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** Lawler and Gold (2016) ** is not listed in the references. Please provide reference details.
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As a human resource (HR) subject group leader, I’m naturally drawn to Leadership Paradoxes. The book encourages the reader to critique rational approaches to paradoxes in leadership and provides a model of academic leadership to view the world from different angles, as its gravity-defying cover based on Escher’s ‘Relativity’ print indicates. This edited collection is neither a textbook nor a prescriptive guide. It is written as supplementary reading for advanced undergraduate, postgraduate, and post-experience students: (a) to stimulate new thinking and debate; (b) to encourage wider reading of paradox and ambiguity; and (c) to consider how paradoxes impact leadership. At a time when many of us are perplexed and confounded by the Brexit referendum vote, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist attacks, and Trump’s nomination for the US presidency, a key message is that organisational leaders/managers can reframe and embrace paradoxes not as problems to solve but as opportunities. The editors seek ‘to introduce some of the paradoxes of leadership and to suggest some ways that leaders and organisations may learn to live with them’ (p. 5). The chapters (of around 20 pages each) persuade us to adopt interconnected, interdependent, and globalised viewpoints in turbulent times. Bolden et al. argue that powerful and influential individuals use control as an illusion to maintain their status and position. We are invited to consider the social construction of ‘realities’ and to adopt synergistic, holistic ‘and ... and’ rather than ‘either ... or’ perspectives. The authors admit the chapters are designed to provide more questions than answers as ‘provocations and catalysts for further enquiry’. I think this makes it uncomfortable reading for those students who prefer seeking positivistic, quantitative and normative methodologies and prescriptions. They will however, appreciate and be grateful for the book’s insights when they encounter messy, apparently insurmountable problems in their working lives. Indeed, after all, we can all recognise apparent workplace contradictions such as when stress enhances productivity, less is more, and tough love mobilises action.

The nine contributors (three women) comprise scholars and practitioners with diverse industry and international experiences, mostly linked by their association with the University of Exeter Business School’s Centre for Leadership Studies in the United Kingdom. Helpfully, the introduction (p. 1) includes an Oxford English Dictionary definition of paradox as a seemingly absurd though perhaps well-founded statement; self-contradictory or essentially absurd statement; person or thing conflicting with pre-conceived notions of what is reasonable or possible.
Each chapter consists of an opening summary, plus questions for reflection and discussion, with recommended reading sections and references. The book’s complementary website www.leadershipparadoxes.com (no login required) includes a sample of Chapter 1, as well as relevant video, slide, and other web links in each chapter summary, and @lship_paradoxes twitter updates.

The chapters are organised around seven main paradoxes:

- **Chapter 2**: Leadership: people need but don’t want leaders
- **Chapter 3**: Perspective: decontextualising leadership may destroy it; leadership is more than just about studying leaders; invisible leadership may be the most effective
- **Chapter 4**: Team and time: leaders must be simultaneously in the present and look to the future while being a part of and apart from the team
- **Chapter 5**: Heroic leadership: our heroes are often fictional or dead
- **Chapter 6**: Distortion: in attempting to control events, leaders lose control
- **Chapter 7**: Authenticity: can result in inauthenticity; it is not just about being ourselves as we have multiple identities in different contexts that change over time
- **Chapter 8**: Right and wrong: when we faced by ethical dilemmas, our values may conflict and outcomes appear unclear
love to build up then destroy our heroes; (5) a hero’s death increases our affection for them; and (6) rule-breakers, risk-takers and fearless high-functioning psychopaths are appealing. The authors observe that mentors transform others by exploring suffering in leadership journeys and that ironically ‘[t]he ultimate paradox of leadership may reside in the idea that one must “give it away to keep it”’ (p. 87).

