



Competing on the Edge : Strategy as Structured Chaos

By Shona L. Brown, Kathleen M. Eisenhardt

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Unstable markets, fierce competition, and relentless change are the only certainties in today's chaotic business world. In their startling new book, authors Brown and Eisenhardt contend that to prosper in such volatile conditions, standard survival strategies must be tossed aside in favor of a revolutionary new paradigm—competing on the edge. To compete on the edge is to relentlessly reinvent, and it's the only way to navigate the treacherous waters of tumultuous markets. Competing on the edge is an unpredictable, sometimes even inefficient strategy, yet a singularly effective one in an era driven by change. It requires charting a course along the edge of chaos, where a delicate compromise is struck between anarchy and order, to the edge of time, where current business is the primary focus, but actions are shaped by past legacies and future opportunities. By adroitly maneuvering through chaos and time, managers can avoid constantly reacting to nonstop change and instead set a rhythmic pace that others must follow, thereby shaping the competitive landscape—and their own destiny. In the first book to translate leading edge concepts from complexity theory into management practice, each chapter focuses on a specific management dilemma and illustrates a solution. Linking where do you want to go? With how will you get there? Here's a bold and surprising strategy that works—when the name of the game is change.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

What do the Atlanta Braves, Microsoft, 3M, Nike, and Intel all have in common? According to Shona Brown and Kathleen Eisenhardt, authors of *Competing on the Edge: Strategy as Structured Chaos*, each of these organizations are predictably unpredictable. They're leaders not because of their ability to predict the course of their markets; rather, these companies have learned to embrace the notion of change. They're successful because they've learned to find that edge between structure and chaos that allows them to be innovative and creative, while maintaining just enough discipline to focus on executing a plan.

The authors contend that competing on the edge is not an efficient or predictable way to do business. Instead, it's learning how to adapt and lead in a business environment that's in a constant state of flux. "The underlying insight behind competing on the edge is that strategy is the result of a firm's organizing to change constantly and letting a semicoherent strategic direction emerge from that organization. In other words, it is about combining the two parts of strategy by simultaneously addressing where you want to go and how you are going to get there."

Brown and Eisenhardt offer dozens of examples of companies that are successfully and not so successfully finding that balance between anarchy and order. If, on the one hand, you feel like your company is bogged down by rules and bureaucracy or if, on the other, it seems like no one in your company knows exactly what they're doing, you'll find that *Competing on the Edge* is a valuable handbook for change. The book is clearly written, full of insight, and belongs on every manager's bookshelf. Highly recommended. --Harry C. Edwards

Review

"An innovative management book." -- *InfoWorld*, October 10, 1998

"If you want to learn something new about meeting the challenges of rapid change, read...*Competing on the Edge: Strategy as Structured Chaos* by Shona L. Brown, a McKinsey & Co. consultant, and Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, a Stanford business-school professor. Chapter six, "Setting the Pace," is worth the price of admission all by itself. In that chapter, the authors describe how Intel uses "time pacing" to enter new markets and to create new products, services, and businesses according to the calendar rather than in response to competitive events." -- *Inc. Magazine*, June 1998

"The authors make a compelling argument for a proactive approach to change and offer a practical vision of the road to take when embarking on such a mission." -- *Choice*, October 1998

This well-written volume about managing in an environment of constant change takes as its context complexity theory--the decade-old scientific perspective often associated with the Santa Fe Institute and concepts such as artificial life. The authors--Shona L. Brown, a consultant with McKinsey & Co., and Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, a Stanford University professor--emphasize examples of successful management that are as complex and unexpected as the theory itself. The authors distill 10 rules of strategy, organization and leadership for competing on the edge and then compare them with traditional rules of management. For those who can live with fundamental ambiguity, the examples make clear how powerful and successful this unorthodox approach can be. -- *Upside*, Stephen E. DeLong

About the Author

Shona L. Brown is a consultant with McKinsey & Company in Toronto, Canada.

Users Review

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Margaret Cardwell:

This *Competing on the Edge : Strategy as Structured Chaos* are reliable for you who want to be described as a successful person, why. The key reason why of this *Competing on the Edge : Strategy as Structured Chaos* can be one of the great books you must have will be giving you more than just simple reading through food but feed you with information that might be will shock your earlier knowledge. This book is definitely handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions in e-book and printed versions. Beside that this *Competing on the Edge : Strategy as Structured Chaos* giving you an enormous of experience including rich vocabulary, giving you trial of critical thinking that we realize it useful in your day action. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

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