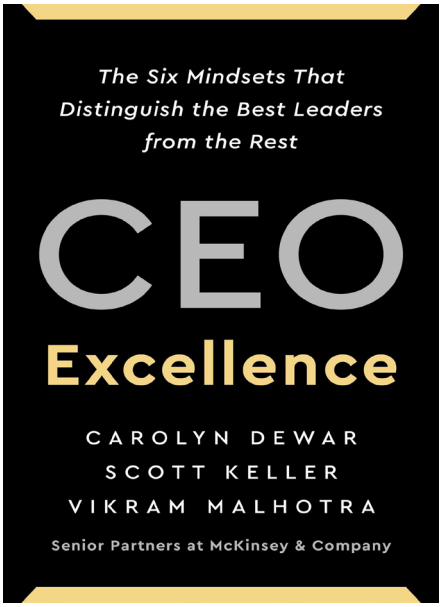
sdmimd
JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT

DOI:10.18311/sdmimd/2025/56005




# Book Review

## CEO Excellence: The Six Mindsets that Distinguish the Best Leaders from the Rest

*Authors:*
**Carolyn Dewar, Scott Keller and Vikram Malhotra**

Book Reviewer:
**Dr. J. J. Savithri**

Professor and Area Chair-OB & HR, Jansons School of Business, Coimbatore – 641659, Tamil Nadu, India

*CEO Excellence* written by Carolyn Dewar, Scott Kellar and Vikram Malhotra, senior partners at McKinsey and Company, is a must-read for leaders and aspiring leaders. The book is 120based on in-depth interviews with 67 most successful CEOs across industries. The authors distil decades of consulting experience and research into six essential mindsets that separate exceptional leaders from the rest. Rather than offering generic advice, the book provides practical frameworks, real-world examples, and lessons that CEOs - and aspiring leaders - can apply in their own contexts.

CEOs are crucial in shaping the performance of their organisation, especially the finances. However, being a CEO is more than producing returns. CEOs must stay current with various issues such as technology, diversity, and be mindful of the impact of social media on their actions. The responsibility is immense and sometimes even the most experienced fall short.

## The Six Mindsets

1. Establish the direction: Business is frequently considered by us as merely a contest of speed. However, it is truly about velocity. Speed that is aligned with the correct direction is required by us. This is why the business's direction must be defined by a CEO before accelerating.
2. Align the organisation: Achieving success relies on how well the organisation is aligned and executed. Organisational alignment primarily concerns "people issues." Often, we categorise people issues as "soft" and technical issues as "hard." Johan Thijs, the CEO of KBS bank, has accurately expressed, "As a CEO, you need to address both aspects. The technical side is the simpler part; the challenging side is managing people". The most effective CEOs adopt a three-pronged strategy to align their organisations - focusing on culture, organisational design, and talent.
3. Motivate through leaders: An organisation's success or failure can be attributed to the skills and interactions of its senior executive team. Any disconnection or inefficiency at the senior level is usually caused by social dynamics rather than intellectual deficiencies. The entire company is frequently affected by ego conflicts, and biases and opinions are more likely to be held by senior leaders. This fact is acknowledged by the most successful CEOs, and the required actions to guarantee the team's performance are taken by them. Their activities are divided into 3 categories: Operational rhythm, team composition, and teamwork.
4. Involve the board: Managing a group of individuals who possess the power to significantly influence your career can be an intimidating responsibility,

even in the capacity of a CEO. Nonetheless, boards tend to be largely ineffective if management lacks a well-defined operational plan to collaborate with them. The most successful CEOs take the initiative to cultivate a board composed of individuals with the appropriate skills and experiences. Furthermore, they strive to ensure that the board operates in an open, transparent, and efficient manner. Effective leaders undertake 3 essential actions to manage a board successfully: Fostering relationships, enhancing capabilities, and ensuring that meetings are productive.

5. Involve stakeholders: The role of a CEO extends beyond merely overseeing a business and managing a board. It is essential for the CEO to engage with all stakeholders involved in the business. As Satya Nadella stated, "The job revolves around customers; it encompasses partners; it includes your employees, investors, and government entities. It is about all of them, consistently". Exceptional CEOs foster interactions and maintain appropriate connections with stakeholders through three key practices: Social purpose practice, stakeholder interaction practice, and moments of truth practice.
6. Manage personal effectiveness: CEOs should keep honing their skills to ensure that they are on top of the game. The best CEOs are amazingly disciplined in ensuring organisational effectiveness. They focus on managing important dimensions of personal effectiveness- managing time and energy, adopting the right leadership model and preserving perception.

The strength of the book is that it is evidence-based and has an open and honest approach. The book translates the challenges of a leader into practical insights. Successful CEOs express a bold vision in a way that every member of the organisation understands and demonstrates. This shows that the role of a leader is not just about strategies, but emotional connection.

Another prominent strength is the importance placed on stakeholder capitalism. Unlike the other models of leadership that focused on shareholder value, this book highlights how modern leaders are judged on how they manage the interests of different stakeholders like employees, customers, regulatory authorities and society. This reveals the expectations from today's leaders.

The book talks about another important aspect - the human side of leadership. The segment on how leaders manage personal effectiveness is relatable to everyone, leaders and people who aspire to be leaders.

It indicates the pressure associated with leadership roles and how they manage through self-discipline, resilience and routines. The authors share personal stories of CEOs who prioritise personal well-being. It is clear that excellence is not possible without personal well-being.

Reading the book makes one feel that it is written for Fortune 500 managers than to any ordinary aspiring leader, manager of entrepreneur. Though it may feel like the examples and stories of leaders are drawn from some big companies like Netflix, JPMorgan, or Microsoft and hence is slightly far from the realities of smaller companies. However, with considerate elucidation, the core lessons are still applicable to different sizes of organisations and at different levels of leadership.

This book is a great read for

1. Those aspiring to be leaders and would want to understand how top class leadership is like.
2. The managers determined to improve their impact as leaders.
3. Management students who wish to learn from the experiences of CEO's they have heard about. Also, trying to connect theory to real world practices.

CEO Excellence is a leadership guide that captures what it takes to be at the top. The book helps in understanding the game in moving to the next level of leadership. The six mindsets framework captures the essence of good leadership, present a roadmap to everyone who aspire to lead with clarity, connection and courage.