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Fall is in the air, time for back to school!

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Dear Colleagues,

Finally a little crispness in the air...

...promoting an uncontrollable urge on the part of many of us to reach for textbooks – or perhaps more fashionably these days to sign up for a MOOC. September always brings on that back-to-school feeling for me, perhaps because once everyone has woken from the August doldrums, we really do all go back to school!

Events

School started for me this September at the [Irish Management Institute](#) in Dublin where the weather was...astonishingly rather nice. I teach a module of their Senior Executive Programme on growth strategies. There were some great observations from the class:

- If we don't give people a great experience when they visit our retail shops, there is no reason for them to come to a bricks and mortar store
- Our growth for the last 10 years has been clever financial engineering and acquisitions – now we're promising our investors dramatic growth from organic innovation, which is the hardest thing of all to do.
- [from an executive with a company that is reputationally challenged] What do we

have to do to regain our reputation? Replied one of his colleagues, “admit defeat and change your name!”

I was the envy of my relatives when the **Insurance Institute of Ireland** arranged for me to stay at the iconic **Shelbourne hotel** in Dublin. The Institute sponsored an exclusive breakfast meetings for senior executives from member companies. One of the most interesting questions at the meeting was whether the advent of “Big Data” might have the effect of disrupting the insurance business, by making the scarce knowledge embedded in risk assessment and underwriting far more widely available. There is more than one profession that might suffer that fate.

On September 18th, I was a guest at the official launch of the Chief Strategists’ Club in London by Paul Barnett of the **Strategic Management Bureau** at another iconic location, the **Royal Society of Art**. As one might expect with a gathering of leading strategists, there was lively debate about the conclusions from my book, in particular whether executives that see change is coming can get their companies to change quickly enough. One attendee observed that at Xerox, their CEO had a vision to create the office of the future. Despite his commitment and best efforts, the future was ushered in by other companies. Another took issue with my observation that analysis in many cases would have less value, suggesting that “Sometimes, reams of analysis have more of an emotional value than a rational one”. Spreadsheets, take that!

The Paley Center for Media held a special event on **September 24** featuring the Riptide project (<http://www.niemanlab.org/riptide/>) , an oral history of what became of the news business as it collided with technology. One big question was whether what happened to news media was inevitable or not. Such luminaries as Arthur Sulzberger, Sir Martin Sorrell, Caroline Little, Henry Blodgett, the authors of the history and the Paley Center’s CEO Pat Mitchell were there. The debate was no-holds-barred with Henry Blodgett arguing for a bright future for media and Sir Martin taking a more dim view. Two quotes from the evening that struck me: “news media used to be like fire hydrants in the desert; today, they are fire hydrants in the ocean” and “you are in the business of trading analog dimes for digital pennies”.



The month wasn't all work though – our family had a lovely time attending the wedding of our niece, Sarah Cundy, to Ross O'Driscoll at the **Wetlands Centre** in Twickenham, which is a village within London. In a bit of a twist from American traditions, hats were quite the done thing – acquiring mine involved much last-minute tromping about in particularly wet London rain to the complete disgruntlement of my family. We did emerge from John Lewis, triumphant, with a pink “fascinator” in hand. At least I didn't let the American side down!

The month wrapped up with the annual meeting of the Strategic Management Society. I moderated the opening plenary on the theme of what becomes of strategy in a transient advantage world, together with V. Ganapathy Subramanian, head of strategy and planning for Infosys and Ryan McManus, the global lead for strategy and growth from Accenture, both companies that are featured quite heavily in my book.

Ganapathy described how Infosys keeps from getting trapped in aging competitive advantages, highlighting 3 practices the firm uses. First, they change their organizational structure every three years, building on external change triggers. Secondly, they re-base the organizational budgets every quarter (yikes!) and keep the resources as close to the business as possible. Thirdly, they direct innovation as a systematic capability, managing a portfolio of projects, developing new platforms that support clients' needs and making

sure that innovation is connected to the purpose of their strategy.

Ryan described some work that Accenture is doing on the future of strategy, highlighting evolving themes that the company is exploring. The first is how demographics – aging populations and emerging markets – are going to fundamentally shift how we work and communicate. The second is an increase in truly global trade. And finally, digital is everywhere and affects everything. He quoted Jamie Dimon as saying “digital is like dark matter – it’s everywhere, you just can’t see it.” He also mentioned the concept of “technology debt” – this refers to the fact that you need to keep investing in new technologies as your existing platforms become obsolete.



Transient Advantage Interview with Mark Littlewood of the Business Leader's Network

In the News

- *Forbes* liberally cited the ideas in *The End of Competitive Advantage* for why so many of our taken for granted rules in strategy – for instance, that size conveys an advantage – no longer apply
- *The End of Competitive Advantage* was included in back to school reading for Entrepreneurs by the nice folks over at Entrepreneur Magazine.

- *Travel Weekly* did a series of interviews in which we discuss, among other things, how short-term assignments are more valuable for some people than a long term job
- You can listen to a “wise talk” interview I did with Mariposa Leadership

In the Blogs

- It was thrilling for me to have **my work cited by Jim Heskett**, someone I’ve admired for some time at Harvard Business School
- A book review in Seeking Alpha discussed **the implications of transient advantage for investors**
- A fellow blogger warns of **the problems of “technical debt”** and transient advantage economy
- Another blogger stressed **the importance of making better decisions**
- **Musings about the end of scale advantage economics** implied by End of Competitive Advantage
- Why **execution can create an advantage** in a transient economy world
- **Why you might be overconfident** in your strategy implementation

In the Works

On November 11, The Thinkers50 folks will be having their bi-annual awards event, and I was delighted to learn that I am on the shortlist for the **Strategy and Best Book awards**. It will be at beautiful Draper’s Hall in London, and will feature a daylong event and an evening gala. I believe there are still a few spaces if anyone would like to join us.

I’ll be heading to Boston at the end of October for the **Business of Software Conference**, where I’ll be giving a keynote speech. Then, on to Toronto and some events with my friends from **TMG International and the Rotman School**. If you are in the Toronto area, come check it out!

One of the events I look forward to most is the twice-yearly run of my own executive education program, **Leading Strategic Growth and Change**. This year it starts on October

21. It can be a transformative experience for participants who come from all over the world. We work hard during the days but have our evenings free. If any of you would like to learn more, let me know.

We're also looking forward to a [Manhattan Chamber of Commerce event on October 24.](#)

All the best,

Rita



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