



## **TRACING THE ORIGIN OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: A CLASSIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

*Strategic management has become a cornerstone of modern organizational theory and practice, yet its intellectual roots remain debated and complex. This literature review traces the development of strategic management from its early origins in classical military thinking to its formal establishment in business schools during the mid-twentieth century and its subsequent growth into a multidisciplinary and evolving field. Drawing on key contributions from Alfred Chandler, Igor Ansoff, Michael Porter, Henry Mintzberg, Peter Drucker, and Jay Barney, this review highlights the significant shifts that have shaped the discipline. The review employs a systematic literature review approach to synthesize historical and contemporary scholarship across management, economics, and organizational studies. Findings identify three main phases of development: first, initial roots in military strategy and early corporate planning, second, formalization through structural and competitive models, and third, diversification into emerging, resource-based, and modern perspectives that address globalization, digital change, and sustainability. This paper argues that the origins of strategic management show the tension between careful planning and adaptive emergence a duality that continues to influence its importance in uncertain environments. By exploring these roots, the review sets a foundation for future research and practice, emphasizing the need for both historical understanding and ongoing innovation to advance the field.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic Management, History, Chandler, Ansoff, Porter, Mintzberg, Literature Review, Origins*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Defining Strategic Management**

Strategic management can be broadly defined as the comprehensive set of decisions and actions that shape an organization's long-term success (Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, 2007). It encompasses strategy development, execution, and assessment aimed at building and maintaining competitive advantage in changing environments. While modern definitions emphasize concepts like global competition, innovation, and stakeholder involvement, the field's intellectual roots go back centuries, showing a rich and evolving history.

### **The Military Roots of Strategy**

The word “strategy” comes from the Greek term “strategos,” meaning “generalship,” and historically referred to the art of military command (Freedman, 2013). Ancient texts, such as Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* (5th century BC) and Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* (1832), outlined principles of planning, positioning, deception, and adaptation in combat. These ideas laid the foundation for early concepts of resource allocation, competitive positioning, and long-term goals and principles still relevant in modern strategic management.

Military strategy emphasized two enduring insights: first, that advantage is created not merely through strength but through intelligent positioning; and second, that uncertainty requires both planning and adaptability. These insights directly foreshadowed the debates between deliberate planning models (e.g., Ansoff) and emergent strategy perspectives (e.g., Mintzberg) in modern management literature.

### **Strategy in the Early Business Context**

As industrial capitalism matured in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, corporations such as DuPont, General Motors, and Standard Oil faced challenges of scale, diversification, and competition. Managers need systematic approaches to coordinate large enterprises and allocate resources effectively. Early management thinkers, like Frederick Taylor (1911) and Henri Fayol (1916), focused on efficiency and administration, but the issue of long-term direction remained underdeveloped.

By the 1930s and 1940s, the idea of “business policy” appeared in leading U.S. business schools, especially Harvard. Business policy courses required managers to analyze the environment, set goals, and coordinate decisions across different areas (Andrews, 1971). Although the term strategic management was not yet officially used, these courses created the groundwork for strategy as a separate field of study.

## **Formalization in the Mid-Twentieth Century**

The 1960s marked a turning point. Alfred Chandler's seminal work, *Strategy and Structure* (1962), demonstrated historically how firms such as DuPont, General Motors, Standard Oil, and Sears restructured their organizations to align with strategic expansion. His famous dictum, "structure follows strategy," established the centrality of aligning corporate decisions with organizational design. Around the same time, Igor Ansoff (1965) published *Corporate Strategy*, advocating the use of systematic planning tools and introducing the growth matrix. These contributions marked the formal recognition of strategy as a scientific discipline within management studies.

## **Evolution Towards Competitive and Resource-Based Perspectives**

The late 1970s and 1980s marked the release of Michael Porter's influential works, *Competitive Strategy* (1980) and *Competitive Advantage* (1985). Porter shifted focus from internal planning to external analysis of industries, competitors, and value chains. His frameworks, including the Five Forces Model and Generic Competitive Strategies, still serve as foundational elements in both theory and practice.

However, critiques of rigid planning started to surface. Henry Mintzberg (1994) argued that strategy is often emergent, shaped by learning and adaptation rather than deliberate design. His later work, *Strategy Safari* (1998), identified ten schools of strategy formation, emphasizing the diversity within the field. Meanwhile, Peter Drucker's focus on mission and objectives highlighted the humanistic and managerial aspects of strategy.

