

School Leadership in the Era of Neoliberalism

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Psychologie a její kontexty 12 (2), 2021, 23–38
<https://doi.org/10.15452/PsyX.2021.12.0009>



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Abstract A lot of ink has been spilled to create a consensus around the meaning of the concept of leadership. This is so because the concept of leadership currently dominates the language of organizations including schools. What instead happened is a deluge of assumptions including but not limited to the beliefs that; leadership is static; it can be taught objectively and effectively to a different group of people in various situations; it can be learned quickly and easily, and the context is a secondary or tertiary importance.

These assumptions gave birth to the leadership development industrial complex, an explosion of leadership training programs all over the world especially in the United States. This growing industry promises to create transformative and high performing leaders for a small fee. Despite this training explosion, it is the opinion of several scholars that leadership failure is almost everywhere. They wonder whether the leadership development industry has improved the human condition. The elephant in the room is the neoliberal context in which all the above is taking place. Neoliberalism is an ideology whose proponents advocate the deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade and industry and the privatization of state-owned enterprise. This ideology pushes individuals to see themselves as self-interested actors rather than people working for the social good. The new managerialism becomes the dominant form of management in organizations whose focus is on productivity, efficiency, surveillance, and accountability.

Educational institutions are not immune to the new managerialism whose introduction deserves to be interrogated. Neoliberalism turns teachers and school principals into technicians rather than professionals. The influence of managerialism on education policies is efficiency in all matters which leaves no room for the pursuit of equity, excellence and ethics and social justice (Codd, 1993). What vision of education should prospective schools' leaders develop while they are being forced to adopt a managerialist approach to

the leadership of school? Should school leaders develop both the ability to resist and build coalitions with proponents of neoliberalism at all costs?

Neoliberalism has successfully coopted our education practitioners and students to turn them into docile minds and docile bodies to the service of the market. The question this phenomenon raises is whether faculty in education leadership preparation programs are preparing their candidates for a meaningful and purposeful life. Perhaps public education should focus on society reproduction, but individual values cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, the neoliberalism ideology and its proponents have taken it upon themselves to prioritize these values less. Hence the ideological struggle continues between proponents and opponents of the impact of neoliberalism in organizations but more specifically in schools.

Keywords School, leadership, neoliberalism, management, administration, managerialism.