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Principles of modern corporate warfare: Integrating Sun Tzu's art of war, military principles of war and concepts of marketing warfare

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ABSTRACT

Effective and sustainable strategy for success in the marketplace continuously engages the principal stakeholders in business, who are always searching for ways and means for a greater share of the customer's mind space and wallet. In military warfare, defined Principles of War help maintain focus and improve chances of a favourable outcome. Similarly, as maritime and corporate strategies share a boundary-less nature of operations in both spheres, "Principles of Corporate Warfare" could be defined to increase uniformity of response and enhance aggressive spirit, so as to ensure a favourable outcome. This paper attempts to define ten "Principles of Corporate Warfare".

KEYWORDS

Maritime and corporate warfare similarities; principles of corporate warfare; Sun Tzu; principles of military warfare; corporate force capability model and analysis

Introduction

The design and application of a strategy for success in the marketplace is a task that continuously occupies the minds of the principal stakeholders in any business. At the apex level, heads of business are always searching for ways and means to win a greater share of the customer's mind space and share of his wallet. This battle in the marketplace can be fought in a similar fashion to the battle in the military space, where well-defined Principles of War, while not guaranteeing success, nevertheless help to maintain the right focus and thus improve one's chances of attaining a favourable outcome. Additionally, the writings of great military strategists, such as Sun Tzu, have substantial relevance for the corporate battlefield. With due adaptation of these military principles, "Principles of Corporate Warfare" could likewise be defined and implemented at various levels of management, so as to increase uniformity of response, and enhance aggressive spirit, leading to favourable outcomes. There is also a strong association between "maritime" and "corporate" strategy, due to the boundary-less nature of operations in both spheres. The writings of Mahan, Corbett and Jomini¹ on the importance of sea control for successful maritime operations also have high relevance for Corporate Strategy.

There exist common threads between Sun Tzu's writings, the principles of maritime strategy and warfare, and, corporate or marketing "warfare". The aim of this paper is to examine the current thoughts on corporate and/or marketing "warfare" and derive similarities with

the current principles of maritime strategy and military warfare, as also with Sun Tzu's principles, and, in the process, attempt to define ten "Principles of Corporate Warfare".

Planning and waging battles: Principles for strategic and tactical success

Strategy is the organised deployment of resources to achieve specific objectives.² This definition is common to both business and military warfare. While distinct product or price differentiation were the traditional cores of business strategy till the 1980s, globalisation of products, assemblies and components led to increasing pressure on profitability and margins.³ Business strategists, therefore, started looking outside to seek answers in studies that examined higher levels of uncertainty and where the dynamics were more fluid. These strategists examined a vast knowledge-base of strategic thought, stretching back thousands of years. Since military strategy had always dealt with uncertainty and volatility, many started examining these writings. Books on military strategy, such as "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu, and Mahan's thoughts on "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" have been drawn upon in detail in various writings and the author has also used many of the thoughts expounded by both of them.

The writings of Sun Tzu' examine both the strategic and tactical side of military strategy and underscore the aspects of intelligence, surprise, troop deployment and committed leadership as the essence of success. In fact, Sun Tzu propounded what business strategists call "first-mover advantage".⁴ Sun Tzu stated: "Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits an enemy is at ease, he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary". Military writings also make it clear that strategic plans are relevant only till the moment of first contact, and thereafter, the fluid and rapidly changing environment dictates the next steps. These next steps are the real differentiator between success and failure on the battlefield. Hence today's focus is on "flexibility" and "Manoeuver Warfare", rather than absolute superiority of forces.

Philip Kotler and JB Quinn were the first to propound theories of "marketing warfare". In an early description of business-military strategy, Kotler and Quinn claim that an effective strategy, "first probes and withdraws to determine opponents' strengths, forces opponents to stretch their commitments, then concentrates resources, attacks a clear exposure, overwhelms a selected market segment, builds a bridgehead in that market, and then regroups and expands from that base to dominate a wider field".⁵ The eminently readable book on Marketing Warfare by Jack Ries and Al Trout⁶ made efforts to equate military terminology to the corporate battlefield by categorising types of defensive and offensive Marketing Warfare. They expounded on "frontal attacks", "flanking", "guerrilla warfare", etc., in attempting to typecast the various forms of "warfare" that companies could adopt to gain advantage. These four definitions have now been accepted as standard in Marketing Strategy and Tactics jargon.

Historically, military planning and doctrine dealt with one enemy. Within the context of past military planning and doctrine, there tended to be, generally, only one enemy and the purpose of military strategy was to create the conditions for a series of events or a specific, decisive act to bring defeat to the enemy.⁷ Business, however, was different. The arena was packed with multiple competitors and neutrals, all battling for victory in the mind-space and share-of-wallet of the consumer in an amorphous market.⁸ In the twenty-first Century, however, the nature of current military warfare has also transformed

vastly from the days of State-on-State positional warfare and two well-defined enemies fighting within distinct geographic theatres of conflict.

For more than seventy years, war planners have been dealing with asymmetric warfare, fourth-generation warfare, low-intensity conflict, and non-State actors participating in various wars and skirmishes. There is, in addition, a distinct anti-war lobby, with laudable intentions and considerable public support. This further puts constraints on the planning and execution of war. Today, in the military, as in business, rarely does one deal with a single enemy or a single decisive battle to end a conflict and bring about the defeat or surrender of the single enemy. The Iraq and Afghan wars of conflict are examples of this change.

