

## Book reviews

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# What Are We Reading? \*

John P. van Gigch

*Book Review Editor*

In this issue, we are fortunate that two of our readers sent reviews of new valuable books. This book section is a shared enterprise which invites all readers to make a contribution. We are waiting for yours. Send us your review per e-mail. It is that easy.

***When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures*** by R. D. Lewis, Nicholas Brearley International, London and Boston, Third Edition, 2006, paperback, £19.99, 559pp.

Coming to grips with “Culture” is more important than ever these days in understanding human systems. We live in an increasingly global economy, with multi-cultural workforces. Managers have to deal with expatriates or are expatriates themselves managing local employees, far from their home base!

Richard D. Lewis’s new edition of his book ***When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures*** on management spanning the frontiers looks like it might fit the bill as a key tool in coming to terms with the above cultural complexity – it is certainly impressive in its weight and bulk! It covers how managers manage across the world and sets out its global stall very persuasively. It looks like it should be a “good read” on a long-haul business-class flight for the interested executive!

The substantive contribution of the book is unfolded in three major parts [“Coming to Grips with Cultural

Diversity”, up to p. 93/ “Managing and Leading in Different Cultures”, up to p. 175/ “Getting to Know Each Other”, up to p. 584] and its presentation covers ten long analytical chapters and then 57 shorter “snapshot” ones on specific countries, some longer, some briefer.

The book is admirably clear and well-written, has pages and pages of complex charts, diagrams and figures, as well as “consultant-speak” in spades; so far, so good. A few critical points: the rich interplay between continental and national traits is not fully taken on board, nor is the regional mix. Many managers have mixed parentage, were born in one state, educated in another, married a foreign national, worked in several continents and so it goes. More and more managers live in big cities and are perhaps also employed in giant MNCs.

Some further reservations: it is not clear what original field research in an academic context the author has carried out and therefore what disciplinary authority he may have for contributing to this rather complex field of management research and practice. From the biographical blurb on the book or what we find in the content of this solid tome, there are no university affiliations. He has clearly has a great deal of practical experience, has traveled widely and built up his fief in consulting. But while better-known management writers like Geert Hofstede, as well as Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner have years of empirical research under their respective belts and link their work to a vast range of academic work on cross-cultural analysis that is well-sourced, the author of the book reviewed here is less satisfactory in this respect. Lewis’s book for instance has a mere two-page bibliography and no footnotes at all, in all of 500 pages of

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\*Note in proof stage: Jus before this issue of *Human Systems Management* went to the printer’s office we received the tragic news that book review editor Prof. John P. van Gigch passed away on August 29, 2006. The book review section “What Are We Reading?” published in this issue of HSM is the last one edited by Prof. van Gigch. He will be missed. HSM readers are invited to keep sending in book reviews for publication in future issues of HSM.

text. Some practitioners may find his book useful but probably not many teachers of management or MBAs.

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**The Six Value Medals** by Edward de Bono, Vermilion, London, 2005, 163 pp., ISBN:009189459-X.

Edward de Bono is the leading authority in the field of creativity and the direct teaching of thinking as a skill. He is also the originator of “parallel thinking” and his tools for perceptual thinking are widely used in both schools and businesses. His latest book, “The Six Value Medals” provides a powerful framework for value assessment for the 21st century for businesses, managers and employees. The purpose of the book is to help individuals go beyond the traditional thinking process of analysis and judgment. De Bono draws analogies to winning a medal in Olympics and expands the categories to include gold, silver, glass, steel, wood and brass as an award to recognize special merit.

Bono underscores the use of value scan before making any decision. For the success of any organization, the employee’s value system must be in alignment with the company’s values. Furthermore, according to De Bono, a business strategy which is not “value driven” is not considered a strategy. Using few examples, De Bono describes each of the above value medals.

The six value medals are as follows:

- *Gold medal values* deal with human values. For example, an organization reviews the maternity leave policy to reflect sensitivity towards the women executives.
- *Silver medal values* are concerned with quality. For example, providing smooth services to minimize customer complaints.
- *Steel medal values* reflect sturdiness.
- *Glass medal values* refer to innovation, simplicity and creativity. They arise from a culture of creativity in an organization that needs to be sustained.
- *Wood medal values* are the environmental values so important in the present context.
- *Brass medal values* deal with perceptual values. The way consumers perceive the company’s products.

Once these six value medals framework is internalized, then it can become a habit to look for values in any situation. One may do a quick search under each medal to see what values are evident in the situation. Depending on the circumstances, certain value medals become top priority over others.

De Bono has further characterized values as strong, weak, remote and negative. How such delineation of values helps to bring clarity while doing a value scan is illustrated by several examples.

Furthermore, De Bono has described a value triangle and value map to define one’s values based on their strength. A value triangle provides a first impression of the values involved. The map allows values to become transparent so that they can be reviewed by anybody. Both, the value triangle and the value map provide frameworks to enable an individual to consider all values, positive and negative-in every decision they make. Bono suggests that in every department of the organization there must be one VICTERI team, where V = Values; I = Ideas; C = concepts; T = Target; E = Examine; R = Review; I = Innovate, to review existing values and to plan the next steps for action.

The book is useful for self-development as such value medals help an individual to strive to be a better human being. A few limitations about the book are however observed. One is the absence of any case study supporting implementation of the six value medals in any organization. There are few examples cited in the book. Many a times in real life one is faced with a “catch 22” situation, when it becomes extremely difficult to deal with two equally important values. It is not explicit how to resolve such dilemmas. The influence of socio-cultural factors is also not considered in the six value medals construct. As a final point, could there be more than “six” value medals?

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**Community Operational Research: OR and Systems Thinking for Community Development** by Gerald Midgley and Alejandro E. Ochoa-Arias (Eds.), Kluwer/Plenum Publishers, New York, and London. 366 pp., ISBN: 0-306-48335-1.

The authors/editors have made a worthwhile contribution to the literature which deals with the design and

implementation of community projects in developing countries. This book demonstrates the growing application of Operations Research methods to community development in a variety of small and large settings in the developed and developing worlds. One of the authors/editors hails from New Zealand and the other from Venezuela.

The authors/editors avoid overt quantification and do not seek to maximize and optimize objectives in settings where there is literally nothing to maximize or optimize. What was needed was a practical approach to problems that could be taught and transmitted to the local people. This is what Midgley and Ocho-Arias have admirably accomplished.

The book is divided into three sections:

- Section One focuses on significant theoretical and methodological issues of Community OR.
- Section Two looks at how people have translated the theoretical insights of community OR into practice.
- Section Three seeks to extend the practice of Community OR in the direction of making real contributions to human welfare and environmental sustainability.

There has always been a culture clash between scientists or academicians on the one hand, and practitioners on the other. Fortunately, Midgley and his co-editor Ochoa-Arias, reunite representatives of these two cultures. In addition, and this is no small feat, the book provides evidence of ventures into the community of countries other than the UK and the US to bring specialized knowledge to places like Venezuela and other less-developed countries. The main hurdle of less-developed countries is that the type of expertise described and applied in this text is of the kind that never makes it to the lower echelons of society. Furthermore, these lower echelons have little access to this expertise because the connection between designers and scientists is usually nil. That this book brings these cultures and expertise together is its main attraction: I commend the authors for their effort.

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