it is likely that this conversation will become more complex. But perhaps this will help us to get closer to the good and the true.

Cameron, K., Dutton, J., and Quinn, R. (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Kohler.

Eagly, A. H. & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573-598.

Ely, R., & Padavic, I. (2005). Feminist analysis of micro research on gender in organizations: Suggestions for advancing the field. Academy of Management Best Conference Paper. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting*, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Linley, P. A., Joseph, S. Harrington, S., & Wood, A. M. (2006). Positive psychology: Past, present, and (possible) future. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(1), 3-16.

Nelson, D. & Cooper, C. L. (2006). *Positive organizational behavior: Accentuating the positive at work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

O'Toole, J. (1996). *Leading change: The argument for values-based management*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Ryan, M. K. & Haslam, A. (2007). The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 2, 549-572.

Schein, V. E. (1973). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57, 177-184.

Schein, V. E. (1975). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics among women. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60, 340-344.