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A Book Review: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

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Introduction

The Stephen R. Covey's book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” tells about ways to increase individuals’ effectiveness and make them more successful. To accomplish these goals, the author proposes the practice of seven main principles or habits. These include: being proactive; beginning with the end in mind; putting first things first; thinking win-win; seeking first to understand rather than to be understood; synergizing; and sharpening the saw.

To combine all of the habits, the author uses the concept of a “*Maturity Continuum from dependence to independence to interdependence*” (Covey, 1989, p. 49). In other words, Covey anticipates that individuals go through each suggested step, meaning that all men and women start as dependents. Then, as they mature, people start to become more independent, physically, emotionally, financially, etc. However, interdependence focuses on arriving at the effectiveness's maximum through independence, and also emphasizes teamwork, which works to combine all talents and abilities. Based on these, Covey creates the concept of the ideal formula for highly effective people.

The most important part of the author’s formula is leaders who either directly possess and/or improve seven particular habits. In other words, these leaders ought to be proactive while, at the same time, be capable of imagining a final aim and arranging their priorities. These habits create the group of “Private Victory.” Another group is labeled a “Public Victory”, and it contains the statement that all individuals have to think win-win, understand their co-workers or employees' interests, and catch a synergy. All of these components cluster around habit 7: sharpen the saw, which means that “top bananas”

must always improve themselves. If these seven habits are practiced, individuals increase their effectiveness. Also, they also are the best guarantee of success in business.

This admirable list could continue ad infinitum, but there is one nuance. This picture of ideal organization or individual or world does not have any connection with the reality. Based on external resources, the purpose of this critique review is to evaluate the following ideas, such as the accuracy and effectiveness of Covey's philosophy. Then, based on the results, several recommendations can be presented which could improve the book.

Evaluation

From Ideal Covey's World to Utopia

The first part of the book, that title is “Paradigms and Principles”, consists the main information of seven habits and formula of effectiveness. To support that position, the author uses many individual, historic, legal evidences. On page 30, par example, Covey mentions that the United States democracy creates a paradigm, that changes “*standard of living, of freedom and liberty, of influence and hope unequalled in the history of the world*” (Covey, 1989, p. 30). Or there is another argument that principles are fundamental and cannot be broken. Here, Covey gives the example of the United State Declaration of Independence, especially a statement that “*all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator*” (Covey, 1989, p. 34). The picture with double faces presents another writer's point that people could have a different opinion about the same thing.

Saying, that all individuals want to live, grow and work in the world where there are equity rights, standard of living, freedom, liberty, justice, and each person could have

their own position, will be always right and have a support from the majority of the Earth's population. Unfortunately, this world does not exist.

The statement about the United States paradigm is approximate, and can be disputed. For example, Covey does not disclose the definition of the standard of living. According to the Human development report of the United Nations, the standard of living includes several components, such as sanitary living conditions; level of food consumption; living conditions; opportunities for education and culture; conditions of work and employment; balance of income and expenses; consumer prices; provision of transport; opportunities for recreation; the social security system; and ensuring human rights and freedoms (Human Development Report, 2013). The opinion that in the US was created an unequaled condition of all indexes can be appealed, because Covey does not give the source, which can support it. Fair to say that the United States of America is an unique country, such as others, but saying that in the US was created an unequaled standards is anticipatory. For example, the statistic shows that the rate of unemployment is growing and it causes the decreasing of living conditions. This suggest that leaders and people still need to do a lot to stabilize and improve the situation. Besides that, the global recession of 2009, and Snowden's scandal show the other side of the Moon.

Another statement about unbreakable principles can also be easily criticized, because there is a huge quantity of historical events or precedents, which had totally opposite effects. For example, Alfonso Capone's case shows that the principles can easily be broken. As it was mentioned by Capone's lawyers and independent experts, this case had an unprecedented judgment (Al Capone trial, 2011). Or the example of Franklin Roosevelt, who were the US' President 4 times, shows that the “unbreakable” laws can

also be broken. Moreover, Churchill's phrase about democracy, that “*many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time*”, comes to mind. Based on these examples, it is very difficult to mention that principles must be fundamental, because the life is more unpredictable, and will always cause changes and transformations.

