

Insider Risk and Personnel Security: An Introduction

Paul Martin
Routledge, 2024

In *Insider Risk and Personnel Security: An Introduction*, Paul Martin, the distinguished former national security practitioner, lays out the instruments of his trade. His book examines the impact that insiders – people who betray trust by behaving in potentially harmful ways (p. 7) – have on organisations and their people, and how personnel security can be used to manage risks. This book is for business leaders and HR professionals who want to learn how to protect their organisations from insiders in a dangerous world where all are left to fend for themselves.

When reading *Insider Risk and Personnel Security*, it is worth remembering that Martin's views were formed by his role in serving UK liberal democracy, and indeed safeguarding it from a variety of threats. His approach therefore comes with its own set of assumptions. Martin's work centres on the idea that readers

can learn to look after their organisations and employees, rather than relying on the government to save them.

In fact, many of the featured insider cases involve grave abuses of trust by people associated with UK and US governments. Murders, serial rapes, espionage, reckless endangerment of nuclear sites, a rampaging psychiatrist, and a suicidal airline pilot form a selection of publicised cases perpetuated by taxpayer-funded insiders and business employees in positions of trust. The work is a survival toolkit that challenges assumptions about how trust is formed. Martin, in essence, sees trust as a survival function between individuals, rather than between tax-paying citizens and government institutions.

The main strengths of Martin's work lie in its practical information on how to manage insider risks across the board. Hence, all organisation leaders and HR professionals, ranging from lower-level line managers to higher-level operational managers, will find something directly applicable to their position within the workplace. The author outlines several systems approaches and individualised tools to help manage risk, while also providing advice on the social skills required to facilitate their effective use.

At the same time, the author critiques these methods so that the reader does not accept them

doctrinally. The focus is instead on learning to adapt them to the reader's evolving situation. At the end of each chapter, there are questions for discussion. These should be helpful for organisation leaders and HR professionals as a way of integrating their learning. The book includes an evidence-based checklist, adapted from the US National Insider Threat Center. This is a noteworthy instrument that professionals can readily apply to workplaces, especially where resources for more costly interventions are scarce (pp. 99–100). Another welcome component of this book is its emphasis on developing ethical organisational leaders. Such people are critical for preventing, detecting and managing insider risk by creating good working conditions. Hence, it is not all about catching the bad guys, but also about ethical organisations supporting people to stay on the right path.

Interestingly, the book contains 80 examples of insider cases. Of these, a clear majority are of individual men. Cases of women, cases where gender is not specified and cases relating to groups represent only about 30% of the examples. Martin remarks that we can never know the true number of insiders as many go undetected. While not explored in the book, it is similarly difficult to know how representative this split is of the actual insider threat picture. Do women form a greater portion of those undetected cases?

Or does the evidence suggest that women are less likely to abuse organisational trust? Further research on such questions might shed more light on who insiders are and what motivates them.

More generally, the book sticks closely to an 'objective' approach, steering clear of personal points of view. While this has obvious merits, at times it is a loss for the reader, as Martin's own subjective thoughts and feelings on evaluating insider risks are largely absent. His use of discretion would have placed a more personal stamp – drawing on his many years of experience – on this work.

For instance, witnessing insider red flags in the workplace is likely to elicit an array of mixed feelings. Bystanders are often conflicted between acting (and being seen as a sneak) and looking in the other direction. Martin does not explore these dynamics, which can play out through formal and informal power imbalances. For example, formal hierarchy will impact subordinate bystanders' interpretations of, and willingness to act on, warning signs of suspiciously behaving leaders and HR professionals. Conversely, leaders of organisations and HR professionals can be weak. When this is the case, they become bystanders in an environment ruled by a formally subordinate but interpersonally dominant insider.

Yet, Martin could have demonstrated how he would have applied his discretion in dealing with insider warning signs in an environment of complex power imbalances. This would have helped to guide the reader on how to apply the instruments designed to deal with the threats that are discussed in the book. This insight would have been particularly valuable for business professionals that might be

deterred from acting even when the skills and techniques within this book confront instinctual power struggles common in the workplace.

Nonetheless, Martin's work makes for a fascinating read on both an intellectual and practitioner level. This survival toolkit is likely to deliver the most value to leaders and HR professionals of all sectors and industries who are keen to protect their organisations and people.