



The Red Queen among Organizations: How Competitiveness Evolves

William P. Barnett



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There's a scene in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* in which the Red Queen, having just led a chase with Alice in which neither seems to have moved from the spot where they began, explains to the perplexed girl: "It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place." Evolutionary biologists have used this scene to illustrate the evolutionary arms race among competing species. William Barnett argues that a similar dynamic is at work when organizations compete, shaping how firms and industries evolve over time.

Barnett examines the effects--and unforeseen perils--of competing and winning. He takes a fascinating, in-depth look at two of the most competitive industries--computer manufacturing and commercial banking--and derives some startling conclusions. Organizations that survive competition become stronger competitors--but only in the market contexts in which they succeed. Barnett shows how managers may think their experience will help them thrive in new markets and conditions, when in fact the opposite is likely to be the case. He finds that an organization's competitiveness at any given moment hinges on the organization's historical experience. Through Red Queen competition, weaker competitors fail, or they learn and adapt. This in turn heightens the intensity of competition and further strengthens survivors in an ever-evolving dynamic. Written by a leading organizational theorist, *The Red Queen among Organizations* challenges the prevailing wisdom about competition, revealing it to be a force that can make--and break--even the most successful organization.



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