

Business Chameleon
A Practical Guide to Success for Managers

László Károlyi
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Foreword

We gladly accepted László Károlyi's invitation to introduce his book, which will undoubtedly be profitable reading for anyone taking on a managerial position. We are sure we can draw inspiration from this series of practical examples forming the chapters of a management story and so many real-life situations—some successful, others less so—offering tips and suggestions of some kind.

Management is a difficult art that allows, over time, across the seasons of the year and of each of our lives, teams to move forward toward improvement and success, while giving each and every member the possibility of growing and maturing.

In these few words of introduction, we would simply like to highlight a handful of parameters that we consider important to remember in the management of people. First, though, we need perhaps to get back to basics for a moment, just to remind ourselves of what it is we call *management*.

While the English term *management* has been adopted by the French Academy, which recommends a French pronunciation—we are unsure of the rule in Hungarian—it is interesting to note that the words “manager” and “management” are actually derived from the French words *ménager* and *ménagement*, which according to the Collins Robert French Dictionary mean “handling with care.”

A manager is someone capable of using the means available to achieve the best possible results. László Károlyi focuses on the management of human resources, and this is clearly where a true manager's real added value lies. We would like briefly to highlight just a few key ingredients of these considerations on management:

- It seems to us that to manage a team effectively, you need to acknowledge a variety of personalities and often cultures and therefore to encourage both individual and group expression to foster both diversity and tolerance—in other words, to facilitate coexistence. This has become all the more essential now that travel is so much easier today that people, especially within Europe, can very easily move from one country to another in pursuit of work. Facilitating coexistence therefore also means mixing new recruits and experienced staff on the same teams, where each will be able to contribute specific added value.
- We might add that a team needs optimism, objectives, and vision, though it is not always easy to provide such a perspective. A good manager will focus efforts on specific objectives, inspiring trust and confidence in others by setting them challenges that can be met successfully. This way, the loop of success becomes a virtuous circle that generates progress.
- Effective management requires an ability to provide meaning and give bearings by clearly situating each decision in time and in its context, by “telling the story” that led to these decisions, relying on the intrinsic need for meaning, transmission, and cultural enrichment.
- Effective management requires relating one's action to the outside world, to society, to the economic and sometimes political background, and trying to anticipate potential developments. Though by no means always easy, thinking ahead to the future can be a key to supporting one's decisions.
- Effective management requires listening and being attentive to what your team is saying—and also to what they may not be saying, being able to decode silence and the unspoken word.

- Last but not least, we should like to stress the need for managers to be recognized for their ethical and exemplary behavior. You cannot expect others to do what you do not demand of yourself. Consistency in what you say and do is essential. This is called *congruity*.

There is of course a lot more to say on this topic, but we shall leave that to the author of this valuable book. The above is merely a glance at some of the aspects we wished to highlight, which you will find addressed in more detail in the pages below.

Enjoy your read.

Gilles Schnepf
Chairman of Legrand Group

Edit Dumas
Group Vice President, Internal Communications and External Relations

Preface

„All life battles teach us something, even those we lose”

—*Paulo Coelho*

You must learn from your battles if you want to reach your goals. In my opinion, in today’s dynamically changing world, it’s more important than ever to expand our knowledge base and promote good decision-making by acquainting ourselves with the experiences of others and by analyzing and evaluating them. This book presents the reader with thought-provoking stories and experiences collected at the frontier between theory and practice, between the global and local, with advice drawn primarily from business life. Given that it focuses on people, teams, and efficient cooperation, I think that it may help readers make good decisions not only in the business sector but also in other areas of life. According to an old proverb, a wise man learns from someone else’s mistakes. Turning that into the positive, I would say let’s learn also from one another’s successes.

Many management gurus have described their own approaches as to what to do and how to do it in order to make an enterprise prosper. In the global world, at times of crisis, one must often venture into new hunting grounds or find a new way around a familiar hunting area that’s changed. Any idea may be useful at such times, and what’s more, it is almost risk-free to draw on the experience and ideas of others. Experience obtainable that way is obviously badly needed while facing protracted economic uncertainty and a foggy, uncertain business environment. Reliable planning is limited to the short term, and one is often forced to make decisions based on partial information, but nevertheless, there are and there will always be good ideas to help develop companies.

