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Book Review

"Metaphors We Lead By: Understanding Leadership in the Real World is a book which I have no hesitation in recommending to any student of leadership. I believe it is best for students with a grasp or understanding of the mainstream leadership theories for the book relies upon established ways of understanding leadership to differentiate itself. I also think consultants and leadership coaches would find this book useful as it provides insights into how one might open a discussion on the quality of leadership within client companies. The book would make an ideal counterpart for many of the 'traditional' leadership courses offered, particularly in the USA, as a way of at least opening up discussion about the nature of leadership and the way in which we make sense of it. As to the novelty of the work, I am less convinced. As I read the book I was reminded of Boje and Dennehy's (1994, Chapter V "Leading stories") postmodern leadership, which is surprisingly absent from Alvesson and Spicer's book; this is rather strange given how similar the ideas are. In spite of this, however, this is

book is well worth the investment. Buy it, read it, and cite it."

Tyrone Pistis, (2011). Management vol. 14 no. 4, 2011, 263-269 book review.

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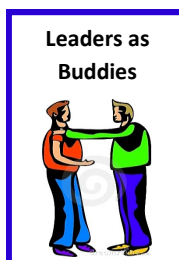
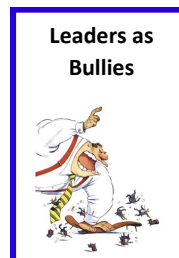
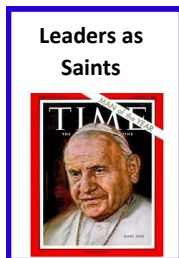
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Metaphors We Lead By

Understanding Leadership in the Real World



Executive Book Summary
 JSGS 808 Leadership, Ethics and Trust

J. Relf-Eckstein

March 15, 2013

JOHNSON SHOYAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

METAPHORS WE LEAD BY

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP IN THE REAL WORLD



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Understanding Metaphors

The metaphoric approach to leadership provides a tool to create a new awareness or an understanding of the complexity of multiple aspects of organizations and everyday life.

This method is based on prior work by Hatch et al, 2006 and Western, 2008.

The authors chose the definition of a metaphor as that which “allows an object to be perceived and understood from the viewpoint of another object” (p.34).

The metaphor captures an objective reality that in a narrow sense, is useful for illustrative purposes, whilst in a broad sense, encompasses a knowledge that emerges or is constructed from a multiple viewpoints.

The authors have chosen metaphors to capture a deductive reasoning and association between the target (leader) and its source (follower). It offers a bottoms-up approach blending multiple meanings and also provides an inductive approach deeply rooted in meanings shared between cultures (pp. 42-44). The advantage of a metaphor is that it is able to convey a large amount of information at one time and has practical applications across a diversity of cultures.

Summary

Alversson and Spicer's book presents a typology of leadership represented by six metaphoric. The types of metaphors are classified on the basis of how people seek to define leaders, and the beliefs, values and feelings of what it means to be a leader in the real world today. It reviews leadership theories discussed in the academic literature, examines business publications, media reports of leaders and combines these findings with personal narratives collected from interviews with business leaders and their employees.

The authors suggest leadership today is an increasingly ambiguous or fuzzy concept that is further complicated by the profusion of definitions and theories, and the range of expectations of what leadership "should be". The metaphors that emerge are not limited to the positivist or prescriptive theories dominating the literature on leadership today. Instead, the metaphors allow a more skeptical stance to emerge that is more descriptive of the reality of leadership and seldom described in the literature.

Asymmetric leader-follower associations reveal dependency based relationships. The processes and situations which influence the dynamics of the relationships are discussed, and the authors unpack the mismatch of interpretations and expectations associated within the domain of leadership.

The authors suggest leadership is a complex social construction that is highly contextual. The imagery and perceptions of the leadership-metaphors will change based on the individual's goals, the organization's or personal performance expectations; the day to day stability of the workplace environment; the urgency and importance of crisis situations as well as the overall culture or ethos of the organization.

The book concludes explaining how the metaphors may be communicated and understood by current leaders and how this scholarship may be used as a resource by students of leadership theory, practitioners and leadership educators.

