

Book Review

Aby Alexander, Prasad Phillips, and Reji Samuel, *Christian Management in a VUCA World: Reflections from a Global Pandemic Context*

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The acronym VUCA stands for “Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous” world. In the 1980s this phrase was coined by the U.S.-American military and introduced in the business world in the 2000s. This book is an attempt to explore Christian Management in the post-pandemic VUCA world. The book has been compiled as chapters contributed by different authors. It has four major sections: Demystifying Christian Management; Changing Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for Organisational Management; Management of Change during VUCA Times; and Approaches to Christian Management in a VUCA World.

The book emphasizes the need for change, as time-tested management principles may not work at this time of history. Dr. Ebe Sunder Raj writes, “We have two options before us: to enter the first boat and have rest, or to leave the second boat and speak to our nation” (7). According to Aby Alexander, “Seeing management from a Christian point of view enables us to respect, review, reflect, redefine, redeem, and restore management principles and practices; this augments the value and worth of management as a practice” (11-12). He writes that Christian management should be studied by exploring biblical concepts of management and examining management concepts in light of Christian values. He summarizes Christian management as Stewardship, Accountability, and Excellence (19-21).

Prasad Phillips writes about missional engagement in the Global South. He lists challenges of harsh realities: 1) Limited resources; 2) Christian mission caught between naïve particularity and vicious universality; 3) Christian management is considered as Western, unchristian, and profit-making; 4) the pandemic has destabilized traditional structures, know-hows, principles, and projects (31-32). He also provides four reasons to maintain the Christian identity of management: first, Christian principles and witness pervades every aspect; second, conflicting ethical environment in our secular world; third, Christian organizations should be witnesses; and four, the need to bring the human and faith dimension in management (34). Phillips also discusses briefly about indigenous managements: *guanxi* in China, *jugaad* in India, *ubuntu* in South Africa, and *blat* in Russia. He suggests that Christian management should focus on 1) non-profit with sustainability; 2) Christian in being and becoming; and 3) indigenous (37).

Gary Hoag writes from the gospels and how the Lord commissioned his disciples. He writes about, first, standards of practicing and spreading the Good News; second, models of ministering; third, the pathway Jesus intended for the first disciples. Hoag elaborates, stating that the disciples were also sent to VUCA contexts: Volatile: Like lambs in the midst of wolves; Uncertain: No purse, no bag—relying on God’s provision; Complexity: Working in pairs, praying fervently, healing, being men of peace; Ambiguity: Will have no idea who will reject or accept their message. Paul also followed the Lord Jesus Christ and provides a case study. Hoag concludes: Christian managers should multiply good and faithful stewards; following right standards; the missions and churches will flourish. Stewards follow standards, which will result in sustainability (50-51).

Anand Samuel writes in today's context as God demands: "Let my people live." Generally, 80 percent of tasks are performed by machines, while only 20 percent are done by humans. Samuel reasons: "Introducing digital technology will result in job reduction only when tasks such thinking, strategizing, innovating, collaborating, motivating, counselling are not all needed in an organization" (62).

James Daniel Paul focuses on investments. He writes about debt, equity, and charity (73-74).

Anand Samuel suggests that lifelong learning culture in virtual mode, flexible working hours with a 24/7 option, proper planning, and prioritizing should all be adapted in Christian organizations. There is a challenge of balancing the degree of change and pace of change and the quantum (extent) of technology; humanizing technology is an important value (63).

Hendrik Storm asserts that the pandemic has caused fear, anxiety, uncertainty and, possibly opportunity (but also greed.) Trust is in short supply (88).

Anita Priya Raja encourages readers to counter volatility with vision, values, and vitality; meet uncertainty with understanding; react to complexity with clarity; and fight ambiguity with agility (105).

Paul Swamidass examines technological innovation and disruptive technology. He notes, "Individual innovators are often the engines of disruptive innovations" (117). He suggests to re-read the Acts of Apostles to overcome today's VUCA world.

Paul Prathap Jayaraj and Deepa Christina Jayaraj forecast that there will be a disruptive change in the kind of skills that will be required for gainful employment in India. Individuals are "pandicapped" (pandemic + handicapped). Their survey with 587 respondents reveals: lack of preparedness of educational institutions; top management team not aware of the competence required for their organizations in next five years. Few valuable suggestions are given.

David Kinnon addresses ethics: "A few with a strategic approach converted the crisis into an opportunity. Extreme opportunity may breed greed. Greed breeds ethical and moral dilemmas. Robust ethical measures must be in place for the sake of the public interest" (144). Kinnon lists principles for a code of ethics: integrity, transparency, objectivity, justice, compassion.

Marina Marwein writes about governance, based on research:

Governance is the supreme managing body of an organisation framing policies and laws defining its vision, mission, the principles, structures, enabling factors and interfaces through which the organization will attain its objectives by delegating appropriate levels of authority and responsibility to managers and other entities, and ensuring accountability (156).

Christian governance should help meet physical, physiological, social, and spiritual needs, all the while addressing socio-economic, technological, and environmental issues, thereby bringing glory to God. Boards should have minimum standards of size, diversity, inclusiveness, and acceptable codes of conduct in functioning, relationships, and attitudes.

Marwein describes four kinds of governing boards: Good Shepherd governing boards; salt and light governing boards; vine and branches governing boards; narrow way governing boards.

Johnson Thomaskutty contributes an interesting chapter about Theo-management, Christo-management, Ecclesio-management, and Pneumato-management.

This book is a valiant and valid attempt in the field of management, especially for today's VUCA world. This is more a descriptive presentation, without incisive analysis and potential solutions. The book is just an initial attempt and leaves many areas yet to be covered, discussed, analysed, and expressed.

In the post-pandemic context, the world is indeed a VUCA world. Hence, this book gives Christians tools to view situations with a missional perspective, to engage, to positively impact, and to bring transformation for the glory of God.