

Epilog

The emperor's new clothes

Of course, I don't know why you read my book. Actually, to be frank, I don't even know if you have read it at all, since it seems one of the first things many people read when they pick up a book is its conclusion. However, if you're not one of those, and you have read my book, I am quite confident that you will have liked it ...

And I am confident of that because, well, first of all, if you didn't like it you probably wouldn't have made it to the end ... (unless you're my mother) hey, it is called "selection bias", remember! However, there is a second reason, and that is because the people who have read my tales before have told me they liked them.

For example, when I first started gathering my thoughts I began writing them on a blog. Nothing fancy, just using some free software, without giving it much publicity. But, quite to my surprise – I had just started putting stuff online to collect my thoughts and force myself to write – I saw my readership snowball, people started commenting and e-mailing me, and *The Financial Times*, *Business Week*, the *Washington Post*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Harvard Business Review*, etc. started to quote from the blog.

And I wondered why ... Till one of my readers wrote to me saying, "It is a very fresh, honest and atypical way to look at business/management issues that few people take the time to stop and analyze" and "it is a side of business seldom talked about". Then I realized that quite a few of my readers liked it because, for the first time, they had the experience of spotting that the Emperor had no clothes ...

People read my stuff and thought, "there's a naked man in the street, wearing nothing but a crown!" And (for some strange reason), quite liked that thought.

I'm sure you know Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy-tale. It is the tale of two swindlers who pretended to be weavers: "they said they could weave the most magnificent fabrics imaginable. Not only were their colours and patterns uncommonly fine, but clothes made of this cloth had a wonderful way of becoming invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office, or who was unusually stupid."

They then convinced the Emperor to let them weave him his clothes for an upcoming procession. At the time the garments should be ready, the Emperor sent his most trusted advisor – an old minister – to go and inspect the clothes: "The honest old minister went to the room where the two swindlers sat working away at their empty looms. 'Heaven help me,' he thought as his eyes flew wide open, 'I can't see anything at all.' But he did not say so."

Several other officials came to "see" the clothes, but not one of them admitted to not being able to spot anything: "So off went the Emperor in procession under his splendid canopy. Everyone in the streets and the windows said, 'Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!' Nobody would admit that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success."

"'But he hasn't got anything on,' a little child said."

The little child's observation was first dismissed with a smile, but it sent a whisper through the crowd, until the mood began to change, and finally the whole town cried at last: "but he hasn't got anything on!"

There is nothing wrong with being naked

And I guess that's really what this book is: it's a little boy shouting "he is naked!" Because the world of business isn't always what it

pretends to be. Things aren't as rational, well-organized and well-oiled as we're told they are. And we sort of know that ... But we also don't want to be seen as "unfit for office, or unusually stupid".

I've seen people read my tales with a smile – honest. I saw them thinking, "He's right; the guy doesn't have any clothes on ...". And isn't it a neat feeling to acknowledge that? It sort of puts us in a club, don't you think? "The club of people who have spotted that he has no clothes on". Shall we tell others about it? Hmmmm, you know what, let them figure it out for themselves. When they do, I tell you, it will be quite a relief: "I am not unusually stupid after all; it is just how the world works!"

But let me add one thing: there is nothing wrong with being naked (it is just the crown that makes you look silly). The world of business runs as it does. It is sometimes silly, it doesn't always work, but let's at least admit that we are all naked, so that perhaps we can start changing some stuff when it gets cold.

Because some things do need changing. Over the past few years, we have seen that companies that at one point are the darlings of the stock-market and the topic of many business books and management seminars often become the villains of the corporate world a few years later. For most people, it is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. How do you know the advice provided in a business book or seminar is fair and reasonable, or whether it comes from tomorrow's Enrons, Lehmans, and Worldcoms? Whose knowledge can you still trust? How do you know that today's advice and cases will not be soon heralded as the epitome of *mismanagement*?

I think that is why people seem to like my book too – although my publisher told me not to tell you this (she thought you'd be bored, and might stop reading, but, hey, it is the last bit of the book anyway!): it is based on rigorous research from management science, conducted at the top business schools from around the world. It is not some bullshitty book that tells you the author's personal view on how to make your organization scream, how to manage your way to the pot of gold at the end

of the market rainbow, or lead your company (with vision!) into a glorious path of unabiding growth. Don't get me wrong, some of these "how-to" books based on personal observations are nice, interesting, original, and sometimes even useful, but personally I also like facts: what do we really know about how things work? And I guess I am not the only one.

But – admittedly – of course this book represents my personal view as well. Yes, it is based on solid research and verifiable facts, but I have chosen which facts to present to you and what research to report; because what goes on in the world of top business schools and management science sometimes also leaves you pretty naked ... Not all research is good and useful, and worth presenting.

I made a selection of what I thought was intriguing and important, and that is what I put in this book. I offer it to you as my crown. Please wear it with pride (but for God's sake, put some clothes on!).