

# Integral Leadership Review

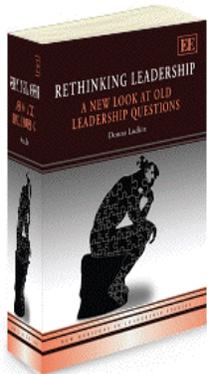
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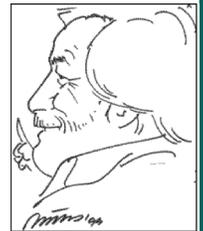


## Book Review

Russ Volckmann



Donna Ladkin. *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Questions*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010.



At the recent Integral Theory Conference, I had the privilege of participating in a panel of my colleagues on the editorial committee of *Integral Review*. A concern was, what are the publishing opportunities for integral material, today. While I heard one or more of my colleagues operating from the belief that they are few such avenues for publishing integral material, I took a different

stance—no better, no worse, just a different view.

I have been involved in publishing integral leadership material and now more broadly integrally-related/informed books since 2000—more than ten years with the bulk of it being *Integral Leadership Review*. This is, by the way, I believe, the integral publication with the longest record of continuous continual releases. We might observe that, of course, online publication isn't a problem. Put up a website or a blog and publish away!

Today, things are different than they were in 2000, even in academia. There is a growing recognition that silo organizations (and associated journals) have an important, but limited role to play. Transdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary efforts are underway at a growing number of universities around the world. These efforts are supported by a growing number of respected academic journals that publish works from associated research efforts.

Academic journals publishing integral material—the primary concern of the panel—are, indeed few, but there are more than there were in 2000. Integrally-informed authors have published in peer reviewed journals such as *The Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *Integral Review*, *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Management Practice*, *The Learning Journal*, *Leadership*, *International Journal of Emotion and Work*, *Culture, Leadership and Organizational Development Journal* and *Knowledge Management Journal*. Many of these include published works of just one integral academic whose online CV lists his publications (they may include others). *Integral Review* and *JOTP* include the work of many.

In addition, Sean Esjborn-Hargens has built a relationship with SUNY (State University of New York)

Press, an academic publishing house that also published Basarab Nicolescu's *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*. Integral is not the only field that has historically had difficulty in finding publishers. So has transdisciplinarity. Sean has spearheaded the publication of four new books with SUNY already this year. Routledge is another book publisher who has joined the growing attention to well-crafted academic integral material. They published Mark Edwards' *Organizational Transformation for Sustainability* (reviewed in *Integral Leadership Review*, June 2010) and Christian Arnspenger's *Full-Spectrum Economics*, reviewed in this issue of ILR. Even Sage, a robust academic publisher like Routledge and SUNY, are publishing chapters in edited volumes they are doing on various subjects, including Richard Couto's edited two volume series, *Political and Civic Leadership*. Our own Integral Publishers has a small set of nine published books with one more being released next month. Many of the other books published have been self-published with Trafford or online print houses.

If we were to expand the list from those who publish explicitly linked-to-integral theory to those who publish integral thinkers, the list would be much longer. Case in point is Donna Ladkin's *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at old Leadership Questions*. Ladkin is an academic philosopher, an expat American teaching at the Cranfield School of Management at Cranfield University. Here is her bio from that institution:

Donna Ladkin is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Executive Learning and Leadership. Originally from the USA, Donna did her first degree at Yale University where she majored in Music and Philosophy. On moving to the UK in 1983, she undertook her MBA and PhD in Organisational Behaviour at Cranfield School of Management, where she also lectured until 1997. She furthered her studies in philosophy by undertaking a Masters in Environmental Philosophy at Lancaster University in 2004.

After seven years running her own consulting company, 'Learning Matters' which focused on coaching senior executives and their teams, she joined the faculty of the University of Exeter's Centre for Leadership Studies in 2005, where she acted as Programme Director for the MA in Leadership Studies as well as Director of Research until returning to Cranfield in 2007.

She brings her background in philosophy and organisational behaviour to her teaching in the areas of leadership, organisational theory and social science research methods. Her research approach encompasses traditional methods as well as Action Research, and she has supervised a number of PhD students through their degrees at the University of Bath's Centre for Action Research, where she is a Visiting Fellow.