Current warfare-strategy

Current warfare-strategy and business-strategy have begun to converge with more remarkable similarities than differences. In business, the competitive landscape is generally complex and dynamic. Strategy and tactical interplay are vital in business. As in military warfare, a multitude of different stakeholders must be considered. The players in the field may initially be listed as “own” or “enemy”, but there are numerous neutrals and/or observers who are initially on the side-lines, but may enter the arena in an active or relevant role at any stage. In Iraq, the US military and its allies were fighting Iraq’s Sunni Arab forces. After the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s brutal Baathist regime, these same Iraqi Arab Sunnis allied themselves with US forces to neutralise the menace of *Al Qaeda*. Both, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, US military forces were fighting alongside with, and supporting, the national security forces of these two nations, while the next minute they were combating them directly and indirectly while fighting the Taliban, fragments of *Al-Qaeda* and different Jihadist combatants.

Further, regulatory agencies, which stay in the background suddenly appear and play either spoiler or facilitator to the strategy of one or more players. The example of Apple and Samsung is apt, as both are fighting court battles over intellectual property rights, while simultaneously cooperating and collaborating on other projects.

Defining the battlefield

With this constantly shifting nature of the corporate-warfare environment, the nature of forces⁹ and the objectives of the battle need to be better defined prior to any further study. Today, corporate-warfare is a battle for the larger share of the customer’s mind-space and share-of-wallet, for a specified duration of time till the next area of competition arises. This new area of competition would require a revision of corporate or marketing warfare-strategy. Just as modern warfare is more about politics and community action than purely military engagement, corporate warfare is more about entering and sustaining one’s position in the customers mind-space and extracting a share of his wallet at the right time, in preference to an alternative purchase. Destruction of the opponent is neither desirable nor necessary. An example is Coca Cola versus Pepsi. Both companies have waged a very expensive conflict in the past; however, neither has an intention of totally destroying the opponent. Destruction of Pepsi by Coke, or *vice versa*, through a direct attack could result in consumers breaking away from both drinks and switching to an alternative

beverage, as the target customers may suspect both parties of playing with their mind-space. Likewise, in the mobile communications space, no handset-manufacturer is ready to state that the microwave radiation from his handset is lower than that of his competitors; as such a statement may lead people to move away from their mobile devices altogether.

The military principles of war and corporate applications

Nations define their military principles-of-war in conformity with their national strategy. Military commanders keep these principles in the forefront while formulating and implementing battle-strategies as well as tactics. This aspect of keeping the principles at the forefront is particularly important, especially during the course of engagement since the fog of war may call for diversion of forces or changes in plans. These well-enshrined and universally-understood principles ensure that a successful and favourable outcome of the engagement is kept uppermost in the mind of the military commander.

The military principles-of-war largely fall into nine sections, with minor variations between nations. Interestingly, these days, the destruction of enemy forces is seldom specified as an aim – a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that any “head-to-head” battles would very probably lead to unacceptable losses, and the costs of victory may Pyrrhic, where the costs end up exceeding the gains.¹⁰ Nations have recognised that modern military forces are more concerned with maintaining peace through active or passive deterrence or neutralisation of the enemy, or minimising his effectiveness for the required duration of time and space, till a favourable balance is achieved.¹¹ Military forces have, therefore, assumed a larger constabulary or peace-keeping role than a war-fighting one, leading to the addition of three new principles, of “restraint”, “perseverance” and “legitimacy”, as specified in the current US Joint Operations Doctrine,¹² taking the total number of principles from the traditional ten, to twelve. These three additional principles-of-war have been added recently, in view of the various influences of human rights and the complex interplay of global alliances. The current US Joint Operations Doctrine brings out that military tasking has undergone a paradigm shift and that the nature of warfare has shifted to achieve very more precise and specific aims. “Destruction of enemy forces” and “Destroying enemy’s will to fight” which were common military parlance till the 1980s are no longer being highlighted. Military deployments have shifted their emphasis from “winning the battle” to “maintaining the peace” and “restoration of equilibrium”. Consequently, these principles exert a moderating influence upon the use of excessive force and also enjoin commanders to keep the ends in view while exercising the means to that end. In corporate-warfare, these have relevance to the political or social fallout of any action that would impact the overall image of the company as a responsible corporate citizen or a future alliance partner.

These twelve principles as specified in the current US Joint Operations Doctrine are listed below, near verbatim, along with a brief explanation of their application and interpretation, including a “Message-for-Managers” at the end of each principle, so as to highlight the relevance of each principle to “corporate-warfare”.

Principle 1: Objective or aim

The military objective has to be specified so that every operation can be directed towards achieving a clearly defined, decisive, and achievable goal. Military objectives must, in the

first instance, support the attainment of the overall political goals of the conflict, which sometimes involves the destruction of enemy capabilities and his will to fight. Objectives must directly, quickly, and economically contribute to the purpose of the operation. Changes to the military objectives may occur because political and military leaders gain a better understanding of the situation, or they may occur because the situation itself changes. These shifts should be anticipated else the achievement of the military objectives may no longer support the political goals, legitimacy may be undermined, and force-security may be compromised.

Message One: Define and redefine your goals and objectives in conformity with the company's defined strategy. Change objectives as strategy changes.

Principle 2: Offensive

The purpose of any offensive action is to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, and is the most effective and decisive way to achieve a clearly defined objective so that momentum is maintained while maintaining the freedom of action to achieve decisive results. Commanders should resort to defensive action only as a temporary expedient and must seek every opportunity to seize or regain the initiative. An offensive spirit must be inherent in the conduct of all defensive operations.

Message Two: Think and act aggressively, seize the initiative and optimise even the most elusive opportunities.

