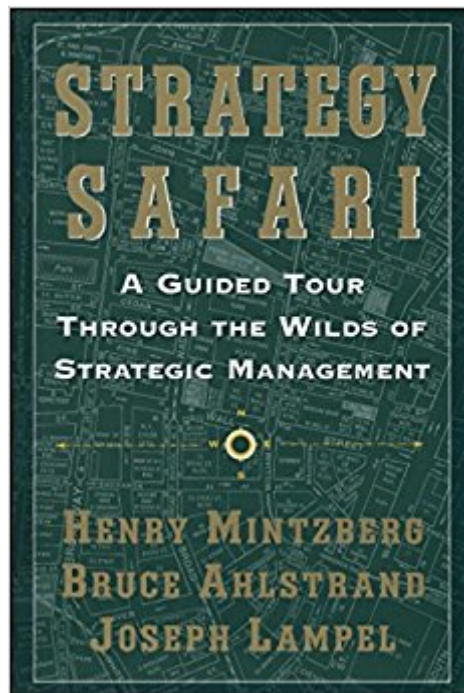




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Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through The Wilds Of Strategic Management



Synopsis

Strategy Safari, the international bestseller on business strategy by leading management thinker Henry Mintzberg and his colleagues Bruce Ahlstrand and Joseph Lampel, is widely considered a classic work in the field. No other book synthesizes the entire history and evolution of strategic management in so lively and entertaining a fashion. Since the initial publication of Strategy Safari, managers, consultants, and academics all over the world have found this book an indispensable and delightful tool—it has been translated into more than ten languages, including Chinese, Russian, and French, and has been used in top MBA programs worldwide. Strategy Safari makes sense of a field that often seems to make no sense. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel pair their sweeping vision of strategy making with an authoritative catalog in which they identify ten schools of strategy that have emerged over the past four decades. Why struggle through the vast, confusing terrain of strategy formation? With clarity and depth, Strategy Safari maps the strategic landscape and facilitates intelligent, informed strategy formation.

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Customer Reviews

Mintzberg is a chaired professor of management studies at --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"Read the book. Let Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel guide you on an enlightening and entertaining excursion through the field of strategy making." -- Lawrence

Bennigson, Senior Fellow of the Executive Development Center of the Harvard Business School"Strategy Safari makes a convincing case for juggling several approaches at once. This book furnishes the complete tool set for every manager involved in strategy formation." -- Report on Business

As a strategy practitioner for > 25 years (and strategy academic for a half-decade before that), the best I can say for this book is that its intentions are good. As is the usual case with Mintzberg, the writing is spicy and entertaining. But if one is looking for better story-telling and greater coverage of the bridge between theory and practice in strategic management, Walter Kiechel's 'The Lords of Strategy' is the book to read. To be sure, there is a need for this kind of 'schools' book because no consensus has yet formed around a particular paradigm for the field of strategic management. Heck, neither academics nor strategists can agree on even a definition of strategy! Worse, in most strategy textbooks I've examined in the last decade, the word 'strategy' is not explicitly defined. Though strategic management has come a long way since I first got immersed in it in 1983, it has a long path ahead. Rather than discuss each chapter separately, I want to take aim here at a key construct in a particular chapter. As I hope will be clear, my target is non-trivial. I will then make a couple of observations about the book's self-serving bias and close with a quotation from the book that, ironically, debunks the notion of subscribing to any one 'school'. I take strenuous exception to both the discussion and the classification of the dominant paradigm today in strategic management: the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (pp. 274-280). The section is entitled 'Resources as the Basis for Competitive Advantage.' The RBV has been THE prevailing view, at least in academe, for over two decades. The RBV has two key assumptions: (1) that every organization has a unique set of resources, and (2) that those resources are immobile. Mintzberg, et al., put the RBV in their chapter about the 'Cultural School' of strategy formation. Their rationale for so doing seems to rest on a 1986 paper by Jay Barney entitled 'Organizational Culture: Can It Be a Source of Sustained Competitive Advantage?' Barney argues that it can be because culture is the DNA of any organization. And, since no two individuals' DNA can be identical, the uniqueness of culture makes it a natural for examination under the RBV. As a long-time adherent to and user of the RBV myself, I think it's about a heckuva lot more than just culture, even allowing the authors the discretion to try to fit square pegs into round holes with arbitrary definitions of 'schools'. My own view is that the RBV should be in Chapter 7 ('The Learning School'). That is where a key construct within the RBV, 'dynamic capabilities,' appears. I was stunned to see the two in separate chapters. In addition, Mintzberg's characterization of the seminal work of Edith Penrose (1959) is incorrect. He says that

