BOOK REVIEW

Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, *Sustainable Leadership*  

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The literature dealing with academic studies on leadership is vast. Without including books and articles on leadership in print, there are over 1.5 million websites on topics related to leadership, including many focusing on sustainable leadership. The quest for a framework in which leaders can anchor their thought processes for initiating leadership events is the essence of mindful leadership. For mindful educators and leaders, Hargreaves and Fink have offered an original and exciting framework of thinking, doing and living Sustainable Leadership.

The notion of sustainability is powerful and is applied across many fields of development. While there is a vast corpus of literature on administration, management, leadership and even entrepreneurship, there is a dearth of information in the area of sustainable leadership. An early definition of sustainability suggests: ‘[*an ability*] ... *to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*’ (Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environments and Development in 1987. *Our Common Future*. New York: United Nations General Assembly). The prominence given to the international agenda to think about and commit to sustainability of our environment highlights the necessity of promoting sustainability in all other areas of lives and development. Hargreaves and Fink have done just that in the fields of leadership, education, change and human and institutional development. It is fitting that Hargreaves and Fink’s book is launched in the year the United Nations launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014.

Hargreaves and Fink have made intellectual and practical connections between leadership and the notion of sustainability and have provided insights into new ways of tackling the economic, social, environmental, educational, leadership and development challenges. The professorial knowledge and international consultancy wisdom of both authors has contributed meaningfully to their concepts of sustainable leadership.

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Whether notions of leadership are universal across cultures, remains an interesting question. Also, whether educational leadership remains culture-specific or universal, is a question yet unanswered. The notion of sustainability, like the notion of development, seems to be universal. This is particularly so when ideas of progress and development seem to use common indicators, values, concepts and language especially in seminal policy-shaping materials disseminated through UNESCO and the World Bank. Leaders from economically and educationally developed as well as less-developed societies will find common values, agenda and useful lessons from Hargreaves and Fink’s exciting, provocative and pioneering work on sustainable leadership in education.

Hargreaves and Fink have taken the notion of sustainable educational leadership beyond the traditional training agenda. Sustainable leadership is founded on moral, purpose-driven leadership, which focuses on what really matters in schooling and education. The authors submit cutting edge ideas on sustainable leadership which enable novice and experienced leaders to examine and understand their practice more deeply, so that they can make the lives of students, teachers, parents and policy-makers better.

Drawing painstakingly from three funded research-based insights, the authors have put forward seven principles of sustainable leadership. Addressing the fundamental issue of educational leadership and change, in their book on “Sustainable Leadership” Hargreaves and Fink aptly surmise:

Better quality education and leadership that will benefit all students and last over time require that we address their basic sustainability. If the first challenge of change is to ensure that it’s desirable and the second challenge is to make it doable, then the biggest challenge of all is to make it durable and sustainable” (p. 2).

Throughout the book the authors carefully and convincingly define, explain and provide examples of the ‘what and the how’ of sustainable leadership. They posit that sustainable educational change and leadership is three-dimensional; it has depth, breadth and length. Four further principles, namely, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conservation add to the meaning of sustainability and its challenges in schooling and education. The seven principles of sustainable leadership, as identified and explained, are indeed powerful, relevant and useful tools. Each of the principles can be enriched by readers as they construct meaning to embrace their own implicit knowledge and experiences, of leadership and change. Scholars and practitioners will, of course, evaluate, and may use such principles in the art and science of leadership. The book provides the concepts and the language to facilitate conversation and voice in common sense leadership, which should foster paradigm changes and new mental models.

Hargreaves and Fink recognize that the key forces influencing change and continuity in the long term are leadership, leadership sustainability and leadership succession. They also note the urgent need to rethink the constant drives in educational policy and practice—the obsession with reaching higher and higher standards—without regard to social justice. The authors take the position that to solve problems effectively and ensure meaningful changes, good leaders need to pursue and model sustainable leadership, and identify and define what matters. Across the pages of the book, there are interesting insights, which will be useful for reflective practitioners. The book provides a core vocabulary for leaders to talk and debate further about change and the authors offer this Last Word as conclusion: