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Ghenwa Mahmoud Al Hakim
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, LEBANON, ghenwa_ha@hotmail.com

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BOOK REVIEW

Comparative book review: “Leading Through a Pandemic” and “Work Smart Now”

Ghenwa Mahmoud Al Hakim*

Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon

Abstract

This article provides comparative review of two books “*Leading Through a Pandemic: The Inside Story of Humanity, Innovation, and Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Crisis*” and “*WORK SMART NOW How to jump start productivity, empower employees and achieve more*” written by professional authors in the field of leadership and successful management practices. These books were chosen for being highly effective in contributing added value knowledge to the literature of leadership practices, whether in the context of crises or normal conditions. The review was commenced with description of the chapters of the books and clarifying its infringements to the readers and highlighting some rooms for more effectiveness. At last, comparison between the two books was made, mainly in terms of the approaches used, issues addressed, problems solved as well as the recommendations and techniques provided.

Michael J. Dowling and Charles Kenney, *Leading Through a Pandemic: The Inside Story of Humanity, Innovation, and Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Crisis*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing. (2020), 224 pp., COVER: E- book. ISBN: 978-1-5107-6385-2

This book is a product of an experience of one of the New York State's largest healthcare providers in 2020 amidst of the COVID 19 pandemic. With 23 hospitals and more than 830 outpatient facilities, Northwell positioned itself as a unique health system that prepared for the pandemic and provided effective guidelines to lead hospitals and healthcare systems to get prepared to any upcoming viral threat. Furthermore, it prescribes changes that went beyond the recommendation of stockpiling of equipment and supplies to challenging the American government regulatory policies to embrace a more flexible emergency response and incorporate a culture of respect to science. The authors draw upon the dramatic experience of frontline workers at the peak of the pandemic and depicts set of lessons learned at various levels of the organizations. Finally, the book provides future projection about the best means to deal with similar situations. This book will serve as good reading material for healthcare professionals, policy makers, researchers and everyone interested in delving in the context of the pandemic.

Chapter 1, 2 and 3 conveys the reality of COVID 19 pandemic and how Northwell

effectively responded through being uniquely prepared for the crisis since more than a decade. When the pandemic reached its peak in the United States, the atmosphere of anxiety and fear unleashed its fur all over the country. With thanks to the culture of preparedness adopted by Northwell and the availability of integrated system, they succeeded in reducing the dreadful impact of the Pandemic. The major lessons learnt during this stage; the state of togetherness, being prepared for the worst by establishing emergency preparedness units and training the organization to be comfortable with uncomfortable situations in addition to working in integrated system are key to pass safely the pandemic.

In chapter 4, the authors depict the prominence of taking care of staff mental and physical health and prioritizing their safety. Staff shall feel physically protected through being equipped with adequate PPE. Similarly, they shall sense emotional protection through the provision of on-site counselling and employee active assistance programs. The major lessons learnt in the scope of staff assistance; protecting the emotional and physical health of the

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* Corresponding reviewer.
E-mail address: ghenwa_ha@hotmail.com.

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staff is the main driver to pass this threat both safely and with less adverse effect.

In chapter 5, the authors present a significant concept pertinent to the supply lifeline that was a major concern during the pandemic. The authors raised the significance of creating an internal supply chain infrastructure with effective leadership to ensure adequate stockpile of PPE at the hospitals and health care centers and not only at the government centers. Furthermore, as major lessons learnt in this context is the prominence of building strong relationships with vendors and having diverse suppliers' base to enable the organization to secure various supply sources. Most importantly, is to encourage the in-house manufacturing of PPE and medical supplies as a refuge to reduce the reliance on China as the main source of these equipment. Not to forget to grant opportunities to staff to innovate and address problems that can be solved immediately.

Chapter 6 reveals the importance of having structured clinical advisory team during the pandemic. Chapter 7 resembles call for government and political officials to realize that some rules and regulations are unnecessary. Speaking of pandemic like COVID 19, some rules and regulations appeared to be in an urgent need for review while others seemed most likely to be changed in the future. On the other hand, the authors recommend as lessons learnt the significance of establishing good collaboration with political officials to expedite the pace of recovery while refraining from micromanagement. Moreover, the authors expand their recommendations in chapter 8 to incorporate reliable research institutes inside the system to conduct clinical trails quickly and with science rigor. This will allow the generation of scientific tested data that can provide hope to patients. In this respect, they call political officials to stick to scientific tested data rather than speculating about the efficacy of untested method. Similarly, the call is extended to respect science in the US that is underfunded and threatened by political leaders who have little technical scientific understanding.

In chapter 9, the authors highlight the imminence of communicating reliable information rather than raising the level of fear endorsing the concept "knowledge is healthy, and fear is not". In this respect, it comes the significance of educating public through engaging with several social media platforms. In the last chapter 10, the authors provide projection into the future by devising series of 13 recommendation from the experience of Northwell during the pandemic. In a nutshell, they recommend to strengthen the culture of preparedness inside the organizations, protect the physical and emotional health of the staff, call for flexibility in the rules and regulations, launch effective collaboration with government, reverse the American's culture disrespect for science, educate the public and foster

the new normal, enforce safety measures in congregate settings and enhance leadership at every aspect of the organization.

