
How can managers reconcile strategic planning with unpredictability? Traditional strategy assumes a stable environment in which managers establish and meet fixed goals. Its precepts are of little help, however, when markets, competitors and technologies change seemingly from day to day. The task for managers, urge these authors, is to confront uncertainty and make it an “ally.” To identify and capitalize on opportunities in the midst of perpetual change, all managers, they say, whether in corporations or in start-ups, must cultivate an “entrepreneurial mindset.”

McGrath, associate professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business, and MacMillan, professor of entrepreneurship at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, cite five characteristic behaviors of entrepreneurs: They energetically seek opportunities, pursue them with discipline, target the best ones while avoiding the others, value effective execution and involve many people when realizing an opportunity. By emphasizing actions rather than inborn traits, the authors make the goal of becoming a “habitual entrepreneur” attainable to managers with many different talents and temperaments. At the heart of the book are guidelines for finding and developing opportunities, managing a portfolio of initiatives, creating a market entry strategy, managing projects under conditions of uncertainty, assessing progress and exercising leadership, the last of which the authors contend is a matter of practice rather than charisma. A concluding chapter argues for the need to better integrate strategic thinking with entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors. Along the way, the authors introduce useful managerial tools. The entrepreneurial frame, for example, is the starting point for the entrepreneurial manager, providing a method for distinguishing between significant opportunities and mere incremental improvements; the opportunity register is an inventory of promising business ideas; discovery-driven planning allows managers to plan and adapt as new learning emerges.

One strength of the book is its contention that even during turbulent times rationality and action are not mutually exclusive. Disciplined, focus and clear priorities, according to the authors, enhance rather than kill creativity. Their approach — "plotting a direction into the uncertain future and redirecting as reality unfolds" — bears little resemblance to the drastic turnarounds with which many companies have responded to a volatile business environment. The goal of the entrepreneurial manager, as outlined here, is not to incite creative chaos. By becoming skilled in identifying "the few most salient features of a rapidly shifting landscape," the manager seeks to reduce complexity, minimize turmoil and enable the organization to learn and adapt over time as it pursues its goals.

“Profit Beyond Measure: Extraordinary Results Through Attention to Work and People.”

One of the most cherished tenets of management thinking — that quantitative targets must drive business operations — weakens the performance and threatens the survival of companies. The experiences of a few unconventional companies demonstrate the benefits of managing enterprises according to principles that govern all living systems in nature. So assert Johnson, professor at Portland State University, Oregon, and Bröms, cofounder and managing partner of SAM Samarbetande Konsalter AB, in this thoughtful and passionately argued book. Long-term profitability, they contend, depends on managers shifting their orientation from results, in the form of abstract financial goals, to the “means” by which work is organized and accomplished.

Traditional organizations, observe the authors, view workers, customers and resources mechanistically, as discrete objects to be manipulated as needed — however destructively — in order to make the numbers. Layoffs provide a familiar example. Companies that “manage by means” rather than results view the organization as a vibrant system of interrelationships among workers, processes and customers. They pay attention to the tangibles of the business: people, work and how and why work gets done. Their chief motivation is the long-term health and sustainability of the enterprise, not growth at all costs.

To advance their argument, Johnson and Bröms blend history, scientific findings and case studies. They contrast Toyota’s approach to manufacturing with that of the Big Three U.S. automakers in the years following World War II, demonstrating the affinity between Toyota’s methods and patterns and processes in nature. They then trace how a narrowly quantitative outlook came to dominate business management during the 1950s and beyond. The middle portion of the book explores how Toyota and Scania, a Swedish truck manufacturer, achieve high quality, great product variety and low costs through management by means. These organizations “work to order,” seeking to align workers’ tasks with cus-