

Somehow along the path to becoming a CEO, I had missed those all important lessons that told me how to evaluate a strategy. I still had no means to understand what a good strategy was and it was no longer enough for me to think it “seems fine”. I needed more than that as I was the experienced executive that the less experienced took guidance from.

I asked one of my juniors what they thought of our strategy. They responded “seems fine to me”. My heart sank. Unlike that confident executive in the lift of the Arts hotel who was testing some junior, I still hadn’t a clue. I was an imposter CEO! I needed to learn fast before anyone found out. But how?

In 2004, I sat down in my boardroom with our strategy documents and started to dissect them. There were lots of familiar and comfortable terms. We had to be innovative, efficient, customer centric, web 2.0 and all that this entailed. Alas, I suspected these common “memes” were repeated in the strategy documents of other companies because I was pretty sure I had copied them. I had heard the thought leaders at various conferences and read analyst reports that proclaimed these same lines over and over as the new truth. Well, at least we were following the herd I thought. However, someone must have started these memes and how did they know if these memes were right? How did I become like that confident executive that I remember?

Frustrated with my own natural inability, I started to trawl through books on strategy. I was looking for some way of understanding, a framework or a reference point to compare against. More brutally, I