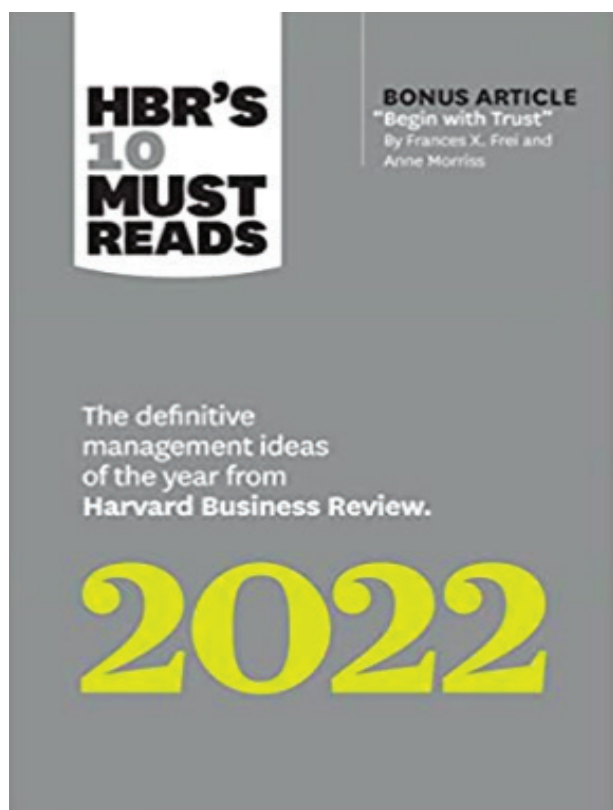


HBR's 10 Must Reads: The Definitive Management ideas of the Year From Harvard Business Review

Anuj Aggarwal*



The book begins with the bonus article **“Begin with Trust”**, written by Frances Frei and Anne Morriss. The two eminent authors have strongly emphasized and accentuated the need for inculcating trust in the organization among all stakeholders. Trust is initial and foundational to practicing ‘Empowerment Leadership’ that is unlike traditional leadership which only focusses on leader’s talents or charisma, instead this form of leadership necessitates and entails creating the conditions for people to feel empowered and fully realize their own potential. According to Frei and Morriss, there are three core drivers of trust such as authenticity, logic and empathy, lacking in any one of them will create a “trust wobble” which will serve as a hindrance in the achievement of long-term organizational goals.

The first article titled **“Cultural Innovation”** written by Douglas Holt is a cautionary tale for the dominant incumbents (Coca-Cola, Proctor & Gamble, Nestle Purina) in the market place as their deeply ingrained and entrenched brand authority is challenged by the new breed of “cultural innovators” (Blue Buffalo, Ford Explorer) as they have failed to formulate a strategy on how to respond to these emerging threats. The author spells out in detail the innovation paradigm practiced by established players, known as *better mousetraps*, which is based on improving the functionality, reliability, convenience or user experience of the products or line extensions offered by the existing firms. The author debates that in the long run, the new competitors will likely outsmart the old incumbents as they are driven by qualitative ambitions instead of quantitative metrics. In 1995, the great American academician and business consultant, Clayton Christensen coined the term “disruptive innovation” which aligns well with the strategic objectives of “cultural vanguards” who are

* Assistant Professor, School of Business Studies, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies (VIPS)

able to redefine the notions of value and transform the value proposition.

The next article entitled **“The Rules of Co-opetition”** written by Adam Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff underscored the need to develop a flexible mindset which calls for exploiting new opportunities through cooperative arrangements with industry peers who otherwise would only be seen as rivals and competitors. The authors have formulated a practical framework to guide the thought process of firms or governments to help them determine if cooperating with competitors is in the best interest of their long-term organizational goals. Further, the authors have outlined four categories in which the deal could fall, should the organization decide to move ahead with cooperation after weighing the potential risks and returns: Firstly, if the two rivals have nothing special but their combination could add substantial value, for instance, Apple and Google decided to cooperate with each other to create contact-tracing technology for Covid-19. Secondly, if the two rivals have something special, which they could combine, to get far ahead of their other rivals, for instance, Ford and GM decided to share their transmission technologies which saved both money, allowed their engineers to work on next-generation EV's. Thirdly, if a particular rival has a competitive advantage and sharing it will increase it even further, for instance, Amazon allowed its competitors to access its customers and warehouses through Amazon Marketplace, which made it almost indispensable for e-commerce. Fourthly, if one party shares its value proposition with the rival, only to reach its customer base, for instance, Google agreed to do an ad-placement for Yahoo in 2008 that allowed search-engine giant generate revenues and reach to an entirely new customer base.

The third article titled **“Negotiating Your Next Job”** written by Hannah Riley Bowles and Bobbi Thomason, encourages professionals to think strategically during their career negotiations with the employer. A successful career negotiation goes way beyond asking for higher pay or benefits, instead it encompasses demanding broader scope of authority, developmental opportunities, flexible work arrangements etc. The authors draw on organizational research conducted at the global level to offer four steps to prepare for career negotiation;

Firstly, one should negotiate keeping in mind long-term goals in order to fulfill both professional and life aspirations; Secondly, one must have clarity about the substance of negotiation and accordingly design an argument, for instance, an employee could either demand a standard increment/promotion or something that defies the organizational norm or literally reshaping the organizational environment; Thirdly, one must be armed with the maximum amount of information instead of walking blind into the career negotiation to generate desirable outcomes; Fourthly, it's critical to build a “coalition of support” with the key stakeholders to be able to enhance your negotiation through relationships.

