

F I F T H E D I T I O N

-THE- MANAGER'S BOOKSHELF

A M O S A I C O F
C O N T E M P O R A R Y V I E W S

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JON L. PIERCE
JOHN W. NEWSTROM

FIFTH EDITION

*The
Manager's
Bookshelf*

A Mosaic of Contemporary Views

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The manager's bookshelf: a mosaic of contemporary views/[collected by] Jon L. Pierce, John W. Newstrom.—5th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-321-01714-5

1. Management literature—United States. I. Pierce, Jon L. (Jon Lepley) II. Newstrom, John W.

HD70.U5M32 2000

658—dc21

99-43083

CIP

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, London
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, Sydney
Prentice-Hall Canada, Inc., Toronto
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., Mexico
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., Tokyo
Prentice-Hall (Singapore) Pte Ltd.
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., Rio de Janeiro

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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PART ONE

Introduction

Part 1 contains three pieces. The first, “Understanding and Using the Best-Sellers,” prepared by the editors of *The Manager’s Bookshelf*, provides insight into why such a large number of management-oriented books have found themselves in the downtown bookstores, on our coffee tables, and on the bookshelves of those who manage today’s organizations. Pierce and Newstrom discuss the rationale for this mosaic of contemporary views on organizations and management, and they provide you with insight into the nature and character of *The Manager’s Bookshelf: A Mosaic of Contemporary Views*. They challenge you to read and reflect upon this collection of thoughts and experiences. They invite you to debate the ideas and philosophies that are presented here. They encourage you to let these contemporary management books stimulate your thinking, to motivate you to look more systematically into the science of organizations and management, and to provide you with the fun of learning something new.

As a result of their concern that these contemporary books will be seen as “quick and dirty” cures for organizational woes, Pierce and Newstrom encourage you to read books such as Ralph H. Kilmann’s *Managing Beyond the Quick Fix*.

Several years ago Ralph Kilmann, in his earlier book *Beyond the Quick Fix: Managing Five Tracks to Organizational Success*, provided us with a valuable message, one that should serve as the backdrop to your consumption and assessment of the myriad of purported “one minute” cures for organizational problems and for the management of today’s complex organizations. Kilmann encourages managers to stop perpetuating the myth of organizational and management simplicity and to develop a more complete and integrated approach to the management of today’s complex organizations.

Many other writers have echoed these thoughts. *Fad-Free Management* (Richard G. Hamermesh) charges that managers engage in “bumper-car management,” in which companies bounce from one fad to another; *Instant Management* (Carol Kennedy) provides a (presumably tongue-in-cheek) “idiot’s guide to management gurus”; *Business Week* (June 23, 1997, p. 47) argues that “some of the most popular management remedies draw the highest rates of dissatisfaction”; and Craig Dreilinger (*Business Horizons*, November–December 1994) acknowledges that although management fads

can (and sometimes do) work, they soon pass out of fashion and often result in more disappointment than success.

In an explicit attempt to provoke your critical thinking about management fads, we have included (as Reading 2) a summary of *The Witch Doctors*. After systematically and objectively reviewing a wide array of popular management books, Micklethwait and Wooldridge conclude that managers must become critical consumers of these products. This means being suspicious of the faddish contentions, remaining unconvinced by simplistic argumentation by the authors, being selective about which theory might work for you, and becoming broadly informed about the merits and deficiencies of each proposal.

Currently two types of voices create “messages” relevant to management education. One is the organizational scholar (e.g., Edward Lawler, Lyman Porter, Charles Perrow), who offers us rich theories of management and organization and rigorous empirical observations of organizations in action. The other source includes management consultants and management practitioners (e.g., Andy Grove, Jack Welch, Tom Peters, Stephen Covey, Bill Gates) who offer us perspectives from their lives on the “organizational firing line.”

Traditional academics—students of tight theory and rigorous empirical study of organizational behavior—often find a large disparity between these two perspectives on management and organization. Confronted with the increasing popularity of the “best-sellers,” the editors of *The Manager's Bookshelf* began to ask a number of questions about this nontraditional management literature. For example:

- Is this material “intellectual pornography,” as some have claimed?
- Do we want our students to read this material?
- Should managers of today's organizations be encouraged to read this material and to take it seriously?
- What contributions to management education and development come from this collection of management books?
- How should this management literature be approached?

For answers to these questions we turned to colleague and friend Professor Larry L. Cummings

We asked Professor Cummings to reflect upon the current and continuous popularity of this literature. Professor Cummings was a distinguished management scholar, organization and management consultant, and educator of MBA and Ph.D. students. The questions we asked Professor Cummings are intended to help us frame, and therefore critically and cautiously consume, this literature. Professor Cummings' reflections on the role of the popular books in management education is presented as Reading 3 in this introductory chapter.

