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Review Briefs

Broad introductions to the whole subject of strategy

Strategy, Lawrence FREEDMAN, Oxford University Press (2013), 751pp., £25.00.

An impressive overview of the use (and abuse) of strategy throughout history, from *The Iliad*, through SunTzu, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Marx to Drucker, Porter and Mintzberg. One of the many themes is the difference between strategies based on the application of superior force, and those essentially based on being clever, although also recognising that those that combine the two are likely to be particularly hard to beat. The book is likely to become a classic that will become essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in the subject. It is inevitably presumptuous to suggest that such a massive study should have been even more extensive, but greater coverage of issues around values, learning and sustainability (words not mentioned in the extensive 30 page index) might have helped provide even more useful lessons for the future. To just argue that it is usually better to have some kind of strategy than not, and that the 'critical success factor' (again not mentioned in the index?) is to be able to change any strategy effectively in the light of new information, doesn't really tell us anything that we didn't already know. But the historic journey is still worth taking.

Textbooks covering the whole subject of strategy

Management: How to Make a Difference and Get Results, Ann FRANCKE, Financial Times Guides/Pearson (2014), 342pp., £13.99. (www.managers.org.uk/ftg-management.)

Full of practical, readable, advice around the key areas: Managing yourself; Developing communication skills and emotional intelligence; Managing others; Setting strategic direction; managing change and Managing money, resources and technology. Full of valuable information and insights, which make it probably one of the most authoritative guides to becoming an effective manager/leader; but the critical role of values (usefully discussed p10-12) could have been given even more attention. Another readable publication that can help improve key management skills, particularly in a school environment, is **How to be an Amazing Middle Leader**, Caroline BENTLEY-DAVIES, Crown House Publishing (2014), 271pp., £16.99. But pity not more on the critical role of values in establishing credibility, as well as underpinning inspiring teachers.

Various concepts of strategic management

The Execution Shortcut: Why Some Strategies Take the Hidden Path to Success and Others Never Reach the Finish Line, Jeroen DE FLANDER, 179pp., www.jeroen-de-flander.com.

A brief, readable, book that should be widely read in view of experience which shows that, generally, around 50% of the financial potential of any strategy gets lost along the execution highway. Yet there are three (relatively simple?) actions that can help radically improve that figure: (1) The Head connection – people need to be aware of the strategy; (2) The Heart connection – people need to care about the strategy; (3) The Hands connection – people need to know what they can do to help move things in the right direction. (And have the energy to do it.) Another useful book, that covers similar ground from a management perspective, without explicitly mentioning strategy, is **The Little Black Book for Managers: How to Maximize Your Key Management Moments of Power**, John CROSS, Rafael GOMEZ & Kevin MONEY, Capstone (2013), 224pp., £12.99.

The 30 Day MBA: Your fast track guide to Business Success, Colin BARROW, Kogan Page (2013, third edition), 323pp., £14.99.

A well presented, insightful, tour of the twelve core disciplines of business, including relevant tools and techniques, as well as case studies. Plenty of material on how to increase *value*, but not enough on the importance of *values*; reflecting one of the core MBA challenges.

Analytical methods, tools and approaches

Managing IT Projects for Business Change: From risk to success, Jeff MORGAN and Chris DALE, bcs The Chartered Institute for IT (2013), 226pp., £24.99.

A well presented basic introduction that provides the principles and guidance, adaptable to different situations, that show project managers and owners how to guide difficult projects. The gap between those projects that succeed, and those that don't, is so great that everyone concerned with this activity ought to be sure that they are aware of the core messages in this book.

Crowd Money: A Practical Guide to Macro Behavioural Technical Analysis, Eon TREACY, Harriman House (2013), 383pp., £45.00.

A fascinating tour of the practice of macro, behavioural, fundamental and technical, analysis that attempts to integrate insights of crowd psychology into financial markets and the underlying application of technical analysis. Also relevant **Deep Value Investing: Finding bargain shares with big potential**, Jeroen Bos, Harriman House (2013), 195pp., £24.99. Includes brief chapters on seven success, two failures (just to show there is no 'perfect approach') and six 'shares of tomorrow'. Both books essential reading for anyone who takes stock market investment seriously.