The next article authorized **“Leading Through Anxiety”** written by Morra Aarons-Mele adds to the discussion around anxiety in the workplace and how we can effectively deal with this new variant of ‘global pandemic’ during uncertain times. She argues that anxiety is not always counterproductive, instead if directed meaningfully, it can make better leaders, make our teams more productive and allow us to respond promptly to threats, but if unchecked, it can drain our energy, weaken our resolve and drive us to make bad decisions. The article suggests a compelling prescription for organizational leaders on how to lead during nervous and turbulent times and lift the employee morale even though livelihoods are in jeopardy. It advises leaders to avoid use of negative language, taking erratic actions, displaying emotional volatility, being pessimistic or selfish in times of enormous distress as it might accidentally trigger anxiety in the workforce.

The fifth article entitled **“When Machine Learning Goes Off the Rails”** written by Boris Babic, I. Glenn Cohen, Theodoros Evgeniou and Sara Gerke sheds light on the potential downsides of the machine-learning, based AI offerings, across industries with special focus on healthcare sector. The authors argue that the difference between machine learning and other digital technologies that preceded the rise of ML, is its ability to independently make complex decisions and continually adapt with the booster of new data. As the usage of machine-learning based tools proliferate, the likelihood of errors, biases, losses etc., in the decision-making also increase due to a range of factors: firstly, ML based systems arrive at decisions based on estimated probabilities which

may lack accuracy; secondly, the environment in which algorithms were developed may vary from the environment in which ML based tool is operating; thirdly, the sheer complexity of the systems in which its embedded may lead to inaccurate decisions. Further, the authors offer a guide to corporate executives on how to manage and mitigate the current and emerging risks of deploying machine learning tools & processes and formulate appropriate practices to address these risks.

The next article **“Getting Serious About Diversity”** written by Robin J. Ely and David A. Thomas makes an empirically robust case for promoting gender and racial diversity in the modern corporate workplaces. The authors claim that today’s business leaders have largely ignored the abundant research done on how ‘diversity’ could add substantial value to reshape organizational culture and boosts its effectiveness, instead, they are articulating an unsubstantiated version of the business case, which believes that by increasing the representation of traditionally under-represented social groups would automatically yield results. The article builds a credible and powerful case for organizations to pursue the “learning and effectiveness” paradigm that entails cultivating learning orientation towards diversity and harnessing it to the fullest extent possible to maximize firm’s profitability. This approach calls for building trust, creating psychologically safe workplace, install systems to combat discrimination and marginalization, embracing wide range of views & styles and drawing on cultural differences to increase organizational learning.

The seventh article titled **“How to Promote Racial Equity in the Workplace”** written by Robert Livingston is a sincere effort to spell out an important issue which organizations often relegate it to the back burner as it’s deemed intractable. The author argues that with the right mix of investment, information and incentive; racial equity is an achievable ideal if organizations are willing to do the hard work to revise institutional policies & practices, rethink cultural norms and create an inclusive environment to effect change in people’s attitudes towards race. The author has designed a five-stage model to promote racial equity, which he calls it as ‘PRESS’ i.e. Problem Awareness (generating awareness about the problem in corporate workplaces); Root-

cause Analysis (understanding the reasons why the problem exists); Empathy (instilling empathy instead of sympathy among white community folks to create genuine concern for the people of color); Strategy (meaningful organizational interventions on the individual, cultural and institutional fronts); Sacrifice (investing time, effort & resources to push for real progress).

The next article titled **“Our Work-from-Anywhere Future”** written by Prithwiraj (Raj) Choudhury highlights the pros and cons of ‘work from anywhere’ (WFA) culture that has become an intrinsic part of knowledge-based organizations in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic. The author points out notable benefits of remote working to individuals (geographic flexibility, lessens commuting time, better work-life balance); companies (reduction of real-estate costs, tapping global talent pool with ease, productivity gains) and society as a whole (in terms of less pollution and brain-drain), while also red-flag concerns emanating from the increasing adoption of all-remote or majority-remote work practices by top corporate brands such as TCS, Facebook, Twitter, Siemens, SBI, Shopify etc. The challenges of implementing ‘WFA’ are enormous as it forces organizations to rely upon asynchronous communications across time zones, socially isolate workers, makes performance evaluation and compensation negotiations difficult, may potentially undermine clients’ data and create regulatory hurdles for the firms.

The ninth article entitled **“A More Sustainable Supply Chain”** written by Veronica H. Villena and Dennis A. Gioia has brought to light the sheer disconnect between the MNC’s expectations from their suppliers in terms of adhering to the sustainability standards and the reality through their supply networks. The authors argue that despite the commitment of MNC’s to procure materials and services from suppliers who implement sustainability practices, the lack of compliance on the part of their first-tier and lower-tier suppliers, exposes them to serious social, financial and environmental risks. The two authors have studied three MNC’s who are deemed as “Sustainability leaders”, they found a series of best practices that enable them to climb the sustainability ladder, while also discovered how difficult it is to enforce standards.

The last article titled **“How Apple Is Organized for Innovation”** written by Joel M. Podolny and Morten T. Hansen outlines the broad contours of Apple’s organizational design and leadership model which could be a useful guide for other companies competing in the rapidly changing globalized environments. The conventional organizational theory suggests that as entrepreneurial firms grow in size and scope, they must shift from a functional to a multidivisional structure, but Apple defied the norm, and CEO Steve Jobs put the entire company under one P&L by combining the different departments of business units into a single functional organization. The functional structure continues even till today when Apple is far more complex and 40 times large in revenue terms as compared to 1998. Further, Jobs laid down the three leadership characteristics that must be possessed by Apple’s managers at all levels: deep expertise to meaningfully engage, immersion in the details and collaborative debate during collective decision making.

The book triumphs in putting across relevant and contemporary ideas related to all branches of management, which serves as an effective guide for corporate leaders, business managers, policy makers and researchers.