In the 1990s, Jay Barney (1991) introduced the Resource-Based View (RBV), arguing that sustainable competitive advantage comes not only from industry positioning but also from unique internal resources and capabilities. This approach broadened the field by merging organizational theory with economics.

## **Strategic Management in the Contemporary Era**

Today, strategic management combines insights from various fields. Globalization, digital transformation, and sustainability challenges have broadened the field beyond traditional competitive models. Theories such as dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), and institutional perspectives (Peng, Sun, Pinkham, & Chen, 2009) demonstrate the ongoing development of the field.

Strategic management thus reflects a dialogue between its military heritage, mid-20th-century formalization, and current concerns. Tracing its origins shows not only historical continuity but also the field's ability for renewal in response to changing organizational realities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Military Origins of Strategy

The earliest ideas of strategy didn't start in business but in the military world. The Greek word *strategos*, meaning “generalship,” showed that winning in battle depended not just on resources but also on foresight, positioning, and tactical skill (Freedman, 2013). Classic military writings still offer principles that are relevant for organizations today.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* (5th century BC) emphasized the importance of deception, intelligence, and adaptability. His dictum that “all warfare is based on deception” underlined the value of knowledge and positioning over brute force (Sun, trans. Griffith, 1963). Modern parallels can be seen in firms' competitive strategies that rely on information asymmetry, branding, and market positioning. Likewise, Sun Tzu's emphasis on agility resonates with contemporary concepts of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2018).

Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* (1832) emphasized uncertainty, what he called the “fog of war,” and the importance of leadership judgment in dealing with unpredictable situations (Clausewitz, 1976). This idea anticipates discussions in strategic management about bounded rationality (Simon, 1997) and emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1994). Clausewitz also highlighted the need to combine political, social, and military aspects, a concept reflected in modern stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984).

Military traditions, therefore, established enduring themes: the balance between deliberate planning and flexibility, the centrality of leadership, and the integration of environment and organization. These themes became the intellectual soil from which business strategy later grew.

### Early Business Policy and the Rise of Strategy in Management

Although strategy had long been used in military contexts, its application in business was relatively new. In the early 20th century, the rise of large corporations brought challenges related to coordination, diversification, and competition. Early management pioneers, such as Frederick Taylor (1911) with *The Principles of Scientific Management* and Henri Fayol (1916) with *General and Industrial Management*, focused mainly on efficiency and administrative principles. However, their work addressed short-term operations rather than long-term strategic planning.

By the 1930s, the need for broader policy thinking became clear. Harvard Business School pioneered the “business policy” course, aimed at training managers to integrate functional decisions (Andrews, 1971). Business policy encouraged students to analyze environments, identify opportunities, and develop coordinated plans across production,

marketing, and finance. Although the term strategy was not yet formalized, business policy acted as a foundation for strategic management.

A critical contribution came from Kenneth Andrews (1971) in *The Concept of Corporate Strategy*. Andrews articulated the importance of aligning corporate objectives, resources, and environments. His framework, often seen as bridging business policy and modern strategy, emphasized top management responsibility for long-term direction. Andrews's work influenced subsequent generations of scholars and helped institutionalize strategic management as a discipline.

### **Alfred Chandler and the Structural School**

The turning point in formalizing strategy occurred with Alfred Chandler's (1962) *Strategy and Structure*. Through historical case studies of DuPont, General Motors, Standard Oil, and Sears, Chandler showed that organizational structure develops as a response to strategic needs. His principle, "structure follows strategy," became one of the most influential ideas in management history.

Chandler argued that expansion into new markets and products necessitated new forms of organization, such as the multidivisional (M-form) structure. This insight linked corporate growth, diversification, and administrative coordination. His historical method also demonstrated that strategy was not an abstract concept but a practical determinant of organizational evolution.

Chandler's influence is still evident in current debates about how business models align with organizational design. His work also laid the groundwork for later studies on diversification, corporate governance, and the role of top management in directing firm paths (Chandler, 1977).

### **Igor Ansoff and the Planning School**

Building on Chandler's foundation, Igor Ansoff (1965) proposed a more prescriptive and analytical approach in *Corporate Strategy*. Known as the "Father of Strategic Planning," Ansoff introduced systematic tools for managers to analyze growth options. His most lasting contribution is the Ansoff Matrix, which classifies growth strategies into four quadrants: market penetration, product development, market development, and diversification.

Ansoff emphasized rational analysis, forecasting, and formal planning processes. He viewed strategy as a deliberate design, best implemented through structured planning systems. In doing so, he positioned managers as rational actors capable of charting long-term futures for their firms.

