



Strategic Tale 7.2

(On the causal ambiguity of competitive advantage)

What is it about the Red Dragon café that makes it so special?

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Many Friday mornings, making the most of the fact I don't have classes at the Faculty this term, I like to treat myself and head off to the centre to have breakfast at the Red Dragon café. Despite being located in the main square, a place with history, and among some of the busiest streets in Cardiff, this café is a haven of peace and tranquillity and allows me to concentrate in a way that I don't always understand. Since I moved to Cardiff and discovered it, I have visited it hundreds of times to literally lose myself within its walls full of history and enjoy the aroma of coffee, with its toasted and deep fragrances, that permeates the entire place from very early on.

It is better not to go on weekends because it is very popular and crowded. From Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon they are constantly baking their famous doughnuts to the delight of regulars and tourists. The rest of the week, they make a lot of buns and sandwiches, and you can enjoy breakfast or brunch for a more affordable price than on weekends. Their croissants are also highly appreciated and popular in Cardiff and remind you of authentic French recipes. However, they are not as traditional as the doughnuts or éclairs they still make. I think they are the best ones in town! They even sell online. Although it may not seem like it, they use the most modern methods, of course.

One of the things I like the most is that they serve all kinds of coffees, each in a different cup. I adore the little porcelain cups with Victorian motifs for black coffee! And they are real experts in mocha, cappuccino and espresso coffees. In my opinion, and in the opinion of hundreds of people who post on the café's Google or Tripadvisor profile, they serve the best espressos in Cardiff.

Sitting at one of my favourite tables, in front of one of the art deco windows that have survived the renovation, I suddenly wondered how a place like the café had been able to keep going for so long. Of course, it can't be because of its founder and famous pastry chef, as she died many years ago. Although its recipes don't seem to have changed one iota! Nor do the ovens that have long since been upgraded, replacing the old ones, as



I was told by one of the waiters I became friends with last year. He was very chatty! Although there, in some basements in the heart of Cardiff, is where they continue to make their delicacies.

Of course, it is not a cheap place, but it is not too expensive either. It is true that the special breakfast on a Saturday or Sunday, or the more traditional buns, are not what you would call a bargain. However, they have offers that change every month. In addition, depending on the time of day, when you are working or reading, they offer second drinks at lower prices.

The service is fabulous, and although some waiters come and go throughout the year, the service is always warm and friendly.

"Helen, so today you escaped from the Faculty, huh?" Liz inquired affectionately when she came to my table.

"No, Liz, I don't have classes on Fridays this term," I replied.

"Well, I recommend the cappuccino." We are using a new coffee and it has more aroma," she whispered as she cleaned my table. Liz has only been at the café for three months, but she seems to have been working there all her life.

The place has all kinds of tables, armchairs and seating that provide different corners for reading, talking, studying, or even just chilling. I don't know how, but the place's acoustics muffle the hustle and bustle, so the background noise becomes an almost constant hum, creating a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere. Although it has been recently renovated, it retains many things from the original premises and business. Thomas, one of the best coffee makers around, has told me the business is no longer run by the family of the original owners and whose daughter, who kept it going after them, never had any children.

"Thomas, and if this is no longer run by the original owners, why does it seem to keep that traditional feel it has?" I asked him curiously on one occasion.

"Well, I don't really know, but you feel like you're in a family here," he replied, as if that could explain everything.

How can it compete with the city's many cafés and huge chains and franchises that serve breakfast, pastries, soft drinks, and sandwiches? What makes it different? Its recipes? Its coffees? Its fame? Its privileged location? The waiters? The pastry chefs and cooks? Its clientele? Or maybe it's a combination of all of these? A perfect combination like the mechanism of a watch capable of telling the time accurately without losing a minute and which is hard to emulate. I don't know. The truth is I became absorbed in these musings this morning while enjoying a delicious coffee with a fresh éclair they have baked specially today because they are trying out new flavours. And so, wrapped up in these thoughts, I have firmly resolved to carry out a new work project. Yes, definitely, I also have to find that different "something", that "perfect combination" for me.





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