13 August 2026


Beyond Frameworks: Where Great Strategy Takes Shape

Frameworks Organize Thinking—They Do Not Create Strategy

Frameworks are widely used in strategic planning. From Michael Porter's Value Chain and Five Forces to SWOT analysis, companies rely on these tools to understand their businesses, assess markets, and evaluate their competitive position.

But does applying these frameworks necessarily lead to a winning strategy?

Not quite.

Frameworks are valuable because they bring structure to complex problems. They help us examine a business from different perspectives, organize information, and ensure that important issues are not overlooked.

However, structure alone does not create a strategy that customers truly value or one that delivers sustainable competitive advantage.

The reason is simple: frameworks help organize thinking, but they do not produce the answers. In fact, when the focus shifts from exploring the problem to completing the framework, analysis may become more structured—but new ideas become less likely to emerge.

Strategy Begins with Customer Understanding, Not Analysis

Many companies apply strategy frameworks rigorously, yet still struggle to develop strategies that truly differentiate their businesses. The result is often another well-structured strategic plan that looks remarkably similar to countless others.

I observed the same during my MBA studies overseas. Many of my classmates became highly skilled at applying frameworks. Their analyses were thorough, logical, and well organized, but that alone rarely led to truly distinctive strategies.

The problem is not the frameworks themselves. The issue lies in where strategy begins.

Before diving into analysis, leaders must first develop a deep understanding of their customers: their circumstances, priorities, and the challenges they face. This allows leaders to see the world from the customer's perspective, something analysis alone rarely provides. Without that foundation, even the most sophisticated analysis is unlikely to produce a strategy that truly reflects what customers value.

Copyright © 2026 Industrial Growth Platform Pte. Ltd. (IGPI Singapore) All Rights Reserved.

One of most effective way to build this understanding is through direct conversations with customers. Rather than simply asking customers what they want, invite them to share experiences that have stayed with them, particularly the moments that delighted them, frustrated them, or made them proud. These stories often reveal motivations, values, and unmet needs that data alone cannot uncover. More importantly, they can change the questions leaders ask about their businesses.

The Real Value of Frameworks Lies in Better Questions

Frameworks are often used as tools for finding answers. Their real purpose, however, is to help us think more critically.

Take SWOT analysis as an example. Its purpose should not simply be to complete a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Rather, it is to challenge the assumptions behind them.

Is this really a strength?
Why do we see this as a weakness?
Could that weakness become a source of competitive advantage?

The value of a framework lies in prompting questions like these. As the quality of our questions improves, so does our understanding of the challenges we face. And when our understanding changes, so do the strategic options available to us.

Ultimately, the ability to develop strategy is not measured by how quickly we arrive at answers. It comes from continually asking better questions while deepening our understanding of customers.

Frameworks can guide that process, but great strategy takes shape in the thinking that happens beyond them.

How IGPI Can Help

IGPI helps organizations develop strategies that go beyond frameworks. We work with management teams to deepen customer understanding, challenge assumptions, and refine the strategic questions that shape competitive advantage.

By combining rigorous analysis with deep customer understanding, we help organizations develop strategies that are both distinctive and executable.

Copyright © 2026 Industrial Growth Platform Pte. Ltd. (IGPI Singapore) All Rights Reserved.

About the Author

Sakata Kohki, Partner of IGPI Group & CEO of IGPI Singapore

After joining Cap Gemini and Coca Cola, Kohki joined Revamp Corporation where he managed projects on global expansion and turnaround in various sectors including F&B, healthcare, retail, IT, etc. After joining IGPI, he has managed projects mainly on global expansion and cross border M&A in various sectors such as logistics, IT, telecom, retail, etc. In addition to his broad experience in implementing solutions that has been developed in Western countries, he has developed multiple methods to turnaround Asian companies with focus on setting clear vision and employee empowerment. Kohki has proven the practicality of these methods by turning around Asian companies not only as an advisor but also as senior management.

He graduated from Waseda University Department of Political Science and Economics and IE Business School.

Issued by: Industrial Growth Platform Pte. Ltd. (IGPI Singapore)
137 Telok Ayer Street #05-01 Singapore 068602
TEL: +65 6226 1524 URL: http://www.igpi.com.sg
Contact us: https://www.igpi.com.sg/contact-us/#sendenquiry

LinkedIn

Copyright © 2026 Industrial Growth Platform Pte. Ltd. (IGPI Singapore) All Rights Reserved.