Principle 3: Mass and concentration of force

The purpose of mass is to concentrate the effects of combat power at the most advantageous place and time, to produce decisive results. In order to achieve mass, force-capabilities are integrated and synchronised where they will have a decisive effect in a short period of time. Massing the effects of combat-power, rather than concentrating forces, can enable even numerically inferior forces to produce decisive results, while minimising human losses and waste of resources.

Message Three: Synchronise your resources of men, material, money, moments, information and intelligence (M^4I^2) so that they have maximum impact in the shortest possible time. Attack the market aggressively with "Blitzscale growth"¹³ and build early momentum.

Principle 4: Manoeuvre

The purpose of manoeuvre is to place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power. Manoeuvre is the movement of forces in relation to the enemy to secure or retain positional advantage, usually in order to deliver – or threaten delivery of – the direct and indirect fires of the manoeuvring force. Effective manoeuvre keeps the enemy off balance and, in so doing, also protects the friendly force.

Message Four: Maintain sufficient flexibility in deployment of resources so that they may quickly be reallocated where required. Cross-train and cross-utilise resources for better flexibility.

Principle 5: Economy of force

The purpose of economy-of-force is to expend minimum essential combat-power on secondary efforts¹⁴ in order to allocate the maximum possible combat-power for the primary mission.¹⁵ Economy-of-force implies the judicious employment and distribution of forces. It is the measured allocation of available combat-power to such tasks as limited-attacks, defence, delays, deception, or even retrograde operations to achieve mass (Principle 3) elsewhere, at a decisive point and time.

Message Five: Maintain a “lean, mean and keen” force. Look for cost-effectiveness in every initiative of corporate-warfare. It is very easy to allot a big budget, but ensure you get the “right bang for each buck”! Do not “throw good money after bad”, by allotting even more resources based upon a hope that they will turn the tide in your favour.

Principle 6: Unity of command

The purpose of unity of command is to ensure unity of effort under one commander who is responsible for an assigned objective. This means that all forces operate under a single command entity who has the requisite authority to direct all forces employed in pursuit of a common purpose. During multinational operations and interagency coordination, unity of command may not be possible, but the requirement for unity of effort remains paramount. Unity of effort denotes coordination and cooperation toward the attainment of common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organisation, and is the product of successful unified action.

Message Six: Authority and responsibility for success of any initiative should not be divided. Additionally, frequent orders and counter-orders lead to disorder.

Principle 7: Security

The purpose of “security” is to prevent the enemy from acquiring an unexpected advantage. Security enhances freedom-of-action by reducing vulnerability to hostile acts, influence, or surprise. Security is a resultant of the measures taken by commanders to protect their forces, and is enhanced by staff-planning and an understanding of enemy strategy, tactics, and doctrine. Risk is inherent in military operations. The application of this principle includes prudent risk-management, but not undue caution.

Message Seven: Your “base” has to be secure to counter or repel attacks. Security of products, supply-chains, manufacturing-facilities, finance, and, most importantly, information, intellectual property and expertise, becomes paramount in the current era of fast-paced business and compressed life-cycles.

Principle 8: Surprise

The purpose of surprise is to strike at a time or place or in a manner for which the enemy is unprepared. Surprise can help the commander shift the balance of combat-power and thus achieve success, well out of proportion to the effort expended. Factors contributing to surprise include speed in decision-making, information-sharing, and force-movement,

effective intelligence, deception, the application of unexpected combat-power, and, variations in tactics and methods of operation.

Message Eight: Think your plans through while maintaining confidentiality. Launch when ready, with a speed and “firepower” that surprises the opposition, enabling you to attain a good position before any reaction. Try and gain advantage through “Shock and Awe”.¹⁶

Principle 9: Simplicity

The purpose of “simplicity” is to increase the probability that plans and operations will be executed as intended, by preparing clear uncomplicated plans and concise orders. Simplicity contributes to successful operations. Simple plans and clear, concise orders minimise misunderstanding and confusion. When other factors are equal, the simplest plan is preferable. Simplicity and clarity-of-expression in plans allow better understanding and execution at all echelons, especially under conditions of stress, fatigue, the fog-of-war, and other complexities of modern-combat, such as multinational operations.

Message Nine: Keep your plans simple and free of complex interplay and interaction. Minimise the “ifs and buts” so that the man on the spot can take a decision when the situation on ground changes, or for commencing the next phase without reverting to a higher authority.

Principle 10: Restraint

The purpose of restraint is to limit collateral damage and prevent the unnecessary use of force. A single unrestrained act could have significant military and political consequences; consequently, the judicious use of force is necessary. “Restraint” requires the careful and disciplined balancing of the need for security, the conduct of military operations, and, the national strategic end-state. In a coalition-force, commanders must be aware of any restrictions imposed on participating forces by their respective domestic laws.

Message Ten: Think before you act and look before you leap. Understand the local ground well, particularly in transnational or global operations. Be particularly mindful of public sentiment and the influence of partisan lobbies.

Principle 11: Perseverance

The purpose of perseverance is to ensure the commitment necessary to attain the national strategic end-state. Perseverance involves preparation for measured and protracted military operations in pursuit of the national strategic end-state. The patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives is essential to achieve success. This will frequently involve diplomatic, economic, and informational measures to supplement the military-effort.

Message Eleven: The desired outcomes of strategic or tactical moves may not be immediate. Perseverance is necessary if long-term goals are to be achieved.

