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BOOK REVIEW

Leadership in Career and Technical Education: Beginning the 21st Century

James A. Gregson and Jeff M. Allen, Eds.
Format: Soft Cover, 174 pp.

Reviewed by Michael Kroth
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*Of courage undaunted, possessing a
firmness & perseverance of purpose
which nothing but impossibilities could
divert from it's (sic) direction.*

Thomas Jefferson, describing the leadership of Meriwether Lewis
(found in *Undaunted Courage* by Stephen Ambrose, 1997, p. 484)

Introduction

Here in the Northwest the explorations of Lewis and Clark are legendary. Their journey into territory unknown to those in their world, facing dangers they could not imagine, was made possible, Ambrose (1997) says, because of outstanding leadership and the ability to mold their band into what became known as the Corps of Discovery. This group trusted each other completely, and had honed itself into a hard, disciplined company able to surmount obstacles we cannot imagine.

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In 1915, Ernest Shackleton completed one of the most amazing feats that has been recorded in our history. After his ship, the *Endurance*, became locked in Antarctic ice and was subsequently destroyed, Shackleton led all 27 of his crew to safety over 850 miles of some of the most dangerous and harsh conditions possible. Albert Lansing's riveting book, *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage* (1959), describes that journey and Shackleton's unending will to take his charges to safety.

In Chapter 4 of the book *Leadership in Career and Technical Education: Beginning the 21st Century*, edited by James A. Gregson and Jeff M. Allen (2005), Jerry R. McMurtry says "it is clear the field [of CTE] is in a situation nearing a crisis." He further issues a "call to action" (p. 108) to current or aspiring leaders in CTE to prescribe the future for the field. He suggests that CTE is moving toward chaos, and may need to consider new structures in order to survive.

Good editors provide an arc, or overriding theme, for a piece of work. In this case, Gregson and Allen have provided the rationale and the impetus for a wake up call. Whether there are Shackletons or Lewises who might emerge in time for CTE is another issue. GE CEO Jack Welch's famous rule "control your destiny, or someone else will" (Tichy and Sherman, 1993, p. 12), seems worth contemplation when the forces of change, as outlined in this book, swirl so vigorously.

Gregson sets the tone in the Forward as he describes why leadership is difficult in career and technical education today. Programs preparing professionals have declined at research extensive and land grant universities, he says, and as a result so has research in the field and about its leadership. Career and technical education programs in general continue to decline as public policy impetus seems to push such programs to the postsecondary level. Resources are shrinking at the same time demands are increasing. Understanding leadership in the field is sufficiently difficult, he points out, because CTE has many purposes and occurs at many different levels. Finally, he situates the challenges proposed by the

book's chapter authors not only in the world of CTE, but also that of higher education and the nation.

Strategic Assessment of CTE

There is nothing new about an institution, field, or organization being made problematic by shifting tides. Business schools have faced challenges similar to those of CTE institutions of higher education (Friga, 2003). New competitors such as private education firms, demographics that increase demand, and the advent of disruptive technologies that affect knowledge distribution are just three of the factors impacting management education as well as CTE.

Michael Porter's (1980, 1985) model of competitive analysis provides a useful tool to assess the forces which may impact an organization's competitive position. A longer article fully articulating Porter's five elements as related to CTE and an in-depth discussion of strategy as tool for leaders might give the field a clearer picture of the future. Here, however, is the basic outline of his model, and how it might be applied to CTE. (For an example of how Porter's model can be applied to higher education see Collis, 1999).

Porter (1980) defines an industry as "a group of firms producing products that are similar to each other" (p. 5). For our purposes let us consider CTE to be that group of higher educational institutions that produce secondary and post-secondary educators. Let us also assume, as Gregson points out, that the demand for CTE teachers is increasing and supply for now is limited.

The five forces Porter describes are: Threat of New Entrants, Bargaining Power of Firm's Suppliers, Bargaining Power of Firm's Customers, Threat of Substitute Products, and Intensity of Rivalry Among Competing Firms. A changing situation in any one of these areas might reorient an industry's competitive playing field. I like this model because it is a lens that can be applied to any type of sector – for-profit, not-for-profit, government organizations, or here, educational institutions. Let us use it to briefly analyze CTE's situation.

