
Book Reviews Book Reviews Book Reviews

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How Organizations Live by and with Myths

Monika Kostera, Ed. 2008. **Organizational Epics and Sagas.**
Great Britain: Palgrave Mac Millan. 196 pp.

The use of myths as metaphor in dissecting organizational flaws and strengths takes center stage in this well- documented (some 16 pages of bibliographical entries, backed up by well- crafted 369 references and related studies) book on management. Varied tales taken from business corporations, economic policies, political set ups, academic institutions, media mileage, movie enterprises, literary genres, sociological constructs - illustrate their mythical underpinnings to unravel their modern meanings and implications.

In the book sagas and epics take the form of “organizational virtues and vices” such as authenticity, entrepreneurial spirit, power struggle, reification of technology, miasma – paralysis of resistance, experience of moral cleansing, despondency, worthlessness, corruptions, even cosmogonic duel that describes the external clash or struggle between the hero or god and the forces of evil all occurring in three phases - the hero’s defeat, acceptance of external help, eventually ending in the protagonist’s victory. Interestingly, the archetypal fight is illustrated empirically in the interviews conducted among Polish students’ trepidation at first in using computer and their feeling of conquest of the machine in programming software for highly statistical graphical construction work as much as in analyzing environmental pollution.

Difficult to set aside, the book helps the layman in deciphering the highly nuanced theory and practice of organizational management and the behavioral patterns that go with it. How much more would professional, seasoned administrators respond to it? Because organizations are man-made, we expect dissent, wrangling, intrigue, professional jealousy, gendering power, the Foucaultian -sense of othering – estrangement , resignation, much less a ‘catch 22 situation’, that is, the condition of ending up in a quandary that offers no solution or respite!

For this context alone, the book proffers much insights into (re)channeling the inner resources, nay adopting a new leadership style to achieve greater heights in organizational goals to effect impassioned, selfless performance in the workplace. When deconstructed, the hierarchy sinks into mediocrity, worse still, inanity. Equally, it differentiates between the myths of Weberian bureaucracy and Maravellian post- bureaucracy in terms of producing a sense of identity and

responsibility. Though the arguments sit well among those who hold on to paradigm shifts', both aforementioned mechanisms, the book contends, are geared towards inclusion and exclusion.

More important, it defines operationally *corporate grail, femocrats, technophilia, sick building syndrome, heroic villains, collateral damage, and self-justificatory stories* along a number of mythic types succinctly shown in form of accompanying grid on pages 128-129. This is only the ninth of the twelve essays explored in the book. Others include Groosi's myths of corporate size in public services, Thorme's myth of virtual organization, Aggestian's myth of entrepreneurship, Erickson's and Nellson's bureaucrats and heretics, Lindqvist's the myth of management as art and vice versa, Durepees' *et al* contextualizing the American ideology or pioneering spirit that characterizes some organizations. All these essays and more provoke and tease, challenge and hint at organizations, their leaders and subordinates reinventing themselves.

One closes the book refreshed, feeling and thinking at the same time that change for its own sake has its own pitfalls, unless a positive, mythic change is internally sought for or devoutly to be accomplished.

Reading While Enjoying One's Life

Peter Boxall. General Ed. 2008. **1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die** London: Cassell Illustrated, 960 pp.

Taking a kind of deathly sentence, the Arabic numeral 1001 alludes to the verdict given to Sheherezade, the lady narrator of the classic collection of stories, *The Thousand and One Nights*, who outwits the king's order that she be beheaded, should she fail to "entertain" the monarch with her tales, so that eventually the king hooked on her seemingly endless narrations, the waiting-for-Godot-stance ends in connubial bliss both for the entertainer and the entertained. To illustrate the morbid metaphor, the fly-leaf to the left side features a skeleton standing, its left arm touching the left sunken cheek, the right palm resting on the flipped page. Enough to provoke a question from the reviewer's 9-year-old grandson, "Does it mean that one actually dies after reading all those books?"

But just what are these 1001 books? In this question lies probably the flaw of its content for the anthology shows a preponderance, if not partiality to a genre- a specific literary type-novels, no matter how it appears international in scope, as the world's best writers and their masterworks (not even Rizal or a Nick Joaquin is cited here) analyzed. A myriad of literary theories graces it- from formalism, deconstruction, new historicism to feminism, cultural studies, even reader-response. More often than not, these nuggets of essays make use of intertextuality or linkages/relationships/contrasts with other texts for reinforcement, or down playing. Because it is reader-friendly, the book offers copious, rare covers/pictures/ illustrations of the authors and works.

