

Skills for business and management

A book review of Sedgley, M. (2020) *Skills for business and management*. London: Red Globe Press.

Hazel Messenger

London Metropolitan University

Keywords: business; management; study skills.

Overview

This text in the MacMillan Study Skills series provides specific advice for business and management students. The book is designed around five key areas relevant to the discipline: independent learning, time management, academic reading, academic writing and group working.

The author brings a wealth of experience in supporting learning development in a university school of management to this publication. Although the title suggests the text will support business and management skills, the emphasis is on learning and preparation for assessments in these subject areas rather than on their practice in the workplace.

The book is organized in five sections, each developing one of the five key areas: independent learning, time management, academic reading, academic writing and group working. There is no indication of the level that the text is aimed at, which suggests it may be interpreted widely. As with many texts associated with study skill development, finding a suitable one is often a matter of personal preference. This text may find its way onto library shelves, available for the individual student, but it could be more useful in the armoury of the subject module lecturer or academic mentor, as they would then be able to customise the content to suit their own teaching or support needs at any level.

Structure and content

The text opens by considering the distinctiveness of business and management studies and provides justification for the five sections that form the main body of the text. Engaging with this chapter and the first section on self-management could provide an effective prerequisite for any business and management course or study level, as it would provide a common ground for academic focus during the 'induction' period that is so often dominated by administrative concerns. In particular, this first section emphasises the significance of self-belief and self-motivation, also indicating the crucial role played by focused reflection in their development. Helpfully, this section also makes reference to university support services, something that is often absent from study skills texts.

The second section, *Academic research*, consists of two chapters: *Searching for relevant texts* and *Efficient reading strategies*. The first chapter provides the reader with resources that will support their ability to explain business and management practice through the lens of theory. As with all of this text, extensive use is made of quotes from business and management students, and opportunities to undertake reflection or focused activities. It is widely accepted that students often find reading and finding relevant texts challenging, so providing tips here on using sources of information like lecture slides, and unpacking assessment tasks, are particularly helpful. The second chapter in this section provides detailed guidance on developing effective reading strategies. The approaches discussed include identifying the reason for reading, making notes, and then extending notes through further research. Mention is made of visual note-making, and it is a pity that this could not be extended further, no doubt because of publisher restrictions, as this has been demonstrated to be a particularly memorable form of supporting students' study skill development (Mills, 2019).

In the third section, Martin Sedgley provides the reader with four chapters relating to academic writing: *Essentials of academic writing*, *Understanding referencing*, *Critically analytical writing* and *Reflective writing*. Each of these sections provides specific examples and opportunities to practise. With a strong focus on grammar, including sentence and paragraph structure, as well as the use of vocabulary, it is this section that could be of particular use to the academic tutor or mentor who is less used to unpacking the detail of critical expression and enabling the student to identify areas for development. A particularly strong chapter is the one on reflective writing, as this topic is one that deserves

attention for long-term development. Reflection is often achieved at quite a shallow level, and taking the reader through strategies to develop more depth of reflection is a valuable exercise. It could have been useful in this section to include more on the way in which writing may develop from description through analysis to critical evaluation, and to provide links to resources relating to the use of vocabulary, which are widely available. Similarly, attention to the different forms of writing (beyond essay writing) relating to business and management practice could have been included, for example, report writing.

The fourth section, *Communication*, mainly deals with groupwork and delivering presentations, both essential areas in business and management education but both contentious in terms of learning and assessment, as they provide students with a minefield of tripwires. These two chapters unpack many potential difficulties, including conflict and personal style, and provide valuable resources for consciously promoting learning development through their operation. Having a focus on 'the ability to work effectively with others' provides clear justification for the detail included, for example, assigning tasks associated with personality style preferences. It was disappointing, however, to see intercultural difference used for the example of conflict as the prevalence of cultural diversity in business and management courses is one of their biggest strengths. The final chapter in this section, *Delivering effective presentations*, gives practical tips on engaging an audience, using voice and non-verbal communication to convey a message, and the design of visual resources. Again, opportunities and activities are provided to support learning and reflect on the practice of others.

The final section, *Personal development planning*, consists of just one chapter, *Making the most of your learning journey*. It seems a pity that this chapter is positioned at the end of the book, as the valuable information and resources it contains could have been effectively positioned at the beginning, alongside Chapter 1.

There are some areas that deserved more attention, for example, digital skills, their use and development; work-related learning and assessment; interpreting numerical data and using feedback to develop learning progress. More emphasis on these topics would be relevant to a text that aims to provide 'Skills for business and management'.

Summary

As indicated in the opening remarks, it is suggested here that this text would provide valuable support for academic staff, academic mentors and learning designers who could use the content to promote learning development in their own contexts. It could provide the supportive backbone for a particular course, so that students become familiar with the style that is expected of them.

References

Mills, E. (2019). *The art of visual notetaking: an interactive guide to visual communication and sketchnotes*. Mission Viejo, CA: Quarto Publishing Group USA Inc.

Author details

Dr Hazel Messenger is a Senior Lecturer, Management in the Guildhall School of Business and Law at London Metropolitan University. She has held roles as an educational developer and undergraduate and postgraduate course leader, and has extensive experience of working with international partners. Her research interests include curriculum design, effective pedagogies for development, leadership of transnational partnerships, and creativity in research.