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Book Review

Rise of the Warrior Leader: Ten Dimensions for Unshakable Steward Leadership

Claudio Chistè

Cham: TW Publishers
2023, 223 pages.
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My first impressions when I read the *Rise of the Warrior Leader: Ten Dimensions for Unshakable Steward Leadership*, was that it is familiar. Not familiar in the sense that it resembles other work, but familiar in the sense that the author, Claudio Chistè, have clearly served in the armed forces of South Africa as an officer.

The concepts, the terms but especially the ethos, principles and philosophical spirit of this book reminded me of my time as a young infantry officer, learning how to be an officer. The lessons that I was taught by my mentors, who were all combat veterans of the Angolan conflict, resonate in this book. Concepts, such as "responsibility", "accountability", "service", "building trust", "setting standards", "ownership for achieving outcomes", "placing the welfare of the team before your own" – are, sadly, often overlooked or forgotten in the present era.

Rise of the Warrior Leader: Ten Dimensions for Unshakable Steward Leadership, published by TW Publishers consists of eight chapters that analytically and comprehensively delve into the concept of warrior–steward leadership based on the ownership continuum. As stated by the author, *Rise of the Warrior Leader* is a leadership development book that emphasises leadership and leadership roles during times of prosperity and relative peace, but especially during times of adversity and crises.

In *Rise of the Warrior Leader,* Chistè[1] analyses the concepts of this warrior–steward leadership in eight chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the need for a new leadership model, Chapter 2 on the "who" of leadership, and Chapter 3 the "what" of leadership. In Chapters 4 and 5, the "how" of steward and warrior leadership is discussed, while Chapter 6 elaborates on the influence of leadership, and how this can have either positive or negative results. Chapter 7 discusses the concept of safety.

Chistè manages to integrate practical experience gained during his time in the South African Navy as well as in the corporate world with academic leadership theory. Leadership and leadership theories are studied from a historical perspective from the time of the "great man" to present theories, such as transformational leadership and self-determination, weaving it together into a new leadership paradigm – loosely based

on situational leadership theory suited for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) times.

What I found interesting was Chistè's integrative approach towards different conditions and concepts that influence leadership. In *Rise of the Warrior Leader* opposing concepts, such as stability and crises, certainty and ambiguity, peace and adversity, simplicity and complexity, goal achievement and trust, centralised and decentralised, are discussed. One of the strengths of this book is the way Chistè manages to integrate traditional Western leadership concepts and qualities with African philosophical concepts of ubuntu (interconnected humanity) and batho pele (people first). He uses historical figures, such as Chief Maqoma, King Moshoeshoe and Nelson Mandela (Madiba), to illustrate resilience, diplomacy, and servant leadership in action.

The central theme of the book deals with the concepts of leadership roles (warrior and steward) within a continuum of ownership (total versus shared ownership). Chistè proposes a hybrid or dualist model called *steward–warrior leadership*, in which good leaders are able to change their leadership style based on the requirements of the situation. In this model, leadership is a combination of two styles:

- **Warrior qualities** involve courage, resilience, discipline, and commitment. Warrior qualities or warrior leadership is described as task-orientated with people in mind – used most effectively during times of crises. Warrior qualities are named by the acronym ORCA or ownership, resilience, courageous (selfless action) and accountability.
- **Steward qualities** embrace empathy, trust-building, and service to others. Steward leadership is described as people-orientated with the task in mind – used most effectively in non-crises situations to flourish. Steward qualities are described by the acronym ARISE or authentic self, relationship, influence, servant (voluntary subordination), ethics, and selflessness.

This duality of leadership styles is meant to help leaders navigate crises (requiring decisiveness and strength) while also fostering collective well-being and psychological safety.

Furthermore, this duality is enabled by the concept "foundational COGS" or communication, ownership, grey matter (cognitive and emotional abilities) and safety. Foundational COGS are described as interconnected skills and abilities that enable the leader to move along the ownership continuum as the situation demands.

Chistè proposes in this book that the steward–warrior leadership concept is built on a foundation of ownership. This foundation encourages leaders to:

- **Own who one is** (self-reflection and self-awareness);
- **Own the mission** (purpose and direction); and
- **Own the result** (accountability for outcomes).

Personal ownership by the leader is central and essential in the sense that it leads to personal accountability but not (necessarily) to personal gain. Leaders are servants first, accountable to themselves, their team and their organisation to achieve goals, build trust and safety, as well as ensure welfare.

Leaders are however also responsible for empowering teams and the organisation to take ownership of their own performance and welfare by applying the same principles of owning "who one is", owning the mission and taking collective responsibility for the results of their team and organisation. Leaders therefore become both the leader and the coach moving between these roles as the situation moves along the continuum of safety.

At times, a leader would assume total ownership in order for the team or organisation to survive a crisis. In this centralised approach, the warrior leadership qualities become more prominent while in higher safety levels, the steward leadership qualities become more prominent as the leader assumes a decentralised approach of shared ownership. In *Rise of the Warrior Leader*, this emphasis on personal accountability is presented as both a mental mindset and practical discipline.

I found the book interesting and a good model for leadership within the South African but also international context. Chistè integrates self-reflection exercises, charts, and frameworks to help readers apply the leadership concepts. In general, the concepts within his model are well discussed and illustrated with practical examples from the author's experience within the military and corporate world. In principle, I find his model and the discussion of it in *Rise of the Warrior Leader* applicable, and very relevant to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of the modern leadership environment.

I however also found the book "heavy" to read. The author discusses complex and widely diverse concepts that are integrated into a "new" leadership model. Keeping track of all these diverse factors makes reading the *Rise of the Warrior Leader* an effortful and mentally taxing exercise. Although the effort is worthwhile, *Rise of the Warrior Leader* is not for light reading. I think, though, that this book could be used to train leaders, but would require instructors that have the required in-depth knowledge, skills and experience to unlock the essence of Chistè's intent.

Anyone who is a serious scholar of leadership – as all professional soldiers should be – would be able to use *Rise of the Warrior Leader* productively both as a reference source and as a teaching tool.

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Endnotes

[1] C Chistè, *Rise of the Warrior Leader: Ten Dimensions for Unshakeable Steward Leadership* (Cham: TW Publishers, 2023).