

Primal Management: Unraveling the Secrets of Human Nature to Drive High Performance
Paul Herr. AMACOM, Hardcover \$25.00 (288 pp) 978-0-8144-1396-8

In *Primal Management*, Paul Herr endorses a science-based approach to managing companies. At the same time, he lobbies for managers to accept and embrace the fact that employees' emotions play a defining role in corporate success. These somewhat opposing viewpoints make for an interesting and provocative book.

Herr argues that a company acting as a superorganism—similar to a colony of army ants—is successful because “it learns how to work harmoniously with human nature rather than against it.” Such a company, he says, relies more on employee empowerment than a conventional hierarchical structure. Herr uses three contrarian business leaders who led non-traditional yet highly successful organizations as examples—Ken Iverson of Nucor Steel, Harry Quadracci of Quad/Graphics, and Ricardo Semler of Semco SA in Brazil.

Herr introduces five “social appetites”: cooperation, competency, skill deployment, innovation, and self-protection. These drive human achievement. Describing each social appetite in detail, the author claims companies that know how to feed “these vital appetites will harvest more motivational energy than those that don’t.”

Employees have deep emotions about each of the social appetites, so Herr developed a survey tool to measure those feelings. Scores from this survey are used to calculate the “Horsepower Metric”—a method of tracking the motivational horsepower of an organization. A positive metric means “employees derive intrinsic pleasure from their work.”

The scientific study of motivation is a springboard to Paul Herr’s own motivation for writing the book. He wants to demonstrate that a company with managers who value, commit to, invest in, and go to bat for employees will almost certainly be highly successful. Moreover, Herr wants managers to understand that emotions are the driving force behind everyone’s incentive system.

Ultimately, Herr believes consensus leadership is the only effective way to manage a company. He weaves the experiences of his three business leaders throughout the book to validate this claim. He demonstrates, for example, how Harry Quadracci used an employee-centric approach to achieve exceptional growth for Quad/Graphics, as well as garner accolades for being an exceptional place to work.

In the end, Paul Herr asks the question, “Is it time to flip the hierarchy upside down?” He thinks it is, because the most productive organizational structure, says Herr, “is the flat, trust-based superorganism”—one that effectively feeds all of the five social appetites. Leaders of traditionally structured organizations might be taken aback by this conclusion, but they may be the ones who will benefit the most from reading *Primal Management*. (May) Barry Silverstein