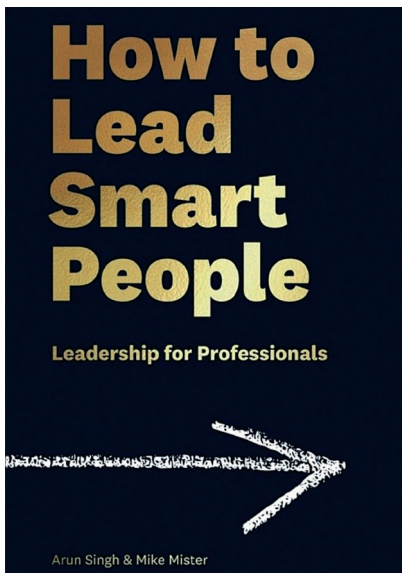


BOOK REVIEW

‘How to Lead Smart People’ by Singh, A. & Mister, M. London: Profile Books, 2019. 235 pp., ill. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-78816-154-1. <https://profilebooks.com/work/how-to-lead-smart-people>

Arun Singh is a leading international business lawyer and formerly a partner at KPMG Legal. He is a corporate educator in leadership and negotiations to international organisations, visiting Professor at UK and Chinese University business schools, and a senior government advisor with over 30 years of experience. Mike Mister was formerly the Global Director for Executive Development at EY Global, but is now based at The Muller Institute at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, UK. His work involves supporting the development of leadership and change management capability in large organisations.



The book was produced with the noble intent of helping leaders to better face work challenges and to exceptionally perform at management, human resource, human behaviour and, particularly, in leading smart people or the knowledge workers. This is a very useful contribution for leaders, regardless of whether they are new or accomplished, due to the clear and simple ideas on how to improve our own leadership skills or competencies, leading teams and the organisation, in order to work effectively with smart people.

The book is aimed at equipping leaders with 46 skills, which are considered to be among the most in-demand, challenging and important leadership competencies. These

skills are based on the authors’ experience, conversations with hundreds of professional and knowledge workers around the world, as well as the practical advice of colleagues and respected experts whom the authors worked with. In a way, these skills are considered as tested effective competencies in leading smart people.

The book consists of three parts which build anyone’s skills necessary to lead smart people. The first part highlights how to develop ourselves to lead. The second part unpacks how to lead teams of smart people and lastly, the third part describes how to lead in a way that we can also contribute to the organisation.

The easy to read and understand presentation and organisation of each part of the book describes skills by explaining why we need the specific leadership skill, followed by an example aimed at enhancing our understanding of the application of the skill. The better part of the book entails key ideas on what and how to apply the leadership of smart people. Finally, there is summary of the application of the skills in leading smart people.

Each skill highlights the characteristics of an effective leader, who should be clear in their objectives and the expected results, consistent in showing sincerity, authenticity and support. It is important for them to have a high level of understanding, to listen carefully and ask for clarity if necessary. They are expected to give guidance, be open to ideas or views, have patience and humility to make corrections or improvements when needed. Simply speaking, a leader of smart people should be a role model to develop and support them on their journey to becoming future leaders.

The book's grip tightens when discussion of the perceived efficiency of multi-skilling comes into play. The authors note that "The simple fact is that multiskilling is inefficient. Both knowledge work and leadership both benefit from periods of focused, uninterrupted attention." (p. 48). This statement is supported by explaining that "Humans cannot multitask when the multitasking involves attempting more than one cognitive task, like writing an email and reconciling a spreadsheet. For cognitive processing, the human brain is a linear processor it does one thing at a time" (p. 48). The authors further mention that "Research has repeatedly proven that the time needed to complete both tasks takes significantly longer" (p. 49).

Sometimes leaders, and leaders of smart people are no exception, find it difficult to communicate their ideas and feelings directly, not only to smart people but to others in general. An effective solution to this problem is offered through developing storytelling skills that facilitate delivery of ideas and feelings in a discreet and encouraging way, avoiding embarrassment and focusing on diversity and inclusiveness.

Future book editions should further help leaders with the inclusion of exercises and tools for application of each skill, or even a sample plan that can be used outright by leaders of smart people in their organizations.

In summary, the book is an excellent practical guide to competencies essential to both emerging and experienced leaders in the modern VUCA world.

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