

Book Review

Managing for Success, *Morgen Witzel*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, Hardback, £25.00, ISBN 978 1 4729 0496 6, 246 pages.

'Managing for success' is a new book by a prolific author on management, namely Morgen Witzel, who is a Fellow of the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter Business School in the United Kingdom. He is the author of over 20 books in total, with translations into 11 languages. As a seasoned business lecturer, experienced journalist and publishing editor, he is well-qualified to cover this highly interesting topic. Witzel is also an accomplished business historian.

This new book is a guide to managing for success in corporations, as the title indicates. It pinpoints the danger signals which appear on a regular basis and which may threaten to drag businesses down. Using case-studies from the Ford Motors, Royal Ahold and Lehman Brothers, as well as many other businesses, the author provides a map for fixing problems before they happen. There is a good deal of practical detail in this work and Witzel does not pull his punches when describing how disaster is just around the corner for many managers.

The book is divided into 13 chapters, making 246 pages in all. The author starts with an account of incompetence and failure and moves on to the thesis that there are no defects but our own, looking at the experience of Ford Motors. He then moves on to examine how the mighty fell, in the case of Lehman Brothers. Many interesting themes emerge in this tome, such as the 'mirage of certainty', the 'unhealthy yearning for precision' and the 'curse of Descartes'. There is lastly a useful appendix on what Witzel calls 'warning flags'.

The author points out that the 'seven sins of management' do not come 'from nowhere'. In the ultimate chapter of the book, called the 'leaning tower of

academe', he provides a salutary critique of business schools. He is wary of the term 'science' when applied to management and the degree to which lecturers in business schools tend to over-identify with the university rather than business.

He points out that:

'Business schools have, in effect, turned away from the light. They are living in Plato's Cave, studying the shadows on the wall and writing papers about them, impassive newspapers to each other to read. I honestly believe that we have reached a point where some academics, and some business schools, are frightened of the reality of daylight. They need to find, somewhere, the courage to leave the cave and go back out into the real world' [page 212].

Whilst this may be true of a number of such academics, it is clearly the case that many do empirical research in 'real world' companies and consult for no small number of them. Similarly, what the authors says about such lecturers, may be equally true of those working in trying organisations, where in their windowless offices there is not that much daylight around. And so it goes.

This book is well laid-out, all things considered, with a wide margins and legible typeface. If there is no bibliography, footnotes are set out at the end of each chapter. There is also a fairly detailed index which is welcome. Witzel has a most readable style and communicates his ideas very clearly. This work is mainly designed for practising managers, but it could equally be useful for undergraduates and MBAs in management studies.

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