

Book reviews

Strategic Foresight: Learning from the future

Patricia Lustig

Triarchy Press, 2015, 186pp, ISBN 978-1909470668, £13.84 paperback (Kindle edition available)

Review by Ramu Iyer

Andy Grove, author of *Only the Paranoid Survive* (Grove, 1998), posited that managers, mired either in past or present, confront a cloud in the head as they struggle to make sense of conflicting information in an attempt to discern the emerging future. In an era of information overload and reduced attention spans, it is critical for managers to learn how to detect early warning signals that are flying at low altitude that are missed while being immersed in the daily operating details of the business.

As I perused *Strategic Foresight* I felt that Patricia Lustig had written a valuable sequel to Andy Grove's classic. The practice of strategic foresight is a participatory, action-focused, and multi-disciplinary journey that enables an individual, group or organisation to co-create desirable futures. Patricia Lustig has woven a fascinating tapestry of diverse resources to create an integrated framework for practising strategic foresight. The author makes a powerful case that the art and science of discovering the future is an emergent process and requires a creative combination of thinking and sensemaking like a hedgehog, fox and eagle as part of a unified continuum to the past, present and future ("tomorrow++"). The author presents a 10-point logic of the "futures toolbox" to help any individual or organisation dynamically practise strategic foresight.

In a volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous world, where the future is often fuzzy, it is a fundamental prerequisite for anyone to think like a marathon runner and ask the question “What is stopping me doing better?” so that one can learn how to anticipate, envision and co-create the future. The action orientation of strategic foresight starts by following the learner’s path, using a reflective process of enquiry and navigating the Hero’s Journey (pioneered by Joseph Campbell).

In order to break out of the status quo and operating assumptions (Horizon One), it is vital to see the emerging trends both in short- and medium-term (Horizon Two) and long-term (Horizon Three). While Horizon Two is an entrepreneurial view and represents a paradigm shift, Horizon Three is considered to be visionary and aspirational. In order to discover and uncover emerging trends, the STEEPLE framework (Social, Technology, Economic, Environment, Political, Legal, Ethical) focuses on drivers of change which are frequently events outside of your control.

Recognising that business is a complex and interdependent set of subsystems designed with a purpose, the author advocates, among a range of multi-disciplinary approaches, using systems thinking and the Cynefin framework to manage complexity and avoid fragmented thinking while exploring creative solutions to often messy wicked problems. Causal Layered Analysis helps remove blinkers and proactively manage wicked problems and messes that become obstacles in the path to the preferred future. The VERGE framework helps you notice the connections and impacts. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative, generative method that helps people co-create a new, desired future and coordinate the action to make it a reality (while getting unstuck from a zero sum game). Strategic navigation methods such as (1) map making to picture “what’s out there” and (2) the futures wheels to make a map of trends and examine the link to tomorrow and “tomorrow + +” are also covered in detail.

Shaping a strategic foresight culture is a real pragmatic practice to help manage uncertainty, improve the quality of

decision-making, implement strategy, and provide the capability to handle change. The strategic foresight toolkit also includes a checklist of questions to sharpen the thinking process to identify and envision the envisioned future.

There are several case studies in the book that clearly describe how to learn from the future and engage in change. Recognising that the future has neither any boundaries nor is it organised and defined, the author encourages us to examine both existing and emerging paradigms, exercise our strategic foresight muscles, reframe our fundamental assumptions that are often taken for granted and improve the quality of the narrative and decision-making.

Strategic Foresight is a timely publication that I would strongly recommend as a valuable addition to every practitioner's bookshelf.

Reference

Grove, A. (1998). *Only The Paranoid Survive: How to exploit the crisis points that challenge every company and career*. London: Profile Books.