

Military Strategy Innovation

Innovating with the support of the Modern Strategic Tool: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) +1

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The technological developments being experiencing in recent decades has had a significant impact on the availability or access to information. This “information bombardment” has distorted how ideas or concepts are interpreted.

This article aims to clarify terms referring to innovation and strategy. It also aims to support the innovation of military strategy using the modern strategic tool SWOT +1. The article is divided into three sections: the first addresses aspects within the context of innovation, the second clarifies relevant contextual aspects of strategy, and the third presents SWOT +1, through which the innovation of military strategies can be facilitated.

The conclusions provide a clear vision of what constitutes innovation in military strategy, and elements that strategic managers should consider.

Present

At present, we can access multiple sources of information; however, having so much access often makes us doubt the interpretations made by some authors and even what we believe. One case in point are the terms innovation and strategy, which will be discussed later.

In recent years, we have taken on the task of observing the way in which many professionals, with and without experience, interpret the concepts of innovation and strategy, and have come to realize that they do not have a clear and concise idea of those terms. This situation is precisely what interferes with the success or failure of a strategic innovation—not only in civilian organizations, but military as well.

Without a doubt, it is extremely important that we clearly understand what the terms are corresponding to innovation and strategy, as they will make it possible to understand how to innovate strategy and develop it in military organizations.

With regards to strategic innovation, it is important to seek ideas that provide a win-win scenario among all the parties involved. Particularly, Dr. Stephen Covey stresses that:

Win/win means that the agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying. With a Win/Win solution, all parties feel good about the decision

and feel committed to the action plan. Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena. Most people tend to think in terms of dichotomies: strong or weak, hardball or softball, win or lose. But that kind of thinking is fundamentally flawed. It's based on power and position rather than on principle.¹

There are many people involved in the strategic innovation process, and it becomes necessary to understand that when developing strategic innovation, planning effectively is a must, since, as Mary Gibbs Jones and Jennifer George state, "planning is the process that managers use to identify and select goals and activities appropriate for an organization."² If we do not plan effectively, it will be difficult to achieve the proposed objectives.

Strategists or strategy directors also rely on effective planning to visualize the environment more easily, since when we talk about strategic innovation, we must always to stay one step ahead of our competitors or enemies.

Regarding the latter, Henry Mintzberg states:

Artisans must train themselves to see, to grasp the things that other people miss. The same is true for chief strategy officers. Those who have a kind of peripheral vision are best able to detect and take advantage of events as they unfold.³

As mentioned earlier, this article attempts to clarify the concept of innovation and strategy, so leaders, via the use of modern and simple tools, can more easily establish innovative strategic plans, to include the development of innovative military strategies. Strategies that, supported using efficient and effective tools, can help achieve a competitive advantage in military activities.

Throughout this process, it is essential to never neglect the role of strategic leaders, and "the ability of the CEO and other senior managers to communicate to their subordinates a convincing vision of what they want to achieve,"⁴ as without good communication and leadership, innovation of military strategy cannot be successfully achieved.

Background

On a day-to-day basis, it is difficult to pay attention to operational details, as many civilian and military professionals complain of the distractions they experience while carrying out their tasks. They feel overwhelmed and try to carry out their actions in the best way they can comply with the mission entrusted to them. In the globalized and highly technical world in which we live, we pay less and less attention to the operational processes that take place in our work centers. Progress is made by reacting to the environment and not by previously structured planning. This daily tempo distracts us from the key concepts and concrete actions that can

be taken to innovate processes and thus establish clear and well-founded strategies. However, senior management, whether civilian or military, should be concerned about having a clear understanding of what is involved and what tools can be used to implement innovative strategies.

Thus, the need arises to clarify the terms referring to innovation and strategy, and how to innovate military strategic processes by means of simple and modern tools, such as the SWOT +1. Oddly enough, when talking to strategists today, many lack the ability to concretely visualize which fields can process improvement be applied to achieve strategic innovation.

Many of these leaders also lack the ability to channel information to allow them to structure problems and generate ideas using a tool such as SWOT +1. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify where and how to innovate, and the type of tools that can be used to collect valuable information, in order to establish a friendlier strategic construct capable of using continuous improvement to lead towards constant innovation.