Leadership Theory

TRAITS of leadership are defined as those that make someone into a leader (House & Aditya, 1977). These include: (1) innate aspect of the self; (2) leader motivation such as pro social or power based approaches to set goals, pursuit of goals to achieve desired outcome and acquire status to exert onto others for positive organizational purposes (McClelland & Burnham, 1976); (3) self-confidence and (4) flexibility and social sensitivity. Traits are rarely stable over time and may emerge as the situation demands.

BEHAVIOR STYLE of leaders is either task oriented or people centered.

FIVE-FOLD APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

- *Traits of self or how leader influences traits in others to develop or emerge*
- *Behavior in relation to the task or people*
- *How leaders operate in different place-time situations*
- *Emergence of leaders from a group where learning has been shared democratically.*
- *Change or transformational leaders*
 - *influencing followers via compensation or contracts;*
 - *influencing followers via motivating & commitment to goals*

The CONTINGENCY APPROACH

(Feidler, 1967) explains how different leaders will operate in different contexts and organizational settings. These behaviors are inconsistent and difficult to measure.

POST HEROIC THEORIES describe a shared, distributed leadership where leaders emerge from a democratized collective or through a peer leadership or mutual learning process. It embraces the principle that anyone has the potential for anyone to become a leader.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP describes how leaders manage meaning for followers. It may be transactional (followers are managed by transactions or sanctions) or transformational (followers feel committed to purpose). Leaders will influence frames and meanings in followers to define their reality (Smirchich & Morgan, 1982; Fairhurst, 2001, 2005).

Chpt 4. Leaders as Saints: leadership through moral peak performance

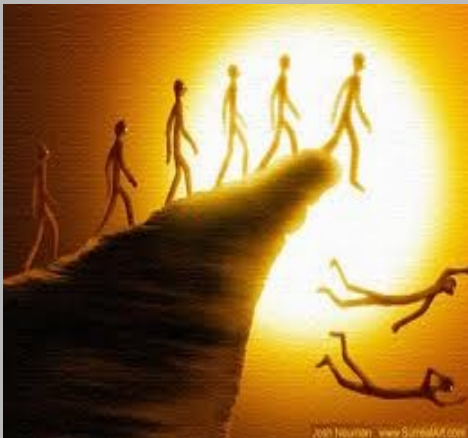
by Mats Alvesson



According to Alvesson, the metaphor of a saint invokes purity, integrity and the attainment of the highest moral and ethical standards. These are desirable traits, qualitative in nature and reflect the attainment of a superior level of morality, what Alvesson calls “a moral peak.” Thus it follows that saints are engendered with high

levels of faith and trust. Followers receive goodness from the saint; the saint believes in and trusts the followers; the followers reciprocate the bestowment of faith and trust with a need to do good (p.66) and embark on the visionary path illuminated by the saint-leader. The saint empowers the followers to make their own decisions and seek their moral peak in their own way. The saint does not necessarily want or need to understand how the follower walks the path, rather the goal is to have individuals self-identify with an altruistic behaviour and continually strive to reach their moral peak. When followers are uncertain of the path, the saint-leader will provide direction through coaching motivating followers in a way similar to the buddy-leader metaphor. However, the difference lies in asymmetrical balance of power and a “worship” relationship with the saint, rather than the more equal balance of power with a buddy-leader. The counselling and supportive traits in the saint-leader align with trait-based authentic and servant leadership theories and parallel the gardener-leader metaphor explored in Chapter 5.

To be a motivational force in a real-world organization, the saint-leader, states Alvesson, does not have to be associated with super morality or larger than life missions. An everyday leader can embody the spirit of organizational purpose and possess ordinary traits of strong will, openness and honesty that will foster a workplace culture where employees work hard. The saintly leader who is considerate and non-pretentious positively influences both followers and co-workers, motivating the individual and the collective to seek peak performance in an ethical way. Moreover, the author suggests that if morally upright saint-leaders resided in the upper echelons of an organization’s hierarchy, fewer scandals would occur (p.67).



Alvesson describes a Utopian culture that is not prevalent in society and to this, the author unpacks the nature of the saint and reveals a dark side of the dependency, trust, and hope, the employee-followers place in the saint-leaders.

Leaders such as Mao and Osama bin Laden may be portrayed as cult-like leaders to a larger society, but to their followers, they are perceived as saint-leaders who motivate their followers to seek a moral peak and achieve the ultimate good of their reality.

