

## Preface

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The subtitle and contents of this book might suggest that I don't believe in contemporary management theories and state of the art strategy tools. Nothing is further from the truth, because I certainly do, and have deployed these successfully on countless occasions.

Nevertheless, a great many businesses never seem to get much mileage from the great strategies they have developed or appear incapable of implementing them successfully. After having been inside several hundred companies in many industries across 5 continents, I have reached the conclusion that, all too often, the real fundamentals of managing a business are inadequate or even missing. This however, doesn't seem to stop many CEOs and their teams in their quest to create value, to embrace strategies that overstretch their business' capabilities or to adopt the latest management fads and tools which exceed the digestive capacity of their organisation. Poor management fundamentals in businesses make many of these initiatives and fancy tools doomed from the word go. Another very basic, but high-impact issue, is the gaming, poor leadership skills and their self-centred view of the world, which far too many managers hold. Career and status often take priority over the performance of the business. Risk averseness – as opposed to confronting issues that are well known and understood – is inexcusable. Nevertheless, many overpaid executives seem to get away with it all the time. As a result, large amounts of shareholder value are simply frittered away. The idea of getting the basics right and using common sense, prior to taking on board high-profile, contemporary management fads, is not “sexy” at all. However, I firmly believe these “non-sexy” basics need to be tackled first and what's more, they need to be done well. Before embracing new tools and initiatives, CEOs need to adopt a critical attitude both towards themselves and their managers, ensuring that the basics are firmly in place to start with. Rewards should more consistently be given to senior and junior managers for achieving, not for devising swanky ideas or proclaiming premature victory and moving on to the next major new project. The fact that performance and operational management is perceived as mundane, whilst strategy and new management fads are deemed “sexy”, is in my view, a very significant issue in business today.

On the one hand this book is meant to give managers direction, by sharing experiences and by providing a few basic steps to actually getting the basics right. On the other hand, this book is an indictment of the irresponsible, even destructive fashion in which some executives behave. It is not built on any great management theory or fad, but just on plain common sense and a lot of experience.

After more than 20 years in various industry positions 7 of these working as a consultant, my view of the world of management is becoming increasingly cynical. In some ways, I would like this book to be the anti-management book. If this book succeeds in its attempt to raise awareness of common sense, experiential learning and simplicity amongst managers, as well as increase their sense of integrity, responsibility and confidence with respect to what really needs to be done, then it has been more than worthwhile writing.

Libraries have been filled with books about solutions on each and every issue raised here. However, many are theoretical and few enable the reader to see the relationships between symptoms. Most management books start with a strategic concept or need, and then go on to provide analysis frameworks and solutions, with the strategy as a starting point. This creates a degree of inflexibility at a practical level whilst ignoring the effects taking place at lower management and operational levels. At the end of the day it is these people who execute strategies and deal with customers on a day-to-day basis.

I have a very strong belief in people's good intent. There is no doubt that every employee goes to work to accomplish positive things for their organisation. On the surface this may sometimes appear different, but bad practice behaviours almost without exception circumstantial. It is my

firm conviction that appearances are deceptive and that the root cause for apparent ill intent lies not with individuals or groups, but with the way in which people are managed and led.