Critics later claimed that Ansoff's model underestimated environmental turbulence and organizational complexity (Mintzberg, 1994). Nevertheless, his work established strategic planning in corporations during the 1960s and 1970s and remains widely used in management education.

### **Michael Porter and the Positioning School**

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked another paradigm shift with Michael Porter's work, who combined industrial organization economics with strategic management. In *Competitive Strategy* (1980), Porter introduced the Five Forces Model, a framework for analyzing industry attractiveness based on competitive rivalry, supplier power, buyer power, threat of new entrants, and threat of substitutes. This external, industry-focused perspective shifted focus from internal planning to market positioning.

In *Competitive Advantage* (1985), Porter elaborated on how firms achieve superior performance through Generic Competitive Strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, focus) and through managing activities in the Value Chain. These concepts provided a toolkit for managers to identify sources of advantage and align activities with strategic positioning.

Porter's contribution was groundbreaking in connecting economics and management, providing predictive insights into firm performance. However, critics contend that Porter's frameworks are too static, ignoring innovation, collaboration, and change (D'Aveni, 1994). Still, his ideas remain some of the most influential in both academia and industry.

### **Henry Mintzberg and the Emergent School**

In contrast to Porter's structured frameworks, Henry Mintzberg emphasized the limitations of deliberate planning. In *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (1994), Mintzberg critiqued the dominance of formal planning, arguing that fundamental strategies often emerge from patterns of action rather than deliberate design. He proposed that organizations must remain flexible, learning from experience and adapting to uncertainty.

Later, in *Strategy Safari* (1998, with Ahlstrand & Lampel), Mintzberg identified ten schools of strategy formation: design, planning, positioning, entrepreneurial, cognitive, learning, cultural, political, environmental, and configuration. This taxonomy emphasized pluralism in the field and validated diverse perspectives. Mintzberg's emergent strategy framework resonates strongly with modern contexts characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and rapid technological change. It also bridges to contemporary theories of dynamic capabilities and organizational learning.

### **Peter Drucker and the Mission-Oriented School**

Although not always called a strategist, Peter Drucker greatly influenced strategic thinking. In *The Practice of Management* (1954), Drucker introduced the idea of Management by Objectives (MBO), stressing that organizations must clearly define their missions, set measurable goals, and effectively allocate resources. His later work (1974) emphasized the importance of clarity of purpose, innovation, and responsibility toward stakeholders.

Drucker's emphasis on mission and vision anticipated later developments in corporate social responsibility and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984). His managerial humanism distinguished him from purely analytical schools, grounding strategy in values and leadership.

### **Jay Barney and the Resource-Based View**

The 1990s saw another major turn with the emergence of the Resource-Based View (RBV), most prominently articulated by Jay Barney (1991). The RBV argued that competitive advantage derives not only from industry positioning (Porter) but also from unique internal resources and capabilities. Resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) provide sustainable competitive advantage.

The RBV connected strategic management with organizational theory, emphasizing knowledge, culture, patents, and human capital as key strategic assets. It also shaped related views such as dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) and knowledge-based perspectives of the firm.

### **Contemporary Perspectives**

Today, strategic management combines multiple schools of thought. Globalization has increased interdependence among firms, demanding cross-border strategies (Peng, 2009). Digital transformation has driven interest in innovation, ecosystems, and platform-based business models (Teece, 2018). Sustainability and corporate governance have broadened the scope of strategy to include ethical, environmental, and social issues (Whittington et al., 2020).

Recent theories, such as Blue Ocean Strategy (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005), which emphasize creating uncontested market space, and dynamic capabilities, which highlight continual renewal, exemplify the field's evolution. Strategic management has thus evolved beyond rigid schools to become a pluralistic, interdisciplinary discipline responsive to contemporary challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employs a classic literature review design (Snyder, 2019), which is well-suited for tracing the historical roots and intellectual development of a discipline. Unlike systematic reviews, which focus on exhaustive searching and replicability, the classic review highlights conceptual synthesis, critical analysis, and narrative building. This method is suitable for strategic management, whose foundations span multiple fields (economics, sociology, psychology, and history) and whose growth has been influenced by various intellectual traditions.