The purity of saint-leaders also begins to wane when they devolve

The dark side of saint-leadership

responsibility for decision making to employee-followers. This devolution of authority may be viewed by the organization as indecisiveness on the part of the saint-leader. Over time these views will erode the status of the saint-leader, particularly if the saint-leader continually defers to the employee-followers.

The darkness of power asymmetry and morality depend on the lens from which one perceives morality, how that morality is defined by the social reality, and the degree of sacrifice the saint-leader is willing to give to guide their followers, in pursuit of the moral peak.

Ultimate service of the goals or vision of the organization may require willingness for the saint-leader to be a scapegoat, or even a martyr; whereas, if the rigid view of the moral peak is not what the employee-follower decides to pursue, then there is no room on the mountain for dissenters and the employee is sacrificed.

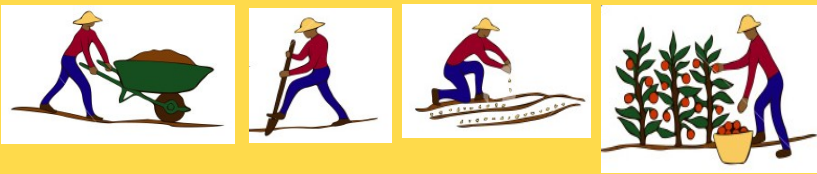
The dark side: followers become too dependent on the saint leader for self-identification and are asked to make unreasonable sacrifices.

The leaders may rely on the followers for answers on complex business matters they chose not to understand.



Chpt 5. Leaders as Gardeners: leadership by facilitating growth

by Tony Huzzard and Sverre Spoelstra



Goals
Reality
Options
Will to act

Just as a gardener prepares the soil, then plants the garden by selecting and placing seeds in a location where the seedling will grow when given the nutrients and conditions necessary for production, the gardener-leader recruits employee-followers suited to the organization, and nurtures them to grow by giving the employee the conditions necessary to meet the production goals of the organization. As a steward or caregiver of the plant, the gardener will regularly monitor its growth, shape it, protect it from threatening conditions or natural enemies, and provide water or extra nutrients in times when the plant is showing signs of (environmental)

stress. When all conditions necessary for optimal growth are provided, the full potential of the original seed is realized and the gardener is rewarded by harvesting the production achieved by maximizing yield potential. In the context of the leader metaphor, the employee-follower is the plant, working in an environment (workplace culture) created by the organization. The gardener-leader observes the (personal) development and monitors the growth (productivity) of the employee-follower through performance goals and appraisals and provides

essential support (e.g. knowledge through training or coaching) when the employee shows sign of stress (e.g. lacking in skills to work at a higher level of responsibility). The gardener will empower their employee-followers to reach personal fulfillment, benefitting the individual while achieving high levels of productivity for the organization. This type of leadership parallels the current North American literature such as self-help or inside-out approaches to leadership management training (Covey, 1992) programs aimed at balancing needs of social and professional life, while achieving organizational productivity goals



The dark side of gardener-leadership

The gardener metaphor presented by Huzzard and Spoelstra also present a dark side and controlling relationship of the garden-leader, showing the risk associated with the metaphor. Unlike plants, people have the cognitive ability to reach their own conclusions as to how to grow, or not. The leader may provide coaching, training and develop personal performance plans, but it is left to the employee's choice to turn the plans into actions. Some employees wish to grow fast and expect recognition or compensation. Conversely, an employee-follower may not wish to continually *grow*, and are satisfied with staying-as-is. The employee-follower may also resist the changes suggested by the leader, or, the employee may not appreciate being *pruned* to fit the culture of the organization. The employee may then become like an *unmanageable weed*. These scenarios place the gardener-leader in a dissonant position. If coercion or *hard pruning* does not resolve the emergent problem, the dissent can spread throughout the organization, and the employee-follower will be re-

moved either by direct force or slowly weakened from exclusion of essential nutrients for workplace survival. With gradual elimination of *pest* employees that no longer maximize personal growth and productivity, the gardener-leader thus works to create an aesthetically pleasing environment and eliminate the *noxious* employee. If planned rotations involving a diversity of types are necessary to achieve long term production, a sustainable workplace may emerge over time that will maximize organizational productivity. However, this has organizational risk associated with reliance on the gardener-leader's criteria for employee selection, growth strategies, training methods or behavior modification programs.