Principle 12: Legitimacy

The purpose of legitimacy is to maintain legal and moral authority in the conduct of operations. Legitimacy, which can be a decisive factor in operations, is based upon the actual

and perceived legality, morality, and rightness of actions envisaged or taken, viewed from the various perspectives of interested audiences. Therefore, legitimacy would depend upon adherence to objectives agreed-to by the international community, ensuring that the action is appropriate to the situation, and, fairness in dealing with various factions. When the public-at-large perceives that their government has genuine authority to govern and uses proper agencies for valid purposes, they view that government as legitimate and agree with its actions. During operations in an area where a legitimate government does not exist, extreme caution should be used when dealing with individuals and organisations, in order to avoid any erosion of legitimacy.

Message 12: While engaging in the corporate war for the mind-space of the consumer and share-of-his-wallet, the company has to always be seen as a responsible corporate citizen.

Principles of maritime strategy and applicability to corporate warfare

The planning and conduct of war at sea¹⁷ is the most commonly accepted definition of Maritime strategy, a term which is considered the naval equivalent of military strategy on land. Therefore, Naval strategy necessitates that countries which have economic, territorial or political interests linked directly or indirectly with the seas develop an overall strategy for achieving superiority against hostile elements. These range from the entire conceptual requirement of size and shape of forces, anticipation of threats and opportunities, planning and conduct of campaigns in furtherance of the aforesaid interests and finally, the disposition and tactical movement of available forces by which a commander deceives the enemy and fights at a place and time of maximum benefit to him. Sir Francis Drake's continuance of the game of bowls till an opportune time of wind and tide is a classic example of mixed fact and legend.

Naval tactics deal with the execution of plans and manoeuvring in battle. Historically, naval forces were tasked to guard their own coastal regions against enemy attacks, and to maintain free trade. This task was accomplished by the fleets of the coastal states engaging the attacker, namely, frequent skirmishes between the Portuguese and the rulers of the western coastal states of India. Larger maritime nations, like Britain and France, sought out the enemy's fleet to neutralise it at sea or to confine it to port, namely, the maritime engagements between Britain and France during the Napoleonic wars. Therefore, the maintenance of a strong, professional ocean-going force successfully achieved the aim of paralysing the enemy fleet, which automatically aided the aims of coastal defence and freedom of trade. A fleet that secures the freedom of its own national interests from attack is said to have command of the sea.¹⁸

Additionally, naval strategy has some fundamental differences from military strategy. Firstly, the high seas have no territorial markers. There is no demarcated territory to hold for strategic or tactical advantage, or for reasons of national sentiment. There is no "high ground to hold" and neither is it possible to "occupy" an area of ocean for a sustained period of time. The convoy supply chain to the Allies in the Second World War became successful only when new tactics were deployed, which restricted the effectiveness of the attacking German submarines. Secondly, apart from the fisheries and, more recently, offshore oilfields and mineral resources, there are no economic assets that can be denied to the enemy and no resources that a fleet can exploit. Thirdly, while an

army can live off the land and have a suitably large enough supply train for immediate, standby and back up supplies, a fleet must rely on either internal resources or whatever can be delivered to the force on deployment. The naval logistics train is far more complex and expensive than that of land or air forces. As Mahan has pointed out, the success of naval forces for sustained operations, particularly “out of area” rests squarely on the logistics capability of the fleet and the support systems available to it, including information and intelligence.

Success in naval warfare comes not from battlefield victories but by dominating expanses of ocean in areas of interest, i.e. “Sea Control”¹⁹ through better “presence”, “reach” and “firepower”. This is the greatest similarity between maritime strategy and corporate strategy – there are no defined boundaries for operations and the arena or area of interest keeps shifting from time to time.

The characteristics of the fleet, its shape, size, firepower and sustainability have to be aligned with the strategic roles visualised for it. For example, relatively small nations, such as Singapore or Israel, would generally be more concerned with safeguarding their respective territorial waters. Their force-structure would primarily compose small, fast vessels, with limited endurance but a powerful punch. For most of the years of its existence, the erstwhile Soviet Navy remained oriented towards the defence of the homeland. The PLA Navy has only recently begun demonstrating its capability in the deep seas, through out-of-area operations in support of the “string of pearls” theory. Likewise, the characteristics of a corporate entity, in terms of its “Men, Material, Money and Moments”, coupled with Information and Intelligence capabilities (M^4I^2) would determine its success in asserting “presence” and “reach” in the selected marketplace, through manoeuvre and “firepower”. All this would need to be commensurate and coherent with the strategy it sets for itself.

While further examining the similarities between maritime strategy and corporate strategy, the first thing to be considered is whether to adopt a capability model or a threat-countering model. The “capability model” seeks to define and build capability to achieve specific maritime tasks, which would include deterrence for war prevention and superiority of forces if called to battle. The threat-countering model seeks to define and quantify known or potential threats and defines the force-levels required to counter them. Naturally, the definition of the required capability is always somewhat open-ended since naval force-levels, both quantitatively and qualitatively, take up to a decade to mature from the time they are defined. Capability always lags behind the requirement. In the arena of corporate warfare, too, capability would always lag the strategic intent and, therefore, aggressive companies skilfully use stretch-strategies²⁰ and “Blitzscaling” to achieve success in the battle for the mind-space and share-of-customer’s-wallet.

