Red Teaming: How Your Business Can Conquer the Competition by Challenging Everything

By Bryce G. Hoffman

Reviewed by Charles D. Allen, professor of leadership and cultural studies, US Army War College

Red Teaming is a book where readers can learn what business leaders have culled from the US military experience over the past two decades. It is an organizational "how-to" that provides tactics, techniques, and procedures to improve decision-making and performance for leaders and managers. As such, the process of red teaming is a component of organizational development with the goals to achieve successful organizational change and improved performance through the alignment of organizational learning and knowledge management.

Bryce Hoffman is a former financial journalist who transitioned to a career as an organization consultant and author. His first book, *American Icon* (2012), is a best seller cited by senior US Army leaders for its key takeaways about leading and managing change in a large enterprise. In 2015, Hoffman gained the distinction of being the first non-US government civilian to attend the Red Team Leaders Course at the Army's University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Through that unique experience, Hoffman learned of the origins, challenges, and evolutions of red teaming. As a result, he embraced the concept and wrote this book to expand upon and provide methods for any organization to "stress-test its strategy, perfect its plans, flush out hidden threats, identify missed opportunities, and avoid being sandbagged by unexpected events or new competitors" (250). While the author is ambitious in such claims, he provides a well-written presentation of concepts, an effective narrative of their application in military and civilian organizations, and useful caveats for leaders and managers.

The book is well-organized as it begins with a critical reflection by the US Army and the intelligence community in the wake of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and subsequent military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. When strategies, plans, and operations failed to achieve desired outcomes, it was necessary to reexamine processes and structures, as well as individual factors of decision-making—hence, the need for red teaming. The reader learns through historical accounts that red teaming is not a new concept, nor is it unique to the US Army.

The author identifies the core problems red teaming addresses when the biases of individuals are compounded in groups and within organizations. Chapter 3 presents "the Psychology of Red Teaming" with well-researched and established findings on individual cognition
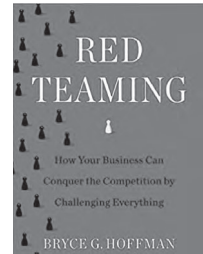
that lead to inappropriately applied heuristics, biased judgments, and use of logical fallacies.

The purpose of red teaming is linked to its description in *Command Red Team*, US Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-16, where the command red team is a "cross-functional organizational element comprised of trained members that provide the commander with an independent capability to explore fully alternatives in plans and operations and supporting intelligence, and to enhance staff decision-making through the simulation for critical and creative thought" (I-2).

In chapter 4, "How to Start Red Teaming," Hoffman directs the reader to consider key questions of the type of red-team model to use, as well as how to staff and to support the team. The three subsequent chapters reveal red teaming is the application of strategic thinking—specifically creative thinking, critical thinking, and systems thinking—which are familiar to senior-level war college graduates. New to military readers will be the compilation of tools and techniques to frame problems, to discern underlying assumptions, and to generate alternative perspectives. Hoffman provides several such tools with practical applications and examples of their use in well-known business organizations. To employ red teaming effectively requires the understanding of organizational culture as well as organizational climate. It also requires an appreciation of team and group dynamics in the decision-making process.

Hoffman asserts that for a red team to be effective, it must be accepted as providing value to the organization. Given that red teams, by design, are not invested in derived plans, courses of action, and selected solutions, the teams are inherently contrarian and viewed as disruptors to organizational processes. Providing value is evident when the red team voice is sought and listened to. While the red team interjections and assessments may not change the organizational strategy, plan, or solution, its engagement can clarify assumptions, generate exploration of potential consequences, and inform contingency development. Hence, red teaming becomes a necessary organizational capability to improve performance of the organization and its members.

Perhaps chapter 10, "The Rules of Red Teaming," is the most insightful: like in *American Icon*, Hoffman provides caveats for leaders with pithy taglines. Of the seven rules, "Rule 1: Don't Be a Jerk" and "Rule 6: You Don't Always Have to Be Right—But You Can't Always Be Wrong" are useful to consider regardless of the type of team or organization—military or civilian.

National security professionals may be more comfortable with former senior fellow of the Council of Foreign Relations and political scientist Micah Zenko's treatment of the topic in *Red Team* (2015). Hoffman's work, however, is more accessible to members of the defense community with engaging vignettes that clearly illustrate the how-tos of red teaming for the military pragmatist. Senior defense leaders will readily find parallel opportunities in warfighting and enterprise organizations within our military to apply red teaming in pursuit of better strategies.