

A Book Review: Leadershift; The Eleven Essential Changes Every Leader Must Embrace by John C.

Maxwell

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This latest publication by a renowned author whose consistent intellectual focus on leadership over the years has earned him recognition in that field as an authority with formidable impact on the consciousness of many leaders and aspiring leaders across the world, is a unique contribution to the body of knowledge on the theoretical and empirical import of leadership in uncertain operational milieu. Drawing from his several years of espousing leadership ideas, John Maxwell, in this new book brings out the winning skill that sustains and enables a leader to forge ahead and to overcome daunting challenges in the environment of his leadership. That skill or attribute of a leader is what he conceptualizes as *Leadershift*, which he defines as the ability and willingness to make a leadership change that will positively enhance organizational and personal growth (p.4).

The author confesses in the book's introduction that he had wanted to write about *Leadershift* a long time ago, having discovered that it gives leadership the essential qualities that differentiate it from the Management principles of the 1970s. He observes that whilst Management takes stability for granted, leadership provides principles that work in the face of the unknown. Emphasizing the imperative of *leadershifting* in the context of the fluidity of developments in the contemporary world, the author avers that as a result of the impact of technology and innovation, things are rapidly changing at shorter time frame- a development, he reasoned ought to make leaders that want to

survive in such inherently unstable environment to learn how to continually make *leadershifts*.

Expatriating on this new concept of *Leadershift*, the author identifies its definitional characteristics as adaptability, readiness to change, flexibility, dealing with uncertainty without losing focus, and the ability to make requisite shifts continually (pp. 4- 6). He defines ‘adaptability’ as the ability to change (or to be changed) to fit new circumstances, which he notes constitutes a crucial skill for leaders. He further reiterates that adaptability is the ability to deal with change and uncertainty (p.5). He analyzes the following as the seven characteristics of *Leadershift*: (i) Continuous learning, unlearning and relearning; (ii) Valuing yesterday but living in today; (iii) Relying on speed but thriving on timing; (iv) Seeing the big picture as the picture keeps getting bigger; (v) Living in today but thinking about tomorrow; (vi) Moving forward courageously in the midst of uncertainty, and (vii) Realizing today’s best will not meet tomorrow’s challenges. These *leadershift* nuggets, the author affirms, were instrumental in most of the *leadershifts* he made over the years, which he classified into the remaining eleven chapters of the book. The author’s past decisions to *leadershift* were in respect of the following: the focus shift; the personal development shift; the cost shift; the relational shift; the abundance shift; reproduction shift; the communication shift; the improvement shift; the influence shift and the impact shift.

In arriving at these eleven *leadershifts*, the author reveals his deep and incredible understanding of the social and psychological drives of humans, and how that could be utilized in providing acceptable and respected leadership for growth-oriented people working in an organization for the realization of the objectives of the organization and sustenance of its institutional relevance and enduring impact. The book is richly laced with

aphorisms and maxims of respected and accomplished leaders who had demonstrated good understanding in their fields of endeavors, and whose wise sayings should naturally command reverence. It is however not within the scope of this review to assess whether the author could have made any other shifts from the options at his disposal at that point in time when he took the decisions. What is important is to interrogate the concept of *Leadershift* and situate its relevance within the broader context of leadership. It is when this is done that the subsequent conceptual issues about the book in this review can be appreciated.

First, the attempt to equalize ‘adaptability’ with *leadershift* on the one hand, and the clarification of the difference between ‘conformity’ and adaptability on the other hand ended up compounding the readers’ confusion (p.6). The clarification under reference cannot provide answer to the question of how adaptability would empower a leader to change his operational environment when he is at the same time adjusting to the changing circumstances in that environment. Following our author’s perspective on adaptability, an adaptable leader cannot demonstrate strength and confidence in his own convictions, judgement and abilities, and this is contrary to our author’s understanding. Second, this new theorizing on the concept of *Leadershift* is largely an affirmation of the need for leaders to flexibly consider their options in taking leadership decisions in any given circumstance they might find themselves. Leaders have always and will always operate in uncertain environment because of the human element involved in the operational milieu of any organization. Also, the challenges of the world in contemporary times could have changed but the world has always been uncertain and in a constant state of flux. Therefore, *Leadershift* as a concept meant to explain the ability of leaders to respond to uncertain conditions in their environment, by implication is not a new realization even though the coinage of the concept is uniquely

novel. Third, *leadershifting* explicates the import of grappling with leadership change in response to perceived challenges that leaders face at any given point in time. It is not quite different from Change Management by leaders, even though the mention of ‘Management’ offends the sensibilities of Leadership Scholars.

Regardless of the foregoing critical appraisal, John Maxwell has added another well-written piece with new perspective on leadership decision-making in uncertain operational environments to the body of knowledge on the theories and practice of leadership. He has not only provided a nomenclature known as *Leadershift* for the explication of that leadership change that takes place when leaders are confronted with uncertain circumstances but analyzed its characteristics from the standpoint of his own experiences over the years as a leader. *Leadershift* is presented in this book as an empirical validation of the strengths of adaptability and flexibility in leadership decision-making, and as a new concept it would certainly gain global scholarly acceptance and be inserted into the glossary of terms for utilization in intellectual and public discourses on leadership and allied subjects. This book will add immense value to the understanding of all those in leadership positions or aspiring to same in any field of human endeavors.