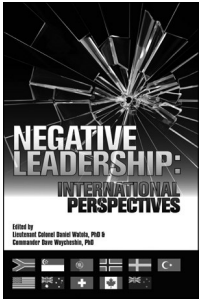


STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP



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Negative Leadership: International Perspectives

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The study of leadership has become an industry, and researchers and authors have partitioned this broad subject area into several categories such as political, business, and corporate leadership; civic leadership; and military leadership. While some researchers may argue that each type of leadership is unique, it may be that all are cut from the same cloth. Examining parts may provide a better understanding of the whole of collective human interactions to achieve common goals.

The editors of *Negative Leadership: International Perspectives*, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Watola, an associate professor at the US Air Force Academy, and Commander Dave Woyschesin, of the Personnel Selections Branch of the Canadian Armed Forces, have gathered papers from a diverse group of military scholars and practitioners working at professional military education and defense research organizations in multiple nations. These researchers are participants in the annual International Military Leadership Association Workshop (IMLAW) which, since 2006, has resulted in the publication of an edited volume. Woyschesin has served as coeditor for three previous volumes. For 2016, the theme is negative leadership—a timely topic given recent interest and scholarship on toxic leadership. (See a review of “Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the US Military” in the Winter 2015–16 issue of *Parameters*).

Comprised of 15 chapters, the book provides international perspectives on the phenomenon of leadership, specifically in the military context. While it is encouraging so much energy is devoted to the subject, it may be disheartening to acknowledge that military leadership, as leadership in the civilian domain, has many facets and presents itself along a continuum of good to bad, including military leaders who range from competent to incompetent and dysfunctional. Leadership may be defined generally as a process to influence others to accomplish tasks or goals. How this process is applied by individuals can have a “dark side” and, hence, a negative impact on followers and organizations. Indeed, each chapter attempts to define the nature of leadership and categorize its manifestations. In doing so, there is overlap among some chapters in the literature reviews of leadership theories, models, and competencies. The commonalities, however, allow for the designation of a cluster of individual and organizational behaviors under the umbrella of negative leadership.

The opening chapters, “Toxic Leadership” and “Why Negative Leadership Matters” provide the foundation and military context, albeit from a predominately US perspective, for the remaining contributions. The authors cite seminal and emerging research (that have added adjectives such as abusive, destructive, tyrannical, despotic, unethical, and laissez-faire to the lexicon of leadership) and contend that militaries

are uniquely vulnerable to negative leadership, which emanates from the “toxic triangle” of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. As Stanford University professor Philip Zimbardo explores in *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (Random House, 2007), readers will ponder whether negative leadership is an either-or proposition of “bad apples” or “bad barrels.”

Subsequent chapters provide case studies and anecdotes of negative leadership that exist within principally democratic national militaries. Chapter 4, “Negative Organizations: Antecedents of Negative Leadership,” posits that attributes generally associated with individuals can be extended and applied as organization-level attitudes and behaviors. Resource scarcity and lack of staff training can result in organizational anorexia. Likewise, organizational greediness can “exact high demands [of] employees” for loyalty, time, and energy (61). Organizational narcissism demonstrated in self-aggrandizement, sense of entitlement, and rationalization can result in failure to meet the needs of stakeholders (59). Such organizational pressures would create an environment (i.e., bad barrel) conducive to generating negative attitudes and behaviors of leaders as well as followers.

Accordingly, Chapters 5, 6, and 9 (written by authors from Sweden, Canada, and New Zealand) explore what makes leaders—innate personality, learned behaviors, or organizational context—bad apples. Chapter 10 from South Africa examines military leader failures caused by incompetence or lack of character, cognitive abilities, professional knowledge and skills, and the ability to influence others. The combination of bad apples and bad barrels results in organizational cynicism, which is explored in Chapter 7 by authors from the US Air Force Academy.

While the chapters provide multiple perspectives of negative leadership, readers would have been better served by a concluding chapter from the editors with their assessment and derived insights. As such, the existing volume is an interesting and informative collection of papers, representative of the IMLAW, but without synthesis. This reviewer ponders questions that were not addressed by the editors. Are the constructs of leadership as presented in the 2004 Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Experiment study useful for the examination of negative leadership? More importantly, are there cultural differences in the perception of negative leadership among militaries?

The IMLAW does offer a valuable forum for military researchers to examine in depth specific topics with implications for military professions. The workshop’s past publications on strategic leadership development (2007), military ethics (2010), and adaptive leadership (2014) are important investigations and presentations of research findings. Accordingly, *Negative Leadership: International Perspectives* is essential reading for anyone who studies and seeks to understand the practice of military leadership. Positive and negative leadership are two sides of the same coin. While the profession of arms seeks to promote positive leadership as the vehicle to serve its stakeholders (i.e., its governments and citizens), the military has the obligation to develop institutional approaches to preclude or militate negative leadership in its ranks.