

Foreword

. . . ethical leadership – the effort to optimise life-affirming choices that seek to protect human rights and advance environmental restoration – no matter how inhospitable the political, social or professional environment: the future of the planet depends upon it.

– Aidan McQuade, *Ethical Leadership: Moral Decision-making under Pressure* (2022, p. 1).

When Aidan approached us with this book proposal . . .

. . . I was immediately captivated and thought: “It would be a privilege to have this book in the series!” I start above with a quote from the book that encapsulated why I got hooked and why I think this is relevant and generative for every person engaging in leadership, which, by the way, in my understanding is everybody!

For years I have been fascinated by the theme of constructive dissent, and thankfully others, better equipped than myself, have written about this. Such as the work by Ira Chaleff on intelligent disobedience, or the book *I Object* by Ian Hislop and Tom Hockenhull accompanying the exhibition with the same name at the British Museum a few years ago. And then a book comes along about choices under pressure and staying the course. What a gift.

Some might think: “Dealing with slavery, corruption, war zones, or life and death decisions as a doctor is far away from my remit at work and my other spheres of life. What has that to do with me?” This is a book for all circumstances. To me the same ideas apply everywhere. We are also somewhat very quickly connected to this theme of ethical challenge when we consider our typical daily activities and decisions for a moment.

Hence, *Ethical Leadership: Moral Decision-making under Pressure* addresses an age-old and contemporary pressing issue that is at the core of thinking and practicing leadership for a desirable world – all the time.

This is a challenging book. That is why it is in the series!

When you start reading the book, to some this will be uncharted territory. However, that is an opportunity to reframe our own leadership practice and thinking.

At its core the book will equip you to lead more ethically and to make difficult choices when you face those moments that profoundly challenge your identity, beliefs and who you think you are.

Asking why some people, professionals, or managers continue to do the “right” thing in situations of adversity is a generative avenue. And a counterpoint to the seeming urge and guilty fascination of focussing on people when they get it wrong. The latter is an important avenue. However, enabling practicing managers to positively deviate in testing times is often overlooked and a day-to-day task, that many of us face.

It is helpful to explore that managers and organizational members can face some form of dynamic balancing between, on the one hand, the level of freedom they have

about their own choices and, on the other hand, the social conditions and circumstances that also impact them. The Cruciform of Agency model is a generative and accessible way to engage with this interplay of the individual and the social in our decision-making and leading. I envision the Cruciform of Agency model to become a guide for managers and humans in those situations.

The second theme that struck a chord with me is the idea of assonance. Admittedly a difficult term, but I have started to embrace it already. Moral assonance sits the middle ground – when things are not clear cut and managers and professionals have doubts or are uncertain about what is the right course of action. Don't you face situations regularly, where it is ambiguous what is ethically right and how to assert human dignity in your world of work and leadership?

This book is not only for the broadsheet attracting cases and situations. It is for everyday leadership, where people are facing ethical struggles. This book is challenging, but make no mistake, life and work are difficult. Therefore, the book provides fundamental guidance on ethical leadership for practicing managers, professionals and humans in all spheres of life – from the moment you start reading, reflecting, and translating this book toward action in your context.

We do not have the luxury any more to ignore in our day-to-day activities in practice and science how every piece of insight and learning can shape a desirable future for our planet.

And if you are not convinced of the practicality of the book, why don't you read page 134, the second-to-last paragraph as a teaser? That is something I try hard every day, hopefully at least sometimes with success. Aidan, thanks so much for reminding us.

Bernd Vogel
Henley-on-Thames, UK
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