Threat of New Entrants. High barriers to entry – passing the bar examination, certain types of regulation or government policy, as

examples - may limit competition to be among just a few, relatively friendly, competitors. Low barriers lead to cutthroat competition with many players. With a high demand for teachers and low supply new entrants should find entering the field appealing. Current providers – institutes of higher education – may find other competitors, private educational institutions for example, entering into the field. If barriers to entry are lowered or made more accessible, say by modifying certification requirements or the introduction of new technology, new competitors will more easily emerge.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers. When there are few or unique suppliers – those who sell to the organization – prices are more likely to be higher. When the organization can buy from many suppliers prices are more likely to be lower. In this case, the suppliers are faculty or potential teachers. Normally, when there is more demand than supply, as we've assumed above, sellers have more bargaining power. Price – in this case salaries, benefits, or the cost of other accommodations for teachers - rises.

Bargaining Power of Buyers. Buyers are those who purchase the group's product. In this case buyers are those who pay CTE higher educational institutions to produce teachers. Buyers here might be state or federal granting institutions or the potential teachers themselves. To the extent there are substitutes, in this case for CTE or for teaching careers, the power of buyers increases because they have more choices.

Threat of Substitutes. Substitution occurs when one service or product takes the place of another when providing for the needs of a buyer. In the case of CTE, if potential teachers find more attractive opportunities than teaching or preparing for teaching they may turn to another occupation altogether. When buyers, such as these teachers or funding agencies, have alternatives their ability to command concessions rises.

Intensity of Rivalry Among Competing Firms. Competition between existing companies may occur through the introduction of new products or services, price competition, marketing strategies, or improved service to customers. Porter says that when competitors feel pressure from other rivals they may try to position themselves to

advantage, which then causes others to then try to reposition themselves. In the case of CTE, institutions of higher education may try to differentiate their offerings or make their processes – and thence the teacher’s learning experience – more efficient, or turn to alternative strategies to position themselves more attractively than other competitors for students or funding.

Porter’s model is not the only way to interpret changes occurring in CTE, but it points out that leaders have tools to help them understand the forces which are driving change. Leadership, in many cases, involves not only the character that Lewis, Clark, and Shackleton exhibited, but also the ability to assess the situation and to think strategically. Every chapter of *Leadership in Career and Technical Education* provides compelling evidence that CTE leaders must be strategic in order to be successful over time.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1, *New Approaches to Preparing Career and Technical Education Teachers*, Kenneth Gray describes changes that have significance for teacher preparation programs and CTE teachers. He provides compelling evidence that there will be a significant demand for CTE teacher preparation programs. Teacher shortages he says, however, are significant and the numbers of CTE teacher preparation programs have declined. Enrollment in these programs has also declined. He describes strategies that institutions are undertaking, such as alternative licensing programs, and notes the new competitors entering the field, such as community/technical colleges, school districts, and private sector for-profits. Much of what he depicts involves rethinking CTE teacher preparation. Gray makes clear that competition for teacher preparation programs will increase, and that the current model will not survive. Specifically, he writes that “while in the past CTE teacher preparation was the sole domain of traditional degree-granting institutions, it is likely in the future these programs will no longer have such a monopoly” (p. 22). Existing programs will face the threat of an “open market” (p. 22).

William G. Camp and Courtney L. Johnston, in their Chapter 2 article titled *Evolution of a Theoretical Framework for Secondary*

Level Vocational Education and Career and Technical Education over the Past Century, describe efforts to develop a theoretical base for vocational education from the 1900's to the present. They then provide a proposed framework for the practice of CTE today. First they relate Prosser's Sixteen Theorems, which they call guiding principles for the design of vocational education from the early 1900's, to the theoretical work of subsequent writers and create a retrospective theoretical framework for vocational education. Concluding that there have been no significant efforts to establish a CTE theoretical framework and that, indeed, one does not exist, they propose their own, with human capital theory as the fundamental theoretical premise and constructivism as the basis for pedagogy. They situate their framework in current educational and work requirements. The leadership issue which Camp and Johnston seem to allude to but did not explicitly identify suggests a dearth of important thinkers in the field. If there have not been theoretical debates over the decades, leading to progressively deep understandings of the profession's underpinnings and at least a tentative theoretical framework either accepted or eschewed by scholars and practitioners, then the field seems certainly at risk.

