

Syncretic Science

A review of

Primal Management: Unraveling the Secrets of Human Nature to Drive High Performance by
Paul Herr

New York: AMACOM, 2009

ISBN 978-0-8144-1396-8. \$25.00

Jamie A. Welch

University of Central Oklahoma

Abstract

People tend to operate most effectively in small groups of 150 or less, but as organizations expand globally, employees are finding themselves in less than optimal work environments. Paul Herr, author of Primal Management, spent thirty years developing research and training tools which will allow managers to maximize productivity in their organizations. Herr's research draws from the fields of business and psychology. Most surprisingly, Herr reveals that human beings have a biological impetus to perform well that can be scientifically supported with fMRI data. Primal Management explores Herr's findings as well as provides today's managers with practical tools for implementing his concepts in their workplace.

Keywords: industrial-organizational psychology, motivation, organizational behaviors, psychology, management

Investigating Division of work permits reduction in the number of objects to which attention and effort must be directed and has been recognized as the best means of making use of individuals and groups of people.

--Henri Fayol

When managers are in powerful situations, it is easier for them to accomplish more. Because the tools are there, they are likely to be highly motivated and to be able to motivate subordinates.

--Rosabeth Kantercontour.

Could more supportive and emotive managers and employees translate to a better bottom line? Or is Paul Herr's *Primal Management* just another one of the many management books littering the shelves which promises a management panacea? The answer lies somewhere in the unexplored ether which surrounds the often divergent sciences of management and psychology. *Primal Management* is a groundbreaking piece of literature which employs a multidisciplinary approach to determining key components for using unorthodox management skills to increase productivity, profit, and unprecedented employee satisfaction. This book is refreshingly unique due to Herr's brilliant intermingling of familiar concepts from the fields of biology and management science, along with the less familiar ideas such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) data which suggests that emotions elicit biological responses.

Send correspondence concerning this article to Jamie A. Welch, College of Business, University of Central Oklahoma, 100 N. University Dr., Edmond, OK, 73034; e-mail: jwelch10@uco.edu

The human being is a highly social creature capable of complex interaction with peers. Recent research suggests, though, that humans perform best in smaller groups. Robin Dunbar suggests that 150 people are the maximum amount of people with which one person can effectively maintain a genuinely bonded relationship (Dunbar, 2010). These assertions by Herr and Dunbar underscore the ethological/evolutionary psychological foundations of their research which suggests that, although we are far removed from our ancestral relationships, we continue to exhibit tendencies to operate most effectively within these groups of less than 200 and that this phenomenon is linked to our tribal roots.

In *Primal Management*, Herr proposes that because human beings are essentially placed in an artificial environment in today's workplace, they are no longer operating effectively. He blames the current model of management taught in business schools which advocates focus on profit first and personnel second for this crisis. He cites examples of three mavericks in the business world that have abandoned traditional management principles and realized dramatic increase in profits as well as a devoted workforce. Herr outlines how these innovative managers have created a super organism of employees who are held together not by extrinsic rewards, but through an invisible glue which binds them into a tight-knit group committed to working together. This type of approach has overtones of a collectivistic society referenced by Hofstede (Hofstede, 2009) or Guanxi, advocated by the Chinese (Los Angeles Chinese Learning Center). These mavericks are unusual because they have broken away from the traditional and time-honored methods of management and gotten back to a more pre-industrialized approach. Prior to industrialization, tight-knit circles of skilled laborers were common, but this demographic shifted with the advent of mass production.

The basic underpinnings of management science tended to accentuate the need for profit and output, the proverbial bottom line, while effectively dismissing more humanistic elements such as emotions and social interaction. During America's industrial revolution human beings were essentially viewed much as the machinery which they operated: interchangeable pieces of a large machine which could be discarded if they became broken or lacked productivity. The very nature of industrialism emphasized quantity, often at the expense of quality. Mass production transformed the blacksmith, the tailor, and the farmer into a nameless, faceless employee among many. As the workplace transitioned into neo-classical management style and then into modern management principles, more attention was focused on the physical and emotional needs of the employees. Studies began to indicate that soft-skills and humanistic emphasis improved morale and motivation (Nelson, 2011). While this was certainly a move in the right direction, it did not get at the heart of the issue. Terms such as "soft-skills" tended to relegate these properties to second place in favor of harder, more tangible skills such as logic and profit statements. This attitude was due in part to the intangible nature of human emotion. With the advent of MRI technology, scientists were finally able to document quantifiable biological changes in the human brain which corresponded with emotion (Bechara & Damasio, 2000).