Defining a capability model for corporate force structure

Business strategy, like maritime strategy, requires the corporate entity to muster, organise, identify the potential of resources, or capability, and extract the maximum to gain advantage over competitors, in the “one-on-one” or “one-on-many” theatres of war. This is depicted in [Figure 1](#).²¹

Clarity in respect of the strengths and weaknesses of “Men, Money, Material, Moments (time), Information (internal) and Intelligence (external)” = [M^4I^2] has to be available at

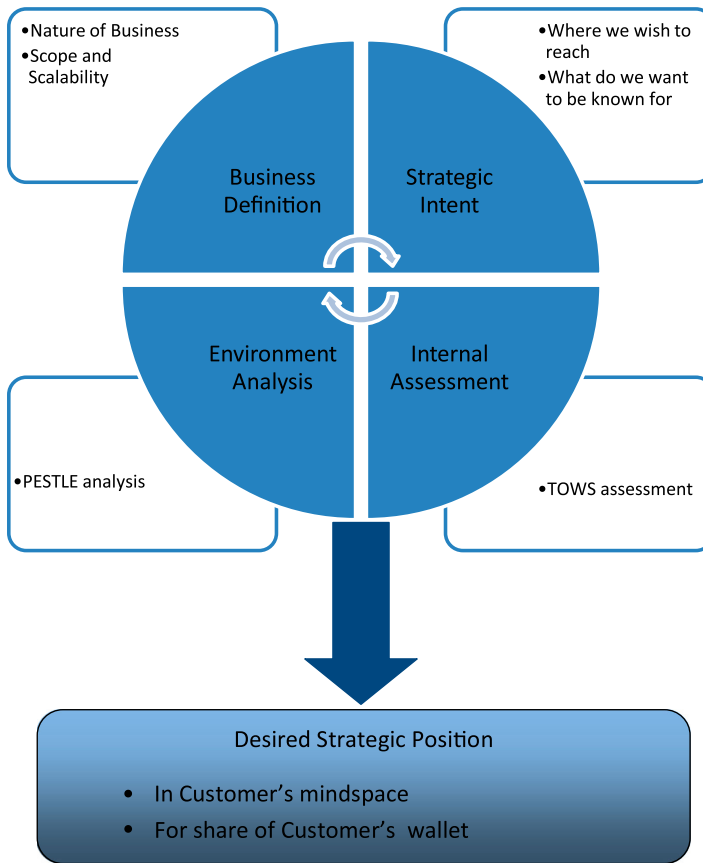


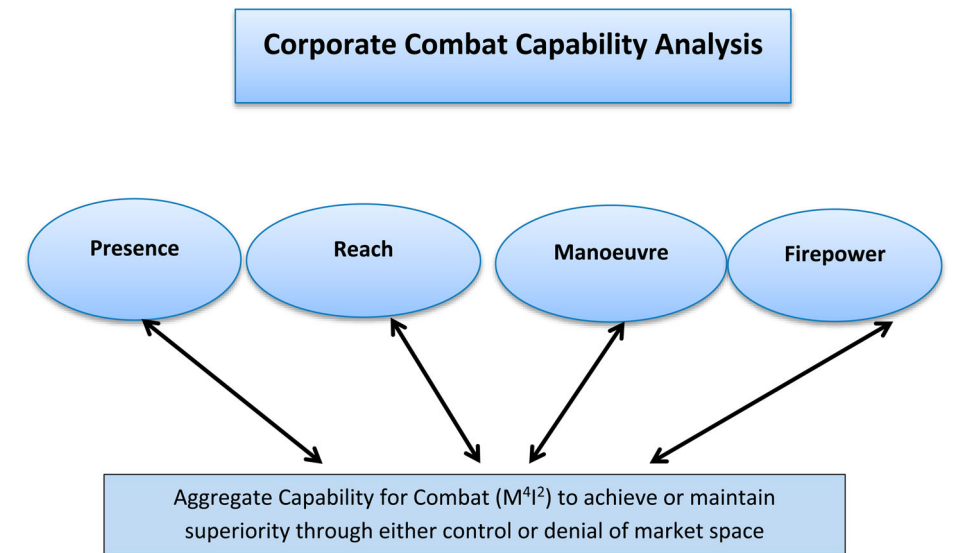
Figure 1. Approach to strategic positioning. Source: Author.

all times to the corporate strategist. To evaluate the essential capabilities of corporate forces rather than their corporate structure, the criteria could be as set out in Table 1²² and as per Figure 2.²³ The strategic capability of the corporate entity should be analysed

Table 1. Categories for capability assessment.

Category	Maritime forces	Corporate capability
Presence	The area of ocean and littoral, including air and underwater space, within which maritime forces can assert direct or indirect influence	The impact our brand has in the marketplace, where we would like to position it, and what influence we wish to assert
Reach	The area of ocean over which the maritime force can detect and react to threats, through force-multipliers such as surveillance systems, scouts, or, extended-range weapon-delivery	Our ability to gather real-time intelligence, and effectively deliver our product or service beyond our immediate physical space. Also, our ability to counter any negative impact from the actions of our competitors, customers and the marketplace dynamics
Manoeuvre	The ability of the maritime force to position itself for a pre-emptive strike or a counterattack so as to maintain its advantage over the enemy	Our ability to redeploy our M ⁴ ² assets in real time, so as to gain the initiative and advantage of "space"
Firepower	The aggregated surface, air, underwater, cyber and psychological weaponry that the maritime force can bring to bear for decisive action	The integrated M ⁴ ² capability that we can bring to bear in the marketplace, so as to maintain an advantage over the competition, gain new customers, or delight existing ones

Source: Author.



