

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Leading Change in Multiple Contexts: Concepts and Practices in Organizational, Community, Political, Social, and Global Change Settings

*Edited by Gill Robinson Hickman
(SAGE, 2010, 305 pages)*

Change is in the air we breathe in the early 21st century, and it's likely that in the years ahead, books, articles, and online resources devoted to understanding, managing, and facilitating change will continue to multiply within both academic and non-academic circles. *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts* is an interesting case in point. It is an academic textbook designed to serve the learning needs of multiple disciplines and student populations in the wake of growing awareness about the significance of change processes.

Gill Robinson Hickman's book was published by SAGE Publications in 2010. SAGE's strong academic and professional-sector reputation has been built on a consistent commitment to innovative topics in education and the social sciences, including emerging trends in media, research methods, and publishing models. The author's diverse academic experience has clearly shaped her insight into contextual differences in the practice of leadership. Currently a professor of leadership studies at the University of Richmond in Virginia, Robinson Hickman has also served as founding dean in the School of Health at California State University, as a professor of public administration, and as director of human resources for two organizations. *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts* follows a variety of Hickman's other publications, including a previous SAGE publication, *Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era* (2010).

This book is designed primarily for inclusion in graduate and undergraduate courses within a variety of academic disciplines from management studies to adult education and public policy. The educational goals of *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts* are ambitious ones, both in conceptual scope and in the primary and contributing authors' shared intent to offer a useful and diverse set of tools for understanding the structural complexities of change and for cultivating insight into change's "dynamic causation."

Serious social, political, economic, and environmental situations loom ever larger in the world today, and are increasingly seen as interconnected in ways unimaginable by the 18th century founders of western democracies. How will leaders of all kinds, from governments to community and political activists, make sense of their purpose and direction within such a

radically expanded field of action? This book offers a multifaceted approach to addressing this question by delving deeply into patterns of change as seen through a detailed discussion of five distinct contexts—organizational, community, political, social, and global.

Although theoretical issues and “analytical frames” are fully integrated into the book’s conceptual design, there is little doubt that the educational motivations of the authors are fundamentally pragmatic and focused on leadership as a process for making creative and strategically positive contributions to real world situations. The analysis is wide ranging and intellectually detailed, but it also clearly invites students and other readers to engage with the material in active, inquiry-driven, and personally meaningful modes of analysis and discussion. This is a text that “walks the talk” in demonstrating the social construction of knowledge.

The book’s design incorporates a rich set of diagrams adapted for each primary chapter. These provide a consistent conceptual foundation for the evolving analysis within each of the context-specific chapters. Case studies or “change vignettes” as they are called here are also embedded into each chapter with considerable effectiveness and provide opportunities to observe and discuss the network of actions and influences shaping specific change situations.

From a Canadian perspective, the political themes, historical references, and cultural assumptions of *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts* often ring with an American tone. It is clear from the book’s epilogue that the election of US President Barak Obama during the completion of the book created a unique historical moment for presenting the book’s primary themes. However, this attitudinal bias need not be seen as a particular limitation in the book’s use in the Canadian academic context. On the contrary, it could be readily incorporated into the context-based analysis that is intrinsic to the book’s educational purpose.

Gill Robinson Hickman and her colleagues are interested in supporting leaders of all kinds to manage and influence change more effectively through a deeper awareness of the structures and dynamics of change. They also argue for more skillful and conscious uses of our collaborative capacities. As Robinson Hickman says throughout the book, answers are to be found “in community” where learning is ongoing, and where the “effective use of collective capabilities relies on adaptive work, cultural proficiency, organizational learning, and a willingness to experiment” (p.50). *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts* can be seen as a path-finding contribution to the emerging cross-disciplinary field of change management, as well as a solid reference manual for serious change makers of all stripes.

Reviewed by Beth Hawkes, University of British Columbia