

READING AND USE OF ENGLISH PART 5

THE NEW MANAGEMENT GURUS

Bees. Ants. Reindeer. Not the usual topic of conversation at an average board meeting. But if Peter Miller's debut book, *Smart Swarm*, is anything to go by, the creatures could revolutionise the way we do business. In the latest in a series of books that challenge leaders to think differently, *Smart Swarm* explores the habits, actions and instincts of animals and how they can be applied to business. The book is set to become the most talked about in management circles after Miller, a senior editor at National Geographic Magazine, wrote an article on the subject a few years ago, which was read by 30 million people globally.

It follows a string of 'business thinking' books that have hit the shelves in recent years, all searching for new answers on how to run organisations effectively. *Obliquity*, published in March, told us that the most profitable companies are not the most aggressive in chasing profits. *Wikinomics*, a bestseller, demonstrated new models of production based on community and collaboration. Miller believes his book is the first time anyone has laid out the science behind a management theory. 'The biology of how ant colonies or beehives work are appealing models for organisations and systems that can be applied in a business context,' he says.

So how exactly can bees help run board meetings? 'By the way they work independently before they work together,' Miller says. 'Picture a huge beehive hanging on the branch of a tree, with about 5,000 bees vying for space and protection. They know their colony is getting too big and home - and fast - but in a way that everyone agrees with. In today's business environment, managers need to be able to make the right decisions under huge amounts of pressure. Yet, it is clear that some of the best-paid leaders in some of the biggest organisations can get it dramatically wrong. How is it that they can fail to make efficient business decisions when a swarm of bees can make a critical decision about their hive in just a few seconds?'

According to Miller, 'swarm theory' can help managers in three simple steps: bees first realise they have a problem. They then fly into the neighbourhood to find potential new sites. They come back and perform a 'dance' to get other bees to follow them. Eventually, the bees with the best dance attract the most votes — and a decision is made. Back to the board meeting. Managers that encourage debate and then have a ballot over which idea is best, stand a better chance of getting it right, Miller says. 'The bee example tells you that you need to seek out diversity in your team. You need to have a way of gathering up very different approaches and ideas so you can make sure pick the right one.'

Ants, in addition, can help businesses organise workflow and people. In an ant colony, there is no leader. Ants are self-organised, and respond to their environment and each other. One ant on its own could not raid a kitchen cupboard, but one ant telling the next one that it's worth following him to find food ends up creating a food chain, 'In an ant colony, you get

the right number going in and out searching for food, you get the right number taking care of the babies,' Miller says. 'As a manager, this can tell you your hierarchy, your bureaucracy, is getting in the way of getting the work done.'

The airline industry has already flirted with the idea that ants can help make flying stress-free. Southwest Airlines, an American low-cost airline, was concerned its 30-year-old policy of letting customers choose where they sit once they boarded a plane was slowing down the process. By creating a computer simulation of people loading on to a plane, based on what ants would do, the company was able to show that assigned seating would only be faster by a few minutes. It was not worth scrapping their first-come, first-served policy, which was a key part of the company's brand.

Miller says: 'If you are concerned about surviving the business cycle, in other words giving your company the resilience and ability to bounce back from challenges that you can't anticipate, then Nature is a great model.'

31. What does the writer say about Smart Swarm in the first paragraph?

- A It has already attracted a great deal of attention.
- B It is one of several books on animal behaviour and business.
- C It concerns a topic that a great many people are interested in.
- D It reflects what is already happening in some businesses.

32. Miller believes that his book differs from other 'business thinking' books because of

- A the evidence given in support of the theory.
- B the ease with which the theory can be implemented.
- C its focus on behaviour rather than profit or production.
- D its emphasis on practical action rather than theory.

33. In the third paragraph, the writer says that the behaviour of bees can show managers

- A the consequences of making the wrong decisions.
- B how to pinpoint exactly what a problem is.
- C how to arrive at the correct conclusions very quickly.
- D the need to act decisively when under great pressure.

34. According to the 'swarm theory', managers need to

- A consider the effect of a decision on a variety of other people.

B be able to persuade others that their proposed decisions are right.

C regard decision-making as a collaborative process.

D accept criticism of decisions they have made.

35. The example of ants raiding a food cupboard illustrates

A the need to create the right kind of hierarchy and bureaucracy.

B the differences between how managers and employees think.

C the belief that aims can be achieved in various different ways.

D the effectiveness of employees making decisions for themselves.

36. Looking at the behaviour of ants caused Southwest Airlines to

A improve one of its practices.

B speed up one of its processes.

C retain one of its policies.

D increase customer choice.