Her current research interests focus on the ethical practice of leadership, leadership as an aesthetic phenomenon, and exploring the role leadership plays in enabling organisations to mobilise towards ecologically sustainable ends. In all of her work she seeks to highlight new and creative practices, and to explore models of leadership, which challenge more traditional views.

<http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/p2597/People/Faculty/Academic-Faculty-Listing-A-Z/Last-Name-L/Donna-Ladkin>

Her combination of academic and practical experience is significant in that it seems to influence her writing, which is clear, well organized and highly accessible to those not steeped in the complex set of philo-

sophical perspectives she brings to her work. In fact, as much as the book is about leadership, I would contend that it is an elegant statement of the importance of philosophy in the way we make sense and meaning of life. She draws heavily on Continental Philosophy, particularly phenomenology and hermeneutics. And she draws from them a set of concepts which she can apply to her real task, a significant revision in the way we think about, develop and practice leading and leadership. All of this without one explicit nod of the head toward integral, but with what I would call an integral mindset.

Here are some examples of the concepts she does use. First there is *Lifeworld*—the socially constructed meanings we all live with. They are not materially oriented, but socially constructed. As such, “The power of concepts arises from the way in which they remain unquestioned and remain generally accepted [like the concepts of leader and leadership]. In phenomenological terms, ‘the Lifeworld’—day-to-day reality of how these concepts operate—is central to their very existence.” Here we begin to see how her work adds life to integral.

Other concepts include sides, aspects and identity. *Sides* is akin to perspectives, to the external positions of the observer. At any point in time [again, breathing life into integral] we can “see” only one perspective of any object and we “co-intend” the rest of the object we are observing. Yet it is more than just observation. By looking at leadership from the “sides” of the leader, the follower, the historical situation and the organizational or social context we get many different perspectives. We learn not just what is seen, but by using phenomenology, we also discover more about who the observer is and what their stake is in what they are observing.

*Aspects* “are the specific angles or orientations through which something is perceived.” The understanding of leadership from the orientation or aspect of a ceo, a political leader, or a stakeholder (including follower) will be different. *Identity*, then, is more than just the sum of sides and aspects. Identity includes the interior, that which cannot be viewed by an observer and includes what is non-material. Thus, it is identity is illusive. A key ontological assumption of phenomenology is that the identity of what is viewed is “beyond the reach of human apprehension.”

For me, the concept of identity, so understood, opens the door to mysticism, acknowledging that there are things we cannot “know,” to the notion of spirit, which we cannot “see” but which many testify to, and to inviting out never ending quest to sense and meaning. I have found myself in pursuit of integral continuously looking for answers, certainty, comfort. All this shadow activity has influenced my thinking, while ostensibly I have never trusted that such complete knowing is likely. Thanks Dr. Ladkin.

But there are still more concepts, wholes, pieces and moments. *Wholes* are independent and separate entities, presumably from a material perspective. You are a whole, as am I. So is the computer you are looking at. And here we may get into the distinctions between human, the individual as a holon, the collective as a holon, and artifacts like the computer. Being an artifact does not demean the importance of a thing. Wholes are composed of *pieces*. “Their ‘being-ness’ is dependent on the things of which they are part.” The occurrence of pieces as wholes are *moments* in phenomenology. When I read this, I immediately connected to the language Ken Wilber uses, that is his use of the concept occurrence. We can speak of a leadership occurrence or a leadership moment. The significance of this should become clearer as we proceed in this review.

Thus, as you already have no doubt surmised, a leadership occurrence viewed by individuals from different “sides” seeing different “aspects” will have various meanings associated with the identities of the

observers and participants. In Ladkin's words:

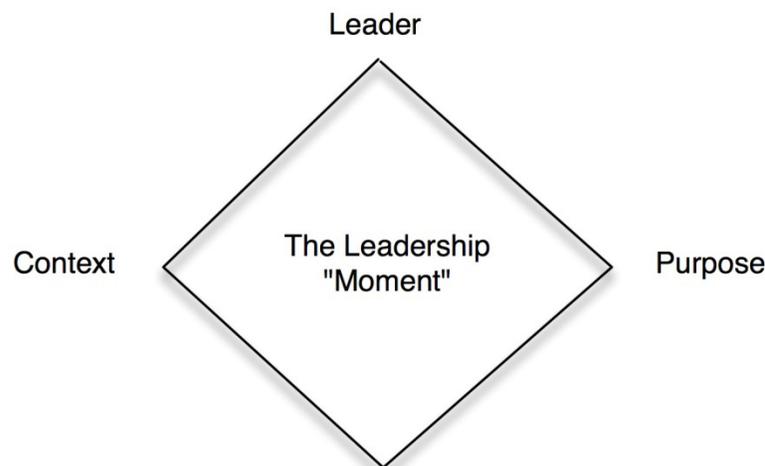
"...the notion of the 'Lifeworld' suggests that in order to understand leadership as a lived experience, it is important to study it within the particular worlds in which it operates. As a phenomenon which arises from constructed social realities, the meanings it has for those engaged with it, either as leaders, followers or academic theorists, impacts significantly on how it is experienced or viewed." (21)

