

## Mapping Strategic Planning

Recently a colleague doing some consulting for a government department, remarked to a staff member that a particular plan would be difficult to implement. He was met with a look of incredulity and the comment, "We have nothing to do with implementation, - we're policy".

This comment rings true in Henry Mintzberg's important book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. In a reflective and thorough overview of all the basic planning literature, Mintzberg explores the reality that nearly anyone involved in managing and planning actually knows but is hesitant to face, - that planning rarely accomplishes what it is intended to do.

Mintzberg painstakingly builds the case that our use of the term, "planning", is frequently imprecise. We usually mean managing, controlling or decision making. Formalized plans often avoid the reality that strategy formation evolves intuitively rather than from a linear and formalized rational process. Probably the most striking point is the questioning of the core dogma of planning, - that analysis produces synthesis.

This, Mintzberg categorically denies and spends several chapters building his argument. The old SWOT theory, the examination of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, - seldom is effective, Mintzberg says, because it is rooted in an organization's current perceptions. Planning also sets up a conflict between managers, who have authority and a more intuitive and flexible approach gained in the fray of the daily battle, and planners, who have time and techniques but less understanding of the changing scene, and a need to document and control. Both sides blame the other as either too ineffective or too stupid to get it right.

The author's most devastating example of a planning disaster is the battle of Passchendaele, where military planners formulated tactics suitable for dry land. They had never visited the field where thousands fell to their death in a sea of mud.

Planners typically make pleas for flexibility and patience, but in the end Mintzberg sees the search for the "one best way" as flawed. Planners are seldom as detached as they claim.

Even a marketing approach won't work. In a typical witty example, Mintzberg speculates whether a buggy whip company might decide, in taking a proactive marketing approach, that it was really in the flagellation business.

Vision, in contrast to the analytical approach of planning, depends upon the ability to see and feel. Mintzberg cites the work of Nobel prize winners Sperry and Ornstein, whose studies of the brain assign a different role to the right cortical skills. It is the role of synthesis, which focuses on the big picture. Synthesis is a different process. As Mozart says, "I can see the whole ... at a single glance in my mind, as if it were a painting or a handsome human being". Because analysis is not synthesis, strategic planning is not

strategy formation. Rather than being the "one best way" strategic planning is an oxymoron.

Does this mean that all planners must now join the ranks of the unemployed? Mintzberg would not eliminate them, but recommend that they enter the planning process at an appropriate time and place. The time comes after the strategy has been formulated by those who actually lead and manage. The place is preeminently in mature industries whose operations are stable, simple, capital intensive and controlled.

Mintzberg's name for them is machine industries. Among the roles for the planners here are communication and interpretation, scheduling and control. Here is the proper place for logic in action.

Other types of organizations need a different approach. Among these are entrepreneurial organizations who depend on the vision of their leader or founders; professional organizations such as hospitals and universities where special areas of knowledge drive new initiatives; and what are termed "adhocracies" such as new high tech software companies, whose products pass from initial concept to market entry in a few months. The role of the planners here could better be described as strategic programming.

Mintzberg asks for new approaches to strategy formation but he doesn't explore actual tools in this book. Mind Mapping might be one of them. Its holistic approach which integrates right and left cortical skills is a simple and effective way to break through traditional linear planning methods. By branching out from a central vision, a Mind Map depicts the vision and integrates its components in a holistic way. Concepts are not boxed in and can expand in many directions.

Mind Maps also have the right pedigree. They are thinking tools directly based on the brain research of Sperry and Ornstein, which Mintzberg posits as central to the understanding of actually creating and implementing sound strategy.

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