

Compte rendu

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par Anthony M. Gould

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Global Competitive Strategy,

by Daniel F. SPULBER, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 290 pp., ISBN 978-0-521880-81-7.

This book presents ideas about business planning and corporate strategy development. Its target audience is executives who manage firms operating—or having stakeholders in—several countries. The publication is structured according to themes which denote a collection of chapters. These are: an introduction section which reflects on the definition of globalization, its implications for commercial competitiveness and its opportunities; a discussion of cross-boarder cost considerations which include commentary on how to make international economic comparisons; a section which presents a template for strategy development; and, a series of applied sections which delineate corporate strategies for firms operating globally.

Spulber's book develops ideas on competitive advantage in the same *genre* as Michael Porter. It presents generic approaches firms may use when operating internationally and draws on contingency theory to offer standard templates for analyzing an entity's circumstances and appreciating its threats and opportunities. The work mostly uses case studies to illustrate its points and develop its conceptual frameworks.

Ideas in Spulber's book are presented clearly. They are introduced in a logical order and each is well explained; giving the reader a solid grasp of its importance and context. A key strength of the author's written style is that points of theory are presented somewhat independently of real-world discussion of firm experience and case-studies. This approach means that readers observe how a familiar idea is applied and simultaneously come to appreciate ways it may not work in practice. Upon completion of each chapter I found myself asking how generic principles may be amended in light of experience. I believe

that part of the reason I was challenged in this way is the author's transparent writing style.

Spulber's clear, if somewhat simplified, manner of communication gives rise to a manual for international strategy development which is easy to understand and could be used as a firm self-help guide. In this sense the book does its job in addressing the needs of its intended market. I was convinced that the publication covers all topics that a budding business planner needs to consider. I gained insight into why principles are important and the practical aspects of globalization. The book's conceptual frameworks, such as the "star analysis", are mostly intuitive and lead to disciplined thinking about strategy development. I was particularly attracted to the metaphors and analogies Spulber uses to illustrate ideas. This characteristic enlivens discussion through presenting entertaining and vivid examples and engaging commentary. For me, such an approach lightened the read.

My criticisms of the book are mostly reflections upon the methods of researchers examining strategic planning. In my view Spulber's work, although compelling, is somewhat unsuitable for a critical and/or research oriented audience. I have presented my concern as three overlapping issues.

First, the discipline of corporate strategy research should develop its ideas more conservatively. Insofar as this publication is concerned, several conclusions are drawn from a limited information base. An example of this appears early—on page three. Here it says: "keeping up with competitors' means you must expand your reach to different countries". I am unsure about this claim and would have liked to have seen some data. Sometimes, I

was concerned about the author's rather dogmatic style of writing. For example, he defines globalization as "the gradual reduction in the costs of trade" (p. 6). I am aware of other definitions and would have appreciated preamble about the fact that there are various points of view and that, for present purposes, a particular one is chosen.

Second, limited discussion is given of how the book's theory was developed. For example, was the "star analysis" concept created based on application of the author's logic and polemic, did practicing managers suggest its elements in light of personal experience, or was another method used? How should we weight the importance of the model's various features? I raise these matters to indicate my disquiet that scholarship about corporate strategy does not pay sufficient heed to conventional benchmarks for quality research. Another example concerns the generic strategies that firms may adopt. In the book, I found insufficient detail about the process the author undertook to identify and/or validate these. Certainly, ideas seem to make sense and it does appear from the case studies that they have real-world utility. However, such impressions may be deceiving. Could we—as readers—be being duped by only having examples presented to us that support the principle (i.e. data-mining)? The answer to this question could be provided through use of sampling and statistical inference. If such analyses were beyond the scope of the project or would have disrupted the

flow of the argument, their relevance could still have been discussed.

Third, theory about strategy development may be overly generic. When I read Spulber's range of options, I contemplated how a commercial entity may pursue alternatives. This raises the question: what evidence is there that a given set of strategy options accounts for all possible approaches that a firm may pursue? Some commentary on this issue would have given the book more substance. My bias would have been to either provide such additional information or, at least, flag the issue.

Overall, Spulber's book provides a solid contribution to its field. The work introduces a substantial amount of new and innovative material. It does not necessarily create genuinely original theoretical paradigms but certainly pushes the conventional ones to their limits. For this reason alone, it is at least as good as other well known books about commercial strategy. I have suggested to my master's degree students that they should read Spulber's latest work. I have told them that I think it contains ideas which are novel and intuitively appealing. However, I have invited those with a research bent to consider how material may be further tested and evaluated. When such further scrutiny occurs, we will know whether Spulber has written something that is merely practical, helpful and well written or a genuine classic.

ANTHONY M. GOULD
Laval University

Fragments sur l'essentiel du droit de l'emploi,

par Fernand MORIN, Montréal : Wilson et Lafleur, 2007, 300 p., ISBN 978-2-89127-790-7.

L'objectif poursuivi par l'auteur est simple. Il partage ses notes et observations à l'égard de différentes facettes du droit de l'emploi en mettant l'accent sur les questions relatives aux justificatifs et aux sources des règles de droit (omettant

sciemment toute transposition technique sous-jacente), interrogations qui expliquent sa nécessaire raison d'être au plan social, économique et juridique. C'est par le truchement de vingt-cinq billets portant sur autant de facettes