

## Book reviews

---

# What are we reading?

To have your book review published, please send your review to: **What Are We Reading?** c/o John P. van Gigch, HSM Book Review Editor and Editorial Board Member, E-mail: vang@sonic.net.

In the last few months, many old and new books have crossed my desk. I would like to name a few:

Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Viking, The Penguin Group, New York, ISBN 0-670-03384-7.

This is a weighty book where the author tries again to show the role of technology in our future. Kurzweil is called a “futurist” because he postulated in his previous work that with the ever-accelerating rate of technological change, computers could rival the full range of human intelligence. The union of human and machines – he argues now – “in which the knowledge and skills embedded in our brains will be combined with the vastly greater capacity, speed and knowledge-sharing ability of our creations”. That merging is the essence of the Singularity, “an era in which our intelligence will become increasingly nonbiological . . . the dawning of a new civilization that will enable us to transcend our biological limitations and amplify our creativity”. (From the Inside Books’ cover.)

I have not read the book in detail and only leafed through it. My rapid and superficial assessment is that while this type of volume has its adepts, I vastly prefer to read other books which emphasize our ability (or inability) to solve the quandaries that the human race faces. Do I really want my “intelligence” to become “non-biological”?

Instead, I would vastly prefer to dwell on the personal and professional life of luminaries such as Professor Richard P. Feynman, the famous author whose work is suddenly enjoying a revival. The following books about Feynman have just appeared:

*Classic Feynman: All the Adventures of a Curious Character – Richard Feynman*, by Ralph Leighton (Ed.), W.W. Norton, New York, 2006, and,

*Perfectly Reasonable Deviations From the Beaten Track: Selected Letters of Richard P. Feynman*, Edited

and with Additional Commentary by Michelle Feynman with a Foreword by Timothy Ferris, Basic Books, New York, 2006.

You might recall that Richard Feynman is the well known physicist, Nobel Prize Laureate, who participated in the Los Alamos project of building the atom bomb, was instrumental in discovering why the Challenger disaster occurred due to the defective design of the O-rings which could not function in the cold weather and in the myriad of other discoveries for which he is justly famous.

The above two books are really repetitions of previous works which described Feynman’s idiosyncrasies of a fertile and creative mind.

For a summary of his life you can also read:

*Richard Feynman: A Life of Science*, by Gribbin and Mary Gribbin, Penguin, New York, 1997.

All these new books tickled my interest about Feynman. I read again:

*Feynman’s Rainbow*, by Leonard Mlodinow, AOL time Warner Books, New York, 2003.

In this last book one gets an intimate view of Feynman’s life and way of thinking. Mlodinow recorded some interviews with Feynman while the former was carrying out his doctoral research at Cal Tech. At the time, Mlodinow was just starting his professional career as a physicist, while Feynman was already well known. In particular, I enjoyed reading about the contrast that the author makes between the mind of a Gell-Mann and Feynman’s. They both had faculty offices near each other but they could not be more different in thinking style and approach to life.

Mlodinow calls Gell-Mann a “Greek” and Feynman a “Babylonian”. It seems Gell-Mann always carried the burden of wanting to prove himself and being insecure. On the other hand Feynman could not care less what others thought of his accomplishments and was more lighted hearted than his counterpart – Gell-Mann. Feynman helped Mlodinow choose the subject of his doctoral dissertation and was grateful of Feynman’s help in showing what is important in life.

One anecdote is central to the book and explains its title:

If asked what causes the color of a rainbow, Gell-Mann would answer in terms of theoretical physics. Feynman instead would have said: "Isn't it beautiful?"

Throughout the book we are aware that during this period Feynman was facing his own mortality and had suffered more than two serious operations for a nasty cancer. He died while the book was being written. Feynman was ready for his own death. To him it was one more incident in his long life of continuous discoveries.

John P. van Gigh  
*HSM Book Review Editor*  
 E-mail: vang@sonic.net

We are happy to include in this issue a book review written by one of our readers and a member of HSM Editorial Board.

Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel, **Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance & Leadership Success**, Wharton School Publishing, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2005, 256 pp.

In modern times intelligence quotient and technical intelligence has been the hallmark of leadership in any organization. To this list are now added the emotional intelligence and moral intelligence. They are not the same. Moral intelligence is not devoid of values whereas emotional intelligence is assumed to be value

free. Study of rapid decline and vanishing of several internationally known giant corporate houses in the recent history, points that they lacked the moral skills, moral leadership and moral intelligence.

This book brings out this issue in a convincing manner. Integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness, the four principles of moral intelligence should drive any organization is the message. To be moral and still do the business in the competitive world is well illustrated with numerous cases. Building a moral compass and living in alignment with it holds the key both at the personal and organizational levels. The authors provide detailed guidelines for this purpose.

In the view of this reviewer, cultivating high organizational integrity would benefit all stakeholders because responsibility for being of service to the others and acknowledging mistakes and failures do help in the long run. In the era of globalization the corporate culture must include moral intelligence as the cornerstone of the business strategy to sustain the credibility and support.

The book is recommended for every individual who aspires to lead a team besides guiding his own life and family.

Vivek Patkar  
*HSM Editorial Board Member*  
 E-mail: vnpatkar2004@yahoo.co.in  
 E-mail: vnpatkar@ibsindia.org