### Data Sources

To ensure a comprehensive account, this review drew from multiple scholarly and archival sources:

- Databases: JSTOR, Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar.
- Core Journals: *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Long-Range Planning*.
- Books and Monographs: Seminal works by Chandler, Ansoff, Porter, Mintzberg, Drucker, and Barney were included, as well as military classics such as *The Art of War* and *On War*.
- Historical Archives: Harvard Business School teaching notes and the early “business policy” literature.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review included works that explicitly addressed the concept of strategy in either military or business contexts. Were recognized as seminal or highly cited (threshold:  $\geq 1,000$  citations in Google Scholar). Provided historical or theoretical foundations relevant to the evolution of strategic management. Excluded were works that: Focused narrowly on functional-level strategy (e.g., marketing strategy, operations strategy) without connecting to general management. They were purely practitioner-oriented without significant academic impact.

### Analytical Framework

Following Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart (2003), analysis proceeded in three stages: Descriptive mapping – identifying key authors, concepts, and schools of thought. Conceptual synthesis, grouping contributions into coherent intellectual traditions (military, structural, planning, positioning, emergent, resource-based, etc.). Critical evaluation – examining

strengths, limitations, and enduring relevance of each tradition. This framework ensured both historical depth and conceptual clarity.

## **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

### **Strategic Management as a Multidisciplinary Field**

The review confirms that strategic management is not the result of a single discipline but rather a blend of multiple academic fields. Military history contributed to the language of strategy and the lasting themes of uncertainty and adaptation. Economics influenced Porter's positioning framework. Sociology and organizational theory provided insights for Chandler's structural analysis and Barney's resource-based view. Psychology and cognition support Mintzberg's emergent strategies. This multidisciplinary character makes strategic management both diverse and debated.

### **Key Phases in the Development of Strategic Management**

The literature reveals four broad phases in the field's development: Foundations in Military Strategy (Pre-1900s): Strategy as planning and adaptation in warfare (Sun Tzu, Clausewitz). Business Policy Era (1930s–1960s): Harvard's case method, Andrews' corporate strategy framework. Rise of Strategic Management (1960s–1990s): Chandler's structure-strategy linkage, Ansoff's planning school, Porter's industry analysis, and Mintzberg's emergent school.

Contemporary Integration (1990s–present): RBV, dynamic capabilities, global strategy, digital transformation, sustainability. This trajectory illustrates increasing complexity and pluralism. Where Chandler emphasized alignment, Porter emphasized competition, and Mintzberg emphasized emergence, contemporary scholars advocate a synthesis of these perspectives.

### **Theoretical Contributions and Tensions**

The field is characterized by enduring tensions among schools: Planning versus emergence: Ansoff and Porter stressed intentional analysis, while Mintzberg believed that strategies often develop through experience. Modern research tends to blend these perspectives, highlighting the significance of ambidexterity (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

External vs. Internal Sources of Advantage: Porter's positioning view emphasizes industry forces, while Barney's RBV highlights firm-specific resources. The dynamic capabilities perspective (Teece et al., 1997) seeks to connect these by emphasizing the firm's ability to reconfigure resources in response to external changes. Efficiency vs. Stakeholders: Drucker's

humanistic mission-oriented approach and Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory challenge purely profit-driven models, highlighting the social responsibilities of strategy. These tensions remain central to debates in strategic management research and practice.

### **Enduring Impact of the Proponents**

Chandler (1962): Remains relevant for understanding organizational design, particularly in multinational companies. Ansoff (1965): His growth matrix remains a staple in business education, even as critiques mount regarding rigidity. Porter (1980, 1985): His frameworks are applied widely in consulting and policy, though sometimes criticized as outdated in fast-moving industries. Mintzberg (1994, 1998): His insights into emergent strategy resonate strongly in agile and lean management.

Drucker (1954): His vision of mission-driven organizations prefigures contemporary ESG debates. Barney (1991): The RBV has become one of the most cited theories in management, inspiring decades of empirical research. Thus, each thinker contributed a "building block" to the intellectual edifice of strategic management.

### **Strategic Management in Contemporary Contexts**

The findings suggest that the contemporary relevance of classic strategy lies not in choosing one school but in combining insights: Globalization: Firms now face fragmented value chains and geopolitical risks (Peng, 2009). Chandler's alignment principle and Porter's global industry analysis provide partial guidance, but dynamic capabilities must supplement them. Digital Transformation: The rise of platform ecosystems (e.g., Apple, Google, Alibaba) challenges Porter's five forces, as cooperation and network effects become as important as competition (Adner, 2017).

