

Praise for

Speed Lead

“We all want our companies to be faster, simpler and easier to run—this refreshing blend of challenging ideas and practical tools shows us how.”

*Karl Kahofer, Group President Rubbermaid/IRWIN Group
Europe & Asia Pacific*

“Great management and leadership includes application of a lot of common sense. This book contains the sort of practical help and guidance that you can dip into and refresh your common sense quotient. Keep it close!”

Christine Betts, Senior Director, Audience Marketing, Microsoft

“A much needed new look at managing and leading in complex modern organisations. Practical tools you can implement to speed up your company.”

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“SPEED is the key word for companies in the Asia Pacific Rim: China, Japan and Korea. Kevan’s remarkable new book comes from his long practical experience and is based on Creativity and Innovation, Simplicity, and Ease of applicability for managers of global companies. New tools and techniques from this book can be applied in many different countries without any cultural difference.”

*Professor Jae Ho Park, Founder of GRCIOP and Professor of
IO Psychology at Yeungnam University, South Korea*

“Organizations are getting ever more complex. Globalization, technology and scale can lead to growth and success, but they also bring dysfunctional baggage. Kevan shows how to get off the organizational ‘hamster wheel’ and focus on what is important.”

*Geoff Armstrong, Director General, Chartered Institute of
Personnel and Development*

Speed Lead

Faster, Simpler Ways
to Manage
People, Projects, and Teams
in Complex Companies

KEVAN HALL



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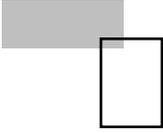
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Introduction

I meet some great people in my job: smart, keen, and self-motivated. They are as well educated, trained, and focused as any in history. They are more diverse than ever before and equipped with startling levels of technology to help them do their jobs. They work for world-class companies but are frustrated that, as their companies grow, they become more complex: slower, harder, and more expensive to run, and less satisfying to work in. This book is about how to simplify the way we work together in complex companies to increase speed, make them easier and less expensive to run, and provide a more satisfying place to work—speed, ease, and satisfaction.

Talented people, globalization, and information technology have combined to create an unprecedented period of growth and much higher levels of integration inside large companies. Unfortunately, as companies become more complex they start to slow down. The fast, entrepreneurial spirit of the old days begins to erode. People have to cooperate with diverse colleagues in many locations, control different business lines and functions, coordinate complex activities, and cope with the sheer scale of the organization. Eventually this complexity starts to undermine what made the company successful in the first place:

- Activity slows down and people find it increasingly difficult to make decisions and get things done.
- The organization becomes difficult, expensive, and time consuming to run. People spend more time and resources on sorting out internal complexity and less on customers and competition.
- The company becomes a messy and less satisfying place to work. The spirit people enjoyed in the early days is hard to maintain.

As the internal world of an organization starts to slow down, the external world moves faster than ever. Every year we need to deliver better, faster, and at lower cost. If we don't, our customers can usually find someone who will.

In this book I introduce some challenging ideas and practical tools to simplify the way people work together in order to avoid the negative consequences of complexity. When you implement this approach, you should expect to see significant improvements in three main areas:

- **Speed**—up to 25% faster delivery by complex teams and projects. At a strategic level, speed delivers faster innovation, faster improvement activities, reduced time to market, and higher levels of delivery for the same resources.
- **Ease**—by making the organization easier to run you can reduce the time and expense of unnecessary cooperation, control, and communication by up to 20%. You can redirect these unproductive overheads and administration resources to things that build productivity.
- **Satisfaction**—improve the satisfaction of team members by 10–20%. Greater job satisfaction correlates with higher motivation, increased performance, and a reduction in staff turnover.

Unlearning traditional management skills

When my colleagues and I were working with talented people in many of the world's most admired companies, we discovered to our surprise that the highlight of our remote and virtual teams training was in deciding where *not* to be a team. The most useful elements of our communications training were helping people communicate *less*. We found that managers were more successful when they *gave up* control to their people; and we found that there was sometimes *too much* investment in the wrong types of community and team spirit. We began by training people to cope better with complexity; we learned that it was better to cut through it.

Initially we resisted this learning. We had all developed our skills in world-class companies such as Procter & Gamble, Mars, and GE. We had learnt the importance of teamwork, communication, and control. We had all been successful managers but had chosen to leave the large corporate world to escape its complexity and constraints and achieve more flexibility, challenge, and control over our own lives.

We came to realize that the traditional line management skills that had made us successful early in our careers were holding us back in a more complex world. We learnt new skills ourselves and, by working with hundreds of real teams, we evolved different ways of working to reduce and cope with complexity.

The 4Cs

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The book is organized around 4Cs, all major sources of organizational delay, cost, and dissatisfaction: Cooperation, Communication, Control, and Community. In each of these areas I show why traditional ways of working have become too complex to cope. I propose some simpler methods and tools for working together to deliver results faster, without unnecessary costs, and with improved job satisfaction.

COOPERATION

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As organizations grow and work becomes more complex, there is more need to cooperate to get things done. In large companies, we have to cooperate with colleagues from other departments, locations, cultures, and time zones. We need to build trust and good working relationships with diverse groups of people whom we may never meet face to face.