The dark side: followers become dependent on the gardener leader for survival but if they grow beyond their desired limit may be brought back into a manageable form (pruned) or eliminated (weeded out).

Chpt 6. Leaders as buddies: leadership by making people feel good

by Stefan Sveningsson and Martin Blom



Sveningsson and Blom describe the behaviour of the buddy-leader as one who works to ensure that employees feel good and are therefore better equipped to deal with the anxieties, uncertainties and changes inherent in everyday workplace culture.

Their goal is to improve their employee-follower wellbeing and empower them to perform their best, while generating performance levels to meet the organization goals.

They do this in many ways such as cheer-leading to lift the spirit of employee-follower, recognizing the need for recognition and praise and knowing individuals on a first name basis.

They act as a safeguard between the employees and the insensitivities of upper level managers. The buddy-leader is empathetic to the needs of the employees, and understands their concerns and personal challenges.

Using a participatory process to build consensus on decisions, the buddy-leader creates a workplace culture where people feel a sense of belonging and will therefore go the extra mile to do what the buddy-leader says is necessary for the organization. No one is left out.

The authors explain the image management portrayed by this metaphor. The *ombudsman* image protects the interests of the employee-follower, thereby earning trust, loyalty and gratitude in return. The *party host* makes sure everyone is included in invitations to social gatherings and special considerations are made if needed. The *pseudo-shrink* actively listens to the employee-follower concerns, supporting the individual to work through problems and continue to be happy and productive.

Lastly, the image of *one-one-of-guys or-gals* is used by the buddy-leader to gain social acceptance, understand their employees and gain their confidence.



While these relationships are based on trust and making the employee-follower *feel good*, the goal is a productive workplace where people work harder to increase organization productivity and are less resistant to change. However, the close distance in the personal relationship exposes the dark side of this metaphor, very similar to the cyborg-leader.



The dark side of buddy-leadership

There are many less than desirable outcomes in the buddy-leader metaphor of leadership. As Sveningsson and Blom suggest, occasionally the buddy-leader will be pulled too deep into the personal relationship creating an unhealthy dependency, very similar to cyborg and saint leader metaphors.

The buddy-leader and the follower build a relationship based on trust and loyalty, becoming dependent on each other for self-confidence and social affirmation.

The employee-follower's self-esteem becomes contingent on the symbolic daily greetings, recognition of effort and praise for achievements from the buddy-leader.

This dependency is termed "buddification" of leadership and reinforces a duality of dependency for both individuals.

The inherent risk in this association comes to bear when the buddy-leader is forced to downsize the organization, change the workplace culture or even terminate the employee-follower's position. This is viewed as betrayal and eventually poison the happy workplace, generating mistrust.

Conversely, the employee-follower may be the causation of the change in relations, placing the buddy-leader in a situation which does not have the stability or predictability of employee-follower productivity.

The buddification of hierarchial relations: the context matters

1. In countries such as Sweden, leaders are less willing to position themselves as authoritarian, portraying themselves to be more pacifist and equal (e.g. gender), soft, supporting and considerate to their followers (p.104).

2. in knowledge intensive organizations, there is a strong sense of "we", social belonging and identity. These are typically workplaces requiring highly specialized skills and there is a concerted effort to retain employees and create workplace of autonomy (p.105).

3. the fashion of the times creates a society that celebrates the therapeutic norm of providing people with comfort and self-esteem. This leadership ethos flows down to the managers who are characterized as being egalitarian and buddy-like. It is a progressive alternative to industrial, hierarchial, non enlightened and inhumane forms of leadership (p.106).

Chpt 8. Leaders as Cyborgs: leadership mechanistic through superiority

by Sara Louise Muhr



Cyborg leaders are actively recruited by many organizations seeking leadership to enable radical improvement. The cyborg's tireless energy and relentless passion for the goal is both seductive and contagious and the like-minded team that emerges under their leadership gel and hold

