

BUSINESS POLICY MANAGING STRATEGIC PROCESSES

EIGHTH EDITION



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PREFACE

The eighth edition of *Business Policy* text and casebook marks a watershed in the life of what has turned out to be a 30-year teaching and research project. For the first time since its 1965 publication, the text has been completely rewritten rather than modified.

We have retained in this edition those cases that our users have found most helpful in accomplishing the objectives of their courses. Nonetheless, we have sometimes changed the way in which they are used to reflect a new approach to the subject matter of the book. Ten of the holdover cases are on the list of all-time best sellers of the Harvard Business School Publishing Division. But we have added a number of new cases that have proven powerful vehicles for learning about the challenges of general management in the turbulent and competitive global markets of the 1990s.

In the eighth edition, we have emphasized five basic educational themes. First, the material focuses on the roles, tasks, and skills of the general manager in leading the overall enterprise or business unit, in contrast to the tasks of a manager whose responsibilities are limited to a functional specialty. Second, our text and cases highlight strategic management as a key function and responsibility of the line general manager, not as a staff planning activity. Third, we emphasize the extent to which an organization's strategy is built by administrative processes over time as opposed to being designed in an analytic process at a moment in time. Fourth, the extent to which building strategy and building an organization are interdependent tasks is reflected in the structure of the book, its text, and the cases. This represents a major departure from the "formulation followed by implementation" structure of preceding editions and reflects major improvements in the development of general management cases. Finally, a study of this material emphasizes the importance of general management practice as a professional activity. General managers are responsible to multiple constituencies with conflicting needs and goals.

They must manage those organizations so as to achieve economic, social, and ethical goals.

The fourth of these themes is worth further attention. The development of the concept of corporate strategy has exploited the power of the basic idea that structure should follow strategy. Great insight into the appropriate nature of organizational purpose and design has been achieved by examining these topics in sequence with an analytic perspective. Considerable progress in the field of strategy has been possible precisely because of this separation and sequencing. But as the cases in previous editions revealed and the text asserted, and as research in our field has proven for two decades, the two topics are not independent from a general manager's perspective, nor can they be managed in an orderly sequence.

As the pace of competition has accelerated, an accurate reflection of the challenges of general management requires a framework that views these problems as occurring simultaneously. Our focus in this text on the general manager as strategist, organization builder, and doer reflects this objective.

Attention to the role of the general manager in managing these strategic processes has changed as business leaders have come to better understand the value of a positive work environment and constantly improving capability. Both require the involvement of a committed workforce at all levels.

The evolution of this book has been encouraged by many individuals—business managers, academic instructors, and students—who have taken the time and effort to send us suggestions for improvements. We are in *their debt*. *Their continuing interest has helped us to develop a course in general management that can be taught effectively at undergraduate, graduate, and executive seminar levels.*

Whatever the course name, all students of general management participate in a long-term, evolving intellectual adventure. The basic administrative processes and problems with which we are concerned have been part of organizational life for centuries, and date as an academic field to the first business policy course at Harvard Business School in 1908.

This edition builds on substantial contributions made by former and present colleagues; it carries their efforts further along the way to better understanding and greater applicability. In particular, this book abandons the pedagogical approach of separating sharply the formulation and implementation of strategy. It continues the trend toward more international material and more cases concerned with the process of transforming organizations so that they can engage more effectively in the competitive battles that characterize most industries around the globe.

The specific core ideas, the concepts of corporate strategy and managing strategic processes, were developed at Harvard Business School in the 1960s and early 1970s under the leadership of three now emeriti professors: Kenneth R. Andrews, C. Roland Christensen, and Edmund P.

Learned. Two of this book's authors, Joseph L. Bower and Hugo E. R. Uytendaele, worked closely with them in the development of the early course. Christopher A. Bartlett has worked to apply these ideas to international strategic management, and Richard E. Walton has brought to bear his extensive research on the transformation of human behavior in organizations. Over the years, other colleagues have made important contributions through the writing of cases, doing research in general management, and teaching in the MBA and executive programs.

The concept of *corporate strategy* articulated in this textbook has been derived from the careful study in hundreds of company situations of the uniformities that constitute the way decisions about corporate purpose are made and carried out. Distinguishing more from less successful experience has led to a theory about how the tasks involved in giving direction to an organization in competitive conditions can be made more effective. We call it corporate strategy to distinguish it from popular presentations of *economic strategy*.

The idea that perceived strategy at a point in time is the outcome of *managed organizational processes* over time rather than the result of detached analysis has been built up from research and case studies on the making of business unit and corporate strategy. It has been particularly important in helping students and managers to understand why it is so extraordinarily difficult to "turn around" a large previously successful corporation.

We develop at length that the primary function of the general manager is to lead a continuous process of determining the nature of the enterprise, setting and revising goals, building layer upon layer of corporate capability relevant to those goals, and driving day-to-day activity so that over time the organization prospers as its environment changes. By emphasizing the leadership of process in addition to the generation of strategic vision, we have recognized that a general manager is as much the builder of the organization and a leverager of ongoing organizational performance, as he or she is a strategist, and that depending on the circumstances any one of these three roles may be most important.

While our conceptual scheme is not elegant in the conventional sense that the disciplines seek simple formulaic power, we believe that it has great power in application in each unique corporate setting. Although it has not been derived from theoretical modeling or management science, it is based on long experience. The authors, besides being familiar with and having contributed to the literature of strategic management and organizational behavior, have been teaching and doing research in general management for a combined total of more than a century. They have written and supervised more than 400 case studies of domestic, foreign, and multinational companies. They have served as consultants to about 200 companies on general management problems, and serve or have

served on the many different corporate boards of directors. Apart from case collections, they have authored ten research monographs.

We have concluded from this varied experience that no comprehensive positive theory of general management is currently possible. The combination of objective and subjective elements, of economic, social and personal purposes, and of complex ethical and social responsibilities makes automatic outcomes impossible. Close competitive analysis may point to a desired generic economic strategy for a business unit. A unique corporate strategy, however, will reflect the judgment, aspiration, desire, and determination of many fallible human beings in ways that no theoretical model can prescribe. All-purpose management formulas are transparent fantasies. We cannot tell you from our conceptual scheme what the corporate strategy should be for any one company that we do not know, nor what the plan of action should be for that company's general manager. This book will help you find out, in a company you do know, how to approach your own conclusion.

How is this thinking about general management work related to the task of learning in the classroom? We summarize our answer as follows:

The uniqueness of a good general manager lies in one's ability to lead effectively organizations whose complexities he or she can never fully understand, where a capacity to control directly the human and physical forces comprising that organization is severely limited, and where he or she must make or review and assume ultimate responsibility for present decisions which commit concretely major resources for a fluid and unknown future.

These circumstances—lack of knowledge, lack of an ability to control directly, and a mixture of past, present, and future time dimensions in every decision—make the concept of strategy so important for the generalist, senior manager. For strategy gives a manager reasonably clear indications of what one should try to know and understand in order to direct an organization's efforts. It counsels on what to decide, what to review, and what to ignore. It gives guidelines as to which critical, central activities and processes one should attempt to influence or, on rare occasions, attempt to control. It encourages a general manager to view every event and question from multiple time dimensions.

Chester Barnard said that the highest managerial traits are essentially intuitive, "being so complex and so rapid, often approaching the instantaneous, that they could not be analyzed by the person within whose brain they take place." If Barnard is correct, and we think that he is, how do those of us interested in management education strive to contribute to the development of future general managers? We do this first by disciplined classroom drill with the concept of strategy. Drill in the formal and analytic sense—what is the current strategy of the firm? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Where, in the firm's perceived industry, are profit and service opportunities? And how can those corporate capacities and industry opportunities be effectively related? We then ask, What new capabilities must be created? How can the work environment be transformed so that organization

members will perceive the need to acquire them? Which individuals must be engaged in the process so that it succeeds? And what sequencing of strategic, organizational, and interpersonal action will effect intended change? This framework of questions helps to give order to the familiar chaos of complex organizations. It provides the manager with a map relating past, present, and future, industry and company-specific decisions to wider objectives.

Moreover, this analytic classroom process focuses attention on a key administrative skill—the process of selecting and ordering data so that management asks the critical questions appropriate to a particular situation. Here the choice of abstraction level is key, for the question has to be stated in a way that avoids the specific that has no meaning and the general that has no content.

We seek also, via the classroom case discussion process, to educate in the nonlogical—that mixture of feeling and sentiment, comment and commitment, certainty and uncertainty—that goes into every decision and judgment. Such directed group discussions force attention to the human dimensions through which the analytic framework is filtered in real life. It serves further to emphasize the ongoing or process nature of the general manager's world.

It is a combination of these two forces—the analytic framework of strategic planning and the process framework emphasizing human interaction, the complexities of persons, and the difficulty of communication and persuasion—that make up our educational fare.

The need is great for professionally trained generalists—those men and women who make our organized society's critical decisions. We continue to believe that this challenge will be met, at least in part, by all of us who work in the general management area, both in academic and practical pursuits, throughout this country and the world. And we hope this book will be of some help in meeting that challenge.

Joseph L. Bower

Acknowledgments

The history of the Business Policy course at Harvard Business School began in 1911, when a small group of instructors first developed a course outline and materials for a pioneering venture in education for general management. Those of us who currently teach and do research in the business policy arena are in debt to those pioneers who provided the academic platform on which current efforts rest. We wish to especially recognize and thank efforts of A. W. Shaw, the first policy professor at Harvard Business School, M. T. Copeland, George Albert Smith, Jr., and Edmund P. Learned, who provided almost 60 years of dedicated leadership to course ideals and development, and Kenneth R. Andrews and C. Roland Christensen who built and sustained the modern policy course both by introducing the concept of corporate strategy and by preserving the course's central focus on the leadership function of the general manager. We are in their debt, as we are to those colleagues who worked under their leadership and who assisted in past course development.

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Although the text for this book is new, it reflects its roots in the concepts and principles articulated so well in the earlier text material authored by Kenneth R. Andrews. It also has been influenced greatly by the teaching faculty of the MPP and GMP courses at Harvard Business School during the 1990–94 period and numerous unnamed doctoral candidates in Business Policy who have discussed the course with us. Ken Andrews and Chris Christensen are both enjoying busy and productive lives in retirement. But the thousands of students and faculty with whom they worked know how much they have contributed to thinking about all aspects of general management in business schools everywhere but especially in practice. They remained focused on the human and ethical aspects of leadership at a time when analytic nostrums were epidemic. They were our teachers and friends, and we have dedicated this book to them.

Dean John H. McArthur and Warren F. McFarlan, Director of the Division of Research, provided us with intellectual support and practical administrative assistance. We are in their debt. A special thanks to the reviewers for this book: T. K. Das, Baruch College; Professor Andrew Deile, Mercer University; Professor Joseph Monroe, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Dr. Ben B. Sutton, Our Lady of the Lake University; Professor Frank L. Winfrey, Kent State University.

Marguerite Dole took on the management task of producing this book and carried out the assignment with her usual blend of efficiency and good humor.

We hope this book, within which the efforts of so many good people are compressed, will contribute to constructive concern for corporate purpose and accomplishments and to the continuing and effective study and practice of general management in private, nonprofit, and public organizations.

JLB
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CONTENTS

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xiii

**Introduction The General Management Perspective
and Business Policy 1**

Business Policy as a Field of Study 2

A Concept of “General Management” 3

The General Manager as Strategist 4

The General Manager as Organization Builder 5

The General Manager as Doer 5

The Skills of the General Manager 6

Cases

Bright Horizons Children’s Centers, Inc.—1987 8

Head Ski Company, Inc. 21

Phil Knight: CEO at Nike (1983) 48

Serengeti Eyewear: Entrepreneurship within Corning
Inc. 68

Chapter 1 What Is Strategy? 88

Introduction 88

Strategy Defined 92

Explicit Strategy 94

Sound Strategy 97

A Strategic View of Market Opportunity 99

A Strategic View of Capabilities 100

Strategy as a Summary of Corporate Values 103

Cases

- Crown Cork & Seal in 1989 106
- Asahi Breweries, Ltd. 130
- Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. 152
- Komatsu Limited 176
- Corning Incorporated: A Network of Alliances 195

Chapter 2 Industry and Competitive Analysis 221

- Introduction 221
- Noneconomic Factors 221
- The Primary Proposition: Profit Potential 223
- Strategic Analysis of Industry Structure 226
 - The Threat of Entry* 226
 - The Threat of Substitution* 229
 - The Power of Suppliers and Customers* 229
 - Government* 230
 - Rivalry among Competitors* 231
- Relating Opportunities to Capabilities 233
 - Opportunities and Threats* 233
 - Assessing Capabilities and Weaknesses* 235
 - Matching Opportunity and Capability* 237

Cases

- Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 239
- Firestone, Inc.: Globalization 272
- Ingvar Kamprad and IKEA 295
- Apple Computer—1992 318
- Bill Gates and the Management of Microsoft 342

Chapter 3 Personal Values and Corporate Strategy 363

- Introduction 363
- We All Have Values 364
- Values Are Key to Legitimate Action 367
- Awareness of Values 368

Cases

- Salvatore Ferragamo, SpA 371
- Schlumberger Ltd.: Jean Riboud Excerpts from “A Certain Poetry” by Ken Auletta 393
- The Body Shop International 417

**Chapter 4 Relating Strategy to Social Responsibility
435**

Introduction 435

Responsibility for Economic Action 436*Responsibility for Social Action* 438

The Moral Dimensions of Strategic Action 440

Strategy for Social Action 442

Cases

BayBank Boston 444

RU 486 (A) 469

Chapter 5 Building Strategy 482

Introduction 482

The Process of Strategic Development 484

Summary 489

Cases

Adam Opel AG (A) 490

Intel Corporation—Leveraging Capabilities for
Strategic Renewal 513

The Harvard Business School 546

**Chapter 6 Building Organizational Capabilities
561**

Introduction 561

Tailoring the Organization to Strategy 561

Beyond Organization as an Architectural Task 565

Building Organization Capability 566

How Work Environments Contribute to Capability
570*The Forces That Shape Work Environments* 570

Summary 571

Cases

The Adams Corporation (A) 572

Colgate-Palmolive: Company in Transition (A) 576

The Lincoln Electric Company 594

The Johnsonville Sausage Co. (A) 625

Banc One—1993 639

ABB Deutschland 663

Chapter 7 Transforming an Organization 678

Introduction 678

Ingredients of Successful Planned Change 680

Building Motivation 680*Formulating a Vision* 682*Managing the Process of Change* 686

Continual renewal 688

Summary 691

Cases

Richardson Sheffield 692

Jack Welch: General Electric's Revolutionary 709

The Battle of Mannheim 730

Marks & Spencer: Sir Richard Greenbury's Quiet
Revolution 740**Chapter 8 Building Relationships 770**

Introduction 770

Building Relationships with Direct Reports 771

Building Relationships Upward 772

Building Relationships with Customers and Suppliers
774Building Relationships across the Organization with
Peers 775**Cases**

Basic Industries 776

Kentucky Fried Chicken (Japan) Limited 788

Cleveland Twist Drill (A) 808

Richardson Hindustan Limited (Abridged) 830

**Chapter 9 Building a General Management Career
846**

General Management Skills 846

Steps in a General Management Career 847

Cases

Gurcharan Das's Career Choices 851

Ben & Jerry's Homemade Ice Cream Inc.: Keeping the
Mission(s) Alive 864**Index of Cases**

Introduction



The General Management Perspective and Business Policy

This book is about the work of general managers, those executives with responsibilities for running an entire business as opposed to a function like finance or a process like human resource management. There are general managers in all kinds of organizations, nonprofit as well as profit-making, but the cases in this book describe the problems of business managers.

Some general managers run companies and others run subsidiaries or profit centers. Much is similar in the general management work of these different kinds of managers, and this book is concerned with both of them. But it is also true that some general managers are responsible for their entire company, and we are particularly concerned in this book with this critical work of corporate leadership. We will usually speak of this top role as “chief executive officer” or, less formally, as “the president.”

There is something special about this role. Harry Truman captured a great deal of it when he said, “The buck stops here.” The chief executive is responsible for the results of the corporation’s behavior, the earnings, the balance sheet, the quality of the products and services, the safety of plant facilities, the citizenship of the company in the towns and countries where it operates—everything. In large companies, chief executives go to sleep each night knowing that the next day’s headlines may include some terrible gaffe or even crime committed by an employee. And when something goes wrong, the chief executive is supposed to be able to explain the problem knowledgeably whether it is surprisingly low earnings, the result of a change in some government’s policy, or an environmental disaster.

At the same time, customers look to the chief executive as the ultimate salesperson for the company. Where customers are large relative to total sales, selling is actually something the president does. But in all companies, the president is the person to whom the markets look as the chief spokesperson. The smiling face of Sam Walton represented Wal-Mart, and his presence in his stores reflected his conclusion that the customers were right. Especially in the United States with its strong populist tradition, anonymous is a negative description when applied to a chief executive.

Equally important to the work of the president, the people of the organization look to him or her for personal leadership. The chief executive operates on a stage with bright lights on most of the time. All actions and words are interpreted for meaning, and inconsistencies are duly noted. What is the president saying, and does he “walk the way he talks”? The values of the organization, its standards of performance, and generally the way people are treated inevitably reflect the way the president behaves.

Sometimes, the comprehensiveness of these responsibilities is experienced as a real burden by company leaders. Especially if they were entrepreneur founders of their organizations, they sometimes yearn for the “freedom” they experienced in their companies’ formative years. (Usually this means they have forgotten their dismay with the behavior of their financiers!) How well they deal with these almost unlimited responsibilities depends on their personality and their physical condition. An important characteristic of chief executives is simply their stamina. John Harvey-Jones, famous as the chief executive who turned around the U.K. chemical giant ICI, has remarked that physical and intellectual toughness are key attributes of business leaders.¹

BUSINESS POLICY AS A FIELD OF STUDY

Many business management students aspire to the role described above. Many others see top management as their ultimate client for consulting or banking services, or their employer. For all, understanding the role of the general manager and the skills required in the job is central to understanding the nature of a business and how it is managed. As a field of business administration, *business policy* “is the study of the functions and responsibilities of senior management, the crucial problems that affect the success of the total enterprise, and the decisions that

¹ John Harvey-Jones, *Making It Happen: Reflections on Leadership* (London: Collins, 1988).

determine the direction of the organization, shape its future, and, when well implemented, secure its achievement.”²

Today, the subject of business policy is taught under a wide range of names. At many schools the title “Strategic Management” is used to reflect the body of research that has been carried out in the last 15 years in that field. Elsewhere, the problems of economic strategy are separated from those of leadership. The research and literature that provide the foundation for this book, as well as its previous editions, find the core problems of general management in the indivisibility of the twin tasks of shaping the purpose of the organization and managing the processes by which the organization operates. Except for narrow pedagogical purposes, it is not even right to separate from the study of the work of general management the vital contribution the president can make by leveraging the day-to-day performance of the organization.

It is precisely to emphasize the importance of process and action in the functions and responsibilities of senior management that we have shifted emphasis in this edition from the more analytic “business policy,” with its emphasis on the core concept of corporate strategy, to the more dynamic “general management,” with its balanced view of purpose and process interacting.

A CONCEPT OF “GENERAL MANAGEMENT”

Even the brief review that we have made of general management responsibilities reveals the comprehensiveness and complexity of the job of chief executive. In order to make sense of the job and to study its functions, it is useful to consider it in terms of three roles, *strategist*, *organization builder*, and *doer*. These three roles encompass the tasks of

- crafting the strategy of the organization and communicating it to the organization.
- managing the resource allocation process so that it reflects the strategy.
- managing the selection, training, and progress of the people organization and building a positive work environment, designing the structure and systems that provide context for the operations—both so that capabilities increase in areas that permit moving toward strategic objectives.
- intervening personally where necessary to drive forward and raise the quality of day-to-day performance.

² Joseph L Bower et al., *Business Policy: Text and Cases*, 7th edition (Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1991), p.2.