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A Best Practice Guide to International
Business and Commercial Diplomacy

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MAKING TRADE MISSIONS WORK

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MAKING TRADE MISSIONS WORK: A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

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This book would not have seen the light of day without the help and support of many others. It is also the outcome of a process that I would call an example for how knowledge and insights can be the result of a gradual but steady and focused approach of students and faculty involvement. It all started in 2011 when I had done quite some work on the cross-over between commercial diplomacy and international business. I observed that one particular commercial diplomacy instrument seemed to have a prominent place as part of the entire set of instruments used by governments, namely trade missions. However, I lacked clear and in-depth knowledge and insights on how trade missions work, whether they are useful and how they are considered to be useful for commercial diplomacy purposes. This notion triggered me to initiate research projects into exactly these questions. I invited two of my graduate students of the International Management program that I was coordinating and content wise responsible for to join this initiative. And as I now can say, the rest is history. Altogether about 15 graduate and undergraduate students, three faculty lecturers, who wanted to get more research experience, and several industry partners joined the trade mission research program, which it turned out to have become. The program started off with basic exploratory questions and moved on to more explanatory questions, such as to what extent do characteristics of participating entrepreneurs have an influence of trade mission outcomes? All the pieces of knowledge and insights resulted in the development of a three-stage models and a perspective that considers trade missions as pre-dominantly a learning experience rather than the “traditional” view of a business deal closing event. The model was then field tested in an action research-based project with real-life companies joining in. Therefore, I am really proud of the entire research journey and its result: a very thorough, underpinned, and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of trade mission. I even dare to state that the trade mission research program turned my research group at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences into a national and international thought leader on commercial diplomacy and on trade missions in particular. Please note: every year altogether thousands of trade missions are organized by national, regional and local governments, and commercial parties around the world. Millions of tax payers’ money is invested by governments, and millions are paid by companies to commercial parties to join in a trade mission.

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