For Chapter 6, Lawler and Gold evoke Wittgenstein’s metaphor of a river and riverbanks creating each other. These scholars argue that leaders must gain first-hand experience of an organisation’s ‘noise’, its backwaters, turbulence and overflows, to gauge how they go with the flow and change its direction. They critique research on leaders’ competences, advocate distributed leadership, and debunk the myth that leaders can gain full control. Lawler and Gold (2016) portray leadership as ‘adding to the flow of energy’ through story telling about successes while allowing for the ‘paradox of distortions’ (p. 109). This chapter includes a useful stakeholder mapping exercise (p. 98) and two case studies and a stakeholder mapping exercise (p. 99). [AQ1]

Chapter 7 on the psychological paradoxes of authenticity and inconsistencies suggests that authenticity is not about ‘being yourself’. Adarves-Yorno promotes leadership development through mindfulness and introspection, detachment, and ‘fluid authenticity’. Within four paradoxes, she asserts that (i) authenticity is context dependent and leaders who candidly admit to their lack of confidence can lose legitimacy; (ii) we have multiple expressions of authenticity and identities; (iii) contradictions arise from leaders manifesting different aspects of their authentic selves; and (iv) over time inaccurate behaviours result from a fixed self-image. Adarves-Yorno’s enthusiasm for ‘inner training’ may resonate well with students who are undergoing transitions from technical specialist to general people management roles.

For the penultimate chapter, Board explores the ‘paradox of right and wrong’ when our values conflict. Drawing on examples from religion, English literature, science, and corporate engineering failure, she presents ethical dilemmas based on utilitarianism, rules, and care. Board reflects on moral courage and whistleblowing, concluding that our survival depends on ‘clearing the capacity to embrace learning from life’s paradoxes.

In the final chapter, the editors focus on negative capability, that is, our ability to accept uncertainties without needing to be rational. They consider socially constructed leadership, wicked problems, complexity, and boundary spanners. Bolden et al. reiterate that ‘[p]aradox demands us to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity and to hold multiple possibilities in our minds at the same time’ (p. 153). The authors ‘encourage reflection, debate and critical engagement in order to facilitate alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world’ (p. 154). They recommend systemic and holistic thinking and reiterate that paradoxes offer energising and stimulating possibilities.

What I like about this book is its focus on leadership and paradoxes as distinct from paradoxical leadership (Lavine, 2014; Smith et al., 2012). The web-site and end-of-chapter questions are useful for researchers and workshop facilitators. The range of citations is diverse, from physicists, philosophers, TED Talks, and political, historical and contemporary events. If using this book with students, I would add definitions of paradox by management scholars. For instance, Schad et al. (2016) define paradox as the ‘persistent contradiction between interdependent elements’ (p. 10), while Cameron and Quinn (1988) assert that paradoxes ‘seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously’ (p. 760).

Although the book states seven core paradoxes in each of the main essay titles, it is confusing that some chapters present even more paradoxes. A summary of all the paradoxes highlighted would be useful in addition to specific organisational illustrations of Quine’s three categories of paradox. While key concepts such as followership, distributed, team, heroic, authentic and ethical leadership, and traits and styles (p. 8) are mentioned, in future editions of
this book, I would welcome a theoretical review of paradox literature, for example, Denison et al. (1995), Zhang et al. (2015) and Jarzabkowski, Lewis et al. (2016). Chapters on concepts such as organisational humour, irony, and satire, emotions, and embodiment, and sociomateriality could also be added. I would like to hear voices from emerging economies, for instance such as the United Nations (2015) Sustainability Development Goals. It could be interesting to see watch a live debate between the authors, policy makers, and students on the book’s web-site.

In conclusion, these essays are problem-centred and thought-provoking. Leadership Paradoxes meets its stated objective of making us consider how paradoxes affect leadership. We are encouraged to question our assumptions about the elusive and dynamic phenomenon of effective and ethical leadership in uncertain contexts. I would expect advanced-level business school students to demonstrate critical engagement with top academic journal articles, especially within strategic management literature beyond references provided in the book. Overall, Leadership Paradoxes certainly stimulates ‘rethinking’ of how we frame paradox within well-trodden perspectives of conceptualisations of leadership as contingent, complex, distributed and relational. Students with an action-bias may be frustrated by the authors’ recommendations to be mindful, not in control, and to embrace view paradoxes as opportunities rather than view them as difficulties to solve. As educators, however, we must learn to challenge our students to be reflexive, courageous, curious, and contextually sensitive as paradigms and centres of gravity shift.

Of course, we are all familiar with working in ‘an uncertain world’ as the term VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) has been commonly used since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, this book is to be commended for reminding us that an understanding of leadership requires us to live with absurdities and continually question leadership practices and development. The companion web-site provides an excellent forum for further dialogue. Overall, Leadership Paradoxes is a timely text in a post-heroic age as we strive to grapple with integrate converging physical, digital, and biological spheres—conundrums in the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016).

References