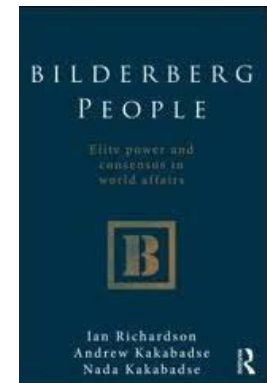


Recommended Reading: Reviewed by Dr James McCalman

BILDERBERG PEOPLE: elite power and consensus in world affairs

By Ian N. Richardson, Andrew P. Kakabadse and Nada K. Kakabadse

Each year the rich and powerful meet. Not at the World Economic Forum nor at Windsor Castle but at the Bilderberg Forum where secrecy is the watchword. The 120 participants attend in a private capacity and, officially, they do not forge agreements over global economic policy. The official Bilderberg website states that, "Bilderberg is a small, flexible, informal and off-the-record international forum in which different viewpoints can be expressed and mutual understanding enhanced. Bilderberg's only activity is its annual conference. At the meetings, no resolutions are proposed, no votes taken, and no policy statements issued." The group meets each year in different locations and is comprised of powerful influencers – royalty, politicians, members of the military, and figures from the financial sector, major corporations and the media. The group first met at the Hotel de Bilderberg in 1954, after it was proposed that there should be an international conference at which European and American leaders would come together to foster cooperation on political, economic and defence issues.



There is an unwritten code of privacy meaning that attendees do not speak about what was discussed at the meetings and the Bilderberg group does have genuine power, which outranks even the World Economic Forum. Take this power, coupled with a lack of transparency, and it is easy to see why there is so much speculation as to what happens.

In their book 'Bilderberg People' Richardson, Kakabadse and Kakabadse gain access to thirteen Bilderberg attendees who gave them anonymous interviews. Their findings suggest that there was a strong theme of bolstering consensus around a particular strand of capitalism and promoting Western interests around the globe.

The authors comment that these elite power networks are self-selecting, continuous, reject creativity and change and perpetuate the status quo, "What we can say with a degree of confidence is that a transnational network of business interests has undoubtedly formed in recent decades. And, at certain points these business interests interconnect with, and form part of a broader transnational policy community" – Bilderberg being one of the key outlets for this grouping. Members are aware of their influence and as the authors suggest, "What becomes clear when speaking with Bilderberg attendees is that, while few would openly admit it, they are acutely aware of their standing in the elite network.....Prominent individuals are not simply comparing the standing of other attendees with their own, they are subconsciously attempting to enhance or preserve their status. They conclude that, To fraternize, or be seen to fraternize with some of the most influential people in the world serves as an

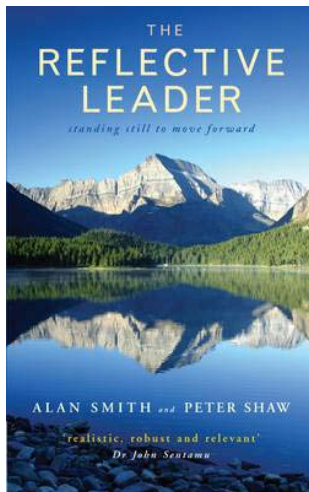
extraordinary aphrodisiac. It propels the participant into the most revered of circles and, by implication, increases the reverence with which such individuals are perceived.”

Who gets to join is a foregone conclusion. Richardson, Kakabadse and Kakabadse argue that, “elite policy networks (such as Bilderberg) are structurally biased and ...the bias...has become a largely unconscious driver of consensus.” This leads to a particular kind of consensus being reached within the network – one stemming not from the attendees being privy to an ‘enlightened’ way of thinking, but rather from old-fashioned power dynamics which affect even the most influential players globally.

The authors worry that Bilderberg people are not accountable in the traditional sense and the lack of transparency surrounding their activities makes it very difficult to hold them to account despite the influence the meetings undoubtedly exert. However, an even stronger counter balance to any conspiracy theorists amongst us are, “the emergence of powerful challenger states is threatening the dominance of this traditional alliance and, in particular, the Anglo-American conception of corporate governance at its core.”

Bilderberg people is an excellent study into how elite power groups are formed and operate. It doesn’t fall into any simplistic conspiracy theory trap but instead looks seriously at how elite groups are formed, how they reach consensus and what impacts such groups have for a wider society.

Author Andrew Kakabadse is a Windsor Leadership Trust Fellow and has spoken on many programmes, mainly on the Newly Appointed Strategic Leaders Programme (2009, 2010 and 2011).



THE REFLECTIVE LEADER: standing still to move forward

By Alan Smith and Peter Shaw

By complete contrast this book is about you and me! In ‘The Reflective Leader’ Smith and Shaw challenge us to focus on our abilities to reflect - on one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and on human nature and behaviour in order to bring out the best in others and build team spirit and morale. The insights of a Bishop and an internationally engaged coach (Smith is a 2009 Alumnus), the book articulates key themes in manageable chapters prefaced by appropriate stories and concluded with pertinent questions. The 31 chapters are arranged around the themes of Know Yourself, Understand

Others, Create a Flourishing Team, Read the Context and Next Steps.

This practical and inspiring book sets out an approach to leadership that is more effective in the longer term and explores: the art of reflection, the ability to identify key

facts, how to weigh up risks, how to nurture self-knowledge and understanding of others, how to differentiate between knowledge and wisdom, the art of listening, building a common vision, and more. From their extensive experience training leaders in business, ministry and public service, the authors offer a wise and reliable guide to genuine reflection, awareness and development. The book is very simply written, short but asks searching questions of you. It's on the self help shelf but it will make you think about that key ingredient of leadership – yourself.

Whereas Richardson and the Kakabadse's deal with how the powerful elites interact, Smith and Shaw ask us, as individual leaders the searching questions of ourselves in an attempt to get us to reflect on how and for what purpose we choose to lead. In essence it is nearer to the ethos of the Trust's role as developer of leaders where Bilderberg people reflects the Trust's attention to the wider societal questions we should be asking.

Two recommended reads but perhaps for different audiences, times and definitely purposes.

Author Alan Smith is an Alumnus of the Newly Appointed Strategic Leaders Programme (2009).