In recent years, I have often seen assessments from analysts sounding the death knell for the future because of the difficulties of the economic environment. These difficulties notwithstanding, I think Franklin D. Roosevelt had a point when he observed that “there are as many opinions as there are experts.” In many respects, economic developments resemble the changing of the seasons, with

inconvenient and more popular periods alternating. We're all entitled to our opinions, but we have to make decisions and develop activities in all seasonal conditions.

Transition is slow sometimes, as if time had come to a standstill on a sweltering summer day or a humid late autumn day wetted by soft rain. At other times, however, a gust of stormy wind suddenly turns everything upside down. That is how it is in the economic environment too. Farmers may note sadly the damage caused by an unexpected storm; nevertheless, they start anew each year. Of course, they learn the lesson and try whatever they can to protect the crop with new solutions against changing environmental effects. And if such guarantees take into consideration the environmental impact and do not exploit nature, the cycle can be assessed as one that represents a development system sustainable in the long run.

Sustainable, efficient, and effective operation under changing conditions: that is the ideal goal. That is the task of company management in the most basic terms. What you need for this is knowledge, experience, and someone to produce results—that is, a human being, the manager.

Knowledge can be acquired, but experience is a matter of time and opportunity. With time, our deposit is finite; there is nothing we can do about that. As for opportunity, the problem is the component of risk that goes with it. You can learn from a failing project or business plan, though naturally in such cases one would much rather collect the lessons as an external observer than the person responsible for the task.

That is why I thought it might be useful to many if I selected some of my managerial experiences of the past thirty years. The business environment in which I had to perform and the companies in which this happened changed like the seasons. There were sunny days, but there were also tougher, harder times. The experience kept accumulating, in local and global enterprises in Hungary as well as in other countries worldwide. Efficient and effective operation and making the most of opportunities—that's how you might summarize the expectations for a leader. What is needed for that, however, is neither machinery nor money but good managerial decisions and a good team. In other words, the key to results and efficiency is man himself.

To make decisions, you need information—not only the process metrics but also methods, analyses, and opinions. Sometimes good ideas strike while you're reading a novel or watching a movie. This is the arsenal of the manager, from which he chooses according to the situation. The theoretical arsenal, on the other hand, is complemented by experience.

—László Károlyi

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1.11 Make Your Decision, Here and Now

A certain number of failures is indispensable for success. If you have never been unsuccessful, that merely shows that you have set yourself excessively safe objectives, and you haven't tested yourself sufficiently to be able to develop.

—David Viscott

Aldous Huxley's protagonist in his book *Island* is shipwrecked on a rockbound coast. He loses consciousness but fortunately drifts to shore, where he is awakened by a strange bird yelling "Here and now, boys, here and now." And the mynah bird continues, "Here and now!" The protagonist is a British journalist, landing by chance on an exotic island-state, one isolated from the world. The inhabitants of the island save his life, and while he is recovering, they show him their happy country combining the advantages of Eastern and Western civilization. The utopian story continues as it depicts a totally disillusioned, cynical British journalist becoming a happy and wise island reform-thinker, capable of everything and in particular of surpassing his former self for a just cause.

From our point of view, the crucial thing is the mynah bird, which is "like the electric light ... They don't belong to anybody" and keeps repeating "Here and now." Make your decision, here and now! To the journalist's inquiry as to why the bird says those things, the explanation is, "That's what you always forget, isn't it? I mean, you forget to pay attention to what's happening. And that's the same as not being here and now."

But let's return from Pala, the fantasy island, to reality. The message of the mynah bird may be useful. Unless you pay attention to what's actually happening and make your decision at the right time, you will merely drift with events. And if you do that as the leader of a company, your company will also do nothing but drift like a forsaken ship on the sea.

I remember a case at our company. Sanyi had joined the firm two years before. After a short trial period, he was appointed logistics manager. The first year passed in relative calm, with minor operational problems, but he had a good team and his fellow managers accepted him. He thought he had made a good choice, and work colleagues agreed.