her book addressed the question, 'Why do firms diversify?' It did nothing of the sort. She made a strong case that the inability of most firms to grow profitably lay in the managerial capabilities (or lack thereof) of those in charge. In fact, the title of her book, which Mintzberg et al. disclose only in the References section (p. 387) is 'The Theory of the Growth of the Firm.' In my view, it is THE most underrated, most under-appreciated, and most important unread book in the strategy canon. Rather than the 'Learning School' title of Chapter 7, I would have named it the 'Evolutionary School'. That might sound like a distinction without a difference and a minor quibble, but it is neither. For one thing, firms do 'evolve'. That is the essential nature of companies in free markets. For another, companies are collections of individuals, and people certainly evolve. Third, the importance of evolutionary thinking in strategic management is often overlooked, esp. by those in the business community. 'Organizational Evolution and Strategic Management' by Rodolphe Durand (Sage, 1997) is terrific contribution to the strategy literature. Renaming Chapter 7 would have also, I hope, triggered the relocation of the RBV discussion to that chapter, where it rightly belongs. In its last chapter, 'Strategy Safari' is nothing if not self-serving. In Figure 12-1 on p. 353 ('Evolution of the Ten Schools'), two of the book's ten 'schools' have the sharpest upward trends: the Learning School (Chapter 7) and the Configuration School (Chapter 10); the latter is also dominant in Figure 12-3 (p. 369). A close examination of these two chapters will show that the work of Mintzberg and his sometime collaborators is prominent in both. Though I seldom agree with Mr. Mintzberg, I know him to be personally charming and a wonderful iconoclast in a discipline that needs more iconoclasm; objective, however, I think he's not. I wish that he had been more forthcoming in disclaimers about the inclusion of his own work in Chapters 7 and 11. I close with a quotation that, in my view, pulls the rug out from under the reader after s/he has waded through this sometimes-confusing-but-often-entertaining book: "We should certainly encourage scholars and consultants to continue probing the important elements of each school: we need to know more about tasks and trunks and tails [Reviewer comment: those latter two labels continue an 'elephant' construct that runs throughout the book]. But more importantly, we have to get beyond the narrowness of each school: we need to know how this beast called strategy formation, which combines all of these schools and more, really lives its life" (p. 373). To which I can only add, "Hear, hear!" but also ask: "Why pull the rug out from under readers?"

a very readable, well-organized review. Dated, now, of course, but an excellent way to start grasping the strategy field.

Authors Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel provide the oft-cited "The Blind Men and the Elephant" by John Godfrey Saxe as a backdrop to their discussion on the ten schools of management (Design, Planning, Positioning, Entrepreneurial, Cognitive, Learning, Power, Cultural, Environmental, and Configuration), because while at the outset they indicate that "we are the blind people and strategy formation is our elephant", since "everyone has grabbed hold of some part or other and 'railed on in utter ignorance' about the rest" because "no one has had the vision to see the entire beast", the authors end their discourse by showing that there is not necessarily one safari beast with which to contend, but multiple, although "we shall never find [the whole beast of strategy formation], never really see it all". Corresponding to each of these ten schools is a different view of the strategy process - strategy formation as a process of conception, strategy formation as a formal process, strategy formation as an analytical process, strategy formation as a visionary process, strategy formation as a mental process, strategy formation as an emergent process, strategy formation as a process of negotiation, strategy formation as a collective process, strategy formation as a reactive process, and strategy formation as a process of transformation. The chapter introductions to each of the schools provide superb historical information, and the last chapter discusses the evolution of the the ten schools and provides an excellent bulleted summary table that whimsically assigns different beasts to each school as well as easy-to-remember homilies such as "take us to your leader" for The Entrepreneurial School, "I'll see it when I believe it" for The Cognitive School, and "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" for The Learning School. In the opinion of this reviewer, the chapters on these three schools are also the best, even though the authors indicate that The Cognitive School is "characterized more by its potential than by its contribution. The central idea is valid - that the strategy-formation process is also fundamentally one of cognition, particularly in the attainment of strategies as concepts. But strategic management, in practice if not in theory, has yet to gain sufficiently from cognitive psychology. Or perhaps more accurately, cognitive psychology has yet to address adequately the questions of prime interest to strategic management, especially how concepts form in the mind of a strategist". The authors draw from many research sources (some readers may be interested in knowing that the bibliography is 18 pages long), including some of their past works, most notably Mintzberg, and their liberal use of well-placed sidebars and diagrams in the material is extremely effective in bringing these together. Their use of humor is also well received by this reviewer, especially when placed in the midst of some of the rather lengthy discussions that some readers new to his subject matter might otherwise receive as dry. For example, the chapter on The Design School starts with a quote by an anonymous manager about a Harvard MBA: "The damn guy just sits there waiting for a case study."

This reviewer completely agrees that, in the words of the authors, this book makes sense of a field that often seems to make no sense. Well recommended to anyone in business, especially those struggling through the vast, sometimes confusing terrain of strategic management.

This book provides a great introductory overview of the field of Strategic Management and is useful to any MBA or consultant with an interest in that area. It provides an overview of 10 schools of strategy, with an assessment of the contributions made by, and a brief critique of, each school. This helps you learn to spot the pitfalls of using one approach exclusively. The text can occasionally be a bit academic however, since cases are not the authors' intent, so don't expect many "real world" examples. Nor is the book exhaustive, though it does provide a bibliography for further reading. Finally, the attempt to pull all 10 approaches together, while an admirable effort, may be little more than wishful thinking, since the tenets of some schools are difficult to reconcile. With this in mind, the book is a great starting point for those exploring the field and a handy refresher for those with more experience. If you're interested in Strategic Management, this is as good a place to start.

Very refreshing look at a very cloudy and complicated subject. This book although somewhat academic in nature is easy to comprehend and helps the reader understand and grasp concepts in the different schools of approach in the world of applying strategic concepts. If you are interested in this subject or you are a practitioner this is a must read that will give you a new understanding and appreciation for the development of strategic management.

It's a great book if you want to learn about all the evolution of the marketing schools.

I passed the class, and this was part of the class requirement. I didn't find it that interesting though.

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