READING I

Understanding and Using the Best-Sellers

Jon L. Pierce and John W. Newstrom

For several decades now, there have been a large number of books treating various aspects of management. These books have been in high demand at local bookstores. Several individuals have authored books that have sold millions of copies, among them Tom Peters (e.g., *In Search of Excellence*), Bill Byham (e.g., *Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment*), Stephen Covey (e.g., *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*), Lee Iacocca (e.g., *Iacocca: An Autobiography*), and Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson (e.g., *The One Minute Manager*). Some of their books have stayed on “best-seller” lists for many weeks and even years. What are the reasons for their popularity? Why have business books continued to catch the public’s attention as we move into the twenty-first century? Frank Freeman of the Center for Creative Leadership suggests simply that we are living in the “business decade.”¹ Corporate America, he says, is back in good standing with the public, and there has been a resurgence of pride and hope in the business community.

We have heard stories about, and many have felt the shock waves of, downsizing, restructuring, and reengineering of the organization. We have all heard stories about the success of foreign organizations. We have continued to watch bigger and bigger portions of our markets being dominated by foreign-owned and controlled organizations. And we have witnessed foreign interests purchase certain segments of America. Perhaps in response to these trends, a tremendous thirst for *American* success stories has arisen. In essence, the public is receptive and the timing is right for the writing, publication, and sale of popular management books at bookstores everywhere.

A second reason for the upsurge in management books stems from another form of competition. Many management consultants, fighting for visibility, have written books they hope will become best-sellers.² Through the printed word they hope to provide a unique take-home product for their clients, communicate their management philosophies, gain wide exposure for themselves or their firms, and occasionally profit handsomely.

Third, the best-sellers also provide an optimistic message to a receptive market. In difficult economic times, managers may be as eager to swallow easy formulas as sick patients are to drink their prescribed medicine. Sensing this, the authors of the best-sellers (and of many other books with lesser records) often claim, at least implicitly, to present managers with an easy cure for their organizational woes, or with an easy path to personal success. In a world characterized by chaos, environmental

turbulence, and intense global competition, managers are driven to search for the ideas provided by others that might be turned into a competitive advantage.

Fourth, we are witnessing an increased belief in and commitment to proactive organizational change. An increasing number of managers are rejecting the notion that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” and instead are adopting a *bias toward action*. These managers are seriously looking for and experimenting with different approaches toward organizational management. Many of the popular books provide managers with the insights into new and different ways of managing.

In their search for the “quick fix,” generations of American managers have adopted a series of organizational management concepts, such as management by objectives, job enlargement, job enrichment, flextime, and a variety of labor-management participative schemes (such as quality circles and quality of work-life programs).³ Each has been widely heralded, frequently implemented, and sometimes later abandoned and replaced by another emerging management technique. As a consequence of this managerial tendency to embrace ideas and then soon discard them, many viable managerial techniques have received a tarnished image. For example, many of the Japanese participative management systems that are being copied by American managers today found their way into the garbage cans of an earlier generation of American managers. With the demand for quick fixes, there is a ready market for new, reborn, and revitalized management ideas. We encourage you to read and seriously reflect on the probability of finding a legitimate quick fix. The search for solutions to major organizational problems in terms of “one-minute” answers reflects a Band-Aid® approach to management, one that is condemned in a couple hundred pages by us and destined to ultimate failure.

We alert you to this managerial tendency to look for “new” solutions to current organizational problems. The rush to resolve problems and take advantage of opportunities frequently leads to the search for simple remedies for complex organizational problems. Yet very few of today’s organizational problems can be solved with any single approach. High-involvement management, the learning organization, and corporate culture advocated in today’s generation of popular management books may also join the list of tried-and-abandoned solutions to organizational woes. We especially hope that the quick fix approach to organizational problem solving that characterizes the management style of many will not be promoted as a result of this mosaic (i.e., *The Manager’s Bookshelf*) of today’s popular business books.

RATIONALE FOR THIS BOOK

The business world has been buzzing with reference to terms like *vision*, *paradigms*, *stewardship*, the *learning organization*, the *spirit of work* and the *soul of business*, *transformational and charismatic leaders*, *knowledge management*, *high-involvement management and organizations*, and *corporate cultures*. On the negative side, these new terms feed the management world’s preoccupation with quick fixes and the perpetuation of management fads. On the positive side, many of these concepts serve as catalysts to the further development of sound management philosophies and practices.

In earlier decades a few books occasionally entered the limelight (e.g., *Parkinson’s Law*, *The Peter Principle*, *My Years with General Motors*, *The Money Game*),

but for the most part they did not generate the widespread and prolonged popularity of the current generation of the business books. Then, too, many were not written in the readable style that makes most contemporary books so easy to consume.