Further, "From each perspective, a different aspect of leadership's identity is potentially revealed." Citing leadership theorists such as Mary Parker Follett, Keith Grint and Martin Wood, she concludes this part of her discussion, "...the distinction between 'wholes', 'pieces', and 'moment' offers philosophical justification for the intertwining of leadership and context..." Wood (in "The Fallacy of Misplaced Leadership," *Journal of Management Studies*, 42, 6, 1101-21) in fact, coined the term leadership event in 2005 (I have not read this yet, so cannot vouch for his inspirations.) And this is also an important lesson from integral. Wilber's (and phenomenology's) occurrence helps us understand the nature of our enterprise to appreciating and comprehending any phenomenon and, in our case, particularly that of leadership.

Ladkin goes on to spell out the implications for the identity of leadership(24). Here are some of her suggestions:

- "...the very apprehension of leadership is a socially determined phenomenon."
- "The notion of aspects demonstrates that leadership will be viewed from different perspectives and that each perspective can potentially provide a new insight into its identity." This is so rich, pregnant with meaning. It hints at integral methodological pluralism, for example.
- "As a 'moment'... leadership can not exist without those who would enact it, the context from which it arises, as well as the socially constructed appreciation of it as a particular kind of interaction between human being."
- And, in the spirit of integral, "each of the many leadership theories currently in existence could be seen to be addressing a particular side of the phenomenon from a particular aspect." True, but partial!

From here on, Ladkin's discussion is brilliant, clear and well grounded. I will not recount it in detail. I will point out that she, like David V. Day and myself opposes the conflation of terms like leading, leader and leadership. Such conflation has been a thorn in the side of efforts for clearer understanding. Rather, it is important for us to consider the leadership occurrence, event or 'moment.' Here is Ladkin's way of demonstrating this point graphically:



Ladkin's Leadership Moment

While here she makes the point, I would suggest that the AQAL map as modified by me in other publications in which the leader and the context are treated separately as holons is, in some ways, more useful. Furthermore, it seems to me that expanding the perspective of follower to one of stakeholder would add value. Also, purpose is something that needs to be addressed both at the point of the leader and stakeholder (follower). But this matters little, I suppose. After all, this is a map and, like AQAL, just a map that helps us make meaning. There is so much richness in this small volume, roughly 190 pages. Take, for example, her treatment of leading as a “hub of meaning-making”. And her inclusion of dialogic processes and process philosophy a la Whitehead helps us to recognize patterns in the continual becoming of institutions and organizations.

In closing, her discussion of the questions we ask is important. Rather than what is leadership, consider what leadership is for. What does it mean in the context of the particular culture you are considering. And she asks, “what does our preoccupation with it reveal about us?”—with acknowledgement of a different position for leadership in non-Western cultures. She references Kenneth Burke’s observation that we need someone to blame for our problems and shortcomings. I referenced this long ago: “Politicians: we swear them in and cuss them out!” We have seen this recently in the case of Obama and the dramatics of the radical right, as Ladkin so correctly observes.

She notes:

“Taking the notion of ‘leadership’ as presented here seriously has significant implications for our ability to continue to blame leaders. In accepting the notion that leadership is a dynamic in which followers are also implicated, failures of leadership are followers’ responsibility as well. ‘Leadership’ demands a level of attention from all of those involved in its enactment which is not recognized from a ‘leader-centric’ viewpoint. The notion of the flesh of leadership implies that leader and followers are together implicated in the enactment of leadership which successfully achieves mobilization towards desired purposes.” (188)

Ladkin has done more here than talk about leadership. For me she has demonstrated the central role of philosophy, not only in comprehending leadership, but in comprehending ourselves and our lives.