Are there really no books in allied disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, economics, history, biology, psychology, religion, to name some, worth

including or reading, for that matter, to enrich one's existence, better yet stress its meaning before his/ her "cup runneth over," so to speak? This is a crucial issue to settle, unless of course, the pool of editors coming from varied fields (academe, journalism, research, engineering, translation, criticism, photography, archeology, etc.) must have combed through a listing of the canon after the Christian era to the first decade of the 21st century. Otherwise, the 156 contributors must be thinking of gathering other 1001 titles in other disciplines, as they did in previous anthologies of movies to see, food to eat, wine to savor, gardens to tend, battles to change the course of world history, children's book to read **ad infinitum**.

Be that as it may, this book is admittedly, a must-have for university/college libraries even those not offering literature as a major discipline to broaden their students' liberal education or balance their field of expertise. At this time when surfing the web has distracted the younger generation from actually absorbing a book of poems, adventure stories or even a novelette or when the simple gesture of leafing through crispy, unruffled pages of any book – hard bound or paper bound – has been stolen from virtual readers, the book under review holds much promise to a happy few.

Re-visiting and Re-visioning Tertiary Education

Robert Craig Strathdee. 2008. **Tertiary Education in the 21st Century (Economic Change and Social Networks)** New York Palgrave MacMillan. 198 pp.

Since the late 1980s educational institutions have been borrowing and adopting sounder, creative, pragmatic ideas from business/economics to run the academe, especially on the tertiary level. Hence, such technical terms as *benchmarking, paradigm shifts, stakeholders, cutting edge, entrepreneurship, labor market, outsourcing*, to name a few, have found application in managing colleges and universities- both state run and privately-owned

By and large, at the threshold of the 21st century a number of socio-economic terms infused in educational jargons have entrenched themselves securely to great advantage in tertiary education: *Knowledge economy, knowledge transfer partnership, geographies/ ecologies of talent, university – industry interaction, positional knowledge vs. reputational knowledge, labor mobility, technocratic – meritocratic perspective, training gospel* and more. All these notions/ constructs are defined operationally, exemplified, better yet, reinforced by empirical research/ studies and the latest literature in Strathdee's book.

Purposely, the book attempts "to assess the relationships between innovation, social networks, and the competition for advancement through tertiary education." To achieve these aims, the publication not only explores the factors influencing network formation but also describes the internal changes in school that form rules of advancement among their student clientele in particular and social economy in general. The classic observation of mismatch between university curriculum cum skills demanded in specific disciplines and the "great expectations" of the labor market is hinted at, but more pointedly, how social methods, in

particular social networks- and labor mobility help transmit innovative knowledge as well as creative output that first emerged in business enterprise to the shock of recognition of the former. Contextually these, in turn, holds the author, link the two. Knowledge creation and knowledge transfer – that gradually lead (to the employed graduate) social inclusion or social exclusion.

Inevitably the book raises such related questions/ issues as: For those who have the means, is sending a student to an elitist/ exclusive university good financial investment to ensure marketability, i.e, employment (at least in the Philippines setting this scenario holds true in whatever disciplines so that other graduates suffer from “othering” in the Foucaultian sense)? How about the observation on producing doctorates **en masse** in one specific, but saturated discipline to the detriment of equally needed, if not more vital fields of expertise (e.g. biotechnology, meteorology, urban planning, oil exploration, demography)? And the wisdom of exposing graduates to taking psychometric tests to find out or predict behavioral directions in future, stressful adjustment in the workplace? Just what aesthetic, critical, cultural and social skills are students equipped with to assure possible recruitment? Are all qualifications valued equally across all fields, even used as prerequisites for employment? How do changes in economic policy affect the evolution of newer/older or existing fields? How would the development of national qualification frameworks and outcome – based assessments impact on education and the labor market? Moreover, and nonetheless pressing, how valid, reliable, insightful are testimonies of managers who employ students insofar as upgrading, revamping or completely doing away with tertiary schools’ antiquated delivery system? Does globalization level the playing field of advancement as much as can it beget elitism or isomorphism? Even the nagging question of democratizing access to quality education remains too theoretical to be true. Similarly, are networks commodifying and how do we prevent their turning so?

The comforting thought, though, is that the above cited queries seek answers in the book that vexes and challenges and confirms and refutes, as empirical evidences warrant, prove, assert or negate. For that alone, no matter how Western – based this timely book is, it finds relevance (a much abused word) in today’s world when universities work toward accreditation, and eventually internationalization. Take the bull by the horns, so to speak, tertiary institutions Must, instead of running away ostrich-like from their academic/administrative problems that multiply due to myriad factors – limited budget, unimaginative research, unmotivated work force, outdated, poorly maintained infrastructure, delayed promotion of faculty, apathetic staff, autocratic management style, unsupportive stakeholders, etc.

Then it is high time, indeed that administrators, policy makers, researchers reconfigured the stiff, highly competitive field for personal (and corporate) and national growth by re-visiting and re-visioning tertiary education along socio-economic change.