



Revival of the Fittest: Why Good Companies Go Bad and How Great Managers Remake Them

Donald N. Sull

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Will your organization still be here in ten years? It's a familiar story: a company rises to become an industry leader. Competitors try to emulate it. Analysts rave about it. The CEO's picture is splashed across magazine covers. Then the company stumbles, profits erode, and the stock plummets. How does this happen? Why do good companies so often go bad? More important, what can you do to prevent it from happening to your company? In "Revival of the Fittest", Donald N. Sull takes a provocative look at corporate failure and proposes a practical new model for effecting change that can vastly increase your organization's lifespan. Ironically, argues Sull, leaders sow the seeds of failure during a company's most successful times, when they make a set of commitments - whether to a core strategy, a key customer, or an innovative manufacturing method - that constitute the company's success formula. Managers become so married to the formula that they can't divorce themselves from it when the competitive situation changes. They respond to the future by doing more of what worked in the past - a phenomenon Sull calls 'active inertia'. Based on extensive global research into successful and failed transformations across many industries, "Revival of the Fittest" introduces a three-step model for making transforming commitments - actions that prevent managers from reinforcing old behaviours in the face of change. Sull identifies five areas in which transforming commitments can be anchored - strategic frames, processes, relationships, resources, and values - and provides diagnostic tests, hands-on tools, and real company examples to show how managers can: gauge their company's susceptibility to active inertia; determine which commitment is right for a specific situation; appoint the best person to lead the charge; ensure that the new commitment sticks; avoid common mistakes that can sabotage the transformation effort; and weigh the personal risks associated with leading corporate change. In an unpredictable marketplace, commitments can make and break a company. But Sull shows that corporate demise is not inevitable. Through transforming commitments, revival of the fittest is possible - and managers can make the difference. Donald N. Sull is Assistant Professor of Business Administration in the Entrepreneurial Management area at Harvard Business School.

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