

Book Review: The Dynamics of Strategy: Mastering Strategic Landscapes of the Firm

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Book Information

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BOOK REVIEW

This first edition of 'The Dynamics of Strategy' by Robertson and Caldart has a distinct flavour to its approach in examining the field of strategy. The book is in two parts. The first part focuses on the external competitive landscape and the second looks at the internal 'organizing' landscape. Distilling key framework and theories in light of their potential for strategic analysis, the book is undoubtedly a good read. However, though comprehensive in some ways, future editions will need to re-examine the books positioning as a generic strategy text.

The book takes off with a very lucid description of models of competition from economics and links them up with the conceptualization of strategy. The expression in easy to read boxes is well complemented with business examples. Emphasizing the adaptation required with respect to these classical models to help the practice of strategy is useful. This helps understand the evolution of strategic analysis to cope with the increasingly turbulent and complex real world business situations. Recognition of the need for strategy to draw from different disciplines also comes to the fore.

The practice perspective in context of dynamic environments arrives rather quickly in the third chapter. The context for adding to concepts and models in strategic management like the 'dynamic capabilities' perspective under the folds of the resource based view reads very well. However, while the emphasis on evolution of models to support the practice of strategy in turbulent and high velocity environment appeals, there is a case to elaborate on some classical models to help have wider appeal. This could be in boxes here - like the five forces, generic strategies, strategy clock and maybe also a snapshot of strategy schools. This suggestion draws on the presentation that has been used in the previous chapter (2) to great effect. While these classical models can be found in many strategy textbooks, they would provide a more holistic feel to this book as a standalone text for students. The difficult task of course would be to keep it terse and maintain the flow.

Chapter 3 and 4 work to built and discuss the idea of competitive landscapes making useful connections with the idea of agent based models and social networks. From a practice perspective the book does tend to get more descriptive in chapter 3 and loses some of its initial emphasis on focused business examples before coming back to it rather strongly in chapter 4. The part on agent based models as network models is particularly useful as the book starts to focus on organizational performance and profitability. The discussion starts to look at connections between actors, contextualizes non-linear behaviour, and also the impact of variation in sense making of the business environment by different actors.

Part II of the book, starting chapter five, begins by looking at the organizational landscape. It discusses organizational structure and design to complement the earlier discussion on competitive landscapes and on the networked business environment. Leading with the rational approach to organization design the book builds an 'evaluation' and 'customizing' argument. This is to argue that different situations call for an assessment of the interface between the internal and external landscape. The book presents perspectives from literature used to study organizing and organizations. It discusses how different organizational objectives (viz. change or task), and organizational forms (viz. industrial context, evolutionary context) can be understood. Chapter 7 does the difficult task of integrating the external and internal perspectives, or of aligning competitive landscapes with organizational landscape. It does a fair task in drawing on key literature that is important for musings presented here. Business examples to elaborate on these are particularly well written. The sharp and focused orientation of the book remains in a succinct chapter 8 that concludes with a classificatory discussion on key frameworks, and also to an extent, what the book has tried to do.

As mentioned this book is not a conventional strategy text, it is very useful to read for research students and academics but may appeal less to students in taught programs. This is partly given its selective and rather succinct approach. This approach is crucial for the flow of the book but misses out on some crucial elaborations; particularly in chapter 3 where more expression on some popular strategy models (as aforementioned) may be contemplated. The book may also be a good read for senior managers for getting a grasp of the relevance and context of strategy in practice. The construction of the strategic landscape is a useful emphasis throughout the book. It is a good post- MBA read, simply because it juxtaposes the challenges of strategic analysis, and the potential of drawing and combining conceptualizations from literature to deliver to them.