

Here Matthew Jones, a current DBS MBA student, gives his verdict on

Execution To Die For: A Manager's guide to making it happen by DBS alumnus Graham Haines

When I was first asked to review *'Execution to Die For'* by Graham Haines, BA Economics & Law 1965–68, part of me was a little anxious. Being in a time-finite environment, during and after MBA exams and prior to starting the busy elective period, now was perhaps not the best time to get into a good-sized book, especially one that was not well known or immediately relevant. Ultimately, I asked myself, what could one book cover that the rest of the MBA literature to date had not? To my pleasant surprise, a startling amount!

So, what is the book all about? For those involved, directly or indirectly, in change management, strategic planning, business transformation, project management, and many other related specialisations, this is a must read! Tell me why, I hear you say... It is easy to read and understand, full of real case studies and anecdotes, and very practical.

Haines identifies 36 barriers to business plans developing into anything further than a pretty document in the office library. He answers the question, 'Why do most very detailed, well documented, flawlessly logical plans (which often cost significant resources to develop) FAIL?' The answer to this question is simple – poor implementation. More importantly though, Haines makes the point that far too often business planning, and the implementation

of those plans, are treated as two disconnected elements, often with two completely separate groups of people carrying them out, ie the 'planners' and the 'implementers'.

When failure occurs, the 'planners' blame the 'implementers' for an inability to carry out instructions, whilst the 'implementers' blame the 'planners' for ambiguous and illogical thinking, which can only be confined to theory and is empirically impossible. As many of us well know from first-hand experience, this account is not just limited to the private sector or a particular industry; it equally affects the public sector and all organisations undertaking change and/or improvement activities.

Haines solves this conundrum with his very creative Wagon Wheel framework which, amongst other things, promotes effective organisational communication at all stages of the planning process, creating two-way feedback that ultimately helps shape and adapt business plans according to their unique environments. In addition, organisational implementation no longer occurs as a separate process, but instead as a gradual and continuous process from the onset of the change initiative. The Wagon Wheel paradigm thus helps resolve and overcome Haines's identified barriers to the successful execution of planned changes.

Overall, this is an excellent book. The simple and easy-to-remember Wagon Wheel framework is well worth further consideration and may be the solution your organisation needs. Is this framework the end of management consultancy? Unlikely, but it can be said that those who implement Haines's planning framework will be much less likely to require expensive consultants to answer the question, 'Why did my business plan fail to be executed?' With Haines's *'Execution to Die For'*, business planning and execution is, in my opinion, triumphant.

My verdict?

A recommended read for all wannabe business planners!



BOOK REVIEW