

REFLECTIONS

**My thoughts on
the future of leadership
and business in India**

SHIVAKUMAR



*Dedicated to my mother
Mrs. Seeta Devi
for her infinite confidence in me*

REFLECTIONS

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Foreword

There are management books and there are books by managers who have been there and done that. Even the finest of theoretical thinking cannot replace the battle experience earned in the trenches and the strategy rooms. That is why I find this collection of Shiv's reflections on contemporary management very special.

As a young manager, Shiv managed and built many FMCG brands at Hindustan Lever, the ultimate marketing company in India in those days. Later at Philips, he revitalized the company's consumer electronics business in India. In his past assignment as the head of Nokia's business in India, Middle East and Africa, he showed how to turn global brands into winners in the emerging markets.

Moreover, Shiv is a very special manager. While there are many successful CEOs who are excellent at vision, strategy and execution, Shiv is somewhat unique. He can not only perform, he can also teach. He has the rare gift of articulating his ideas in such a way that others can grasp and use those ideas with ease.

What makes Shiv even more special is his willingness to share his secrets of success. I would describe him as an 'intellectual philanthropist'. Despite extreme busyness, he has always taken out time to teach and write. He has taught at his alma mater, IIM Calcutta and he has counselled young managers and management students at many Shaping Young

Minds Programmes of All India Management Association (AIMA). He has presented his ideas on topical issues at conferences in India and overseas.

Importantly, Shiv is an original thinker and says it as he sees it. He is not one to take the easier option of using off-the-shelf ideas or saying what may please his audience. He is so committed to management thinking that he always makes time to write all his speeches and articles. Every bit of the articles included in this collection is written by Shiv himself.

I am delighted that through this book, Shiv has decided to share his astute and visionary ideas with a broader audience. Importantly, he has chosen to focus exclusively on the contemporary management issues, which makes this book extremely useful to all practicing and aspiring business leaders.

Shiv has covered a wide spectrum of current concerns in these articles. I am particularly pleased that he provides answers to questions on overcoming uncertainty, filling the skill gap, using data analytics, succession planning, innovation strategy and many more such vital issues.

Shiv's insights are incisive and his advice potent. For example, he tells you to use data analytics as a new differentiator by acting on market data while it is still current. Another gem in these pages is about balancing future potential and present performance while picking the next-generation leaders. He also tells organizations to hold on to talented young employees by helping them manage their financial obligations.

Shiv is particularly sensitive to people issues and he has spoken and written extensively on the subject. I appreciate that he has been very vocal about the issue of job creation and employability of Indian youth. Importantly, he does not merely complain and drops cheap advice for the government. Instead, he offers practical solutions that can be implemented at enterprise level. Significantly, he warns against policies and

actions that would create low-income jobs that will be a waste for India's aspiring new generation.

I also appreciate that Shiv draws on his global experience to tell us about how India can make the best use of global interest in the country. Contrary to the intuitive differentiation by India, he tells us to emphasize how similar we are to the rest of the world to ease the outsiders' concerns. And, he does it tongue in cheek. He is not shy of letting us know that global executives joke about Indian executives' tendency to shun accountability by tying all actions to ifs and buts.

Shiv is not one to just throw opinionated advice at you. He knows his numbers. His approach is to start from facts and conclude with insights, which is quite a relief from receiving wisdom that is soiled by presumption or prejudice. For example, when he talks about growing business uncertainty, he lets you know that the average life-span of companies on S&P list of stocks has fallen from 60 years in the 1960s to mere 18 at present. He lets you know that on an average one brand has been dying every two years in many an industries, such as mobile phones and commercial airlines. This helps the reader get a solid handle on the issue being discussed.

I have enjoyed the book and found many nuggets of management wisdom that even the seasoned CEOs like me can add to their leadership toolbox. Shiv drives home his point with laconic wit. The expressions like 'Courage is one part logic and many parts magic' and 'Death by PowerPoint' will stay with me forever.

This book is one of the better additions to the contemporary management literature and I am sure that every reader will gain by reading Shiv's articles.

Shri Rajive Kaul
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