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Management 21C

The only thing we can say with any certainty about management in 20 years time is that it will be substantially different from today. The question is, of course, how will it be different? And how can we gain competitive edge by adopting the right new techniques before every one else does?

Well, you could do a lot worse than ask the world's top management thinkers and futurologists for their views. Which is exactly what Subir Chowdhury, an executive vice president at the American Supplier Institute, has done in *Management 21C*. The book is a collection of essays and speculations by the likes of Peter Senge, Sumantra Ghoshal, Barry Posner and 23 more management heavyweights on the future of business, leadership, business process and organisation. The breadth and diversity of the speculations makes them almost impossible to summarise. But if there is one recurring theme it is that management is undergoing a shift from a masculine to a feminine paradigm.

If during the bulk of the 20th century, management was about manly things such as certainty, predictability, competition, domination, and winning, in the 21st century it will be concerned with more traditionally feminine traits such as uncertainty, ambivalence, change, collaboration, paradoxes, co-operation--and winning. In his own provocative essay, Chowdury describes how new managers will have to become multi-skilled people-centred leaders whose most important task is to inspire the work force with emotion and belief. He argues that in the next century corporate success will depend on the effective use of talent: "The relentless pursuit of talent should be a main management strategy. More and more companies simply cannot recruit talent fast enough." The "return on talent", which he defines as, "the payback on investment in people" will become a key business measure just like return on capital, he says.

Senior managers will ignore this thought-provoking collection of essays at their peril.