

Bernard Bourigeaud

Jacques Brun



**THE
SIMPLEST IDEAS
ARE OFTEN
THE BEST**



EYROLLES

THE SIMPLEST IDEAS ARE OFTEN THE BEST

Bernard Bourigeaud and Jacques Brun have written this book on the basis of their personal experience and recollections, far removed from purely theoretical considerations and outdated practices.

With a common passion for companies and everyone who works in them, their aim is to share their ideas, however provocative, on leadership and the fundamentals of company management.

Driven by the conviction that only managers who show proper consideration for their employees can hope to counter disillusionment, they formulate practical advice drawn from the everyday experience of an entrepreneur and a top manager.



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61, bd Saint-Germain
75240 Paris Cedex 05
www.editions-eyrolles.com

Translate from french by Philip Minns
Original title: *Management, les idées les plus simples sont souvent les meilleures*

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ISBN : 978-2-212-56757-1

Bernard Bourigeaud • Jacques Brun

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We would like to thank Marie-Paule Virard
who helped us write the original version
of this book in French...
... and Philip Minns who translated it into English.

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Preface

We have both worked in many different companies over several decades. The main reason we decided to write this book was not an urge to project ourselves as management gurus but simply a desire to pass on to as many people as possible our shared experience.

Another reason was to convey a deeply held conviction that has guided all the decisions we have taken during our business careers: the human factor is the key to business success. Individual well-being and corporate performance are intimately linked.

This is not just a restatement of fashionable clichés. On the contrary, it is simply an acknowledgment that motivated men and women do a better job. If managers, at whatever level, are capable of taking care of the people who work for them, they will be more likely to attain their business goals: create wealth, grow their company and maintain its profitability. In addition, they will also play a useful role in society by contributing to a better work/life balance and individual happiness. Today, unfortunately, we tend to see the opposite: an insidious climate of dissatisfaction at work, adding fuel to the “society of mistrust” in which we live.

The economic crisis has made matters worse. Under pressure to produce more and better with ever fewer resources, companies often tend to overlook the men and women who work for them and sometimes leave them out of the equation altogether. This is why a general feeling of disillusionment is growing, the bitter fruit of outdated

management practices and the gradual erosion of human values.

For lack of motivation, people tend to become more inward-looking and increasingly lose interest in those around them, their bosses, their colleagues or their employees. There is an increasing tendency to look after oneself alone. And yet, we are convinced that the winds of change will soon be blowing through management. The human factor will make a big comeback.

Although it may sound naïve to say such a thing, we cannot escape the fact that two trends are becoming increasingly apparent, showing that we have more or less reached the limits of our current system. Today, men and women, especially from the younger generations, aspire to a different balance between life and work. They feel less and less committed to the values they were taught at business school and are looking for something different. And companies are only just starting to realize that they have been slow to catch on to this trend and that they must adapt quickly to these new aspirations if they want to continue to attract the best new graduates, attain their business goals and secure their future.

Our intention in starting this book was not to further any particular line of academic research but simply the desire to capitalize on our own experience and memories, those of two managers from two different fields – one a senior executive, the other an entrepreneur – both passionate about companies and the people who shape them. Two managers who, during the course of their careers, have witnessed many profound changes while never ceasing, every single day, to manage, purchase, develop or advise companies.

We first met at a business conference, the start of a mutually rewarding professional relationship, soon backed by a solid friendship. Although our careers have been in different areas of business, we have realized over and over again that we not only see eye-to-eye on essential values but also that we have much the same approach to the management of people and companies. It is this process of sharing, which has worked so well for us both and enabled us to learn so much from each other, that we would now like to share with the readers of this book. By revisiting our own experience we hope to pass it on, particularly to the younger generations, who, more than ever in a profoundly changing world, are on the lookout for a sympathetic hearing and well-considered advice.

In this book we will not attempt to define “the perfect leader”, especially as different styles of leadership can be equally successful, given that so much depends on the context, the people and the circumstances. Neither do we claim to offer a course in management. All we are setting out to do is to share our experience and our convictions and provide, in all modesty, some food for thought about that most difficult and subtle exercise, day-to-day management. And in doing so, we invite the reader to follow our intuition, which is that, in this area as in many others, **the simplest ideas are often the best.**

Part I

The company:
a community of motivated
people serving its clients

Governance: committed Directors please!

Quality governance is a really strategic tool for a company. And yet, so often, senior managers do not consider it as such and do not pay enough attention to its effectiveness. The role of Directors is not just to approve the financial statements at the end of each financial year. It is also, more importantly, to provide guidance to the Chief Executive, who is often very much alone in taking decisions. A collegial decision-making process is a major asset.

The way that governance actually functions will clearly depend on a company's ownership structure. In a family-run company, the family holds most of the share capital and by extension, most of the power. This is a special case that we shall not dwell on, although we would simply note in passing that in family-owned companies, a very prudent and professional approach should be recommended when deciding to employ members of the family, although there is nothing wrong with the idea in itself...

The governance arrangements will also differ according to whether a company is almost wholly owned by a private equity fund or whether it has a very dispersed ownership structure. In the former, the Board of Directors will meet more often – at least once a month – and members of the Board will be far more actively involved in operational matters than in a more conventional listed company.

The choice of Board members is of the utmost importance and top managers must give the matter a lot of thought. It hardly seems necessary to add that a position on a Board is not supposed to be a safe haven for the survivors of a business shipwreck, nor should it be offered as a favor in return for past favors. No, a Board of Directors must be made up of people who are capable of participating actively in the definition of a business strategy and the means of implementing it. As to the way the governance actually functions, it should be designed and fine-tuned to play its full part in the harmonious growth of the company.

“Governance should be designed and fine-tuned to play its full part in the harmonious growth of the company.

Inevitably, whatever the legal structure of the company, governance arrangements will depend very much on the customs, culture and legal system of its country of origin. But for all companies, governance is a way of adding value, provided

a number of principles are complied with. Most of them are a matter of common sense.

BUILD A SMALL AND COHERENT TEAM...

The first principle is that a Board should not be too big, at the risk of losing coherence and effectiveness. In choosing a Board member, it is important to consider his or her compatibility with the other members, as a Board must be able to work as a team. One of the tasks of the appointments committee in interviewing candidates is precisely