Corporate Warfare Resource Definition and Assessment			
Action Plan	Available	Required	Gap
M ¹ - Manpower and Intellectual Capital	_____	_____	_____
M ² – Material and Technological Capability	_____	_____	_____
M ³ – Money including liquidity and cost of capital	_____	_____	_____
M ⁴ -- Moments or time frame of task(s)	_____	_____	_____
I ¹ – Information – both external and internal	_____	_____	_____
I ² – Intelligence – of competitor and consumer behaviour	_____	_____	_____

Figure 2. Corporate combat capability analysis. Source: Author.

and evaluated under the categories in Table 1, and the business strategy reviewed accordingly.

Corporate warfare tactics, Sun Tzu and principles of corporate warfare

Mention has been made earlier of the impact of Sun Tzu’s writings on the art of corporate warfare. There are several intensive reviews of Sun Tzu’s work that have closely examined its relevance to both military and corporate warfare. Some key quotations that are considered closest to the US Joint Forces Doctrine’s military principles of war and further distillation into principles of corporate warfare, are set forth in Table 2.²⁴

Table 2. Comparison of US principles of war with Sun Tzu's quotations and their applicability to "corporate warfare".

Principles of war (US joint forces)	Sun Tzu classical principles	Applicability to corporate warfare
<i>Objective or Aim:</i> Selection and maintenance of the aim. Provides a focus for coordinated effort and a reference point against which to measure progress	According to circumstances that are favourable, one should modify one's plans	<i>Maintain Objectives:</i> Determine a clear direction and keep a steady aim. Do not wander down side-tracks
<i>Offensive Action:</i> Implies a vigorous, incisive approach to exploiting opportunities and seizing the initiative	<i>Essentials for Victory:</i> 1. He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight 2. He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces	Understand when to launch the offensive. Good information sources will help you know when to take offensive action and when to withhold it
<i>Mass and Concentration of Force:</i> Balance forces to deliver sufficient fighting-power at critical points and times	If you set a fully equipped army in march in order to snatch an advantage, the chances are that you will be too late. On the other hand, to detach a flying column for the purpose involves the sacrifice of its baggage and stores	In business, as in nuclear fission, a concentration of energy must be attained to achieve critical mass. The manager must focus his or her energy on performance of the tasks most critical to success
<i>Manoeuvre:</i> Move forces in relation to the enemy to secure or retain positional advantage to deliver direct and indirect fire	Nothing is more difficult than tactical manoeuvring. This requires turning the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain Manoeuvring with an army is advantageous; with an undisciplined multitude, most dangerous	Force ($M^{4/2}$) deployment must be planned in such a way that manoeuvre is built into the master plan. Force redeployment to meet anticipated or surprise contingencies has to be foreseen so that effectiveness is maintained
<i>Economy of Effort:</i> Economy of effort is best summarised as creating the right effect, in the right place, at the right time with the appropriate resources	Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical	When you attempt to concentrate everywhere, you have no concentration The more thoroughly you specialise, the surer you are to win. Winning-strategies amass resources on the main effort and allocate minimal resources to secondary efforts
<i>Unity of Command:</i> All forces operate under a single commander. In multinational operations, unity of command may not be possible, but unity of effort becomes paramount	Form a single united body and make the enemy split up into fractions. Hence there will be a whole pitted against separate parts of a whole, which means that we shall be many to the enemy's few	When engaging in a highly competitive environment, the person in charge of the "campaign" needs to have control over all resources deployed. Division of authority would lead to dilution of effort and outcome
<i>Security:</i> Demands managing risk, protecting high-value assets and resilience	He wins his battles by making no mistakes. Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory, for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated	<i>Establish a Secure Position:</i> Strengthen your core competencies. Occupy a position that cannot easily be taken by your opponent. Ensure your own $M^{4/2}$ is well protected
<i>Surprise:</i> A significant way of seizing the initiative and may be a critical precondition for success. Surprise is transient and must be exploited rapidly	Therefore, against those skilful in attack, the enemy does not know where to defend, and against the experts in defence, the enemy does not know where to attack	The mental advantage is achieved through surprise . . . by getting inside your adversary's observation-orientation-decision-action time cycle
<i>Simplicity:</i> Clear, precise and simple orders increase the probability of success. Simplicity and clarity-of-expression facilitate mission-execution in stress, fatigue, fog of war, and other complexities of modern combat	Sun Tzu makes no specific mention of "simplicity". However, his entire text is laid out in simple and clear language, and, considerable stress is laid on clear and unambiguous use of signals and effective communication	Simple and direct corporate communication is the essence of successful corporate or marketing warfare

Source: Author.

Table 3. Comparison of the UK's principles of war with Sun Tzu's quotations and their applicability to "corporate warfare".

Principles of war (UK)	Sun Tzu classical principles	Applicability to corporate warfare
<i>Maintenance of Morale:</i> Morale manifests itself as staying power and resolve, as well as the will to prevail in spite of provocation and adversity	He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks	Consistently maintaining high standards creates an environment where discipline is effective and accepted. In these circumstances, morale is high
<i>Flexibility:</i> Flexibility requires the physical and structural ability to allow forces to act rapidly, especially when operating in complex situations. Really flexible organisations are highly responsive	He who can modify his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation and thereby succeeds in winning may be said to be divine	One size does not fit all situations, and we must be flexible in customising systems to the situation
<i>Cooperation:</i> Is based on team spirit and training. It relies on three interrelated elements: mutual trust and goodwill; a common aim; and clearly divided responsibilities (including understanding the capabilities and limitations of others)	There are not more than five primary colours (blue, yellow, red, white, and black), yet in combination they produce more hues than can ever been seen	Intelligent cooperation is of infinitely greater value than mere mechanical obedience
<i>Sustainability:</i> Rigorously assessing logistic realities, including redeployment, is essential to operations planning. Sustainability may be the deciding factor in assessing the feasibility of a particular operation	We may take it then that an army without its baggage-train is lost; without provisions it is lost; without bases of supply it is lost	To achieve success, you must have superiority. However, that superiority is always relative. It is necessary to answer the question: What is the allowable limit of resources to allocate? Additionally, efficient and effective logistics can be the tipping point between success or failure in the market

Source: Author.

