

Book Review

Reviewing *Power for All, How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*

Or, One More Book Added to My List of Favourite Books

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Battilana, J. and Casciaro, T.
Power for All, How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business. Simon & Schuster, 2021, 288 p., ISBN 9781982141639.

Mediators will likely have their favourites in the vast catalogue of wonderful and excellent books available on mediation. Certain books leave a bigger footprint than others because the insights offered by those books consciously come to mind while in mediation. The following are a few from which I have often gratefully put to use the lessons offered in their pages: *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman,¹ *The Tao of Personal Leadership* by Diane Dreher,² *Staying with Conflict* by Bernard Mayer,³ *Assertiveness at Work* by David Stubbs,⁴ *The Wis-*

est One in the Room by Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross,⁵ *The Fearless Organization* by Amy Edmondson⁶ and *Beyond Reason* by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro.⁷ Now there is also *Power for All* by Julie Battilana and Tiziana Casciaro.⁸

Reading Daniel Kahneman's book created an awareness of the role of unconscious (self-serving) bias, among many other things. One of those other things is that the future cannot be predicted with a reliable degree of certainty. Kahneman offers telling examples that help to explain this to everyone who thinks differently. In *The Tao of Leadership* Diane Dreher underlines the wisdom of stepping out of negative radiation. If someone is sending negative messages, the hope is that one will answer by returning negative messages, which in turn may be used against one. The advice is not only not to return negative messages but to go even one step further and empathise with the person who is sending them, thus identifying him or her as a possible victim (of pain, distrust, fear or other relational hardship) rather than as an aggressor. Bernard Mayer, in *Staying with Conflict*, explains how to deal with situations in which conflicts are there to stay. Think of parents who are splitting up in an

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1 Kahneman D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin Books.

2 Dreher D. (1997). *The Tao of Personal Leadership*. New York: Harper-Business.

3 Mayer B. (2009). *Staying with Conflict: A Strategic Approach to Ongoing Disputes*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

4 Stubbs D.R. (1997). *Assertiveness at Work: The Ultimate Management Skill*. London: Pan Books.

5 Gilovich Th and Ross L. (2016). *The Wisest One in The Room, How to Harness Psychology's Most Powerful Insights*. London: Oneworld Publications.

6 Edmondson A.C. (2019). *The Fearless Organization, Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

7 Fisher R. and Shapiro D. (2005). *Beyond Reason, Using Emotions as You Negotiate*. London: Penguin Books.

8 Battilana J. and Casciaro T. (2021). *Power for All, How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*. London, Piatkus, an imprint of Little, Brown Book Group (ISBN 978-0-349-42549-8).

unfriendly manner and have young children. They remain to be parents and will together for the foreseeable future have to make many important decisions for the lives of their children. His advice is to name the elephant in the room and agree to practical ways of dealing with the situation and adhere to that agreement (agree to traffic rules). David Stubbs convincingly demonstrates the power of the I-message. Rather than making another reproach, explain one's needs and ask for help to meet those needs. Do not assume and verify.

In the *Wisest One in the Room*, Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross give an insight into many a thinking trap, the most telling of which is that people can believe to agree with one another while, in fact, disagreeing (false consensus effect). For example, consensus on love of music of the sixties may completely miss that the one loved the Beatles and the other the Rolling Stones. Preference for the former or the latter was often an expression of very different culture and taste. One of the most helpful things to pick up from this book is the way to explain to parties in mediation how priming may influence one's experience: suppose you encounter a stranger in an otherwise empty street at night. Is it someone to fear? You are much more likely to come to that conclusion if you are just returning from seeing a horror film than if you have just seen a romantic comedy. This is because whatever happens to be on the top of your head because of prior events is readily applied to whatever stimuli you subsequently encounter. The work of Amy Edmondson to find out how communication may contribute to a workplace – or by comparison to a mediation – where people feel safe to share ideas and mistakes offers many important practical leads. Last, but certainly not least, in this short list of books with much to offer for a mediator is *Beyond Reason*, by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro. They have looked at the common denominator in every dispute and how to manage the underlying emotional aspects that almost always play a part. They have identified five core concerns, which deserve attention while dealing with conflict: (i) express appreciation, find merit in what others think, feel or do and show it; (ii) build affiliation, turn an adversary into a colleague; (iii) respect autonomy, expand yours and do not impinge on theirs; (iv) acknowledge status, recognise high standing wherever deserved and (v) choose a fulfilling role and select the activities within it. The examples from the aforementioned books are just a few of many great insights to be found in the treasure trove of those books, and, of course, there are many more equally insightful books available in the field of psychology and mediation. One more book of interest to mediators, which appeared recently, is *Power for All, How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*, by Julie Battilana and Tiziana Casciaro.

