

Good to Great in Context

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Abstract

Jim Collins' book **Good to Great** (2001) has created much interest and debate in academic and business circles. The highlights of the book featured in this paper, mostly in the words of Collins, are logically arranged to help comprehend the necessary connections among them. The paper also refers to work of other leading management writers, to either place Collins' thesis in context, or to enrich it. A critique of the research methodology adopted by Collins and the key assumptions made by him in the conduct of the study follows. The relevance of some of Collins' principles of greatness, to a Sri Lankan cultural context is also discussed.

There are five key areas of findings of Collins' research project. The guiding principle of a Good to Great Company is the combination of three key factors or considerations. The company's enduring commitment (what it is passionate about), its unbeatable competence (what it is best at), and growing cash streams (economic engine). The selection of a GTG company's business scope and its operating credo depend largely on the confluence of these three factors.

GTG companies first ask **who** should be in our midst, and only then ask **what** should we do - a reversal of conventional wisdom. GTG companies have level 5 leaders who have a unique combination of professional will and personal humility. GTG companies also have a paradoxical organizational culture in which freedom and responsibility co-exist. Technology in the great companies only accelerates growth, but does not create it. Careful application of relevant technology is the key, rather than embracing the latest technology, in an attempt to stay ahead. A GTG company's greatness cannot be attributed to a few defining moments or events. It is a consistent process of a rather slow build-up, and then, breakthrough - a case of consistently gathering momentum to unleash exceptional performance.

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