

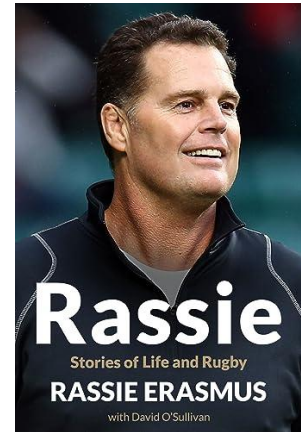


Title **Rassie – Stories of Life and Rugby**
 Author **David O'Sullivan**
 Published **2023 by Pan Macmillan**
 Review By **Ravi Naicker (Partner, Lucidum)**
 Review Date **August 2026**



Lessons for
 Directors, Prescribed Officers, Executives
 Governance Officers, Company Secretaries
 Ethics Officers, Risk Managers, Compliance Managers
 Audit Professionals
 Strategy Professionals
 Line Managers

Relevance	Overall Rating
9	7
6	
8	
5	
8	
6	



Synopsis

David O'Sullivan's *Rassie: Stories of Life and Rugby* is both a biography and a leadership manual disguised as a rugby book. It blends personal history, national context, and high-performance coaching insights to show how Rassie Erasmus became one of the most influential figures in modern rugby. The narrative follows Erasmus's journey from a difficult childhood in Despatch to becoming the strategic architect of South Africa's 2019 Rugby World Cup victory. His life story reveals how hardship, curiosity, and relentless innovation shaped a leader who consistently challenged convention and reshaped South African rugby culture. A defining theme is Rassie's deep desire to **see what others were not seeing**. Long before he became a coach, he spent hours analysing game footage and even purchased specialist software to break down matches — a practice unheard of at the time. This obsession with hidden patterns became the foundation of his coaching philosophy. The book also explores his willingness to take bold risks, such as appointing **Siya Kolisi as the first Black Springbok captain**, a decision that expanded rugby's fan base dramatically, especially in the townships. It highlights his influence on governance at World Rugby, where he challenged inconsistencies in officiating and used strict compliance with the laws of the game as a competitive weapon. While the book does not portray Rassie as exposing corruption, it does show him challenging administrative inefficiency, inconsistency, and outdated systems. Several themes indirectly touch on governance and risk through his battles with rugby establishments, his strategic risk-taking, and his stance on transformation and meritocracy.

Key Concepts:

1. Leadership strategy and innovation.
2. Risk taking.
3. Governance, accountability and team culture

Quotes:

"Over the past 30 years of working with Rassie, I've become used to his hunches and how accurate they are. I am a man of science, and this is something I can't explain. On the day we selected the team he said to me we must pick Morne'. He said it wasn't a hunch, he could see it"

"He predicted the All Blacks/Springboks score "the final score will be 31-22 to New Zealand, and after this you can call me Nostradamus ~ Jacques Nienaber, Springboks Head Coach 2023 Rugby WC.

Practical Tips & Things to Think About

For Leaders

- Build emotional connection before strategy - Using adversity as a catalyst for learning - Innovate deliberately, challenge norms when they no longer serve the mission - Communicate with radical honesty to build trust - Know your people deeply; tailor leadership to individuals.

For Teams

- Create shared meaning: alignment is more powerful than instruction - Embrace diversity as a strength multiplier - Stay adaptable, shift tactics quickly when conditions change - Celebrate small wins to build momentum.

For Organisations

- Invest in talent pathways and succession planning - Balance transformation with performance, they reinforce each other - Use technology to enhance decision-making, not replace intuition - Build systems that survive leadership turnover.

Think About

- How serious are leaders on building emotional connection before strategy?
- Innovation is closely linked to taking risk for rewards – Have we practically set our risk appetite and tolerance levels?
- Is the power of diversity being fully realised in a team environment?
- Do organisations do enough to treat staff as employee numbers rather than real people?
- Do organisations invest enough in talent pathways and succession planning, including partnerships with universities and colleges?

Contact Us

www.lucidum.africa

Christelle Marais - Executive Director

+27 (0) 82 453 7948

christelle@lucidum.africa

Ravi Naicker

Director, Align Risk & Forensic Services

+27 (0) 82 655 8757

ravi@alignservices.co.za