

Book reviews



Something for everyone?

Strategy and Organization Realizing strategic management

Loizos Heracleous, Cambridge University Press, 2003, £18.99

Reviewed by Kim Warren

First impressions can be deceptive. On picking up this book and skimming lightly through, it seemed unlikely to be valuable to practising executives, even those with some intellectual interest in strategy and organisation. The preface would strike many as abstract and theoretical, an impression reinforced by the large number of references supporting the relatively short chapters. The endorsements on the back of the book do little to dispel this impression of a theoretical discourse with little relevance to real-world challenges. So on seeing the claim that the book was “ideal for MBA students, strategy researchers and the more thoughtful practitioner” it really looked like the second group were going to get most out of it, while the others would only pick up a few crumbs.

On getting stuck into the book though, I found an unusual, but surprisingly effective mixture – concise, readable and useful summaries of important themes and connections between strategy and organisation, with plenty of threads into further useful reading. Yes, many of the numerous references are dauntingly academic, but there are also many that practitioners will find helpful for clarifying and expanding on the topics covered in the short chapters. Yes, some of the concepts covered are rather arcane, but many others are of real practical value. Furthermore, they are organised into a neat structure that shows how they connect and build on each other.

The book is organised into three sections of a few chapters each.

- ‘Bases of Strategic Management’ is one of the most concise summaries of the main ideas in the field that you are likely to find – a little too summarised, some might argue, but certainly clear and quick to absorb. Also, given the book’s title and intent, this section understandably leans towards the issues of strategy process rather than strategy analysis.
- The chapters in ‘Realizing Strategy’ explore in more depth how organisation and cultural factors impinge on

the implementation of strategy, and again achieve an excellent précis of a wide-ranging and complex subject. This includes a good selection of well-established frameworks, from both academia and consulting organisations, to help bring some clarity to the often messy issues involved.

- The final section on ‘Current Themes and Applications’ perhaps overreaches itself in trying to comment on such diverse challenges as privatisation, governance and interorganisational relationships, but again manages to achieve the seemingly impossible feat of being at once succinct, authoritative and useful.

An unusual, but surprisingly effective mixture – concise, readable and useful summaries of important themes and connections between strategy and organisation, with plenty of threads into further useful reading.

My guess is that the book’s most enthusiastic consumers will be MBA students with a special interest in organisational issues, plus younger research students wanting a quick reference to some key ideas. Consultants specialising in the connection between organisational issues and strategy should also have this book on their shelf. And while it may not be the average manager’s in-flight reading, there is enough practical and usable content to make the book a handy reference for the more reflective and intellectually curious executive who likes to refresh and expand their understanding of the field in which they operate, especially if faced with complex organisational challenges.