



The silent running



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Developing an innovative business strategy is difficult. Very difficult. However, the most difficult part awaits you at execution time. Often, you will find that your fantastic idea fails. Not because this idea was unrealistic, but because it was unrealistic for your company.

Blue Ocean Strategy

End of last week, we finally finished reading Blue Ocean Strategy by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne. We assume that for some of you, this will seem weird. Indeed, in [We respect your privacy](#) of May 2005, we already mentioned that we had bought this book at Amazon.

Two years after due date.

Beware, this has nothing to do with Amazon. They delivered the book nicely as scheduled. No, part of the explanation has to do with our chronically reading backlog. Over the past months, we have tried to reduce this backlog, but we only partially succeeded. At the latest count, we still have one and a half meter to go. Keep on trying.

However, part of the explanation has also to do with the popularity of this book. For various reasons, Blue Ocean Strategy has incited a lot of interest. As a result, it was not too difficult finding or hearing a summary of the main concepts and consequently, it dropped on our priority list.

And this was not too bad a decision. As with most management books, Blue Ocean Strategy's value proposition is limited to a few interesting ideas and observations. In this case, these concepts were really worthwhile reading. Unfortunately, this does not fill a book. So these 20 or so really interesting pages have to be complemented with other "stuff" in order to get to the obligatory 200 pages the average management book is expected to contain.

And this is not always the most interesting reading. In general, reading a complete book like this is a waste of time. Still, sometimes it brings you to some unexpected thoughts.

Fair process

At the end of the book, in the chapter that covered the execution aspects of your strategy, the authors introduced the concept of "fair process".



Blue Ocean Strategy
 W. Chan Kim, Renée
 Mauborgne

According to the authors, in order for your plans to succeed, you must engage in a process of communication and collaboration with your employees, in such a way that these employees get the feeling that they are both emotionally and intellectually respected and appreciated.

Emotionally in the sense that they want to be seen as a valued and respected individual and not being treated as a number. Intellectually in the sense that they want respect and appreciation for their own ideas.

Make sure that your employees have the feeling that they are both emotionally and intellectually respected and appreciated and, without asking them, they will go the "extra mile". If you fail to give them this feeling, even the most brilliant Blue Ocean strategy will fail.

How simple and how true.

Unfortunately, reality is quite different in most organisations. Often, we observe an enormous difference between the proclaimed level of respect and appreciation and the day-to-day reality. In the May number of the [Harvard Business Review](#) you can find some interesting observations on this.

Indeed, in the section "Forethought", there is a short article by James R. Detert and Amy C. Edmonson titled "Why employees are afraid to speak". In this article, the authors describe how they had to discover during one of their studies that nearly half of the surveyed employees stated that in many cases, they preferred "to keep their mouth".

OK, this might seem normal if you are thinking about your personal opinion about your boss. We know that our own personal opinion about our boss was not exactly the kind of thing we wanted to be found on the copier.

However, in this case, these employees were talking about ideas for the improvement of work procedures or business processes. Positive things, Things that every normal organisation is interested in knowing more about it.

Still, even in such situation, nearly half of these employees preferred keeping a "low profile".

We will not go into the details of the reasons for this behaviour. Still, we do not think that these employees really had the feeling that they were both emotionally and intellectually respected and appreciated. If you have such feeling, you will not feel restricted. You will talk. You will present and defend your ideas. You might even talk about your boss.


Of course, in such situation, the statements will be less colourful.

About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

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