Julie Battilana is a professor of Organisational Behaviour and Social Innovation at the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Kennedy School, where she is also the founder and faculty chair of the Social Innovation and Change Initiative. Tiziana Casciaro is a profes-

sor of Organisational Behaviour at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Theirs is a remarkably easy and readable book explaining the mechanics of power and demonstrating that power is not just for the few at the top; rather, it is relevant energy for everyone to harness to better their lives, work, relationships and societies. They discuss the fundamentals of power and explain how to obtain, exercise and control it through many examples of real life cases and events. Power and the influence it may have on relationships is of immense importance for everyone particularly for mediators, consultants and managers. Dealing with conflicts inevitably demands attention to the power balance between the participants in a conflict. Battilana and Casciaro look at the fundamentals of power from a multidisciplinary point of view. Examining various definitions from a range of disciplines, they arrive at a definition of their own. In social science, power is conceived as the ability to carry out one's will despite resistance; to elicit desired behaviour out of others; to set boundaries within which discussion and/or decision-making takes place; to impose one's will on others by withholding rewards or imposing punishments; to convince others to believe what one wants them to believe; or to get things done the way one wants them done. Power can thus be viewed as the ability of a person or a group of people to produce an effect on others so as to influence their behaviour. A distinction is made between persuasion-based types of power, such as expert power that stems from trusting someone's know-how or referent power stemming from admiration for or identification with someone, or power stemming from control over cultural norms as one category. The other types of power are coercion based, which include the use of force (be it physically violent or not) and authority (or 'legitimate power') to influence people's behaviour (pp. 199-200). Derived from the vast body of literature they have researched, Battilana and Casciaro came to see power as the ability to influence another person or group's behaviour, be it through persuasion or coercion. Power is a function of one actor's dependence on another. Its fundamentals include the fact that it is always relational. A power relationship may be balanced if both parties are mutually dependent and each equally values the resources that the other has access to. It is imbalanced if one of the parties needs resources that the other party can provide more of (these resources may be material as well as psychological). The authors conclude that power is, ultimately, the ability to influence another's behaviour, be it through persuasion or coercion. This ability is determined by the control over access to resources that the other person values. This is seen as the key to understanding the power dynamics in any situation, 'whether it's one in which you have power over someone else, or one has in which they have power over you'. In this, material and psychological resources are not mutually exclusive.

Examining the question of what it is that people value, Battilana and Casciaro point to two defences against the

existential dilemma of the fleeting nature of our existence: at the deepest level of what people long for, it is safety and self-esteem. This confirms the direction that I seek in mediation in order to find common ground between the parties to create room for a solution. There are two needles on my compass, which point to the north of a solution, I like to think. What I hope to achieve in mediation, as embodied by those two pointers, are (i) the mutual validation of the self-respect between the parties and (ii) that each party will take ownership for its own contribution to the origination and continuation of the dispute. It has been maintained that people can go for a long time without a lot of things, but not without self-respect. This was observed by Paul Randolph, who looked into the psychology of conflict,⁹ who identified self-esteem as one of the most, if not the most, powerful factors in all conflicts in human existence. In combination with a need for approval and fear of disapproval, self-esteem, as I like to frame it, 'is the psychological spine/back bone to which our concept of self is attached'. A perceived dent in our self-respect impinges on our self-esteem, and if the one who caused the dent does not make up for this, we will protect and restore our self-worth by proving to everyone that we are right and the other is wrong. That is why mutual validation of self-respect by parties to a conflict is so important. The awareness of 'I am OK and you are OK,' or 'if we are both sincere, we are both right', can render a paradigm change, opening a pathway leading to a solution. Battilana and Casciaro confirm all this in their chapter on humanity's two basic needs: safety and self-respect. Books like *Power for All*, which add insights that are new and additionally, that support what mediators will need to know about power mechanics and how to deal with these, are worth reading. This book is highly recommended.

9 Randolph P. (2016). *The Psychology of Conflict, Mediating in a Diverse World*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., p. 59.