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PANDORA'S BOX

I set up Armstrong Wolfe in 2011, moving forward in a challenging market that was struggling post-credit crunch. With this fresh start, I decided to plough my furrow in an area I had only previously tiptoed in and out of, that of business management and the chief operating officer community.

It soon became clear to me that this community was both misunderstood and undervalued, but as we began to harvest opportunities, it became equally apparent that we were one of the very few beneficiaries of the new regulatory era. In this period, the COO moved front and centre, taking on responsibility for the tidal wave of new regulation. To manage this efficiently and effectively, there was clearly a need for additional headcount – and therein lay our opportunity.

By 2013, the business was doing so well that I set a further objective: to become the global number one for business management executive search and advisory for the financial markets. I can say with confidence that we are now regarded by many within our community as the authoritative voice on the role of the banking business manager: chief operating officer, chief administrative officer, chief of staff, chief control officer and all roles embedded in their offices.

This achievement has been facilitated in part by the series of articles I have written over the past few years, with the aim of gaining a broader and deeper understanding of the sector in which I work and the people within it – our clients and candidates. This book brings together those articles. It is a cacophony of COO conversations, a summary of the opinions of a large congregation of CAOs, the observations of CCOs and the mutterings of those who look into this community from the outside, trying to understand it.

The book's readership will be narrow, I expect: the business management community, maybe those interested in joining it, the occasional accidental reader, and my mother Diana (I promised her I would write a book one day, although I expect she hoped for something rather different).

The ambiguous nature of the business manager's role means that my views and conclusions have an equal likelihood of meeting with disagreement as agreement from readers. However, I always intended this to be a Pandora's box – not offering definitive answers but rather fostering thought and debate. If just one new person gains an understanding of the COO community and begins to appreciate the career opportunities and challenges it offers, then I will have fulfilled my aim.

Maurice Evlyn-Bufton
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