To further derive value from Sun Tzu's writings, the UK's Principles of War have also been examined for similarities with Sun Tzu. Table 3²⁵ has taken four of the UK's Principles of War,²⁶ which are not part of the US principles, and, once again correlated them to Sun Tzu and corporate warfare.

Principles of corporate warfare: Postulation and application

Based upon the foregoing analysis and comparisons, ten Principles of Corporate Warfare are defined below, along with a brief review of their application. These could be applied in any scenario of corporate or marketing "warfare", be it against a key competitor, or, relevant to an independent launch targeting a new market. The aim is to win a larger share of the customers' mind-space and share-of-wallet.

Principle no. 1: Selection and maintenance of objective

Clearly identify the market-objective and strategic position, and verify alignment with "vision" and "mission". In the event of any dissonance, the objective has to be reviewed against the strategy and refined accordingly. Once agreed upon, the objective becomes the master principle, with all other principles subordinate to it. The external and internal environmental influences that have led to the selection of the objective should also be identified and recorded as any change in them would necessitate a review of the Objective.

Principle no. 2: Initiative, momentum and sustainability

Seizing the initiative and maintaining momentum is a key decision-point in application of these principles of corporate “warfare”. The apparently-perfect plan may fail, for while it may well be good, it may yet be too late. Similarly, a hastily drawn-up plan is quite likely to fail due to lack of attention to detail. “First-mover advantage” holds true here, but has to be accompanied by scalability and rapid build-out, in a Blitzkrieg or “Blitzscale” approach to execution. The logistics of the operation have to be especially planned on a fool-proof basis, as the initial thrust can soon be blunted if it is not sustained.

Principle no. 3: Concentration of force

The identified force-components from the M^{4I^2} arsenal need to be concentrated at the point of “attack”. A weak attack, with inferior forces, will not have the required impact. A failure of attack is worse than no attack at all. Forces should be well consolidated and effort brought to bear at a narrow point so that success can be managed and momentum can thereafter be built. It is desirable to identify the vulnerabilities of the competition, and the emotional needs of the customer, and then concentrate suitable forces for the “attack” on the market.

Principle no. 4: Plan and manage costs

Initially, this principle may seem contradictory to Principle No. 3 (Concentration of Force). The bid – of the individual in charge of the campaign – for resources to an assigned task is frequently exaggerated. It is necessary to scrutinise these force-requirement projections so that the forces are utilised efficiently and to best effect. Reserves would always be available through Principle No. 9 (Manoeuvre).

Principle no. 5: Unity of command and cooperation

Current business structures are a mix of vertical silos and hybrid arrangements, with frequently shifting roles and reporting-lines, especially in the case of “virtual” enterprises. In such a scenario, clearly defined lines-of-command and a project-management approach are necessary to attain success of an attack on the market. Resources assigned to a campaign must not be diluted or diverted until the campaign ends.

Principle no. 6: Simplicity of plans and communication protocols

These require no amplification in today’s world of “marketing warfare”. Direct measures, with minimal “ifs and buts”, gain quick results. Indirect measures may also be deployed, such as for image-building. However, these would be slow in achieving measurable results. Escalation-paths and triggers need to be well-defined and active on a 24 × 7 basis, till a steady-state is achieved.

Principle no. 7: Security and counter-intelligence

Plans must remain highly confidential and shared solely on a need-to-know basis. Consultation, group-thinking and brain-storming may be done at the planning stage, but final plans should be known only to a select few. Security of information, and safeguarding the integrity of highly vulnerable elements of own supply chain, are critical.

Principle no. 8: Surprise

Aspects of timing, place-and-size of the “attack”, etc., have to be aggregated in order to generate the requisite “shock-and-awe”, so that momentum can be quickly built and thereafter maintained. A low-key attack, even if it has a strong element of surprise, is likely to have little impact and will soon be overcome. The “when” element is powerful and has to be supported with overpowering “what”, “who” and “how” elements.

Principle no. 9: Manoeuvre and flexibility

Manoeuvre is more in the implementation of the plan than in its design. At the design stage, various contingencies have to be visualised that would require the redeployment of forces, and, the appropriate forces identified as “reserves”. These reserves would be deployed as circumstances require. It is essential that the reserves are made aware in advance of their likely deployment and roles. All forces have to maintain flexibility in deployment, and the switching of plans should be possible without question or delay.

Principle no. 10: Morale

Although placed at Number 10, this principle can make or break the success of any campaign. The morale of the “attacking” force has to be maintained at a very high level, be this in the form of rewards and benefits, or, human comforts, or, motivational messages, or, immediate access to the leaders when in distress, or any combination of these. Fear-of-failure is a strong negative and all efforts should be made to imbue the teams with positive emotions and confidence of success.

Conclusion

The corporate environment is becoming increasingly aggressive and the constantly shifting influences on the consumer demand very agile responses from all levels of management. While strategic plans can be rolled out in corporate headquarters, it is the persons in the field who have to implement these plans and act to either thwart or preempt moves by the competition. Persons in the field also have to maintain sensitivity towards environmental changes or public expectations. Today’s dynamic corporate “battlefield” has a multitude of ever-shifting forces, all of which strongly influence the consumer, whose mind-space and share-of-wallet is the corporate target.

