

GOOD TO GREAT:

Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Some Others Don't

By Jim Collins

Reviewed by:

Zaenuddin Hudi Prasajo

(Pontianak State College of Islamic Studies)

The book consists of nine chapters explaining the concept of Good to Great. Starting from emphasizing that “good is the enemy of great”, Jim Collins provides great explanations as well as arguments of why his concept is very important for leaders who want to be successful in their efforts of building “enduring results” of their companies, organizations, or institutions. He in detail explains four principles underlining the framework of good to great. There are disciplined people (level 5 leadership and first who, then what concepts), disciplined thought (confront the brutal facts and the Hedgehog concepts), disciplined action (culture of discipline and the flywheel concepts), and building greatness to last (clock building, not the time telling and preserve the core/stimulate progress concepts). For further analysis of the Good to Great, I will shortly summarize the concept of how to make something good to be great explained in the book in the following section. I will also conclude this paper by commenting on the concept as my critique toward the theory of Good to Great.

The main concept of the book is the explanation of a series of principles for how to achieve greatness. Good is different from great. Great is distinguished from good. And to make a company or institution or organization become great, there some input variables that should be provided and passed through. This is what Collins calls “what inside the black box.” Besides other concepts as shown at Diagram-A in the end of this paper, the first and foremost requirement of great organizations, according to this book, is to have great leaders. The good to great framework strongly focuses on the roles of leaders in running organizations. Based on the empirical data and the discussion on theories about leadership and other aspects related to it as the findings of his research project, Jim Collins proposes a concept of leadership that is “the most provocative of the whole study”: “Level 5 leadership.”

LEVEL 5 LEADERSHIP

Level 5 leadership is a new concept discovered from the research findings.

The name is given after Jim Collins and his colleagues do not have a term that can represent best of the concept. Finally they decide to add one more level of leaderships after level 1 to 4. Leaders in this level are not high-profile people with big personalities leading them to become celebrities. They are also not those without ambition and self-interest. But level 5 leaders are those who “blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will.” They channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. They are incredibly ambitious, but their ambitious is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves. Level 5 leaders should be the top level of hierarchy of capabilities, setting up their successors for even greater success in the next generation, displaying a compelling modesty, self-effacing and understated, fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results, acknowledging that success is the results of other factors than themselves and taking full responsibility when things go poorly. Although most people are in the level 1, many people have the potential to become level 5 leaders.

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK

Jim Collins spends five years working with his colleagues on his research project and finishing this book. This is to say that the idea of Good to Great is not only based on theoretical analysis but also comes from empirical data taken from various experiences from the field. The combination between theory analysis and empirical data has given this book a strong basic assumption to the readers of the validity of Good to Great theory. Moreover, although it is based on “American companies contexts” the book also shows readers that Good to Great is a grounded research theory that to some extends can be applied to other cultural contexts besides the contexts of business companies. The general theory of leadership is applicable not only for organizations in western context abut also for those in eastern context.

In general, the concept of good to great is very good. It has very strong basic elements of developments and innovations. The core idea is about understanding, recognizing, and knowing resources of ourselves as leaders and what we need to be successful not only for smaller goals-- individual interests, but also bigger and larger scale of goals-- organizations. In this context, I agree with Jim Collins that leadership is one among the key variables of the successfulness of organization. He even puts the leadership as the first and the most important aspect in creating great organizations. He has shown us how good to great companies gain their success under their great leaders and those succeeding after them.

The Level 5 leadership concept covers a lot of great aspects of leadership

that are great. For organizations with strong power on the top leader's hands, the concept will work excellent. It is because the top leaders have absolute power that gives them authority to fully manage and "own" both all assets of the organizations including the people. Moreover, they can easily fire those cannot work together with them. This style of leadership requires absolute authority to take wrong people off from the bus. However, this leadership concept will not work in organizations with less hierarchy. Cultural context also determines the style of management of organizations. For example, governmental offices in Indonesia have civil servants with their rights and duties. If Level 5 leaders find a wrong person in their departments, they have to follow the rules of firing the person that sometime do not allow the head of the department to fire the person directly. In short, this concept will not well work in bureaucratic organizations until it takes consideration of the cultural context of the organizations.

The concept of hedgehog is also great but not at all the time. Sometime leaders should have not only one expertise but more. Organizations need managers who can lead people within organizations to work well supporting the goals of the organizations. And great leaders also need other knowledge to support their goals. I would argue that great leaders should have some expertise so that they can supervise and control their right people to work on the right paths. Leaders also function as role model, teacher and "parents" who can give shelters to their right people. The more the knowledge, skills, and expertise the leaders have, the better. Another point of critique for the Hedgehog concept is that the leaders or individuals live in time and space. A leader should really think about the "change" of the time in away that competitions shift from time to time. Although Apple is great in "ipod" now, for example, it needs to have other great products in the future. Its leaders should think about the time change that means the opportunities and the challenges are also different and they need more than one best thing to deal with those challenges and opportunities. In this context, the fox (the enemy of Hedgehog) gives me ideas of a hardworking person. A fox always thinks how to attack the Hedgehog. It is a figure that never gives up achieving its goals. It likes to experience and does trial and error. It just needs to organize itself in order to get better results.

Discipline is another point that I also strongly agree with the good to great framework. Moreover, I would argue that discipline is not only important for the successful of individuals and leaders in an organization, but also crucial for every individual who want to be successful. This is very important issue I want to emphasize here since every individual is a leader. Prophet Muhammad says, "Everyone is a leader responsible to lead themselves." The successfulness

of organization is also based on the successfulness of individuals within the organizations. This book even emphasizes that discipline should be in three aspects: disciplined people who have disciplined thoughts that can be discipline is their actions. Culture of discipline becomes the first key variable not only for leaders of organizations but also for every individual within organizations.

The culture of discipline also supports the theory of good to great to build to last. If everyone is discipline in keeping the great results and successful in sustaining the disciplines in the three aspects—people, thoughts, and actions, the organizations will reach built to last level. Hardworking needs to be emphasized for built to last level. However, the culture of discipline needs to be supported by consistency and coherency. These two aspects are very crucial in sustaining successfulness, even for transforming from great to enduring results. For great leaders, the question then is “how to create a culture of responsibility?” I believe that responsibility is the underline of the productive relationships among individuals. Then great leaders will have to add a serious attention in creating the culture of responsibility within the culture of discipline. This book really needs to talk deeply about how to educate individuals within organizations to build responsible relationships within organizations. The discipline for people in the organizations in dealing with other people out of the organizations also needs to be addressed seriously. This is to answer the question “how to build credibility of organization among its partners and competitors.

Finally, this book does not really talk about the concept of solving problems by great leaders in organizations except “getting the wrong people off of the bus.” In other words, great leaders just need to have the right people and get rid of the wrong people. How if the right people they have chosen become the wrong people on the way? How to deal with conflict with other people outside of their organizations? These questions really address the theory of human nature. Human being is a unique creation. Every single person has their own uniqueness. Human life is not as simple as what we think. Life is complex. In short, human relationship is not stable and it depends on many aspects of life. Leaders should have the capacity of problem solving and conflict transformation. As the nature of conflict that can occur at anytime and everywhere and to everyone, having skills of conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation is a must. Remember, besides other leadership roles, leaders in an organization also functions as supervisor, parent, supporter, encourager, and problem solvers (mostly with the involvement of others).