the key to expectations of rapid transformational change. Driven as if programmed, Muhr asserts that with the mechanistic approach to everything they do, the cyborg leader will seldom will reveal any emotion that suggests a human flaw or crack in their armour or mask. They are feared by those who do not understand them and viewed cautiously by long time staff that balance personal needs with organizational goals. The cyborg will therefore seek out like minded employee-followers, or will recruit and mold new followers in their image, propelling them to relentless push themselves and attain perfection of performance. The employee- followers will respect and look to the cyborg for a sense of belonging, identity and recognition as they collectively seek perfection and reach their goals. High achievers, these leaders have extraordinary expectations that if the employees do not achieve, they will severed swiftly from the high performance collective. Often perceived as mavericks, the cyborg-leader will break rules that prevent them conducting their work. Rule breaking is often overlooked when results are delivered and new standards of achievement become the norm. By nature cyborg-leaders are often intimidating, highly competitive nature and fueled by the ambition. Failure is not an option and as they manage firstly the business needs and secondly family or physical needs. Muhr suggests society encourages this SuperLeadership or superiority and continues to promote the achievements of performance driven leaders. Business is about being the best and survival of the fittest. The cyborg delivers on these objectives and realizes the goals of the organization. Furthermore, society is beginning to witness a technology driven and mechanistic aspect to leadership which transcends gender-based stereotypes in a traditional patriarchal system of organizations (p. 141).



The dark side of cyborg-leadership

The cyborg leader is somewhat narcissistic, needing followers while simultaneously demanding sacrifice of their follower-employees.

These employee-followers will push themselves to the limit, potentially crashing when they can no longer keep up the standards demanded by their cyborg-leader.

Something lies beneath the cyborg-leader's mask of perfection and the leader is therefore viewed with mistrust by those who do not conform to the pursuit or excellence ideology. Those employees are often severed from the collective.

Impression	Management
Charismatic Leadership	Charisborg
Transformational Leadership	Technocrat
Super-leadership	Perfectionist

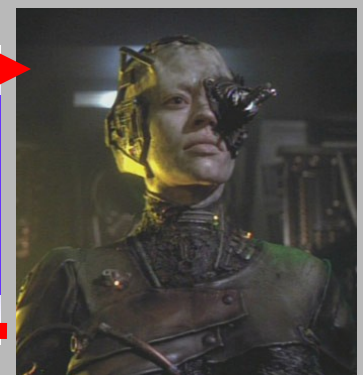
Leadership Theory

The dark side: followers and leaders become dependent on each other for self-esteem, social acceptance and confidence. When these dependencies are disrupted, stress and anxiety take hold.



The cyborg-leader will sacrifice a lot in order to become perfect and skillful at their job, so perfect they end up roboticizing themselves... leaving a dehumanized impression (p. 139).

Followers become dependent on the cyborg-leader for their own identity just as in 7 of 9 in the Borg, cannot survive if severed from the like minded, high performing collective.





At first consideration of this metaphor, one expects no bright side to the seemingly dysfunctional buddy-leader. However, Kärreman suggests these leaders remain a reality for many organizations (p.179).

He concludes that the bully-leader is effective at controlling the workplace and is able to stabilize volatile situations by neutralizing difficult employee-followers (e.g gossipers) by forcing disassociation from the group.

In the specific context of a military group, the interview participants reveal how the bully-leader is used to enforce humiliation of employee-followers who ridicule female officers (p.179), creating a workplace culture where the (female) officers then receive proper respect from subordinates. The offending soldiers are ostracized from the collective through shame and ridicule.

The bully-leader is able to enforce ideology by casting dissenters as outsiders and advance the agenda of the organization by intimidating any contrary voices.

The dark side of bully-leadership

The bully-leader is an area in the literature that has explored the dark side of leadership (Einansen et al, 2007; Harvey et al, 2007 and Ferris et al, 2007).

Any employee-follower can be a target and by denying the individual respect it will injure their dignity and lead to exclusion from the collective group.

Using intimidation and fear, the bully-leader metaphor parallels the cyborg and commander-leaders.

Delegating the strategy of bullying was recommended by Machiavelli as a leadership strategy; the bully behaviour will breed mistrust of the leader amongst all employee-followers, disrupting the workplace and will be discouraged in most democratic organizations.



Chpt 7. Leaders as commanders: leadership by creating clear direction

By André Spicer

The commander metaphor of leadership connects with the cyborg in many aspects. Spicer concludes they are both very dominant persons, driven by an intense desire to achieve, intolerant of failure and are willing to break rules, taking quick and direct action to achieve goals.



With leadership style originating in the military, the commander leads from the front and while making demands of the employee-

followers, the leader themselves will work tirelessly alongside their followers.

