Book Review

Seven Strategy Questions: A Simple Approach for Better Execution

Author: Robert Simons
Reviewer: Alva Wai, PMP

As stated clearly by the book title, the seven questions in this book focus on how to execute business strategy, not how to formulate it. So, before you can ask yourself these seven questions, you should have already formulated your company’s business strategy. The author Robert Simons, a professor at Harvard Business School, guides you through the execution process by asking the right questions. The target readers are senior executives of companies or management consultants who help client companies with their business strategies. As a management consultant, I highly recommend this book to my peers and clients, mainly because the author explains the correct way to address these seven questions clearly and logically, making the business strategy execution process easier than without these guiding questions in mind.

This book is organized in a way that readers can follow the strategic thinking process naturally. It is precise and concise, such that readers can use it as a checklist to stimulate strategic thinking in various situations during day-to-day business operations.

I quote the seven questions here so that you have an overview of the key contents:

1. Who is your primary customer?
2. How do your core values prioritize shareholders, employees, and customers?
3. What critical performance variables are you tracking?
4. What strategic boundaries have you set?
5. How are you generating creative tension?
6. How committed are your employees to helping each other?
7. What strategic uncertainties keep you awake at night?

The author ordered these questions logically into four stages - foundation (questions 1 and 2), focus (questions 3 and 4), facilitate (questions 5 and 6), and future (question 7). I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the author to
present the ordering of these questions in this way to make readers easy to remember. Besides, the author kept reminding readers about key words in the questions to make sure readers can recall them.

Some readers may expect a book about business strategy execution would be boring but I can assure you that this book is very interesting and brings surprises to you. For instance, when the author wrote about the primary customer question, he quoted a number of well-known companies which did not define the consumer as the primary customer. I will leave it for you to find out the reasons by reading the book on your own. One thing about the question on critical performance variables, the author recommended the number of critical performance measures to hold someone accountable for should be kept within the range of five to nine. The author did explain the reasons for choosing this range, but I did not agree totally with the author on this idea. In reality, there are senior executives who are responsible for multiple business functions or service lines, if not the entire company, and so inevitably they should be held accountable for critical performance measures more than the upper range recommended by the author.

Overall, this book is easy to read and contains execution approaches that are simple to use in daily business operations. The true value is the organization and presentation of these simple approaches by the author to solve the right questions logically and systematically. You will have to practice these approaches and adjust them to suit your needs in order to succeed.

Recent Book Reviews

**The Accidental Entrepreneur - The 50 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Starting a Business**

It turns out that becoming an accidental entrepreneur is similar to becoming an accidental project manager. They're just victims of circumstances. While the latter may have been the result of drawing the short straw (no one else wanted the responsibility of running a particular project), the accidental entrepreneur may result from such things as one's having been downsized due to a corporate downturn, or one's decision to turn a hobby into a new career, or someone being unable to get a job and being forced to "create" a job. The result is a decision to stop working for someone else and going to work for themselves.

**Million Dollar Consulting**

I enjoyed reading *Million Dollar Consulting* by Alan Weiss. For a somewhat dry topic, Alan Weiss keeps the reader engrossed through his wit, little nuggets of advice marked clearly, and bulleted checklists. The book has a very smooth flow to it, starting with a general 'preparing' part, before going on to actual, crisp tactics. I could easily apply the principles in the book to my own profession of consulting, which is cross industry. The way the book is written, readers should be able to apply it to any industry.