This is an important book. A courageous book. With a very positive outlook concerning virtue and virtuosity which needs to be read by practitioners and academics alike. This is not a book just for CEOs, executive directors, heads of business units, marketing directors, or new product development cross-cultural team leaders who perform “tasks with a global impact” (Rego et al., 2012, p.33) – it is a book which needs to be read by anyone in a position of influence. Parents even. So that they may instil in their children the character strengths and virtues of which Rego et al. (2012) speak.

Valuable knowledge is communicated in a friendly format – one may find an assortment of tables in the book, on subjects such as the “three dimensions of global mindset” (Rego et al., 2012, p.35) which actually includes clear definitions of intellectual capital, psychological capital and social capital dimensions – so necessary to build the relational capital in order to be effective in diverse environments. “How corporations may contribute to fostering peaceful societies” (Rego et al., 2012, p.43); “the principles of good business” (Rego et al., 2012, p.48); and “global citizenship initiatives” (Rego et al., 2012, pp.93-95) are just a small sample of additional topics covered.

We agree with Rego et al. (2012, p.17) that “there is a tendency in the management literature to romanticize corporate leaders as heroes”. However, they continue, these same heroes “often subsequently show feet of clay” (Rego et al., 2012, p.17). History has shown us that corporate leaders can be everything but heroes. While having a positive outlook, it is equally important to have this in mind also.

We share the view that “global leaders may make a real difference” (Rego et al., 2012, p.17) also due to “the emergence of digital technologies [in] a globally distributed network of neighbours” (Rego et al., 2012, p.27). Coming from an information and communication technologies background, we welcome the transparency that comes with the blogosphere and hope also that “greed and dishonest practices are punished by the market [while] being virtuous is rewarded” (Rego et al., 2012, p.27).
Not all cultures value honesty equally though, as stated by Usunier and Lee (2005). Which can be a problem, later on, when certain individuals are in positions of power.

Even if one is honest there are still forces that may sway us to having a negative impact on society. Rego et al. (2012) refer to political leaders, military leaders as well as to leaders of multinational companies as being in positions to influence the lives of millions of people. Pressures may, however, influence leaders to decide “against the interests of society as a whole” (Garret FitzGerald, 2000, p.117, as quoted in Barry, 2009, p.1). So, all the more important is the character strength ‘integrity’, defined by Rego et al. (2012, p.8) as “speaking the truth; presenting oneself in a genuine / authentic way; acting in a sincere way; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions”.

Could such behavior handicap professionals in a work environment where dishonest individuals operate? Colleagues within organizations withhold information in order to increase their positions of power (Mudambi and Navarra, 2004) and may focus on their own goals to the detriment of the organization and the greater good (Mudambi et al, 2013). Customers who want to receive free goods may lie about their warranty claims. In view of this, it may be difficult to “focus on the positive”, as Rego et al. (2012, p.17) suggest.

Schein (1996) commented that organizations may be mean to people and indeed train employees to have a negative view of human nature. Schein (1996, p.231) also advocated the need to “retrain managers, to teach them “human relations”, and to show them that human nature was not intrinsically bad”. We view Rego et al. (2012) as an extension of this research, in so far as it provides solutions to the problem; suggesting that “a pervasive belief in the benefits of global leaders’ and organizational virtuousness can also become self-fulfilling – but positive” (Rego et al., 2012, p.18).

In Rego et al. (2012) the message is to develop the desired values by following rules and by adopting a stance of fairplay, such as should be found in sport. Certainly the literature on sports psychology states that sportspeople need to focus on the positive, rather than fearing failure (Rotella and Cullen, 1995) and “the destructive negative” (Saunders, 1984). Rego et al. (2012) also defend (citing Cameron, 2010) that heliotropic effects result from focusing on the positive – living beings have a tendency “to move towards light” (heliotropism – Oxford Dictionaries online). “Leaders who capitalize on the positive similarly tend to produce life-giving, successful outcomes in organizations” (Cameron, 2010, p.46, cited by Rego et al., 2012, p.17).

Fairness is a character strength mentioned in Rego et al. (2012) which is of paramount importance. Fairness involves an absence of bias in decision making and a sense of justice (Rego et al., 2012). Which, again, is culture-specific, meaning that there are no universal solutions, even in the case of global managers. Is having a sense of justice, adequate to all situations, the greatest challenge of all? What should we expect of global managers?

What is particularly refreshing is how Rego et al. (2012) do write about “learning and understanding the complexities of the cultural, economic and political ‘mosaic’” (Rego et al., 2012, p.7); and about “respecting and adjusting to different cultures and people” (Rego et al., 2012, p.7). Are not Protestants so different to Catholics (House et al., 2004)? So many leadership texts seem to forget the diversity to be found in the global village, even those which are ‘best sellers’. Can leadership be applied the same way, where ever we are? The ‘local’ is different to the ‘global’, state Rego et al. (2012). And this may well be the greatest challenge facing global managers today. Along with the courage to be decent and humane, even when our intuition and training urges us to do otherwise.

So as to not take our own virtuousness for granted, it must be tested. No better solution for this than to follow Rego et al.’s (2012, p.183) “ten tests of the ethical compass” (adapted from Glynn and Jamerson, 2006, and Newton, 2006). After all, we want our families to be proud of us and, also, we want to be able to sleep soundly at night with the decisions we have made. Rego et al. (2012) are commended for the attention they have given to virtuous leadership and its relation to positive performance, and more such studies are needed.

Figure 1 summarizes this book review and how virtuous global leaders can create a positive spiral in
their organizations. Though being distracted by negative occurrences and thoughts, leaders must focus on the positive and lead towards the light.

Figure 1 – Virtuous global leaders and the positive spiral (Source: own elaboration)

References


