Book Review

WITHIN: A Leader's Best Pathfinder – Where Questions Find Answers

By Sridhar Aranala

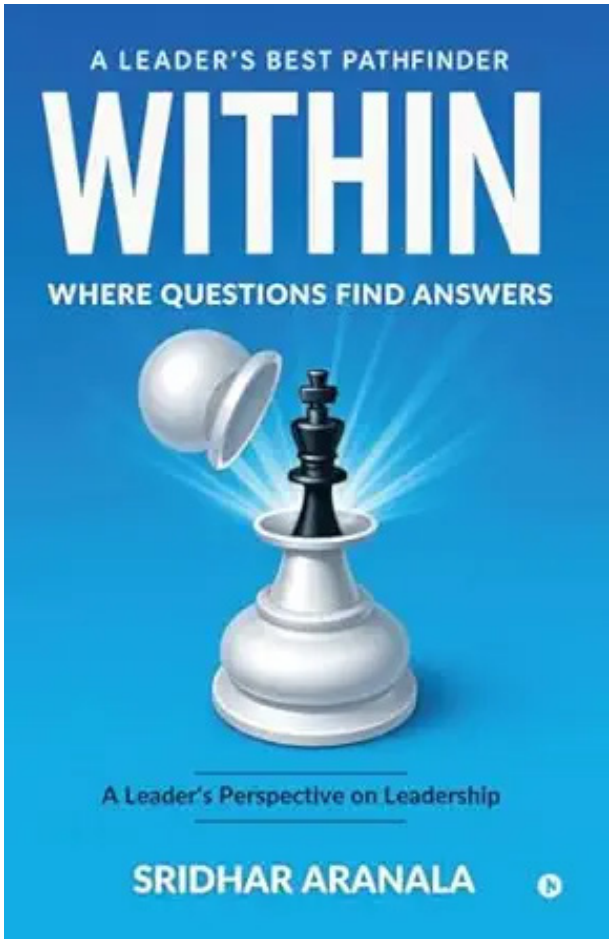
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About the Writer

With over 20 years of experience, Sridhar Aranala is currently serving as a corporate mentor, an organization development facilitator, and a leadership coach. His specialization includes helping individuals and leaders to enhance self-awareness, purpose clarity, and strategic decision-making. As an experienced coach, he has been helping different professionals to uncover their inner drives and leverage their potential as leaders.

His writing inspires scholars to explore the deeper realities of leadership that are often sidestepped within the typical managerial literature by integrating the concepts between behavioral psychology, emotional intelligence, and personal transformation. His belief that effective leadership must emerge from personal understanding and knowledge of the inner landscape rather than from any imposed external authority is captured within the theme of WITHIN.

Appreciation and Critique

The book draws on a very introspective approach toward leadership, emphasizing that the best solutions often lie from within oneself. He integrates insightful observations with leading stories to illustrate the way in which self-awareness becomes the best guide of the leader in times of turmoil, uncertainty, and decision-making.

The transforming power of questioning is the underlying theme in this book. He shows just how leaders can get clarity on, and transform barriers into teachable moments, by asking the right questions of purpose, intention, emotion, and choice.

Each chapter of the book takes the reader on an introspective voyage to motivate them to pause, reflect, and thereby re-establish themselves on the foundation of key principles. The effective examples and stories used in the book illustrate how major changes inside can easily trigger major changes outside. The book does well to convey the reality of the supremacy of controlling oneself over controlling others, which defines leadership itself.

Another strength of the book is the simplicity and effectiveness of the ideas expressed. Ideas put forward and the reflections presented are easy to associate with and very useful. These can not only be identified and applied by emerging and successful leaders and professionals but also by the next level of leadership and other professionals who have been in the job for some time and have some experience. The message of achieving balance and being conscious leadership-relevant. Managers who prefer action-oriented tactics may wish for more business examples or step-by-step leadership tools because the focus is primarily inward. This inwardly focused approach, however, is what makes the book different-it shifts the emphasis from the practice of leadership to the state of being a leader.

Besides its application within leadership training, WITHIN makes an important contribution to the

broader debates on aware and authentic leadership. This book is an invitation for the reader to reconsider the founding stones for effective leadership in an age where performance data, aims, and outcomes tend to be the criteria for leadership. Obviously and implicitly, it proposes that if leadership is not internally consistent, it will be shallow and transitory. This approach is very much in tune with the current debates on organizational behavior with its focus on emotional intelligence and values leadership.

Another interesting aspect of the book is its stress on emotional literacy. The theme of awareness of oneself, management of one's own emotions, and empathy is deeply interwoven in the narrative, although the writer may not articulate his ideas within the context of the concept of emotional intelligence per se. It is advised that leaders need to have an awareness of their own emotional propensities, understand the role of emotions in decision-making, and take informed decisions rather than rushing into them emotionally.

The questions asked by the book are thought-provoking and therefore stimulants for introspection. In fact, instead of providing solutions, the writer puts his audience through what their lives as leaders entail—often scenarios of discomfort, ambiguity, and doubt. This is an effort towards an almost absorbed experiential process of learning. This, therefore, is an introspective and transformative process as one is literally carrying an internal conversation, as compared to mere reading.

In terms of organizations, WHILE WAITS in the background to remind everyone about the importance of cultures of self-reflection and psychological safety. Trust, transparency, and authenticity might find better breeding grounds in situations created by people with self-awareness. The concepts in this book could be used to improve leadership approaches to ethical decision-making, mindful communication, and compassionate listening, even if it's not about improving organizations or frameworks for its culture.

Apart from those within the corporate world, teachers, mentors, trainers, and those in the field of people interaction can also derive benefit from the book. People who deal within the realms of coaching, training, or development, where a leader's inner self plays a large role, will be able to identify well with themes of the book. Because of its lack of defined structures, the book is flexible and not restrictive.

Notwithstanding the context above, the book might appear abstract or philosophical to those who come from a standard background of management learning. This abstract approach creates the possibility for the reader to reflect and interpret on their own, without the imposition of meanings or ideas derived from literature focusing on leadership skills. This book encourages a paradigm shift from "problem-solving to sense-making." This approach would work well under volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous VUCA environments.

In summary, WITHIN acts more like a mirror reflected backwards, rather than a guide. Rather than issuing instructions, it offers leaders a clearer vision or understanding of who they are. One thing is certain—within inner awareness preceding outward action, leaders are able to generate the presence, clarity, or resilience needed. The book underlines the power within, as a reminder that the greatest journeys are always the inner journeys.

Dr. Kokila Kulkarni
Assistant Professor (HR & Centre for Peace)
R V Institute of Management (RVIM)
CA–17, 36th Cross, 26th Main
4th "T" Block, Jayanagar
Bengaluru – 560041, India
E-mail: kokilakulkarni.rvim@rvei.edu.in