The military principles-of-war defined by various nations have guided commanders in the field in identifying actions in dynamic situations. They have facilitated resource-deployment and optimisation even in the most constrained circumstance. Offensive

action has often converted near-certain defeat into victory. The wisdom of Sun Tzu has been applied to management by many authors. This wisdom can be effectively applied while designing strategy at the corporate level. However, the conversion of Sun Tzu's thoughts into easy-to-understand and specific directives for the person out in the field has not been undertaken in depth. Consequently, most executives need to seek direction from higher echelons when faced with a changing environment. The ten principles of "corporate warfare" defined in this paper are considered a positive step to reduce reaction-time and help the field-people to proactively initiate measures to progress a position of advantage or negate setbacks.

The prime pillars of corporate strategy – Vision, Mission and Values – serve well in identifying strategic response. However, the real test comes when an unforeseen event or series of events stalls what appeared to be perfect plans. Such cases, even when field-personnel are sufficiently enabled and empowered, leads to the tendency to look over one's shoulder towards the corporate hierarchy for direction and decisions. The definition and dissemination of "principles of war" by corporate headquarters would help in reducing reaction time and encourage swift progress of tactical responses to achieve strategic goals.

Notes

1. Recommended reading in this regard includes: *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* by Corbett; *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* by Mahan; *The Art of War* by Jomini, and a thesis, *Building Corbett's Navy: The Principles of Maritime Strategy and the Functions of the Navy in Naval Policy*, available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/6856463/Building_Corbetts_Navy_The_Principles_of_Maritime_Strategy_and_the_Functions_of_the_Navy_in_Naval_Policy.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId= (accessed October 7, 2018).
2. See Richard L. Daft and Dorothy Marcic, *Understanding Management*, 8th ed. (Mason, OH: South Western, Cengage Learning, 2013).
3. Margin is the difference between revenue earned and costs incurred in delivering a product or service to the consumer.
4. "First-mover advantage" is a business initiative that creates a unique identity for itself, e.g. the Apple iPod, or Windows OS with its unique GUI. Imitators often find it hard to follow or overtake such an initiative.
5. This argument can be seen in the views of many authors who have written on business strategies. One example is: Lampel, Mintzberg, Quinn and Ghoshal; *Strategy Process: Concepts, Contexts, Cases*. 5th ed.
6. Jack Ries and Al Trout, *Marketing Warfare*, 20th Anniversary Edition, McGraw Hill Education (India) Private Limited, June 2012.
7. An example in the Indian context is the planning and ensuing actions by the Indian Armed Forces during the 1971 war with Pakistan that led to the Liberation of Bangladesh.
8. Some examples that can be examined for a better understanding of this aspect are the Coca-Cola and Beer Wars of 1960's–1970's, and film v/s digital photography (Kodak v/s Sony).
9. Nature of Forces covers the ambit from single role to multi capability through in-built force multipliers or networked resources.
10. Armed forces are presently being trained and equipped more for deterrence and maintaining peace rather than winning battles as the cost of armed conflict is undeterminable and could reach unacceptable levels. Also see¹⁰ US Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, 17 January 2017.
11. Other than in proxy wars, military forces are generally deployed to attain a favourable situation before negotiations for ceasefire and a peace settlement commence. Examples are Iraq

- and Libya. However, this approach has not succeeded in Afghanistan or Yemen, due to the divergent goals of local and external stakeholders.
12. US Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, 17 January 2017, Appendix A, A-1 to A-4, available at <http://data.cape.army.mil/web/character-development-project/repository/jp3-0-2017.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2018).
 13. Blitzscaling, adapted from the German term Blitzkrieg of World War II, is the current practice of companies rapidly scaling up growth within short time frame and achieving market dominance. In this context, Google, WhatsApp and Amazon are the best examples.
 14. Secondary efforts are additional tasks intended to close out the primary objective(s) after initial success. These often require a lot of detailed planning and may therefore divert attention from the primary effort(s).
 15. Primary efforts are the main tasks and allocation of forces to achieve them. The efforts require high flexibility and maintenance of adequate reserves to sustain achievement of the objective.
 16. “Shock-and-Awe” is the attainment of victory through overwhelming surprise and total superiority of the attacking forces. The First Chechen war (1994–1996) and the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition, are historical examples of the use of overwhelming superiority of artillery, rapid advance by armour, and pinpoint accuracy of PGMs.
 17. Derived from the writings of Mahan and Corbett.
 18. Derived from the writings of Mahan and Corbett.
 19. As one of the most important concepts of maritime power, sea control denotes a condition where one is able to use a defined sea area, for a defined period of time, for one’s own purposes, and at the same time deny its use to the adversary. See Indian Maritime Doctrine, Naval Strategic Publication 1.1, Updated online version 2015, p. 77, available at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian-Maritime-Doctrine-2009-Updated-12Feb16.pdf> (accessed December 29, 2018).
 20. “Stretch” strategies’ are those that demand extra results from assigned resources and seek outcomes despite potential constraints that would otherwise expect a “fit” strategy that adjusts to the environment.
 21. Created by the author based on literature on Strategic Positioning.
 22. Created by the author.
 23. Created by the author.
 24. Created by the author.
 25. Created by the author.
 26. See <http://www.incommand.co.uk/#!ten-principles-of-war/ceua> for UK Principles (accessed December 29, 2018).

Notes on contributor

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