Herr spent thirty years researching and gaining experience in the field in order to develop his theory for his readers. Herr combines concrete biological evidence in the form of MRI data with psychology and business concepts in order to paint a complete picture of good management techniques. These MRI studies suggest that the human brain responds to the chemical changes that occur when positive social encounters are experienced. "Feel-good" chemicals, such as oxytocin and vasopressin, are released and encourage the individual to repeat the desired behavior.

A commonly held belief in management circles is that most employees are motivated primarily by tangible rewards such as pay, while intangible rewards such as "atta-boys" take a backseat role. This idea is further supported by Abraham Maslow in his famous hierarchy of needs (Abraham Maslow father of modern management, 2009). Both psychology and business students alike are introduced at an early stage to the iconic triangle which purports that basic needs such as food and shelter must be met before moving on the next stages. Needs for acceptance and self-esteem are not commonly regarded as basic but are placed in a higher category only to be fulfilled in the proper order. In an apparent nod to Maslow, Herr updates the famous triangle recognized by psychologists and business scholars alike and transforms it to include corresponding emotional and biological appetites, which, in essence, gives equal billing to both biology and psychology. Furthermore, Herr suggests that emotion creates a biological reaction which is basically a pleasure/pain response. In a Maslovian fashion, Herr asserts that there are five social appetites which drive human beings: Self-protection, Innovation, Skill Deployment, Competency, and Cooperation. These social appetites have equally weighted biological appetites which drive humans as well. These appetites are, respectively, as follows: Nutrition, Energy Conservation, Protection of Body Proper, Breathing, and Reproduction. Traditionally trained managers might initially dismiss the idea that emotions belong in the workplace. However, Herr is urging his readers, particularly managers, to adopt a syncretic approach when structuring their businesses.

It is sometimes easily forgotten that many of the concepts put forth in management science are derived from psychology and sociology. Management science is a relatively new science which is generally credited to Fredrick Taylor's attempt to figure out how to quantifiably manage the large amounts of workers coming into the factories during the industrial revolution (Taylor, 1911). Herr urges his readers to bridge the chasm between psychology and management science by drawing lines which inextricably connect them together.

Herr's groundbreaking theory which seeks to codify two distinctly different approaches to management into one highly efficient and functional model expertly explained and supported by hard science which effectively dismisses the idea that emotion can be relegated to a substandard level of importance. While the average business student or professor may not be an expert on neuroscience, Herr is able to distill the essence of the emotional response into an understandable, yet undiluted format appealing to those with either business or psychology backgrounds and training.

Students are often taught that Fredrick Taylor is considered the father of scientific management, Lillian Gilbreth the mother of scientific management, and Wilhelm Wundt the father of psychology. As management science and psychology became more entwined, Industrial Organizational psychology was born. Herr's research is a crucial piece of literature in this field which hopefully will pave the way for further transdisciplinary collaborations among scholars who seek to use their expertise to inform other disciplines, while more thoroughly examining their own. Herr's bold approach to bridging these sciences, some may argue, should earn him the title of champion of Industrial Organizational Psychology.

References

- Abraham Maslow father of modern management. (2009). *Father of modern management & leadership by employee motivation*. Retrieved May 25, 2011, from Abraham Maslow father of modern management: http://www.abraham-maslow.com/m_motivation/Hierarchy_of_Needs.asp
- Bechara, A., & Damasio, H. A. (2000). Emotion, decision making and the orbitofrontal cortex. *Cerebral Cortex*, 295-307.
- Dunbar, R. (2010). *How many friends does one person need? Dunbar's number and other evolutionary quirks*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fayol, H. (1949). *General and industrial management*. London: Pitman.
- Hofstede, G. (2009). *Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions*. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from itim International: <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>
- Kanter, R. M. (1979). Power failure in management circuits. *Harvard Business Review*, 65-75.
- Los Angeles Chinese Learning Center. (n.d.). *Chinese business culture*. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from Los Angeles Chinese Learning Center: <http://chinese-school.netfirms.com/guanxi.html>
- Nelson, B. (2011). *The effectiveness of non monetary recognition programs*. Retrieved May 26, 2011, from Recognition Rewards Enterprises: http://www.recognitionrewards.com/non_monetary_programs.htm
- Taylor, F. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. New York: Harper & Brothers.