Kirsten Foot: Collaborating Against Human Trafficking: Cross-Sector Challenges and Practices. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 215 pp. $38.00, paperback.

Human trafficking occurs whenever someone is compelled “into any form of work or service through force, fraud, or coercion” (Foot, 2016: 1). In the United States, trafficking has “been documented in restaurants, technology companies, domestic services, nail salons, agriculture, carpet installation businesses, construction companies, massage shops, and magazine sales, to name just a few” (Foot, 2016: 2). Reading these passages at the beginning of Karen Foot’s book, two questions immediately sprang to my mind. First, why does human trafficking still occur on such a grand scale despite a widely shared agreement that it is abhorrent and the fact that it has been illegal for centuries? And, second, given that this is a topic that obviously involves organizations and commerce, why is it not something that has been dealt with more extensively by management researchers? I will begin with the first question and return to the second towards the end of this review. In between, I will provide an overview of the book and argue that it should be required reading for all management researchers with an interest in multisector collaboration and its role in social and environmental justice.

It is also worth noting at this point that I enjoyed reading this book. It is academically rooted, but also the product of direct experience in the field. The observations provided in the book are based on the literature, an in-depth study of various collaborations around trafficking, and the authors’ own experience volunteering in the sector. The book is full of fascinating vignettes from her field research that bring the topic to life. She begins each chapter with a longer vignette that works well to engage the reader and motivate the chapter. And given that these vignettes are stories that always at least touch on, and often engage deeply with, the horrors of trafficking, they work very well to keep the reader highly engaged in a way not often encountered in our field.

In chapter 1, Professor Foot argues persuasively that at least some of the answer to the first question lies in the need for multisector collaboration to tackle trafficking combined with the systematic difficulties diverse organizations experience when they try to collaborate: “The need for multisector collaboration against human trafficking is great, and the challenges are many, deep-rooted, large-scale, and systemic” (2016: 152). In other words, trafficking is a complex issue that requires complex collaborations among government agencies, NGOs, and other organizations and individuals and that these collaborations often do not work very well. Complex problems require complex solutions and Foot argues that we need a better understanding of why multisector collaborations are so often ineffective.

The challenges of multisector collaboration are, of course, a subject that has received considerable attention in the management literature. Foot acknowledges this and cites the work of several management scholars including discussions of Chris Huxam and Siv Vangan’s useful book *Managing to Collaborate*, James Austen’s classic book *The Collaboration Challenge*, and my own *Organization Science* article with Cynthia Hardy on collaboration and conflict. At the same time, the emphasis in management research on strategic alliances rather than cross-sectoral collaboration is evident in the fact that we haven’t made more progress for Foot to build on. This, in fact, seemed to me to be one of the more important insights into our field that is highlighted by this book.

After clearly sketching out the problem of trafficking and the challenges of cross-sector collaboration that tackling trafficking entails, Foot moves on to discuss one of the core challenges facing cross-sector collaboration: the unequal distribution of power that is always present due to “broader political, societal, and economic forces and histories” (Foot, 2016: 55). She begins by defining power and then talks about the complex interactions that occur among power, money, and status. She makes the point that there will always be unequal distributions of power in cross-sector collaborations, so the challenge is not to create a collaboration where power is equalized but to understand and manage the dynamics of power, money, and status effectively.

After tackling power, Foot moves on to discuss the sensitive, but critically important, role of race and gender in the collaborations she studied. Early in her fieldwork, she noticed “that at most meetings and events, the rooms were disproportionately filled with women” (Foot, 2016: 81). Her curiosity aroused, she began to “count male noses” and, while she was at it, count non-Caucasian ones. This led her to a heightened sensitivity for the dynamics of gender and race that create challenges for collaboration. Given the effect of race and gender on interaction and communication, this is not surprising, and she does an excellent job in this chapter of highlighting real examples of how race and gender at an individual level interfered with effective collaboration. She also describes in several fascinating anecdotes how “gendered organizations” and “gendered professions” played an important role in preventing effective collaboration. Here then, lies much of the explanation for the failure of multi-sector collaborations to eradicate trafficking.

Perhaps most interestingly for management scholars, Foot “double-checked ten prominent books on managing collaboration to see if any of them mentioned race or gender” (Foot, 2016: 80). None of them did. Management scholars interested in collaboration need to ask themselves why we have spent so little time on something that is so obviously important in understanding collaboration. Is it something about the contexts we have studied or is it something deeper that makes seeing gender and race difficult in our studies of collaborations? And does this limitation have broader lessons for management scholars working in other areas?

From my perspective, this book is an important one that management scholars should be reading for at least two reasons. First, it is on a topic of real importance that management scholars should be paying much more attention to. Trafficking, like corruption, scandal, global warming, and poverty, deserves much more attention and this book reminds us of the suffering of many at the hands of organizations both formal and informal. This book reminds us that creating organizations to fight for social and environmental justice should be receiving at least as much attention in management research as creating more effective and profitable organizations. In answer to the second question I posed above, this book highlights the fact that management scholars have been too focused on profit and not focused enough on suffering. That’s why so little has been said about trafficking and other ills of modern capitalism in management research.

Second, the book provides a template for the kind of work that is both practically engaged and academically sound. Unlike many of the “airport books” produced by management scholars, this book retains deep links to the academic literature while adding even deeper knowledge of the domain under discussion derived from rigorous research as well as practical experience. The result is a nicely balanced answer to the “rigor versus relevance” question that many management academics could benefit from examining. In fact, it stands as an excellent example that it needn’t be rigor versus relevance. Academic work, as Foot shows so expertly, can be rigorous and relevant (and interesting for that matter!).

At the same time, the book does have some important limitations. First and foremost, it is narrowly focused on the structure and organization of anti-trafficking efforts in the United States. This is not a fault, but simply the necessary outcome of the author’s deep knowledge and experience with anti-trafficking in the US and, in particular, in the state of Washington. It is simply a boundary condition and it means that there is another layer of anti-trafficking collaboration at the international level that needs attention. It also means that while a number of important issues are dealt with masterfully, cultural difference and its role as a barrier to cross-sector collaboration at an international level does not make much of an appearance.

Second, while Foot discusses religion as one potential source of conflict in collaboration, she does so in the sense of contrasting faith based organizations and secular ones in the US contex. In a different context, such as India or the Middle East, the dynamics of faith will work very differently and may even overshadow race and gender in terms of what constitutes the greatest barrier to multisector collaborations around social issues. How transferable her principles for successful collaboration are is therefore an important question as we venture further from the US context in which they were developed.

All in all, this is an interesting and well-crafted book that deserves to be widely read by management scholars. In addition to building on research on multisector collaboration, it makes an important contribution to thinking about this complex form of collaboration that is generalizable to other contexts. It is also a challenge to management researchers to focus more on how our theories might help ameliorate some of the ills of modern society that our focus on efficiency and profit sometimes makes us fail to see.

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