Some employees view this as micromanagement; to others it builds respect and allegiance to their leader and trust in the leader's vision. The employees know their leader is not asking them to give anything that the leader would not willingly give of themselves. Typically, the commander-leader is personified as an alpha male,

physically fit and impeccably dressed. This leader will act with a steely coldness and will readily use coercive power or physical force if necessary, make quick decisions and enforce social order.

They are skilled at framing; the workplace is a battle zone and the organization is at war with their competitors. The employee-followers will be trained in necessary skills to achieve goals. A team is built and when time is ready to launch a campaign (attack the competition) the commander-leader will organize the charge. Using a mixture of fear and respect tactics, the team will comply with orders of battle and achieve the goal and celebrate the success. In times of crisis management, the strategic mental planning and quick decision-making ability of the commander-leader are especially effective.



Despite the dark side of the metaphor, Spicer suggests the "commander may seem to be at odds with the times... at the edge of extinction yet the commanding leadership appears to be alive and well in organizations" (p. 137).

The dark side of commander-leadership



Spicer concludes that the dark side of the commander-leader metaphor is the authoritarian style of leadership which clashes with the more humane approach to leadership themes emerging in today's society.

The commander is task-oriented and when the task or goal is complete, their style of micromanagement and rule by fear is no longer appreciated by experienced employee-followers within the organization.

Their heavy handed approach and use of intimidation and punishment leads to levels of violence or abusive behaviour that is no longer tolerated in many democratic societies and has especially alienated females from pursuing leadership in certain sectors.



The dark side: followers become dependent on the commander leader for self-identity.

The abusive nature of the commander's leadership becomes their norm of socially acceptable behavior for the devoted follower-employees.

Critical Review and Reflections

While this book provides a practical approach to leadership, there are two areas where it fails to deliver on the expectations alluded to in the *Introduction*. The ambiguity theory of leadership is not supported adequately by the literature, which as the reviewer indicates, is available on this topic. Secondly, the chapter *Communicating Metaphors*, falls short of actually explaining the process of how to use the metaphors as communications or leadership learning tool. This was disappointing as the notion of a metaphor could perhaps have been presented as a mirror or self-reflection of one's self-leadership style and how the image projected may not be what the leader intended, or conversely, how a metaphor could be used most effectively. However, the strengths of the book are in the real-world aspect, and provide perspectives on leadership which have implications for many North American government and business organizations, intriguing as this is a book on leadership as viewed by those from a more egalitarian workplace culture of in Sweden.

Through the course of my career in public organizations and private industry, I have experienced all of the leadership styles captured in the metaphoric concepts put forward by the authors. I have learned that the different roles a leader must play are context dependent, and accordingly, different metaphors emerge given the environment, time and place demands of the leadership.

A crisis situation may demand the commander-leader metaphor to emerge from chaos, needing a leader who can quickly and decisively lead their employee-followers. Day-to-day leadership may take the form of the gardener-leader, or buddy-leader, but these same individual leaders may become a bully-leader on occasion. The cyborg leader is common in today's organizations as they pursue performance excellence, improved productivity and increased profits; whereas the saint-leader, who is typically more interested in reaching the moral peak of performance than in profits, may appear less frequently at the highest levels of organizations.

This book transcends the barriers of social science and management-prescriptive rhetoric and places leadership in real-world



descriptive situations. It raises awareness of the humanity of leadership, bringing out the best of the metaphors as well as the dark side of leadership, causing one to pause and remember that humans are not perfect; they are biological organisms that simply express their traits and personality given the conditions of the environment and the context of the workplace culture or situation. Given a change in circumstance, one organization with multiple leaders may find it very useful to array itself with multiple metaphors of leadership, transitioning between saints, gardeners, buddies, bullies, commander and cyborg-forms of leadership, as the need arises. Alternatively, an individual-leader may need to manage their image, shifting between the metaphors, adapting to the circumstance or needs of their employee-followers.

In conclusion, this book is a must-read for neophytes to leadership literature. *Metaphors We Lead By*, provides an easy way to understand the complex and ambiguous phenomenon of leadership. Using these metaphors, leaders can determine their own leadership styles and understand follower perceptions and expectations of leadership, while employee-followers can recognize the motives and understand what lies behind the actions of their metaphor-leaders.