Managers find the current wave of books not only interesting but enjoyable to read. A small survey conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership found that a significant number of managers who participated in a study of their all-around reading selections chose one or more *management* books as their favorite. Of the 179 business or management books identified in total, *In Search of Excellence* accounted for more than half of the books that were read by managers.⁴ In essence, many of the popular management books *are* being read by managers—probably because the books are often supportive of their present management philosophies! Many managers report that these books are insightful, interestingly presented, and seemingly practical. Whether or not the prescriptions in these books have had (or ever will have) a real and lasting impact on the effective management of organizations remains to be determined.

Despite best-sellers' overall popularity, some managers do not read any current management books, and many other managers have read only a limited number or small parts of a few.* Similarly, many university students studying management have heard about some of these books but have not read them. *The Manager's Bookshelf: A Mosaic of Contemporary Views* presents perspectives from (but not a criticism of) a number of those popular management books. The book is designed for managers who are interested in the books but do not have time to read them in their entirety and for students of management who want to be well informed as they prepare for entry into the work world. Reading about the views expressed in many of the best-sellers will expand the knowledge of both groups and enable them to engage in meaningful conversations with their managerial colleagues.

Although reading the 45 summaries provided here can serve as a useful introduction to this literature, they should *not* be viewed as a substitute for immersion in the original material, nor do they remove the need for further reading of the more substantive management books and professional journals. The good news is that the popularity of these books suggests that millions of managers are reading them and they are exhibiting an interest in learning about what has worked for other managers and firms. This is an important step toward the development of an open system paradigm for themselves and for their organizations.

We strongly advocate that both managers and students be informed organizational citizens. Therefore, we believe it is important for you to know and understand what is being written about organizations and management. We also believe that it is important for you to know what is being read by the managers who surround you, some of which is contained in best-sellers, much of which is contained in more traditional management books, as well as in professional and scientific journals.⁵

*For a discussion on incorporating these types of management books into management training programs, see J. W. Newstrom and J. L. Pierce, "The Potential Role of Popular Business Books in Management Development Programs," *Journal of Management Development*, 8 (2, 1989) 13–24.

CONTENTS OF THE BEST-SELLERS

What topics do these best-selling books cover, what is their form, and what is their merit? Although many authors cover a wide range of topics and others do not have a clear focus, most fall into several categories. Some attempt to describe the more successful and unsuccessful companies and identify what made them successes or failures. Others focus on “micro” issues in leadership, motivation, or ethics. And yet others turn their attention toward broad questions of corporate strategy and competitive tactics for implementing strategy. Some focus on pressing issues facing the contemporary organization such as social responsibility, globalism, workforce diversity, and the “virtual workplace.”

In terms of form, many contain apparently simple answers and trite prescriptions. Others are built around literally hundreds of spellbinding anecdotes and stories. Some have used interviews of executives as their source of information, and others have adopted the parable format for getting their point across. As a group their presentation style is rich in diversity.

Judging the merits of best-sellers is a difficult task (and one that we will leave for readers and management critics to engage in). Some critics have taken the extreme position of calling these books “intellectual wallpaper” and “business pornography.” Certainly labels like this, justified or not, should caution readers. A better perspective is provided by an assessment of the sources, often anecdotal, of many of the books. In other words, much of the information in best-sellers stems from the experiences and observations of a single individual and is often infused with the subjective opinions of that writer. Unlike the more traditional academic literature, these books do not all share a sound scientific foundation. Requirements pertaining to objectivity, reproducibility of observations, and tests for reliability and validity have not guided the creation of much of the material. As a consequence, the authors are at liberty to say whatever they want (and often with as much passion as they desire).

Unlike authors who publish research-based knowledge, authors of best-sellers do not need to submit their work to a panel of reviewers who then critically evaluate the ideas, logic, and data. The authors of these popular management books are able to proclaim as sound management principles virtually anything that is intuitively acceptable to their publisher and readers. Therefore, *readers need to be cautious consumers*. The ideas presented in these books need to be critically compared with the well-established thoughts from more traditional sources of managerial wisdom.

CRITIQUING THESE POPULAR BOOKS

Although the notion of one-minute management is seductive, Jim Renier, former chief executive officer (CEO) of Honeywell, notes that “there are no fast-acting cures for what ails business.” Recognizing that simple solutions are not likely to be found and that the best-sellers frequently present (or appear to present) quick fixes and simple solutions, we strongly encourage readers to read these popular books, looking less for simple solutions and more toward using them to stimulate their thinking and challenge the way they go about doing their business. We encourage you to not only achieve comprehension and understanding, but to ultimately arrive at the level of critique and synthesis.

