Chapter 4

Are You Pondering What I Am Pondering?
Eccentric Consideration on Strategic Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with something which is widely spoken about, and very little known: Strategic Management. Following an evidence based approach, the author's objective is to explain why Strategic Management is a scale invariant process that allows who uses it to identify possible and plausible solutions to complex issues. Some of the basics and analyticals of strategic management, such as strategic planning, SWOT analysis, Scenarios, are going to be described in detail. Detailed considerations will be presented on the issue of time and timing, a fundamental parameter that is too often neglected or taken as granted. The importance of strategic management to allow organisations to learn, change and evolve will be described. Some considerations on the importance of using the proper representation of the organisation’s structure will be presented.

INTRODUCTION

It could be that the first Strategic Planner, in the sense that he was the first to write a book about it, was General Sun Tzu. His historicity is uncertain, but his lifetime is dated around 544-496 BC. Since that time, Strategy has been a major techné, in Greek art, in both the military, and the business world. As it happens quite often when a topic becomes popular, many people start to talk about it, sharing the denomination of the words, but not their contents. The author attempts to reframe the Strategic Management issue, in order to make it fit for today fast changing, complex, globalised eco-systems. To do so, he starts giving acceptable definitions of the strategic vocabulary words. Then he analyses some of the elements that are standard tools in the strategic analysis field, highlighting some of the problems that their use may generate. In the final part of the chapter, possible solutions are presented and discussed.

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The approach that the author presents is not a canonical one. The readers will find the definitions, attributes and characteristics of key elements like Vision, Mission, Objectives and Strategy rather different from what, presumably, they have experience of. The following considerations are the result of thirty-plus years of professional experiences working for major international companies being in charge of technology intelligence and strategic planning, of what has been learned being an entrepreneur, and many years of sharing all this with my wonderful university students.

The author considers himself neither an academician having the final word, nor a consultant selling the final solution, but just an amateur story teller, and the narrative does not want to be antagonistic to other stories, other interpretations. It is just one of the many stories that can be told.

The author does not want to come up with a recipe to be followed in order to prepare a palatable strategic analysis. His effort is to have the readers think about the presented issues and problems, and make a personal effort to come up with possible solutions, combining their experiences, knowledge, abilities, and curiosity.

BACKGROUND

Strategic Management in the recent years has been strong on analysis, but weak on results. Its toolbox has been packed with dozen new paradigms, approaches, rationales, beliefs. Great deal of attention has been given to shareholder value, and finance drives planning in many companies. Strategic management has problems. If one prefers it has a big problem made of a set of sub-problems. In this essay these components will be defined and analysed. Let us start with the problems, then the authors shall describe the elements than, properly combined, may bring solutions, eventually.

KEY ISSUES IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Issue #1: Definitions

Words, a pretty dangerous tool, are used taking as granted that who is uttering them, and who is listening to them, share both denomination and contents of these words. Too often this is not the case. On the contrary, almost always the denomination is shared, but the contents are not. Whenever words are used, definitions have to be shared. It has not to be “the” definition, pure and perfect, but it is of utmost importance to agree and share “a” meaningful definition.

Therefore, let us define “Strategic” and “Management”, and to do so it is strongly recommended to start with the words’ etymology.

Strategic is the attribute deriving for the word Strategy. Strategy comes from Greek στρατηγία stratēgia, “art of troop leader; office of general, command”, which derives from the word Strategos, στρατηγό, meaning “army leader”.

In classical terms, a strategy describes how the ends (goals) will be achieved by the means (resources). Strategy is a high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty and of limited resources that have to be mobilized in an optimal way to execute actions targeted to attaining predetermined, measurable goals. From the 18th century, when the word was translated into Western vernacular languages, until the 20th century, the word “strategy” came to denote a comprehensive way to try to
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