All in all, the book emerges as relevant and advisory system in the context of COVID 19 pandemic. The recommendations provided by the authors hit the target especially in the context of in advanced preparedness for any upcoming attack. It inspires readers from all backgrounds, not only the medical field, to listen to the stories of survivals and fighters during this battle. The authors, Michael Dowling and Charles Kenney, smartly tackle the human side of the pandemic through depicting true stories and testimonials from the field. Furthermore, they provide significant guidelines for health professionals and institutions to adopt an integrated system in terms of effective supply chain infrastructure, protecting the physical and mental health of staff in addition to clinical advisory system during the pandemic. What is most interesting about this book is the proficiency of the authors in elucidating what went wrong and why. In this respect, they showed that nonsense of some rules and regulations generated by the government and called for more flexibility which is key in any emergency that requires speedy response and less bureaucratic measures. Furthermore, it is very convincing how the authors portray that the speculation of some government officials about the efficacy of untested method poses serious threat to the health system. In the scope of this discussion, many countries in the world are still paying the price of listening to recommendations not backed by scientific evidence. Additionally, it is honored how they call to more respect to science in the American culture.

The book provides beneficial recommendation in terms of advising countries to stop relying on exporting PPEs and medical supplies especially from China. This could be a good advice for developed countries that have a financial capacity to carryout inhouse manufacturing. However, the underdeveloped and developing countries with limited financial capacities will continue to rely on assistance and exports from external countries. Furthermore, the author emphasized the significance of disseminating information rather than fear in the scope of the pandemic. Having said that it is extremely important to spread reliable information, raising fear about the harmful and dreadful effect of the disease is still to be considered. In some of the developing countries where we noticed irresponsible behavior from minority groups of the public, communicating reliable information about the devastating effect of the disease in the form of fear appeared to be influential in forcing these groups to abide by precautionary measures and protect themselves and others. Therefore, the application of fear in a responsible way and in certain circumstances can still be beneficial.

Richard Polak, *WORK SMART NOW How to jump start productivity, empower employees and achieve more.* New York: Skyhorse Publishing. (2021), 192 pp. COVER: E- book. ISBN: 9781510759824

This book is fruitful combination of components that are essential to boosting productivity while enhancing the motivation of the employees to reach their full potential. It is designed in a manner to draw the attention of the business leaders and CEOs to inspire themselves and their employees to be as efficient and productive as possible. This book will serve as a good reading material for all employees who are working beyond their limits driven by traditional productivity targets. Furthermore, business leaders will have access to easily applicable techniques to improve profitability through motivating employees.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of compassionate productivity and compared it with traditional performance incentives. The concept of compassionate productivity devices that the productivity of the workforce improves when they are happy and compassionate about their job. On the other hand, the concept of traditional performance entails that employee do whatever it requires to fulfill the organizational objectives. The author argues that the latter instills fear and stress into the workforce and causes a state of workaholicism that hinders productivity and diminishes work quality. Therefore, the book introduces set of practices to apply compassion in the workplace as a mean to improve productivity and efficiency. This includes the needs of business leaders to be mindful and empathetic through listening to employees needs and help them to find success. Finally, compassionate productivity requires lot of forgiveness from the management side and understanding that employees don't not always do mistakes out of spite. Furthermore, the author asserts that all these practices cannot be applied without designing organizational culture to support its implementation.

Chapter 2 introduces modern day techniques and cultural concepts that constitute a great workplace and enable employees to work smarter and not harder. This includes sharing information, empathizing strength, putting employees first and not customers, including work as part of life and embracing dynamic hierarchy. Furthermore, this chapter spots light on five productivity buckets that comprises of employee engagement and flexible work measures such as working remotely that boosts employee satisfaction.

Chapter 3 summarizes the concepts of absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace. Just like absenteeism, employees being present physically but mentally absent has the same adverse effect as being completely absent. In this respect, the author devises set of quantitative measures for absenteeism and presenteeism rates to enable a better comprehension of how these measures affect productivity. Chapter 4 assesses the significance for caring for and maintaining the physical, mental, emotional, and financial wellbeing of employees as a mean to boost productivity.

Chapter 5 highlights the importance of employee engagement that is the foundation of absenteeism and presenteeism management. The author asserts that satisfied employee is not necessarily an engaged one where the difference between both is the emotional attachment to the organization. Chapter 6 emphasizes the needs to strengthen the technological tools that are used in the organizations.

Chapter 7 focuses on optimizing the productivity of a worker's day by getting 30 h out of 24 h day. This includes practicing some physical activities while working, avoiding multitasking, scheduling priorities, and structuring the day in the most effective and efficient manner.

