his almost pocket-sized book gives legitimacy to the adage that ‘dynamite comes in small packages’. The lessons learnt from reading the book are wide-ranging and have consequences of long duration.

Managing organisations is essentially about managing human beings. Every activity in an organisation involves people, and people thrive on strong relationships. This book applies relational thinking in order to explain many of the challenges that organisations face. Organisations are a network of relationships; if these relationships do not work, the performance of an organisation declines. Between major organisations and the end-user of its services and goods lies a network of relationships that impacts on its success. The key to success for any organisation is to build relationships with end-users, suppliers, employees and stakeholders. Whilst it’s easy to copy tangible products of a competitor, exceptional relationships are difficult for competitors to duplicate quickly. It is the quality of the relationship that holds organisations together. To find out how successfully an organisation is able to market a product, is essentially to enquire about what relationships have been forged between executives, sales representatives and end-users of the company’s services. To investigate the risk posed by toxic emission is to question the relationship between company executives and members of the public who live near the production plant.

So, while no organisations can survive without policies, procedures and systems, it is relationships that bind individuals and teams together. From an individual manager perspective, it is relationships in the office that make the work of an office manager pleasant or unpleasant. Overbearing bosses, office politics, bullying and unhealthy competitiveness between individuals are evidence of dysfunctional relationships. Individual employee performance in the workplace rests on relational foundations - working amid supportive and positive relationships raises staff sense of self-security and enhances staff performance. Although the rent must be paid, money is not a substitute for relational wellbeing.

It is crucial to bear in mind that strong relationships in organisations do not automatically exist because an organisational line-managerial structure exists. The structure in itself does not provide the trust and mutual understanding that is required to build successful organisations. It is not the ‘paper’ relationships but the relationships in practice that make organisations develop successfully. Although e-mail, BBM, SMS and video conferencing are modern-day favourites, it is direct, face-to-face communication that is the weapon for effective relationships. Direct communication provides fewer opportunities for misunderstanding between managers and subordinates.

This book is not silent on relational managers during workplace conflict. At some point in conflict situations, one has to let go of the past, which means that an individual must cease compiling mental dossiers against persons who may have inflicted pain on them. This is not an easy task, to remind one that closure of a particular bad experience is indispensable in order to turn a relationship around. This is especially crucial in organisations engaging with several stakeholders. Managing stakeholder-relationships does not entail kowtowing to the major player, but it is necessary to ‘find’ each other on the basis of the essential need to maintain parity and equality between stakeholders, and to develop grounds for respect among stakeholders, which includes mutual willingness to identify and acknowledge any shortcomings.

Relational management is about managing the assembly of people and not about assembling an agenda, and is designed not to view people in instrumental terms. The lessons learnt from a careful review of this easy-to-read book is worth the effort and highly recommended, since it is relevant to all spheres of life, and spans many periods of a person’s life.

Mahomed Kamdar