

## **Twenty-First Century Leadership for EU Institutions**

### Book review

Bruin, R. de, Prieto Tovar, S. and Pelland, D. (2017). *Twenty-First Century Leadership for EU Institutions*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

This is the first book bringing together the stories of leading European civil servants examining how these leaders truly serve European people. The book is engaging and a welcome addition to the many publications on leadership. Throughout the recent decade, the EU has remained at the centre of public interest and media. However, insights on EU leadership practices got less attention.

In the first two chapters the authors provide a thought-provoking historical view into the servant-leadership philosophy. More specifically, the kind of servant-leadership we need in the knowledge age is outlined, as a guide for transformation. The final chapter consists of twelve critical interviews with leading EU civil servants organized around a set of guiding questions. The central question addressed in these interviews is how EU civil servants can play a significant role that will allow the EU to reach its full potential in truly serving the needs of Europe's people. The interview series opens with Herman van Rompuy, former President of the European Council. How does he inspire people around him? Van Rompuy considers authenticity and trust to be key leadership characteristics. He prefers to lead by doing, and has no intention of giving lessons like a teacher.

A few interviewees argued that, during their subsequent career steps, they developed their own leadership skills. Thus, for example Lorenzo M. Zimelli. He is the President of the Security Personnel Professional Delegation, European Parliament, Directorate-Generale SAFE. Zimelli became inspired to develop his own leadership skills, ascending to a position where he is capable of coaching others and helping them to solve their problems. At the same time, Anna Lonroth, Head of Life Sciences Unit of the European Research Council Executive Agency, argues that leadership can be learned, while communication skills are key to being a successful leader. According to Lonroth, good leaders provide honest and personal feedback to make people grow.

The heart of the book includes the highly engaging storylines of leading EU civil servants. These EU interviewees claim that investing in talent of young professionals is essential. Carlo Dorlo, HRM officer of the European Commission, Directorate-General CONNECT, considers himself a collector of talent and relies on the old-fashioned method of mentorship. Dorlo remains convinced that senior leaders should be on the outlook for ripe talent, investing in them to eventually fill their shoes. This is in line with interviewee Bernd Reichert, Head of Unit, Executive Agency for SMEs. Reichert believes in empowering people, assigning the task and trusting colleagues without control. He tries to let his staff make decisions for

themselves, preferring to step back and not to be seen at all. Other attributes of servant-leadership that appeared in the interviews were amongst others: the drive to create a cross-cultural understanding in the workplace (Bernd Reichert), constructing a more empathetic environment (Laura Westring), encourage cross-disciplinary thinking e.g. inspiration through art and music (Frans Nijs), foresight and long term vision (Paul Timmers), to develop talent and help prepare your organisation for the future (Bonifacio Garcia-Porras), rewarding team success (Andrea Toth) and participatory leadership (Frans Nijs). These and other interviewees showed how they are guided in their daily operations by their spiritual intelligence, rather than their ego. In sum, the interviews confirm the presence of servant-leadership by the interviewed people across the European Commission directorates.

I genuinely enjoyed the book's focus on the arts of leading and serving. What are the take-aways for readers? First of all, the book provides an important roadmap for future leaders, to consider her or his desirable professional path from an inner motivation to serve. Secondly, the authors offer a guide for a broad audience to maximize their potential. It will be an exciting read for students and professionals interested in sustainable EU leadership and beyond. And for each of us to appreciate the possibilities of becoming a servant-leader. Last but not least the book is a useful guide for public leadership scholars aiming to make a difference in public management research. Last but not least, the authors carefully redefine what a successful leader is. The message of servant-leadership, and what and how they contribute to the organization, is visible in a number of issues addressed such as role models, team and community building, meaningfulness, trust and nurturing talent. After all, these are issues that serve as central concerns of the inspiring EU leaders. The interviews with EU civil servants are great stimuli for further debate in leadership development courses for policymakers and executives. A small suggestion that could be offered here is to add an epilogue or conclusion chapter. This would enrich the findings from the earlier chapters, to reframe and reemphasize the legacies of the leading EU civil servants interviewed.

In summary, I highly recommend '*Twenty-First Century Leadership for EU Institutions*' being proud that one of the recent SERVUS graduates Sebastian Prieto Tovar co-authored the book. The inspiring showcases how servant-leadership is executed on a European level will familiarize readers with leadership dilemmas in the EU. As a result, the book represents meaningfulness for the next generation of European leaders, and might truly lead us toward a more sustainable Europe.

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