

# Book Reviews

Edited by Gregg R. Murray

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Gad Saad (Ed.), *Evolutionary Psychology in the Business Sciences* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2012), 371 pages. ISBN 978-3540927839. Hardcover \$189.00.

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The term “Business Sciences” historically has been a misnomer, if not an oxymoron, as business schools have tended to take an applied approach to educating their students through a focus on proximate problems, methods, and results. This emphasis on pragmatism over theoretical synthesis and sophistication lends itself to “flavor of the month” trends and fads at the expense of in-depth studies searching for integrated insight into how and why *homo economicus* make their consumption and production decisions. Even when theory rears its head, much like a whack-a-mole, it is divorced from an over-arching framework and as a result is curiously flawed in understanding why humans do what they do. The field of economics, the flag bearer for theoretical approaches to business decision making (so much so, departments vacillate between belonging with their scientific brethren in colleges of liberal arts and sciences, or with the financially remunerative endeavors of business schools), has staunchly adhered to theoretical models that are dismal fictions of human behavior—specifically, that humans are strictly rational decision makers.

As pointed out by Monica Capra and Paul Rubin in their chapter in this edited volume, “economists had been heavily influenced by physics, which aims at finding unified theories for understanding the physical world” (p. 322). When advances have been made in the field of economics (and Nobel Prizes awarded), they

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tend to occur when deviations from this rational choice model of individual decision-making are pointed out and modeled. While this does not deny the contributions rational choice theory has made to the understanding of consumption and business decisions, mainly at the aggregate level, the stubborn adherence to this theoretical model by fields contained within business schools, as well as proximate fields of inquiry such as public administration and political science, is dispiriting. especially when a more powerful, robust, and integrated option exists. Furthermore, it suggests a blind dedication to delusions about human behavior that at best is inefficient and at worst is harmful by prioritizing misanthropic behavior.

Into this void steps Gad Saad, Professor of Marketing and Concordia University Research Chair in Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences and Darwinian Consumption, with an edited volume consisting of 12 chapters on evolutionary psychology in the business sciences contributed by eminent scholars from around the globe. Saad, whose apostolic zeal for applying evolutionary psychology to the business sector is evidenced by a multitude of articles, TED talks, the books *The Consuming Instinct* and *The Evolutionary Bases of Consumption*, and a popular blog on the *Psychology Today* website (<http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/homo-consumericus>), brings together 28 contributors representing a broad range of academic disciplines and problem sets. The high quality contributions highlight the unifying power evolutionary theory has in bringing together such diverse scholars and signify evolutionary theory’s ascendance both as a grand unifying theory of human behavior and as an eminently pragmatic approach to solving real-world problems faced by businesspersons across the world.

By understanding that human behavior as a production of selection based on problems posed in our distant evolutionary past—problems whose solutions helped humans survive, reproduce, and thrive—we are in a better position to appreciate how not all current behaviors are necessarily beneficial in the modern world. For instance, ultimate causation suggests that

humans who were able to find and consume fatty, sweet, and/or salty foods were better able to survive and reproduce in ancestral environments; however, in the modern world the abundance of foods with fat, sugar, and salt, as well as the mimicry of these qualities by foods deficient in them, leads to maladaptive proximate behaviors such as over-eating and concurrent health problems, including obesity and associated diseases.

After Saad's introductory chapter sets the stage for the volume, the first contribution in the book is a theoretical essay by Griskevicius and colleagues. This chapter deviates from the predominant rational choice model by suggesting a "fundamental motives framework in which recurring social problems related to affiliation, self-protection, status attainment, mate attraction, mate retention and child rearing" (p. 35) are viewed through an evolutionary psychology lens. Here, solutions to these ancestral problems are overlaid onto problems faced in modern business settings, complete with matches and mismatches of evolved strategies. This broadly based chapter reviews key literature and contextualizes potential applications for the framework; at the same time, it prefaces the marriage of ultimate causation with proximate application that signifies this book.

The next five chapters address sex differences in the workplace either directly or indirectly. Due to the central role sexual selection plays in the development of social strategies and its importance in evolutionary theory, this is not unexpected. Indeed, the modern workplace has been changed in recent decades by the influx of women into a traditionally male dominated arena; thus, understanding sex differences is key for successful business practices. In Buunk and colleagues' chapter, "Intersexual Competition Within Organizations," the authors consider the role of sex differences in jockeying for positions of relative dominance, which in turn is determined in part by reproductive strategies. Here, the authors see males utilizing physical dominance and eminence (i.e., elevated rank through socially approved accomplishments) and females tending to use physical attractiveness to compete for resource holding potential and social attention holding power. This, in turn, occurs within large organizations that have small groups nested within it leading to competition both between groups and within the larger group. Following this, Browne exposes weaknesses

inherent to the socialization perspective which posits that sex differences in occupational patterns are based upon social constructs. Using extensive secondary data on vocational interest and ability, he proposes a model of ultimate causation through sexual selection and a proximate model of hormonal causation, suggesting that sex differences "have an underlying biological foundation upon which social forces can build, and that foundation will continue to exist whether we acknowledge it or not" (p. 88).

While sex differences are addressed in Price and Johnson's chapter, "The Adaptationist Theory of Cooperation in Groups," this contribution is most compelling in its consideration of first order tangible benefits from cooperation and second order social status benefits from group interaction and how these benefits apply to the modern workplace. This chapter fruitfully builds from evolutionary theory on reciprocal altruism to provide lessons easily applied by managers to everyday problems concerning the breakdown of cooperation by "free riders" and other threats to organizational solidarity. Furthermore, the authors make tangible managerial suggestions based upon sound principles and insight into demoralizing of employees—including why large bonuses hoarded by bankers are viewed with such public outrage and derision.