Effective Management in Practice: Analytical Insights & Critical Questions, Robin WENSLEY, Sage (2013), £75.00 (hard), £24.99 (soft).

A readable and relevant tour through the basic analytical approaches to decision making required for more effective management practice. Also relevant **Management: A Very Short Introduction**, John HENDRY, Oxford University Press (2013), £7.99. ebook £6.66. Although the book is pocket sized, the small sized typeface (which doesn't make it an easy read) hardly makes the book 'very short'. Both books would have benefited from a greater emphasis on the critical role of meaning and values. Another valuable approach is provided by **The Moment of Clarity: Using the Human Sciences to Solve your Toughest Business Problems**, Christian MADSBJERG and Mikkel B. RASMUSSEN, Harvard Business Review Press (2014), 199pp., £18.99.

Mindful Co-working: Be Confident, Happy and Productive in Your Working Relationships. Clark BAIN, Jessica KINGSLEY, (2014), 176pp., £14.99.

Shows how by becoming more attuned to our colleagues, we can remove (some of) the pressure and stress of competition from our working relationship as so make them both more productive and more personally rewarding. Although not explicitly about strategy, the subject critical in its formulating and successful implementation. A book we all need to read.

Aligning for Advantage: Competitive Strategies for the Political and Social Arenas, Thomas C. LAWSON, Jonathan P. DOH and Tazeeb RAJWANI, Oxford University Press (2014), 237pp., £.

A thorough study of how a company needs to develop a pro-active strategy to take account of the growing political and social pressures. Important issues; although the presentation is aimed more at the academic market, rather than the practical manager/decision-makers.

Leadership, change and implementation

Grounded: How Leaders Stay Rooted in an Uncertain World, Bob ROSEN, Jossey-Bass (2013), 349pp., \$26.99.

Argues that most leaders are poorly served by the current paradigm that is focused (obsessively?) on short-term results, while undermining their ability to become healthy human beings. Also that a new approach is needed, based on the Rosen Healthy Leader Model that highlights the six personal dimensions that are the key to sustainable success: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, vocational and spiritual health. Full of well present, relevant, insights that need to be widely read – and acted on – before it is too late; although even greater emphasis on the role and importance of values could have been given even greater emphasis. Could be usefully read in conjunction with **Extreme Leadership: Leaders, Teams and Situations Outside the Norm**, Edited by Cristina M. GIANNANTONIO and Amy E. HURLEY-HAMSON, Edward Elgar (2013), 242pp., £75.00. Seventeen papers (organised into three parts: Extreme Expedition Leaders; Extreme Work Teams; and Extreme Individual Leaders) that provide many valuable additional insights.

The Blunders of our Governments, Anthony KING & Ivor CREWE, Oneworld Publications (2013), £25.00.

Explores the worst government horror stories and attempts to explain why the British political system is particularly prone to making these mistakes. Also includes useful suggestions for a more fool-proof policymaking approach. Important messages and worth reading, but more on the need for relevant strategic thinking, rather than partisan policy, would have given it even more credibility. Also more on the short-term (often highly political) role of the media might have added some more useful insights. Would electoral reform towards the German 'model' make a difference?

Leadership: A Critical Text, Simon WESTERN, Sage (2013, second edition), 360pp., £85.00 (hard), £29.99 (soft).

A useful teaching text that combines theory and practice to offer insights into the real challenges facing leaders today, although pity the role of values as the underlying driver for successful leadership was not given greater emphasis.

Leadership Assessment for Talent Development, Edited by Tony WALL & John KNIGHTS, Kogan Page (2013), 246pp., £29.99.

Uses detailed analysis and case studies to provide practical and insightful ideas on how the principles of leadership assessment can work in practice for HR and talent professionals, which should help improve the probability of their organisation achieving a more sustainable future. Well presented material, but another book where a greater emphasis on the role

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