

Rainhart Lang & Irma Rybnikova

### **Aktuelle Führungstheorien und -konzepte**

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After Neuberger (2002) and Weibler (2012) there now is a third German book on managerial leadership and leadership theories. Rainhart Lang and Irma Rybnikova wrote a book that, according to the authors, covers both current leadership theories and concepts. Their selection of theories, concepts and themes encompasses new theories and concepts within the domain of leadership studies. The authors' aim is to put these to test and to make them subject to a critical evaluation.

The book covers nine different theories and themes that are representing the canon of current theorising in leadership studies. We learn about the psychoanalytical leadership approach, implicit leadership theories, neo-charismatic leadership theory, myths of leadership and the romance of leadership, shared and distributed leadership, leadership from a micro-politics perspective, women and leadership, virtual leadership, and global leadership. With the selection of the theories presented in the book the authors, although disclaiming completeness, highlight some of the theoretical avenues of current leadership research, which are most often addressed, and therefore influence current leadership studies and leadership practice.

The authors claim that their book should serve students and scholars within the field of social sciences and business administration (for some, these are still separate areas). Furthermore, they attempt to address 'theory-minded' managers and consultants, who could arguably benefit from immersing themselves in research-related literature. I believe that the authors' decision to structure each of the chapters similarly eventuates in the specific audience of the book. The book starts out by providing a brief introduction, outlining the historical context and the main ideas of leadership research. This is followed by a presentation of the central arguments and thought-figures of each theory. Furthermore, the authors pay particular attention to empirical studies that are representative for each theory, detailing both methods and findings. Afterwards, the reader learns about practical applications of the theory. Finally, each chapter closes with a critical evaluation of the theory.

After reading Lang and Rybnikova's book, I asked myself what makes it unique, given that there is no shortage on books providing overviews of theories and concepts in the domain of managerial leadership? Put differently, what is its contribution beyond the above mentioned books from Weibler (2012) and Neuberger (2002) and books such as Northouse (2012), Yukl (2012), or (if I may add my own humble attempt) Winkler (2010) – all three in English language? From my point of view, exploring this aspect is essential in order to evaluate what Lang and Rybnikova add to the canon of leadership theories presented in other books, which also claim to overview the leadership research landscape. Comparing the list of theories and concepts presented in Lang and Rybnikova's book with the above-mentioned literature, one mainly observes similarities. This means that the two authors, in my opinion, offer the same

or similar theories and concepts that one could find in other books. However, is this all there is to it?

I personally believe that the value of the book does not lie in the selection of particular theories, but rather in the way the authors read and present the field. Firstly, one could observe the authors' sound background in organisation and social theory, a background that contributes to anchor the leadership theories in a broader conceptual perspective. Secondly, Lang and Rybnikova make a distinctive attempt to link theoretical content with empirical research and managerial application. They do so by highlighting empirical methods and approaches that are used by scholars, who conduct research following either one of the leadership theories presented in the book. Furthermore, selectively illuminating particular empirical studies contributes to a better understanding of the theories' content. In terms of managerial application, the authors show how the conceptual background of each theory influenced leadership practice. Hence, they trace how theoretical understanding has been translated into managerial, or more precisely, leadership activity. Thirdly, it appealed to me that Lang and Rybnikova decided to use one case incident throughout the entire book. They offer different readings of the case incident depending on which theoretical perspective the case is applied to. Finally, I really enjoyed reading the intermezzo, a refreshing chapter on leadership insights from various fields and perspectives. Well done!

However, there are also a few aspects that I disfavoured and that somehow got in the way of fully enjoying the book. I appreciate the authors' ambition to provide a figure for each theory depicting the "Grundstruktur" of each approach. Yet, as it is the case with most of such basic ideas-portrayals, they are (necessarily) simplifying and reducing. Personally, I would avoid trying to represent a complex theory such as the neo-charismatic leadership approach or a multi-faceted theme such as women and leadership in one figure.

Furthermore, I would have appreciated to learn more on theorising leadership from a social-constructionist vantage point, although I found traces in the chapters on symbolic leadership and leadership myths. This is something I cannot find in almost all current leadership textbooks. It appears to me as if the early works developing a distinct social-constructionist approach to understand leadership, such as Brown and Hosking (1986), Dachler and Hosking (1995), Dachler (1999), or the more recent work of Grint (2005), Pye (2005) and Fairhurst and Grant (2010) are not deemed as worthy enough to be recognized as distinct theoretical line of thinking in leadership textbooks. I also missed a chapter on critical leadership thinking following the ideas of for example Alvesson (1996), Cunliffe (2009), Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) and Alvesson and Spicer (2012). Here, however, I also see the difficulty of presenting a full chapter about critical leadership research, as this clearly constitutes an emerging field within leadership studies. So, perhaps we may see something on this in the second edition?

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