Gregg and Susan Murray's empirical examination of "Caveman Executive Leadership" provides an explanation of the relationship between biological sex and leadership grounded in evolutionary theory and supported by three experimental studies. Here the authors find empirical support for the assertion that biological sex matters in the preference for physically formidable leaders in times of crisis, especially in those instances when external threats such as warfare are present. They suggest that not only will this help with understanding the self-selection and election of political leaders but also will provide insight into the phenomena of sexism in the business world and community at large.

Likewise, "Leadership in Organizations: An Evolutionary Perspective," by Spisak, Nicholson, and van Vugt, considers the role of leadership, and perhaps more importantly, the decision made by some individuals to be followers. The authors explore this leadership-followership connection in response to four behavioral dynamics essential for human survival and

reproductive success: resource attainment, group movement, internal peacekeeping, and intergroup relations. Here they posit that leadership may be disentangled by understanding the situational demands facing leaders, processes by which leaders direct and coordinate group efforts, and the qualities seen to be required in leaders via an evolutionary lens. They argue that mismatches in the modern world occur on a regular basis, especially as evolutionary adaptations predispose the selection of masculine leaders in the formation of dominance hierarchies. As a result, they suggest businesses may benefit from a more “feminine” approach that espouses egalitarian values, creativity, and distributed leadership while understanding and supporting the base of followers that makes any organization possible.

David M. Wasieleski’s contribution stands out for analyzing a core component of the marketplace, if not all social interactions, by looking at social contracts and identifying when they have been broken. Understanding cheater detection in organizations is the focus of Wasieleski’s inquiry, which in turn builds upon the groundbreaking work of Cosmides and Tooby<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> by using the Wason Selection Task in two studies. Here, Wasieleski explores the “evolutionary social contract,” which forms “in response to, and exists within, ecological challenges and [is] sustained by a need to develop individual and group advantage” (p. 201). His findings suggest human minds are designed for cheater detection on social contract-type rules and take into account intentionality in the policing of social groups and response to cheating.

The next two contributions consider the role of evolutionarily adapted mechanisms for communication of information between organisms and how knowledge of this can benefit marketers. Dunham’s contribution on the role signaling theory plays in effective marketing asserts that the transmission of information from a sender to a receiver is fundamental for understanding marketing. Here, honest signals provide information that communicates an underlying attribute of an organism due to that signal being unfakeable or costly. Appreciating the lessons of evolutionary theory and how they apply to the marketing of goods, including the senses used and the message communicated, is seen as having substantial implications for a variety of audiences ranging from suppliers, to consumers, stockholders, and even employees of companies.

The following contribution is an empirical exploration of “Using Fitness Cues to Enhance Advertising Effectiveness” by Vyncke. Here, informed by evolutionary theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model—a framework for understanding persuasion effects—is used. Specifically, the evolutionarily old, automatic, intuitive, preconscious processing of System 1 and the more evolutionarily recent, conscious, controlled, reflective and as a result slow System 2 are seen as playing distinct roles in consumption decisions. Testing the relative power of each system through participant choice from a set of 80 different stimulus ads, Vyncke finds that decisions are based on general sexual attractiveness (such as cues of good health) as well as sex-specific cues of attractiveness (such as female fertility indicated by the 0.70 waist-to-hip ratio) with strategies that are overwhelmingly indicative of the use of System 1 processes. These findings are in turn supportive of evolutionary theory based predictions.

The final three chapters are broadly theoretical in their approach to problems posed by their respective academic disciplines. Joye, Poels and Willems’ contribution develops and explores a design strategy for retail environments (Evolutionary Store Atmosphericity) based upon evolved landscape preferences for complexity, coherence, mystery, and legibility, providing suggestions for businesses based upon the types of goods they provide and sell, as well as the role of sex differences in shopping patterns. Here, there is an eye towards not just greater sales but also increased employee satisfaction and well being from a workplace that enhances health and productivity. Capra and Rubin’s chapter on economics and evolutionary psychology introduces the concept of ecological rationality in which adaptive decisions and resultant behavior are carried out based upon the context in which they are made. In this contribution, the authors endeavor to synthesize the diverse findings of behavioral economics into an overarching paradigm of choice that supersedes the flawed rational choice model.

In the final chapter, Hantula and colleagues consider how evolutionary theory enhances our understanding of interpersonal connections through the use of electronic communication technology such as text messaging, e-mail, video conferencing, and related platforms. They posit eight principles in their “media compensation theory,” such as naturalness. Typified as face-to-face interactions, naturalness decreases either

with “lean” or “superrich” media. An increase or decrease in this naturalness then affects performance and trust in our increasingly hyperconnected world.

In conclusion, this wide-ranging collection addresses a range of issues through the unified lens of evolutionary theory in a manner accessible not just to intellectually curious students of the business world, but also to scholars interested in a more complete understanding of human behavior. Although experts may disagree on the specifics of evolutionary theory, this edited volume provides an integrated framework by which a broad array of business-related concerns may be fruitfully addressed, and provides a means by which those who wish to gain the upper hand in the applied world of business can obtain the necessary edge. In this sense, *Evolutionary Psychology in the Business Sciences* is a worthy successor to Jerome Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby’s *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*,<sup>4</sup> which introduced students and scholars to applications of evolutionary theory on

a broad range of social issues. If this collection finds the audience it deserves, it likewise has the potential to alter a disjointed field of business sciences by providing order and growth not just to research but to the practical application of lessons learned.

## References

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