Sustainability and Governance: Drucker's vision of mission and Freeman's stakeholder theory anticipate today's debates on ESG (Whittington et al., 2020). Uncertainty and Agility: Mintzberg's emergent strategy and Teece's dynamic capabilities provide critical tools for managing crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of Findings**

This review has traced the intellectual genealogy of strategic management, demonstrating that the field is both historically deep and theoretically diverse. Beginning with classical military texts such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* and Clausewitz's *On War*, the concept of strategy entered business discourse through early 20th-century corporate practice and

Harvard's business policy courses. Alfred Chandler (1962) provided the first rigorous historical analysis linking strategy to organizational structure, while Igor Ansoff (1965) codified strategic planning as a systematic managerial process.

The subsequent contributions of Michael Porter (1980, 1985), Henry Mintzberg (1994, 1998), Peter Drucker (1954, 1974), and Jay Barney (1991) enriched the field with perspectives on competition, emergence, mission, and internal resources. The literature identifies three main phases: (1) military origins and initial business roots, (2) the emergence of strategic management as a formal field, and (3) the diversification into various schools of thought. These findings suggest that strategic management evolved in a non-linear manner, with each paradigm contributing valuable insights while also prompting critiques and the development of alternative viewpoints.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The historical trajectory of strategic management illustrates enduring tensions that shape theory development: Planning vs. Emergence: The field oscillates between rational planning models and adaptive, emergent perspectives. External vs. Internal Advantage: Competitive positioning and resource-based approaches complement and challenge one another. Economic vs. Humanistic Orientation: Narrow efficiency models coexist with broader mission and stakeholder-driven conceptions. These tensions are not weaknesses but sources of intellectual dynamism. By maintaining plurality, strategic management remains responsive to new realities.

### **Practical Implications**

For practitioners, understanding the historical roots of strategy underscores the importance of flexibility. Firms that rely solely on Porterian industry analysis may overlook internal capabilities; those focused only on emergent learning may miss opportunities for deliberate positioning. In practice, executives must combine deliberate planning, resource development, and adaptive experimentation to achieve optimal results. Furthermore, Drucker's and Freeman's emphasis on mission and stakeholders foreshadow contemporary ESG concerns, highlighting that strategy is inseparable from social and ethical responsibilities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study provides a retracing of the origin and evolution of strategic management, several limitations must be acknowledged. The discussion is historically biased in favour of Western scholarship, particularly contributions from the United States and Europe,

which dominate much of the literature. This focus risks underrepresenting the rich and diverse contributions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where unique strategic practices have also developed. In addition, the analysis places considerable emphasis on seminal theories advanced by Chandler, Drucker, Ansoff, and Porter. While these works remain highly influential, such a focus may inadvertently overshadow alternative frameworks and less mainstream perspectives that have also significantly shaped the discipline.

Another limitation arises from the shifting contexts in business environments. Much of the reviewed literature is based in industrial and post-industrial economies, which may not fully capture the realities of current challenges like digital disruption, platform-based economies, and sustainability-driven strategies. Additionally, the study is largely conceptual, mainly relying on secondary sources rather than empirical evidence. Consequently, it does not adequately demonstrate how strategic management theories have been applied, tested, or challenged across different industries and regions. Lastly, it must be recognised that strategic management is a dynamic and continuously evolving field. Emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and geopolitical realignments are transforming the discipline in ways that historical frameworks alone may not sufficiently explain. These limitations underscore the importance of future research adopting more inclusive, empirical, and forward-looking approaches to studying strategic management.

### **Future Research Directions**

The review highlights several promising avenues for future research: Digital Strategy: Revisiting Porter and Ansoff in the era of ecosystems, AI, and platform competition. Global South Perspectives: Much of the canonical literature is Western-centric; research should explore indigenous strategic practices in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Sustainability Integration: Drucker's humanistic vision and Freeman's stakeholder theory can inform new models that reconcile profitability with planetary boundaries. Behavioural Strategy: Insights from psychology and neuroscience may deepen understanding of bounded rationality and decision-making in strategic contexts.

### **Concluding Remark**

Tracing the origin of strategic management shows that the field's vitality depends on its hybridity. It is both historical and contemporary, analytical and adaptive, economic and humanistic. Each generation of scholars has reinterpreted strategy in response to environmental challenges, from industrialisation to globalisation to digital disruption. As organisations face climate change, technological shifts, and geopolitical instability, strategic management must

keep evolving. The legacy of Chandler, Ansoff, Porter, Mintzberg, Drucker, and Barney is not a fixed canon but an invitation to innovate. By recognising its roots, the field builds a foundation for relevance in the uncertain decades ahead.

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