

4-29-2019

Review of "Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context: International Perspectives" by Lt.-Col. Douglas Lindsay and Cmdr. Dave Woycheshin, eds.

John C. Hanley

Recommended Citation

Hanley, John C. () "Review of "Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context: International Perspectives" by Lt.-Col. Douglas Lindsay and Cmdr. Dave Woycheshin, eds.," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol28/iss1/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Lindsay and Commander Dave Woycheshin, eds. *Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context: International Perspectives*. Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2014. Pp. 183.

Editors Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Lindsay and Commander Dave Woycheshin provide a compilation of well-prepared leadership essays from various international authors in their book *Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context: International Perspectives*. Each of the scholarly essays addresses the qualities of adaptability in leadership, especially as these qualities apply to current and future international conditions. Conflict in the twenty-first century is decidedly different from the relative predictability of the Cold War period, particularly immediately following the Second World War, due to increased levels of indeterminate global situations facing political and military leaders. As such, these leaders, which are the focus of this book, must embrace adaptability to meet these challenges. Adaptability, as succinctly described by Colonel Piet Bester and Major Anita du Plessis of the South African National Defence Force, is defined "as the process through which an individual (military leader) modifies his or her behavior in response to environmental demands and challenges" (p. 137). Adaptive leadership is not a distinctive form of leadership existing only in unique contexts; however, adaptability is increasingly becoming a greater need in leadership development because it has not been well defined previously. Nonetheless, adaptability is, and always has been, a function of leadership. The essays in this book not only discuss the need for adaptability in leadership but also include many references to developing this skill in all leaders. Developing adaptive leaders is a significant topic among the various authors.

In their chapters, the editors provide well-documented examples of approaches which the authors use to understand and apply adaptive leadership in a military context. Research into behavioural traits is a common beginning for many of the authors' works, and several examine whether leadership is a natural trait or a learned skill. Overall, these authors view adaptive leadership as a skill involving analytical reasoning, critical and interactive thinking, ethical decisions, and a willingness to accept risk applied in dynamic and unstable environments. Dr. Richard Runyon, Colonel Fred Tan Wei Shi, and Jivarani Govindarajoo of the Singapore Armed Forces write that "[C]ritical thinking is one of many significant leadership

skills we desire for our military leaders to be adaptive in volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous operating environments” (p. 96). As these and other authors point out, adaptability is an important and increasingly necessary skill in the development of competent leaders. The leadership development methodology, which is examined by many of the authors from various nations, is anchored in education, training, and self-development. In addition to this methodology, Bester and du Plessis include experience as “an important predictor of adaptive behavior,” coupled with “an iterative process of practice and feedback, where practice is a necessary part of the development” (p. 148). Many of the authors also acknowledge that the concept of critical thinking in adaptive leadership is a learned skill, especially if the learner is provided with an environment where realistic situations are introduced through a safeguarded pedagogy.

As the world is changing in the twenty-first century, leaders, either implicitly or explicitly, as described by Jerry Guo and Dr. Mie Augier of the United States, must motivate themselves and their organisations to accept the need for change. Notably, adaptability is an attribute that leaders use to adjust their behaviours in current situations to respond to ambiguous challenges. Commander Mark Meehan and Flight Lieutenant Delwyn Neill from the New Zealand Defence Force highlight these thoughts, writing that “[l]eaders must be able to adapt their leadership to the level within which they are operating” (p. 115). Many of the authors address the importance of instilling a culture of critical thinking and ethical behaviour so leaders can continue to develop and meet new dynamic situations.

The structure of the book contributes to the understanding of adaptive leadership by providing different international concepts. There is an interesting section that contrasts the differences between eastern and western philosophies of leadership. The main point accentuated by the authors is that culture affects each person and shapes how they interact with others—a necessary understanding for adaptive leaders. Examining the various contributions from the authors, the reader can draw more similarities than differences in the materials. The prevailing thought is that operational challenges and emerging technologies are compelling military leaders to increase their focus on adaptability. As such, Bester and du Plessis correctly define adaptive leadership as “changing behavior in appropriate ways as the situation changes” (p. 139). This quote gives a solid understanding of adaptive leadership because both the leader and the

led must change their behaviours to shape the future. As discussed by the authors throughout this book, global contexts in relation to increasing cultural interactions, dynamic operational climates, and technological developments are constantly changing. These changes create an environment which requires leaders to learn and apply adaptive leadership to meet any national threats.

This book is recommended to all who lead others, especially uniformed, civilian, and contracted individuals who apply their skills and talents to the success of their respective militaries daily. The ability to adapt one's leadership competencies is necessary for all who are leading or will lead in the dynamic and precarious world of the twenty-first century. It is vital in this changing world that all leaders extend their knowledge beyond the current theories of leadership. Military leaders and those who research leadership attributes must emphasise the skill of adaptability as an essential attribute of leadership competency. It is a skill requiring constant personal commitment. Dr. R. Jeffrey Jackson and Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Lindsay, authors from the United States, state that "[f]rom a practical point of view, adaptive leaders can continue to develop themselves and expand their behavioural repertoires using an assortment of developmental best practices" (p. 41). Seasoned leaders will find this book to be particularly useful in their mentoring of emerging leaders. An academic setting provides a solid foundation for the theories of leadership and for instilling the skill of adaptability in leaders. These learned traits must be practiced and tested in realistic and constructive conditions. Bester and du Plessis summarise these concepts well: "It can thus be concluded that military leaders at all levels will be challenged by various complexities that will require adaptability for mission success" (p. 135). Experienced leaders should draw on the content of this book to understand that their responsibilities go beyond the academic development of future leaders. They must demonstrate adaptability in practical situations to round out the education of new leaders in a comprehensive manner.

JOHN C. HANLEY, *INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER*