

Overall, there is an eclectic mix of perspectives on the implementation process. These range in units of analysis from the individual's psychological orientation through organisational case studies of change and implementation programmes to interventions at a multi-organisational level such as the National Action Learning Programme. Another dimension of difference is the theoretical approach used ranging from interpretative case studies, through to large sample studies.

One weakness of the book is the lack of historical perspective on the literature. I would have liked to have seen a chapter commissioned on what we know about strategy implementation. In reviewing the Index I was disappointed not to see references to the works of Bourgeois and Wildavsky in the area. I think such a chapter would have highlighted the contributions which many of the Chapters in this book seek to make.

I recommend this book to academics on the basis that it provides a broad-based introduction to a much under-researched topic. As firms are challenged to compete in "hypercompetitive" markets the quality of both strategic thinking and strategy implementation become critical. Further research into the quality of strategy implementation is called for and this book would suitably inform such research. I recommend the book to practitioners because of the direct style of the writing, the quality of the contributions made and the insights generated by the contributors. The book provides rich material to inform the practitioner about the range of individual, group and organisational challenges posed in considering implementation issues.

Competitiveness and the Value of Intangible Assets

Editors: Pierre Buigues, Alexis Jacquemin, and Jean-Francois Marchipont, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK 2000.

Reviewed by Bakr Alserhan, University College Dublin.

This book documents the proceedings of the conference on "intangible assets and the competitiveness of the European community" held in the catholic university, Louvian, April 1999. It also attempts to present some policy recommendations from the proceeding discussions.

It is divided into three parts, each part is made of a number of papers that deal with a certain dimension of the relationship between the so-called "intangible assets" and competitiveness. It is composed of 12 papers and case studies in addition to three chapters for discus-

sion and a chapter for conclusion. The unique sequence of the subjects presented and its value in surveying future trends make it very hard to resist browsing through each of its three main parts as each of these tackles an important issue of the intangibles-competitiveness relationship. However, it is not easy to avoid that sense of repetitiveness stimulated by the extensive use of the term "intangibles" all through out the book. Also, within each of its three parts some of the chapters seem overlapping and discussing, more or less, the same ideas and there fore reading a chapter or so from each part will be sufficient enough, unless of course one is looking for a thorough and deep understanding of the topic which then requires surfing through all of the book chapters.

The book emphasises the increasing importance of the role of the intangible assets in supporting national as well as corporate performance and analyses some of the reasons behind such an importance. The increasing contribution of the service activities to the GDP in advanced and advancing countries, the shift towards knowledge based economies and the recognition of knowledge as a major source of competitive advantage, globalisation, and other more "technical" issues (i.e. market value, book value, etc) are among the reasons commonly sighted.

The visibility of the intangible assets evolved over a relatively long period of time. Capital was looked at for a long time as a factor of production and measured hardware capital attracted all the attention of economists while intangible capital, as a source of industrial competitiveness was not an issue to be emphasised. Due to many changes in the social as well as business environment the view toward the sources of competitive advantage has changed and now there is some evidence of new approaches (i.e. core intellectual and services competencies by Quin 1992, core competencies by Parahalad and Hamel 1990, and resource-based) to competitiveness that challenge porter's traditional model of the 1980s. In this regard, the book introduces some new and relatively disputable views about the nature of competitiveness. Due to changes in the competitive environment, it is argues that a major shift in both the sources of competitive advantage and how such an advantage is perceived has occurred. Until recently, what used to be a source of a long sustainable advantage are proving to be an easily replicable, readily transmitted, and short life cycle advantages. The competitive process is an ongoing process and new sources and shapes of competitiveness are evolving with every major advancement in technology and/or change in the market structure. It is recognised however, that it is not easy, by any means, to quantify

the intangibles- make them tangible. It is hard to understand the intangibles (i.e. R&D, innovation, patents, trademarks, human capital stock, training, etc) contributions to the firm's competitiveness. To handle this measurement problem, brave attempts were made to quantify some of these intangibles. However, despite that these attempts were highly structured and rely extensively on various sources of data, graphs, tables, charts, and formulas, it is not easy to positively accredit them or find ways of making use of their results in measuring such assets.

Finally, the book concludes by pinpointing some general recommendations for the European policy makers to help them improve the European national as well as international competitiveness. Among those are a better dissemination of R&D results into products and processes, higher education and training levels, and giving at least equal priority to the other important "intangible" assets as of that given to physical assets in governmental policies. Intangible investment should be given the importance it deserves in comparison with physical investment. Perhaps a step in that direction would be to find an alternative word to describe those assets and reflect their vital role in determining competitiveness instead of keeping on using the word "intangibles" which literary means insubstantial, vague, or indescribable

Doing Action Research in your Own Organisation

Authors: D. Coghlan & T. Brannick. 2001, Sage Publications.

Reviewed by Leo F. Smyth, Department of Management, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Of those who have watched their organisation strive to implement change (and sometimes strive against it) there can be few who have not felt from time to time that what they observe should be written up as a research project. Such people see the abstractions of management theory brought to life in a way no textbook can manage, while the gritty realities of strategy, politics, and organisational change make themselves felt as soon as someone is serious about doing things differently. Perhaps they are right, and the story should be told; but action research, while it may include story telling, is much more than that. It is a deliberate attempt to do two things at the same time: to extend the boundaries of organisational science while attempting to solve an organizational problem. To paraphrase Lewin, it

Copyright of Irish Journal of Management is the property of Irish Journal of Management and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.