

Review of Spillane R, Martin J, 2005 *Personality and performance foundations for managerial psychology* UNSW Press, Sydney.

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This review is written from the rather particular perspective of someone who has taught first year, undergraduate Organisational behaviour and management for nearly 10 years. This may explain my heightened almost pathological appetite for considerations of workplace psychology that challenge rather than reproduce the standard canon. And if a novel treatment of the standard workplace psychology cant was all Spillane and Martin delivered I would still regard their work as praiseworthy. However, their work is not merely novel, there is a real iconoclasm in their work. There is a paradigm war taking place between the covers of their book and a rollicking good read it is. None of the big names are spared as Freud, Maslow and even Pavlov and his dogs – to name but a few - are examined and found wanting. My favorite quote from the book is attributed to Maslow who was apparently concerned with the swift, widespread and uncritical acceptance of his theory of a hierarchy of needs. ‘I’m a little worried about this stuff which I consider to be tentative being swallowed whole by all sorts of enthusiastic people who really should be a little more tentative in the way I am.’ (Obholzer & Roberts (2000) as cited Spillane and Martin 2005, p. 47). It is a wonderful admission of doubt by Maslow that is not reported nearly widely enough.

But the substance of their critique does not come from these kinds of charming asides. The real gift of this book is the serious doubts it raises about the probity and credibility of mainstream workplace psychology. The text falls squarely within a critical stream of management studies that seek to challenge and make judgments about dominant management paradigms.

Spillane and Martin are opposed to the standard managerialist agenda of control within the workplace. Within the managerialist paradigm managers control the workplace including employees through heightened understanding and therefore manipulation of employees. The standard theories of workplace psychology provide the formula for this control. Spillane and Martin erode confidence in the assumption that it is possible to fully understand and control employees by locating logical inconsistencies within these theories and or by finding points for departure to alternative interpretation and speculation in their development.

The target for Spillane and Martin and is not a number of isolated theories but rather, the whole underlying paradigm of scientific psychology, and its accompanying ‘doctrine of psychological determinism which claims we are controlled (exclusively) by internal and or external forces.’ (Spillane and Martin 2005, p.249) Instead they suggest an alternative purposive psychology that assumes that people are fully responsible, truly autonomous beings who exercise full agency in the execution of their lives.

The intention of this book is to create an alternative theoretical framework for understanding human behaviour. The intention is not to provide easy, 'can do' recipes for managing people in the workplace. The book therefore does not include snappy global or local case studies that relate the theory to the real world. There are no learning objectives or margin entries, diagrams or photos to break up the text. The theories are not sequenced in the usual chronological or thematic sequences. Each chapter is written as a discrete essay that provides a critique of the existing paradigm within a specific arena. The final chapter of the book is the logical extension of the previous chapters as it reiterates and synthesizes the findings from the rest of the book and fleshes out the image of a purposive psychology.

In short I regard this as a wonderful book most suited for use within a post graduate program, or for use by the interested professional for independent study or interest. This will not however prevent me from incorporating some of its wicked, subversive thoughts in small, safe doses for my undergraduate students.