These increasingly complicated connections are a major source of confusion and delay. As a result, managers in complex organizations are spending over half of their time in meetings (either face to face

or through technology) and on teamwork. They think half of this time is wasted.

The top 25 companies in the Fortune 500 alone employ over 6.5 million people—more than the population of Denmark. The average company in this group has 250,000 employees, of which perhaps 20% experience high levels of meetings and teamwork. So if half the time is wasted, every day each of these companies employs around 12,500 managers to do nothing else but sit in unnecessary meetings and teams—and they hate it.

There are two big opportunities to cut through the complexity and constraint caused by unnecessary cooperation:

- Teamworking has become a slow and expensive way to cooperate. There are simpler, faster ways to work together that are less expensive to run and more satisfying for the people involved. I provide tools to help you diagnose which style of cooperation works for you.
- Meetings are a huge source of waste and frustration. Most writing and training focuses on how to make the traditional meeting process more efficient. I focus on how not to have meetings in the first place and, if you must have a meeting, how to replace “death by PowerPoint” with a much more engaging, fast, and participative approach.

COMMUNICATION

The amount of communication in companies has rocketed in recent years. In general, the quality of communication has fallen at the same time. The perceived need to coordinate and the easy availability of communication technology mean that managers in complex organizations now receive over 130 incoming messages per day. This number is rising fast as new technologies become available. Expect the number of messages you receive to double in the next four years unless you take control of communication *now*.

One example: Email is a great tool, but managers tell us that many emails are a complete waste of time. They delete about 25% of

incoming emails without ever reading them. This means that each of our average top 25 Fortune companies is paying someone to write, send, store, and delete over 250 million pointless emails every year. One major technology company has estimated that 20% of all staff time is spent dealing with emails. If 25% are pointless, this means that 1,600 staff are permanently dedicated to unnecessary emails.

There are three big opportunities for reducing the torrent of unnecessary communication and improving the quality of what remains:

- Disconnecting from the communication that people do not need to be involved in.
- Focusing the content of communication on what the person receiving it actually needs to know. Some good old-fashioned communication principles seem to have got lost in the age of “reply to all.”
- Learning to choose and use communications technology more effectively, to select or combine technologies to benefit from their strengths and avoid their weaknesses.

CONTROL

As organizations grow, they tend to increase control. They create powerful central functions to coordinate activities. They implement rules and systems to maintain the feeling of control that they were used to in simpler times.

Information and communication technologies mean that we *can* control to a higher level of precision, over greater distances, and much more quickly than we could in the past—but that does not mean we *should*. Overcontrol leads to micromanagement and a lack of empowerment and local responsiveness. When your head office is in a different country and time zone, it can quickly become out of touch with local priorities and realities. Managers tell us that control in their companies is increasing at the expense of flexibility, speed, and responsiveness.

There are three important lessons about how to clarify and shorten the lines of control:

- To control things centrally we need to understand them centrally. Complex (particularly global) organizations usually have greater operational understanding at the local level. We have developed tools to move control to where it should be to give the fastest and most effective results.
- Escalating decisions to the center always introduces delay and extra cost and is often a sign of insufficient confidence in local capability.
- People don't like to be controlled and often resist it; they prefer and expect autonomy.

COMMUNITY

In the past, a sense of community, trust, and team spirit was often a free by-product of being in the same location as our colleagues. In contrast, building community in organizations on multiple sites, and especially in global companies, is expensive and time consuming. It works best when we get face to face, so travel becomes a major expense. A study of 89 travel managers by Accenture for American Express in 2004 found an average air travel spend of just under \$30 million each. This represents an average of 65,000 business trips a year for each of these companies. It takes no account of taxis, hotels, time, and other travel expenses.

There are four important aspects to managing the ties of community:

- Trust is essential to cooperation, but complex organizational structures often create tensions and divided loyalties that can work against the best interests of the company.
- Community is no longer a free by-product of location, you have to build it consciously, and there are simple principles and practical tools to help you do this.

- Not all community is worth having—it is expensive and time consuming to build, so you need to focus your investment.
- When it comes to designing a corporate culture to encourage speed and cooperation, there *is* a right answer.

It's not what you know, it's what you do

A consistent theme throughout this book is the need for selective decentralization. There are powerful pressures toward centralization when global businesses are formed through growth, acquisition, or increased internal integration. These large organizations feel risky; we have to manage and rely on people we have never met from different cultures and in many locations. Our traditional attitudes to control and trust are undermined by the scale and complexity of the business. Hundreds of thousands of years of relying on face-to-face relationships and communication are swept away when we can only communicate through technology. Managers often compensate for their uncertainty by increasing control and caution.

We need to find far simpler ways to manage people, projects, and teams in complex companies. The purpose of this book is to provide some of them. Oscar Wilde once wrote, “I didn’t have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.” It took us over 10 years of trial and error to reduce these tools to their essence. We believe that busy managers are more likely to remember and use easy, clear tools.

You will see some new ideas and some traditional common-sense ideas repackaged for simple implementation in complex teams. All of the value is in the implementation—it’s not what you *know* that counts in management, it’s what you *do*.

This book costs about the same as a day’s parking on your next business trip, the coffee break at your next meeting, or the cost of a 25-minute transatlantic mobile phone call. It could be the best investment you ever made—but only if you implement the ideas.

Good luck!