

Ten things a good map can teach you about strategy

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

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There are copious definitions of strategy from numerous pundits in the field - some definitions reminiscent of everything and the kitchen sink. Strategy, although having its roots in ancient warfare, is a relatively new (I nearly said science), where it has progressed over the years, following one of two paths: simplification or complication. Kenneth Andrews, was an American academic who, along with Igor Ansoff (of Ansoff Matrix fame) and Alfred D. Chandler, are credited with founding the concept of modern business strategy.

One would expect Andrew's definition to be somewhat broad, as this was a new field. And it is. However, I have seen its unfortunate use by some universities today where it is used as the standard definition of strategy. It is not - it is the first definition to emerge in a new field, and to give you some idea of the origins of business strategy, let me share his definition with you, but please don't try and remember the details:

The pattern of decisions in a company that determines and reveals its objectives, purposes or goals, produces the principal policies and plans for achieving these goals, and defines the range of business the company is to pursue, the kind of economic and human organisation it is or intends to be, and the nature of the economic and non-economic contribution it intends to make to its shareholders, employees, customers and communities.

This was in the 1950s. In the '60s, Alfred Chandler gives us a more concise definition:

Strategy is the long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals.

Fast forward to the 1980s and we start seeing more focused definitions, such as Michael Porter's:

Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value.

However, Porter's definition supports his perspective that strategy is a competitive endeavour. And today we see many more strategists with precise definitions, but ones that usually support their central hypothesis (and their books).

You must remember that Andrew's definition was proposed at a time when nothing substantial existed in the field, but I think strategy has progressed to the point where we can say it is merely a way to move from A to B. Or, perhaps, I have just taken the liberty to say so. I apologise to strategists for this somewhat reductionist approach - I admit strategy can be somewhat more complicated. However, this simple maxim allows us to take the elements of a good map and align that to a

good strategy, which I believe does have some merit.

Here are 10 comparisons:

1. A good map should be easy to read.
2. It should just show relevant landmarks to orientate yourself (not a whole bunch of unnecessary data).
3. It should be the ideal size - not zoom out too much or show too little.
4. It is not the territory itself - things can change on the ground.
5. There needs to be continuity - having to turn the page (or scroll across) on a map at a crucial juncture makes it more difficult to follow.
6. The map is not the journey itself.
7. It needs to be relevant - a map of Cape Town when you're in Johannesburg might be pleasing to look at, but has no bearing on the actual situation.
8. It is objective - shows things as they are as opposed to how you'd like them to be
9. It points out any dangers along the route.
10. It is the basis for action.

There are numerous templates for strategy on the net. Choose one that looks like a good map to get you to your destination.

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