Chapter 8 introduces the topic of adopting to change by suggesting set of advanced techniques and overlooked changes to optimize the use of the worker's time. The author advises workers to use voice mail services, email dictation, keyboards shortcuts, one minute to do list, password manager, improving typing speed, avoiding distraction and getting enough sleep.

Chapter 9 is an invitation from the author to all business leaders to put all these initiatives into action and never procrastinate on the implementation. He asserts that tools in this book are designed to work in totality to contribute to more success to the firm, happier and more productive employees. Therefore, business leaders are advised to start collecting data and deciding for the change including advising upon all quantitative and qualitative method to be used. Furthermore, the book asserts that it is not always true that one cannot manage what he/she cannot measure where there is

always a need for wisdom in formulating the decision.

As a final note, the author affirms that nothing of these tools will contribute to successful results if it was not accompanied with good leadership and overall organizational management. Additionally, the author advises to create the position of director of productivity to drive the initiative of working smarter now and not working harder.

All in all, the book resembles a tremendous contribution to the employee motivation literature and advanced techniques in motivating employees to optimize their potential in the most effective and positive manner. The chapters of this book are well structured and nicely written. It attracts the reader to delve into the easily understandable concepts and apply them. The author presents this book in the form of discussion between a CEO and his colleagues at work. This is a very smart approach in conveying the real message from this book which is inviting all business leaders to sit with the essential employees and engage them in the decision making. Furthermore, it is interesting how the author delves into the concept of compassionate productivity and introduces all the pitfalls that caused most of the employees to go beyond their limits and experience stress and frustration at work. Furthermore, this

book represents the much-needed guide to address the root causes of stress at work and device practical solutions based on available overlooked technological tools and good leadership and management practices. Additionally, this book transforms the perspective of productivity and increased revenues from being based on the concept of working harder to be based on the concept of working smarter. This was achieved through clarifying the drawbacks of working for longer hours in terms of less productivity and higher costs. On the other side, the author presented the added value of optimizing the workers' potential through prioritizing their well-being and calling for human centered management approach.

Even though the author urges the need to apply good leadership and management practices before companies implement all the recommendations of this book, it can be still tricky for some companies to comprehend the true meaning of good practices in terms of management and leadership and thus fail to reap the benefits of the fruitful advice and techniques. Therefore, it could be more effective to extend the recommendation by clarifying what constitutes good leadership and management practices and link them to the techniques mentioned throughout this book.

Comparison of the two books

These two books provide effective recommendation of the best practices to lead and manage companies by adopting a human center approach. While the authors Michel Dowling and Charles Kenny described the best practices to lead health institutions during crises, the author Richard Polak highlighted smart techniques to lead and increase the productivity of companies. It is obvious how both books were complementary in addressing the essential needs to consider employees as drivers of change and thus invest in their potential skills and competences as well as enhance their physical and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, both books express the significance of applying effective leadership practices either in the context of crises or normal conditions.

Given that both authors emphasize the essence of application of good leadership and management practices, however each book addresses this issue from different perspective. Richard Polak reaches out to target readers especially employees through touching the most sensitive element of work which is motivation. Through capitalizing on the

significance of fostering communication between top management and bottom- and middle-line employees, the author was able to tailor the required leadership practices and link them effectively to employee motivation and productivity. In this respect, the author designed looking into leadership from the perspective of compassionate productivity that entails the need for working smarter and not harder, a concept that we heard a lot about, and we barely understand. Therefore, through understanding what constitutes compassionate productivity in terms of employee motivation and involvement deviates us from the traditional view of leadership aiming at increasing productivity by driving employees to perform beyond their limits. On the other side, the book "leading through the pandemic" devises set of leadership practices in crises, not only from the perspective of employee motivation but also from the perspective of management's responsibility, governmental role and internal and external factors emerged during the pandemic. This book serves a good and beneficial guide for leaders seeking to adopt the best practices to manage

employees and the whole organization during crises. This includes the need advanced preparedness, considering employees mental and physical health and fostering communication with external actors like the government.

Therefore, it is subtle that each of the authors intend to resolve the problem of management and leadership ineffectiveness from two different approaches. The first book provides recommendation specific to the context of the crises

addressing all the components and driving forces to enable leaders manage better through the pandemic. On the other hand, the second book fosters recommendations to enable leaders to understand the context of productivity from the perspective of employee motivation, engagement, physical and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, the latter book devices recommendations and techniques that can be applied in any context, whether it is in a normal situation or during crises.

The table below distinguishes the various approaches adopted by each of the books.

Book	Issues addressed	Problem solved	Recommendations and techniques provided
Leading through the Pandemic	Wholistic view of leadership practices in crises	Ineffective leadership and management practices in crises	Influential recommendations for leaders to adopt in advanced preparedness and consider the well being of employees.
Work Smart Now	Specific view of leadership practices in all situations	Ineffective leadership and management practices in all situations	Highly influential and beneficial recommendations to foster employee motivation as driving force to enhance productivity and organizational performance.