What to say about the example of pictures. Nowadays, people less and less accept the position that people can have different opinions. For example, the politics around Ukraine demonstrates it in full light. Rather to say, that the world has the shade of unipolarity in any relationships.

Practical Application

The following habits, such as being proactive and think win-win, were selected to evaluate and analyze their practical application.

The author presents that one of the most important habits of highly effective people is to “*be proactive*”. To support this position, Covey uses the comparison between proactive and reactive people. In the first case, the author says that “*as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives*” (Covey, 1989, p. 71). In addition, the behavior of proactive people is “*a product of their own conscious choice, based on their own values*” (Covey, 1989, p. 71). However, reactive people “*build their emotional lives around the behavior of others*” (Covey, 1989, p. 72). The analysis of this saying creates a controversial opinion. On the one hand, this is absolutely true that people must act in accordance with their own life principles, regardless of the conditions and circumstances.

On the other hand, this position finds no place in business, or politics. For example, brokers cannot be proactive by definition, because they always should respond to market changes, and based on it do the following transactions. The same hold true for the majority of organizations, because all of them strongly connect with market's tendencies. Difficult to imagine the company, that can be independent from their customers' positions. More that that, how and what it can cause if the politics, who most of the time present someone else interests, will avoid the behavior of business or citizens.

According to the book, the habit “think win-win” means that “*all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action*” (Covey, 1989, p. 207).

However, this position can cause a wave of protest from game theory's followers.

According to this theory, there are two or more groups or individuals, that waging a struggle for their interests' realization. Furthermore, each group has its own goals and strategies, which can lead to a win or lose. Nowadays, there is a high level of competition, and adversarial principle or win-lose is more popular than win-win way.

Further, the majority of businessmen think that only competition can make the organization to be more effective and successful. According to Dock Trecee's article, the competition is “*is an ever-present facet of life and a driving force behind progress, and should be appreciated as such*” (Competition moves society forward, 2010).

Recommendations

First of all, as it was found, that the author does not give the definition what he understands by highly effective people. In other words, Covey provides seven habits, which can make the reader to be more active, and etc. However, it does not give the exemplar, neither the individuals, nor the business organizations. The interviews of

celebrities, such as Top Managers, or Presidents, CEO could more support Covey's theory.

Secondly, using additional sources and criteria could advocate author's position. For example, there are several indexes, such as Happy Planet Index, and Workforce Productivity, to reflect the living quality, and productivity of people. The Happy Planet Index provides the information about the countries, where is a high level of “happiness” or “life satisfaction”. According to the statistic of 2012, top three happiness countries were Costa Rica, Vietnam, Colombia, and “*only four countries have a GDP per capita of over \$15,000. The highest ranking OECD country is Israel in 15th place, and the top Western European nation is Norway in 29th place*”. It shows that there are different measures to identify the happiness. The level of innovations is a main indicator of the workforce productivity. More than that the highest level of innovations in the specific country shows that people work there much more effective, because it has the positive business environment for high level of technologies. It also means that the theory of being proactive could be modified.

Other than these two, the theory of extraversion-introversion also could be used by author. The main idea of the theory is a difference between two types of people. The first group of people, as extraverts, are open and sociable; they can easy go on dialogue, and build the relationship (Extroverts, 1999). Another group, as introverts, are more closed, thoughtful, etc. In addition, they prefer to have their own private space, rather than the society; dislike self-promotion. At the same time, both group of people have totally opposite position, mostly negative, of each other (Quiet, 2013). Based on these

theory, all Covey's principles can be acceptable only by extroverts, because of their nature, than by introverts, because of their specific.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that presented author's inaccuracy forces to assume that Covey describes the non-existent world, or a utopia. In other words, the author describes the ideal society, and business without deficiencies. In addition, he loses sight of global problems, such as crises, revolutions, recessions, which can make people to be slaves of circumstances. But definitely, using these seven habits may be effective for individuals, but they should also see and understand the world more broadly and deeply. In other words, people should think more realistic and rational.

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