
Book review

Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices

Paul R.S. Lawrence and Nitin Nohria

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I will start this review by simply stating that this book is an essential read, and is destined to become a classic text. While professors Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria are members of the Harvard Business School this is a text that is truly renaissance in its' approach, drawing on the disciplines of anthropology, evolutionary psychology, sociology, history, genetic science and political science. The authors meticulously outline their argument that there are four fundamental drives: to acquire, to bond, to learn, to defend that underpin all human actions. That an understanding of these four drives helps explain many of the gaps in our search for a unified theory of knowledge concerning human behaviour. I can see readers thinking, you are stating that the quest for the unified theory of knowledge can be found in this text; well that's why I said it would become a classic text.

As Harvard professors both authors needless to say have already made major contributions to the field of knowledge. While I myself was working on a joint project for the Ministry of Defence with Cambridge and Kings College London examining the command structures within the Russian military post the fall of the Berlin Wall, I became aware of Paul Lawrence's notable work on Russian managerial decision making during the important years 1989 to 1991. This work proposing the four drives

that are the foundation of human motivation (intriguingly underpinned by an emotional core drive) is destined to establish these authors' reputation across a diverse field of disciplines. I believe, and hope, this text will bring us back to a multi-disciplinary approach to academic questions.

The book is divided strategically into four sections. The first section explores the mystery of the "Great leap" in human evolution around 2,000 years ago. Part two of the book consisting of four chapters astutely outlines their case for the four drives that they believe are hard wired into the human brain. I must say writing as a psychologist I found this section enlightening to say the least. Part three deals with the questions that this provokes in relation to human culture. While part four examines the truly radical implications that this theory throws up for organizational life.

I can imagine some readers thinking anthropology, evolutionary psychology this does not make for light reading. I myself have struggled in conversations with my friend and colleague Richard Dawkins on some of these issues despite his clarity. To paraphrase a line from the film "Evolution" "I once did some biology at high school". Most texts touching on scientific issues tend to be turgid. For professional reasons (ok if someone pays me) I occasionally sub-edit papers intended for publication handling shambolic sentences and sub-clauses that are themselves then modified by sub-sub-clauses. This book is not in that category; the reader will not feel that they are reading computer instruction manuals, or the small print of insurance policies. It is well written, witty, learned and an exhilarating read.

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