The Context of Innovation

When it comes to innovation, generally the first thing that comes to mind is product innovation using technology. However, innovation does not just consist of the use of technology. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT), the types of innovations that we can identify are: “Product Innovations, Process Innovations, Organizational Innovations and Marketing Innovations.”⁵ Thus, innovation cannot be solely focused on technology, or as purely applicable to civilian organizations. On the contrary, we must also bear in mind that military operations can and must be subject to innovation.

It is essential to allocate resources to innovate in terms of military operations (process, organization, and marketing) since innovations at this level by themselves “are not only a supporting factor for product and process innovation; they themselves can significantly influence the results of companies.”⁶ In this case, the concept of a company can be applied to a military organization, since in the latter, as in the former, it is necessary to: plan, organize, direct, and control every one of the actions that are carried out.

Furthermore, at present we can observe that:

Globalization has generated significant increases in companies’ access to information and new markets. This has stimulated growing international competition and new forms of organization to manage global supply chains. (...) Knowledge is increasingly considered as a main determinant of economic growth and innovation.⁷

This globalization has allowed for greater appreciation of the differences in quality of products and services not only at the local level, but internationally as well. This, in turn, has forced civilian organizations to innovate constantly and efficiently.

The day by day increase in competitiveness among civilian organizations that develop military equipment drives innovation that directly or indirectly impacts current military processes or methods; as technological progress requires that strategic processes or methods change as well. This, in turn, provides a clearer picture of the challenges faced by many military organizations.

While it is true that “decisions in Japanese organizations involve a significant number of employees and managers, and achieving such a broad consensus is, by definition, a slow and laborious process,”⁸ it has been possible for Japanese organizations to innovate in a variety of ways. Therefore, since our military decision-making structure is faster, we must also be able to innovate.

Innovating is not just doing things better. It is also necessary to know how “the expansion of innovative activity in economies increasingly affects the regional distribution of income,”⁹ and how the military can be an instrument that can alter the economic order of a region. Like civilian organizations, today’s military forces must be able to innovate to achieve differentiation, as “differentiation means walking the path towards absolute exclusivity by building unique dimensions in the industrial sector.”¹⁰

Change must be agile and fast since “just to maintain its relative position, a company must advance through continuous growth and change. To improve its position, it must grow and change at least twice as fast.”¹¹ In our personal and professional life, we must constantly apply *Kaizen*, a Japanese word that means continuous improvement. This continuous improvement will drive us to seek excellence in the activities we carry out and directly or indirectly lead us towards continuous innovation. In accordance with Humberto Serna, throughout this process:

(...) a committed administration is required that is not afraid of change and motivates the participation of the company’s members in the achievement of the proposed objectives and goals. It must be a very secure administration with regards to the direction that it gives to the company.¹²

As members of the military, or a military force as a whole, we must always be in constant search for competitive advantage through innovation since, as this author mentions in his book “The process of a strategist,” “competitive advantage is one that, for one reason or another, makes us unique in the market, with characteristics that are not easily matched by our competitors,”¹³ understanding that the “market” is our military environment and “competitors” are our adversaries or enemies.

But now, with all that we have just read, in what areas can military forces innovate? Sun Tzu, in his book “The Art of War,” mentions that there are five fundamental factors to assess in war. These five factors are: doctrine, time, terrain, command, and discipline.¹⁴ Each of these five elements is subject to strategic innovation for they consist of processes, tools, or technological equipment that can be improved. Thus, we could innovate doctrine for our troops; equipment, machinery or other tools used for offensive strategies in complex environments; or processes and strategies to create military advantage in adverse weather conditions—innovation is the improvement that we apply in our processes, tools, equipment, and so forth.

The Context of Strategy

It is important to clarify the definition of strategy itself. To begin with, the Royal Academy of Spain (RAE per its acronym in Spanish) presents us with the following definition for strategy: “art of directing military operations.”¹⁵ Understanding that “Art” according to the RAE is the “capability or ability to do something.”¹⁶ Thus, we can derive strategy as the capability or ability to direct military operations.

Furthermore, strategy is the capability or ability to direct the actions that seek to achieve a clearly proposed objective through the element of surprise against its competition. Mintzberg also mentions that strategies are “plans for the future and patterns of the past.”¹⁷ In other words, learning from our past experiences to plan our new actions in the future—learning from our experiences will help us in the growth of our environment, including, of course, our military actions. Related to the latter, Alfred Chandler states:

Strategic growth resulted from an awareness of opportunities and needs, created by changing population, income, and technology, to use existing or expanding resources more profitably. A new strategy required a new or at least remodeled structure for the expanded company to be operated efficiently.¹⁸

In this construct, the concept of “expanded company” is synonymous with military organizations that require effective strategic innovation.

