

## Book review

**Pendleton, D. and Furnham, A. 2012: *Leadership. All you need to know*.** Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN:978-0-230-31945-5 Hardback, Illustrated – some in colour, Price: £26.00. First published online 1 August 2012

Leadership is flavour of the month. Wherever you go in modern healthcare there are discussions on the importance of leadership, the problems of leadership, the centrality of clinical leadership. There are countless definitions of leadership, including ‘leadership is the art of seeing which way everyone is going, and running round to the front’. In other words, there is a lot of half-baked nonsense spouted about leadership.

But this book is anything but nonsense. Instead, it is one of the most thoughtful, authoritative, and valuable tomes available in an already crowded field. A subtitle that says ‘All you need to know’ is rarely appropriate. On this occasion, it is spot on.

The most enticing and original part of the book deals with what the authors describe as ‘The Primary Colors’ of Leadership. I’m not quite sure why a British book by British authors from a British publisher chooses to spell ‘colors’ that way, but maybe it is to do with clarity of vision as to where a major market for this book might lie. And clarity of vision is seen as being critical for organisations and their leaders.

The Primary Colors concept argues that there are three main domains in which leadership operates. These are the strategic domain, the operational domain, and the interpersonal domain. These Colors can then be looked at in a Venn diagram that shows all the different facets of an organisation, and the central zone where all the Colors overlap is

where the essence of leadership lies – a concept that works better with colourful diagrams than with words and the book has plenty of diagrams.

And within this central core lie the five main tasks of leadership – to inspire, focus, enable, reinforce, and learn. It would be a rare leader who could excel in all of these – which is why teams become so important.

So what? What does this really mean? A series of intriguing case studies of leaders from Julius Caesar to British Telecom, examines their behaviours – rating each leader on these three primary Colors. So Caesar is an S+, O+, I–: strong on strategic and operational domains, but weak on interpersonal skills. And each case history is analysed in a similar way.

Whilst this could have the risk of descending into psychobabble – much as Myers Briggs advocates sometimes share behaviours with fans of astrology (Wow – you’re an ENFP (or Aquarius) too, are you?) – these categorisations have much more practical value, in enabling leaders to ponder on the strengths and weakness of themselves and their colleagues, and adapt and plan accordingly.

Having spent many years in many senior healthcare leadership roles, I only wish that I had read this book, and carried out its exercises, at the start. It would have saved an awful lot of trial and error. The trial I didn’t mind, but the error is another matter. And quite another story.

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