

BOOK REVIEW

ABOUT THE BOOK

Jules Goddard & Tony Eccles (2013). *Why some organizations consistently outperform others: Uncommon sense, Common nonsense* (Paperback), Profile Books Ltd, London. ISBN: 978-1-84668-602-3, 241 pages, Price, \$15.95

REVIEWED BY

HARI A.P. NAIR

*Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business,
Universiti Utara Malaysia.*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR

This book is intended to act as a reminder to senior managers in today's organizations to get back to the basics of common sense while deriving business strategies. The authors emphasize the fact that today the managers are lost in the abundance of business theories which are pumped into the organizations by many scholars in different context and economic conditions. When these theories are applied to the business without understanding the context which they are operating in, the managers tend to showcase fashionable business initiatives with no proportionate outcome.

Jules Goddard with his rich experience of 30 years in the marketing space; is currently a Fellow of the Centre for Management Development at London Business School. His teaching interest is in competitive strategy and creative marketing. In addition to the teaching assignment in creative marketing and competitive strategy, Goddard is part of the management lab in the school where he doubles up as a Research Associate. Prior to this, he worked in the City University as Gresham Professor of Commerce and was also Mercers Memorial Professor. Goddard had long innings with reputed advertising companies in London and New York before landing in the teaching profession.

Tony Eccles, an accomplished management writer, is currently a visiting faculty in the City University, where he teaches Management students at

the Cass Business School. Prior to that, he taught Strategic Management at London Business School. Eccles had been a television anchor for programs and had won accolades for creative copy writing. He authored two books 'Under new management' and 'Succeeding with change'. Eccles had long years of strategic management consulting experience with many global organizations.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

"Why some organizations consistently outperform others: Uncommon sense, Common nonsense", is an attempt to question the conventional wisdom prevailing in today's business world. The book consists of 5 parts covering 67 short but distinct sections. With this book, the authors call forth the CEOs and managers to identify and weed out the element of non-sense from among the uncommon sense. For Goddard & Eccles, the uncommon sense prevails with the organizations which find the unbeaten path and follow a strategy which is contextual and customized to the business. This will define the real competitive advantage for a firm and to differentiate the best from the rest. The authors reiterate that this is the secret to success for all those organizations which succeeded and sustained the desired business results. A brief outline of each section of the book can be detailed as follows.

Part 1: Winning

In this part, using several anecdotes, the authors explain about the difference between winning companies and losing ones. In most of the sections in this part there are graphs and pictures used to explain the winning-losing proposition in fictitious companies. The highlight is more towards losers than winners. The statements at most places convey strong messages; however they are not empirically explained. The authors say in one section that most firms spend effort on marketing just to reinforce the status quo. Evidently this type of statements are derived from the long experience of the authors in a few firms which may remain as a non-generalizable term.

Part 2: Strategizing

Part two, through 16 small sections covers strategy and tactics. The motherhood statements used in this part are evidently taken from the battlefield learnings. Few of the sections touch upon the requirement of innovation capacity to be embedded in the strategy which is a novel idea. According to the authors, adhocracy and accident are conducive

to innovation and great ideas They highlight that courage and humility breeds strategic intent as opposed to talent and charisma. In this part Goddard & Eccles introduced new buzzwords like ‘bullshit quotient’ which they say is seen at increasing proportions in today’s business world. For them, courage to say ‘I don’t know’ is perceived as an inadmissible option in firms today, which eventually generates large scale bullshit in organizations.

Part 3: Organizing

The focus of this part is on management and its organizing abilities. The authors introduce control and learning as two horns of the concept they called management dilemma. The management theories which are underpinning organizations today are more than a century old where according to the authors, there are huge contextual changes to the business and hence time to shed the good old management theories and overly use of its perceived applications. The interesting section of this part is the concept of double bind injunctions adopted from R.D.Laing’s ‘Knots’ Edge of chaos is another theory advocated by the authors in this part where enormous innovation possibilities emerge when there exists an element of controllable chaos. Chaos is for good. May be a message to take home for managers.

Part 4: Behaving

‘Biases and remedies’ is a summary name given by the authors to this part of the book. As the name suggests this part touches upon suggested solutions to few of the highlighted problems in the previous sections. Exploring scientific discovery in organisations, a contrarian view of the good old value statements, growing importance of simplicity, crowd sourcing through plebiscite, sense of fairness, conversation through cross sections and building firm foundations of learning organization are few of the conceptual threads in this part.

Part 5: Learning

This is the concluding part of the book, predominantly touching the organizational pathology and health. Here, Goddard and Eccles have attempted to elaborate the discovery process as the guiding principle of learning organizations. They explain that the discovery process if throttled well in an organization can galvanize individuals to greater planes of learning. It creates innumerable catalysts and facilitators, breaks silos, let the knowledge permeate internal boundaries and opens up alternate paths for each experiment. This according to the authors

also augments emotional engagement of employees with the organization. There are few examples of the conceptual application cited by the authors in this part.

EVALUATION OF THE BOOK

At the beginning of the book, the authors try to impress the reader by the rebellious statement that the book is a collection of innovative ideas and contrarian perspectives. The intention of the book is made clear in the introduction chapter, which is to challenge the fashionable management theories and notion of best practices prevailing currently in the business world. However, it is arguable that how far the authors could achieve this target and convince the readers with the host of charts and graphs derived from their consulting years with organizations.

Literature on innovation and copycat strategy are not new things in the management world. When a company sticks to patterns of organizational behavior there is likelihood of failure as winning companies always find ways and means to innovate and maneuver strategically through difficult times. According to the authors cutting cost and staying away from innovation is a definite symptom of declining organizational health.

Goddard and Eccles have taken pains to explain the scientific approach to problems as a reminder of the good old step by step process. They say that fundamental principles should not be ignored when tackling complex business problems. Through several pages they elaborated on the process of identifying a problem and testing alternate solutions to arrive at the best option.

The short analogies frequently used in the book to explain underlying concepts leave the readers with the impression that the book is a collection of ideas from the social networking space. The book does not establish a central theme, rather moving from one motherhood statement to other between sections. Possibly the authors' experience with management models in London Business School's M-lab have contributed to the plethora of hypotheses they have used in the book, however these hypotheses have not been tested empirically.

CONCLUSION

There is an attempted wakeup call in the book to the CEOs, for releasing themselves from the shackles of traditional management mindset as according to the authors the all-pervasive technology has collapsed the distance, time

and space which brings customers closer to the organizations. This is an opportunity as well as challenge. In this context speedy innovation and unconventional approach to managing market are the sensible business strategy. Goddard and Eccles opine that the conventional wisdom around the management is still moored around the yesteryear theories of Taylor and Ford. These theories, according to the authors, are outdated and absolute misfit in today's knowledge based economy.

If the intent of the authors was to consolidate and present a menu of contrarian management principles dispersed in several management books explained by several contemporary observers, the attempt was partially successful. The book is suitable for a general in-flight reading for academicians and practitioners of organizational management.