On the other hand, Ohmae Kenichi states strategy “(...) is to achieve the most favorable conditions for oneself, judging precisely the right moment to attack or withdraw and always evaluating the limits of commitment correctly.”¹⁹ We could interpret the above as the capability or ability to analyze the internal and external factors of a military organization to, through surprise, attack our competitors or enemies, thus achieving a competitive advantage in war. Having analyzed these definitions, we can state:

Strategy is the ability to analyze very well the internal and external factors of the military force or operational department, with the intention of directing concrete actions that seek to achieve a clearly established goal. The latter, through the element of surprise against the competition, thus achieving a competitive advantage in the war zone in which it operates.²⁰

“Strategy is the action of surprising, confusing or deceiving our competitors, with the information we have, with the intent of reaching a goal.”²¹

Modern Strategic Tool SWOT +1

Now, having defined innovation and strategy, what tool could help us better structure our way of innovating strategically? It is at this point where we can make use of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) +1, an improved version of a very common tool in civilian organizations, SWOT.

This tool accounts for the crises that military forces experience and how competitors or enemies will react. While strengths are part of our internal environment, the other three components, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be found in both the internal and external environments. It is worth noting that when we have threats and weaknesses in both environments (internal and external) our military unit will be in crisis.

In the following figure we present this tool:



Figure. FODA + 1 Analysis

Source: Author²²

As per figure 1, the four main components of the original SWOT Analysis tool remain constant, but the focus varies in the improved tool.

First, we expose the *strengths* that will be used against the threats and weaknesses in our environment through our current abilities or capabilities. These *strengths* will be used to seize opportunities. For example, if we do not have the strength of *organizational capability* or *ability to indoctrinate*, we will not be able to take advantage of the opportunities of both the internal and external environment. Therefore, there is a two-way arrow between strengths and opportunities; thus, the use of strengths to take advantage of opportunities. If our military organization does not have highly impacting strengths, they might be able to be exploited, no matter how many opportunities arise.

Continuing with the explanation of this tool, the gray area represents *crisis*: the organization will be in *crisis* whenever there are threats and weaknesses in its internal and external environment.

Nonetheless, threats and weaknesses will present opportunities, which must be evaluated in relation to the strengths of the organization, to realistically assess and exploit advantageous actions. If an opportunity arises, but the necessary resources are not available, that opportunity is not realistic. Focus must be placed on opportunities that can truly exploit current strengths.

Thus +1 in this improved tool is represented by the addition of Reaction *Analysis*, which aims to project the form or manner in which our competitors or enemies will react to opportunities that the organization seizes. The goal is to be able to formulate innovative strategies that are more durable and effective. Nothing is accomplished by formulating strategies that our enemies can immediately match or neutralize. We must always look to deceive or confuse our competition or enemies to achieve important competitive advantage. Consequently, as soon as our enemies understand our strategy and initiate a counterattack, we must immediately reassess our internal and external environment through SWOT Analysis +1.

In summary, this tool requires the definition of current *strengths*, evaluation of the potential *crisis* zone (*threats* and *weaknesses*), followed by identification and assessment of available *opportunities*. We can then project ways the enemy can react, the +1, and adjust strategy (hence the two-way arrow between *opportunities* and +1).

Findings

The innovation of military strategy allows for development of more efficient and effective methods or processes, which in turn will help to differentiate ourselves from our competitors or enemies, thus achieving a competitive advantage in war.

With the exercising of SWOT Analysis +1, it will be much easier to identify what can be directly or indirectly innovated to contribute to a better allocation of the resources available. Additionally, this tool helps visualize how the enemy could counterattack the opportunities our military organization takes advantage of. Of

note, “the development of strategies is a fascinating process, which involves more than a simple set of recipes called planning, with which it is generally associated.”²³

Finally, leaders in charge of strategic military innovation must consider objectivity, leadership, communication, humility, teamwork, discipline, and the ability to know how to motivate their military force. It is important to keep in mind that everyone can interpret the same situation in different ways, and thus it is important to know how to communicate effectively. As Covey reminds us:

Each of us tends to think we see things as they are, that we are objective. But this is not the case. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it. When we open our mouths to describe what we see, we in effect describe ourselves, our perceptions, our paradigms.²⁴

We must know how to interpret available information and how to efficiently discuss amongst our colleagues. □

Notes

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