To help you approach these works more critically, we encourage you to use the following questions to guide your evaluation⁶:

- **Author credentials:** How do the authors' background and characteristics uniquely qualify them to write this book? What relevant experience do they have? What unique access or perspective do they have? What prior writing experience do they have, and how was it accepted by others? What is their research background (capacity to design, conduct, and interpret the results of their observations)?
- **Rationale:** Why did the authors write the book? Is their reason legitimate?
- **Face validity:** On initial examination of the book's major characteristics and themes, do you react positively or negatively? Are you inclined to accept or reject the author's conclusions? Does it fit with your prior experience and expectations, or does it rock them to the core?
- **Target audience:** For whom is this book uniquely written? What level of managers in the organizational hierarchy would most benefit from reading the book and why?
- **Integration of existing knowledge:** A field of inquiry can move forward only if it draws on and extends existing knowledge. Was this book written in isolation of existing knowledge? Do the authors demonstrate an awareness of and build upon existing knowledge?
- **Readability/interest:** Do the authors engage your mind? Are there relevant, practical illustrations that indicate how the ideas have been or could be applied?
- **Internal validity:** To what degree do the authors provide substantive evidence that the phenomenon, practice, or ideas presented actually produce a valued result? Is there an internally

- Reliability: consistent presentation of ideas that demonstrates the processes through which causes for their observations are understood?
To what degree do the author's conclusions converge with other sources of information or methods of data collection?
- Distinctiveness: Is the material presented new, creative, and distinctive, or is it merely a presentation of "old wine in new bottles"?
- Objectivity: To what extent do the authors have a self-serving or political agenda, or have the authors presented information that was systematically gathered and evaluated? Have the authors offered both the pros and cons of their views?
- External validity: Will the ideas work in my unique situation, or are they bound to the context within which the authors operate?
- Practicality: Are the ideas adaptable? Do the authors provide suggestions for application? Are the ideas readily transferable to the workplace in such a way that the typical reader could be expected to know what to do with them a few days later at work?

These are only some of the questions that should be asked as you read and evaluate any popular management book.

NATURE OF THIS BOOK

This is the fifth edition of *The Manager's Bookshelf*. The first edition was published in 1988. Recent editions have appeared in Italian and Chinese, pointing to the international popularity of these books. The fifth edition includes many books that were not previously summarized, representing a substantial revision. *The Manager's Bookshelf* provides a comprehensive introduction to many of the major best-sellers in the management field during recent years.

Some authors have achieved such a level of market success with their first book that they have been driven to follow up their earlier success with one or more additional books. In response to this trend, this edition of *The Manager's Bookshelf* includes summaries of multiple books written by the same author. This feature provides

readers with a deeper and richer understanding of the range of perspectives a single author has, as well as changes in their views of appropriate managerial practices across time.

The selections contained in this book are of two types: excerpts of original material and summaries prepared by a panel of reviewers. In some cases, we provide the reader with not only the main ideas presented by the author of a best-seller, but also the flavor (style or nature) of the author's approach. For some selections, we obtained permission to excerpt directly a chapter from the original book, particularly chapters that are the keystone presentation of the author's major theme. In other cases, the author's original thoughts and words were captured by selecting an article (representing part of the book) that the author had written for publication in a professional journal. Here again, the reader will see the author's ideas directly, though only sampled or much condensed from the original source.

The other major format chosen for inclusion is a comprehensive summary of the best-seller prepared by persons selected for their relevant expertise, interest, and familiarity. These summaries are primarily descriptive, designed to provide readers with an overall understanding of the book. These summaries are not judgemental in nature, nor are they necessarily a complete or precise reflection of the authors' management philosophy.

Determining what constituted a best-seller worthy of inclusion was easy in some cases and more difficult in others. From the hundreds of books available for selection, the ones included here rated highly on one or more of these criteria:

1. *Market acceptance*: Several books have achieved national notoriety by selling hundreds of thousands, and occasionally millions, of copies.
2. *Provocativeness*: Some books present thought-provoking viewpoints that run counter to "traditional" management thought.
3. *Distinctiveness*: A wide variety of topical themes of interest to organizational managers are presented.
4. *Representativeness*: In an attempt to avoid duplication from books with similar content within a topical area, many popular books were excluded.
5. *Author reputation*: Some authors (e.g., Peter Drucker, Edward Lawler III) have a strong reputation for the quality of their thinking and the insights they have historically generated, and therefore, some of their newer products were included.

AUTHORS OF THE BEST-SELLERS

It is appropriate for a reader to inquire of a best-seller, "Who is the author of this book?" Certainly the authors come from varied backgrounds. Some have previously developed a respected academic and professional record and have subsequently integrated their thoughts into book form. Others have spent their entire careers working in a single organization and now share their reflections from that experience base.

Some of the authors have been described as self-serving egotists who have little to say constructively about management, but who say it with a flair and passion such that reading their books may be very exciting. Some books are seemingly the product of armchair humorists who set out to entertain their readers with tongue in check. Other