Christopher J. Zirkle, Rebecca A. Parker, and N.L. McCaslin take on the Changing Environment of Career and Technical Education Leadership Development in the United States in Chapter 3. If our previous authors pointed out the need for new thinking about teacher preparation programs and the lack of existing theory in the field, Zirkle and his colleagues make the case that the numbers of existing leaders and the potential to develop new leaders is a "crisis" (p. 63). The authors here make a compelling case that there will be a dire need for new laborers in the workforce now and in the future. At the same time, educational administrators are or will be eligible to retire soon, creating a shortage they describe as a "grave concern" (p. 65). After describing the difficulties facing CTE leaders, including domestic changes and federal laws, they propose a conceptual framework for CTE leadership programs, drawing upon the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and what they call a career and technical education knowledge base. This knowledge base consists of thirteen categories including such items

as developing a CTE vision, establishing a CTE culture, and understanding policy development issues. They go on to detail the status of CTE-related leadership programs. Finally, they make recommendations for leadership development, including the need for CTE to develop national leadership development standards.

Jerry R. McMurtry begins Chapter 4, with a “passionate call to action for vocational educators to ...alert the field to an impending crisis” (p. 95). This chapter, *Imagining the Future of Career and Technical Education: Reflections for Career and Technical Education Leadership from National Leadership Institute Scholars*, describes leadership development efforts in the field including the work of the National Center on Vocational Education starting in the early 1990’s to identify the leadership attributes of vocational educators. A Leadership Attributes Inventory was developed from this list of attributes for use in CTE leadership development programs. McMurtry says the “overall effort to create a comprehensive leadership development program for vocational education was remarkable” (p. 103). The movement, however, quickly died out until the National Leadership Institute (NLI) was created in 2001. McMurtry describes the purpose of the institute as developing leadership capabilities in CTE educators who were selected to be NLI scholars. The rest of the chapter summarizes key themes which emerged from a Delphi process which engaged 31 participants in the program. Members identified lack of a national vision as the overriding issue facing CTE and lack of new leaders to fill future needs as the second. Vision was identified as the most mentioned attribute CTE leaders will need in the future, second was a commitment to the principles of CTE. The most important skills identified as needed were networking skills, first, and organizational skills, second. McMurtry summarizes by saying that CTE is at a crisis point, not only because of the need for leaders and leadership, but also because of the momentous change that is afoot. Affirming that CTE may be moving toward chaos – much as Porter (1980) describes changes which may occur in various industry structures – he says that new CTE configurations might emerge.

Chapter 5, *Leadership in Career and Technical Education: an International Perspective*, by Joshua D. Hawley, gives an overview

of the status of CTE globally. New policies are developed or in the process of being developed by significant organizations such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Labour organization. Hawley calls these the first major efforts to develop clear global vocational education and training policies in ten years. He notes the continuance of international academic scholarship and also significant new books in this arena. The data he shares is equivocal, however. For example, he reports that 64% of countries experienced increases in enrollment from 1998/1999 to 2000/2001, yet the numbers of graduates declined in 12 of 25 countries between 1998 and 2001. Hawley chalks this up as probably the result of differing ways agencies collect information. He concludes, however, that one cannot deduce that vocational education and training is increasing, nor that the level of funding has increased. He includes interesting discussions about vocational and technical school financing and goals, the role of international agencies, and the privatization of public services. Vocational-technical education will be ever more important, Hawley believes, because governments need to develop their workforces for global competition. He also wonders about the role of national state agencies when international agencies are playing increased roles in decision making.

Conclusions

Times of turbulence are always bursting with both opportunity and threat. When there is a vacuum, proactive people step in and find ways to take advantage of everyone else's hesitancy or fear, in order to rearrange the situation advantageously. This, following Jack Welch's admonition to control one's own destiny, seems to be the state of CTE today, if one believes the authors in this book. No one, wherever they are, desires the "or someone else will" part, yet - if anything - this book signals that this is the state of CTE today. Who will lead CTE through this restructuring process? Who will become the field's thought leaders? Who will become the policy makers and administrative leaders who fill the void? Where are the Lewises and the Shackletons of today's CTE, who can provide the vision, assess

the terrain, lead the people, and negotiate the obstacles that await? The prospects for becoming a leader in CTE have never seemed brighter. The consequences of complacency never seemed so dire.

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