The new year set in with a new project. Significant volume growth had to be attained. Over barely ten months, the production volume had to be doubled without any increase in inventory. At the same time, of course, clients needed to be served on time, just as before. The tense pace, the tight deadline, and the sometimes scarce resources caused many disputes at management meetings. Then, as the tasks kept piling up, the situation became critical. Incoming materials were stored in the courtyard because they hadn't been entered into the books. Packaging materials were drenched by rain, so production could only keep up with orders with overtime and delays; and as might be expected, the phones were ringing ever more frequently as customers prompted us to fulfill their orders.

No one understood what was happening, nor did Sanyi for a while. The situation was analyzed regularly at the weekly meetings, where he presented the problems encountered in the logistics field and anticipated consequences. He said what he could do by himself and what required joint decision-making. Józsi, the production foreman, also supplied information, which he'd assessed and classified from his own perspective. There was no problem so long as managers took measures within their own fields. However, as a result of operating mechanisms being burdened by the many changes, problems affected several areas at once, and they continued to proliferate. These ought to have been decided upon "here and now," when they were discussed. However, because of data deficiencies and most often to contradictory proposals and opinions, no decisions were taken at the management meetings.

The second year passed, and Sanyi got fed up. He resigned. "Even a bad decision taken there and then, when you are analyzing a problem, is better than no decision at all," he said upon parting. Maybe the local managers needed this to snap them out of their slumber. The firm lost a good professional, but the team managed to correct the defective procedure in time.

Of course, one could think of many possible reasons why a manager might fail to decide upon an issue. Perhaps he doesn't notice that decision-making cannot be postponed any longer and he

should act, irrespective of the available information. Or perhaps he doesn't pay heed to what is happening here and now. Or maybe he does recognize how grave the situation is, but he is simply unable to make a decision. From the point of view of outcome, the specific cause is irrelevant.

It is important to decide in time.

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Conclusion

Adventures with thoughts, tasks, possibilities, and tools, beyond and within the borders of management and culture, end here for the pages in this book. But this is not the case in everyday life! This is a process that cannot and must not be stopped. It is not only to have a chance to be successful but also to be worthy men, as advised by Einstein: "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value" As managers, we need sophisticated values. We have to preserve our humanity and trustworthiness within the changes made.

Life is indeed changing continuously. New technologies, global opportunities, and sometimes threats appear. Challenges can only be risen to by active application of creative benchmarking, or "crenchmarking." Creativity has to be developed, and this is also well served by the method of looking around at other fields. "It's not the strongest of species who survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." –as Charles Darwin wrote and this is exactly like the competition in the business the most creative enterprises will survive . For sure there is a lot of good benchmarks to consider. But benchmarks are not enough in a global environment, if it is not combined with creativity and innovation the enterprise will not survive for long as they will not find the right answer to changing business environment.

As Charles Handy an Irish specialising in [organisational behaviour](#) and management, rated among the [Thinkers 50](#), a private list of the most influential living management thinkers wrote, "The most scientific breakthroughs—for example the theory of relativity—derived from borrowing something from one field of life and applying it as a metaphor in another field." I believe that the stories in this book will help the reader live with open eyes and an open mind. What is important is not only what we see but how we interpret things and how we recognize their essence. New knowledge and new experiences are all catalyzers of creativity, but one also needs them to be able to distinguish utilizable ways of operating from theoretical utopias.

Everything is continuously changing. If we have achieved our aim successfully at the end of a month or a year, life will set new goals for us. This is an interesting way of circulation, a wandering toward our aims, and it favors our self-fulfillment at the workplace and in private life. An appropriate metaphor for this is a part of Sándor Márai's book "*Füves Könyv.Gyógyító Gondolatok*" in translation *Herbarium..Healing Thoughts*, in which he explains that, in reality, we are always on our way or en route somewhere:

Do you think you have now built yourself a house—and from the proud peaks of your career you can observe the world with satisfaction? Don't you think that you will forever remain a wanderer and everything you do is a wanderer's movement of someone en route somewhere? You are moving among towns, aims, life stages and changes forever, and if you take a rest it is neither more certain nor for any longer than when a wanderer comes to a sudden stop within the shadow of a roadside apple tree for half an hour. Keep this in mind when devising plans. The sense of your

journey is not the aim, but the wandering. You are not living in specific situations but are en route.

Adventures among thoughts, tasks, possibilities, and tools will never end; they rotate like the seasons. We live in situations either as a manager or a private individual, but we are always on our way.

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