THE STRATEGOS LOOP

The Complete Manual & Walkthrough

A next-generation strategy model fusing Sun Tzu's Art of War with the modern strategic canon

Written for both the scholar and the chief executive · Edition 2026

Contents

Right-click and choose “Update Field” to build the table of contents.

PREFACE

How to Use This Manual

This manual describes a single strategy model — the Strategos Loop — in enough depth that it can be taught in a classroom and run in a boardroom. That dual purpose shapes everything that follows. The model itself is a synthesis: it takes the enduring logic of Sun Tzu's Art of War, written roughly 2,500 years ago, and fuses it with the most useful frameworks the modern strategy discipline has produced, from Michael Porter's competitive analysis to John Boyd's OODA loop. The name is Greek — strategos meant the general, and it is the root of our word strategy. It is a working name you own and may change.

The manual is written for two readers at once, and it signals which is which so that each can find what they need quickly.

ORIENTATION **Two readers, one book**

The executive reads for decisions. Every chapter opens with an Executive Summary and closes with a CEO Checklist. Worked examples, tools and templates are marked in tinted boxes. A chief executive who reads only the summaries, the examples and the checklists will come away able to run the model.

The scholar reads for foundations. Every framework is attributed to its originator, its logic is explained, and Theory & Foundations boxes place the model in the academic conversation. A reference list and a chapter of academic notes and limitations sit at the back.

How the manual is organised

Part One lays the foundations: what the model is, why it takes the shape it does, and the two structures — Sun Tzu's Five Factors and Boyd's loop — that hold it together. Part Two is the heart of the book: a full chapter on each of the six movements of the loop, worked through for both the theorist and the practitioner. Part Three treats renewal — how the loop keeps turning. Part Four is a complete walkthrough, following one company through an entire turn of the loop with its working papers reproduced. Part Five is an implementation and governance guide: how to introduce the model, who does what, and on what cadence. Part Six gathers the templates, a glossary, academic notes and references.

Conventions

- **Executive Summary** (dark box) — the decision-maker's precis of a chapter.
- **Theory & Foundations** (blue box) — the academic grounding and attribution.
- **Tool** (gold box) — a practical instrument you can apply directly.
- **Worked Example** (green box) — the running case, illustrating the stage.
- **Common Pitfalls** (red box) and CEO Checklist (bordered) — what to avoid and what to confirm.

- **Sun Tzu passages** appear in gold, from the public-domain Giles translation; Chinese terms use pinyin.

A reader new to the model should read Parts One and Two in order. A reader who knows it can treat Part Two as a reference and open the single movement they are working on. Either way, the argument of the manual is constant: strategy is the disciplined pursuit of advantage against a thinking opponent, it is decided as much before the contest as during it, and it never truly ends — it loops.

PART ONE

Foundations

What the model is, and the two structures that hold it together

CHAPTER 1

What the Model Is, and Why It Exists

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Strategos Loop is a complete, repeatable system for setting and executing strategy. It answers, in order, six questions every organisation must answer: what are we for, what is really going on, what does it mean, what will we do, how will we make money doing it, and how will we make it happen — then it starts again.

- **It fuses two traditions:** Sun Tzu's timeless logic of advantage, and the modern strategy canon's analytical rigour.
- **It is a loop, not a plan:** the work never ends; results feed the next turn.
- **It serves the whole organisation:** from the owners' intent at the top to the front line's daily action.

Most organisations do not lack strategic effort; they lack strategic coherence. Plans are made, but the analysis that should precede them is thin; execution is energetic, but disconnected from any clear choice about where to win. The Strategos Loop exists to impose coherence — to make sure the hard analytical and diagnostic work is done before commitments are made, that the choice of where and how to compete is deliberate, and that execution is measured and fed back so the organisation learns.

The problem the model solves

Consider how strategy typically goes wrong. A leadership team gathers for an offsite, reviews some market data, argues toward a set of goals, and leaves with a plan. Six months later the plan has stalled. Trace the failure back and you almost always find one of a small number of causes: the team never honestly assessed its own capabilities, so the plan assumed strengths it did not have; it never analysed the industry's structure, so it competed where profit was impossible; it chose no real position, so 'differentiate' meant nothing in practice; it had no business model connecting strategy to money; it could not actually execute at the required speed; or it never measured and adapted, so it repeated last year's approach into a changed world. Each of these is a specific, nameable gap, and the model is built to close each one in turn.

> *“The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin.”*
>
> — *Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)*

Sun Tzu opens the Art of War by insisting that strategy is too serious to improvise. That conviction is the model's starting point. But Sun Tzu, writing about war, could not supply the analytical machinery a modern business needs — the tools to dissect an industry, audit a capability, design a business model or measure execution. Those tools were developed over the last half-century by the strategy discipline. The model's premise is that the two belong together: Sun Tzu supplies the philosophy and the sequence, the modern canon supplies the rigour, and fused they are stronger than either alone.

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **A synthesis, not an invention**

The model does not claim to discover new strategic principles. It claims to organise existing ones into a coherent, usable whole. Its intellectual lineage is explicit: Sun Tzu (c. 5th century BCE) for the philosophy of advantage; John Boyd's OODA loop (1970s) for the cyclical structure; and the modern strategy canon — Porter, Barney, Prahalad and Hamel, Rumelt, Kim and Mauborgne, Christensen, Osterwalder, Kaplan and Norton, Mintzberg, Teece and others — for the analytical content of each movement. The contribution is the synthesis and the sequence.

Key terms

Strategos Loop	The model described in this manual: a six-movement cycle fusing Sun Tzu with the modern strategy canon.
Movement	One of the six phases of the loop: AIM, OBSERVE, ORIENT, CHOOSE, DESIGN, ACT.
Coherence	The property the model exists to create: analysis, choice and execution that reinforce rather than contradict one another.

CHAPTER 2

The Architecture at a Glance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

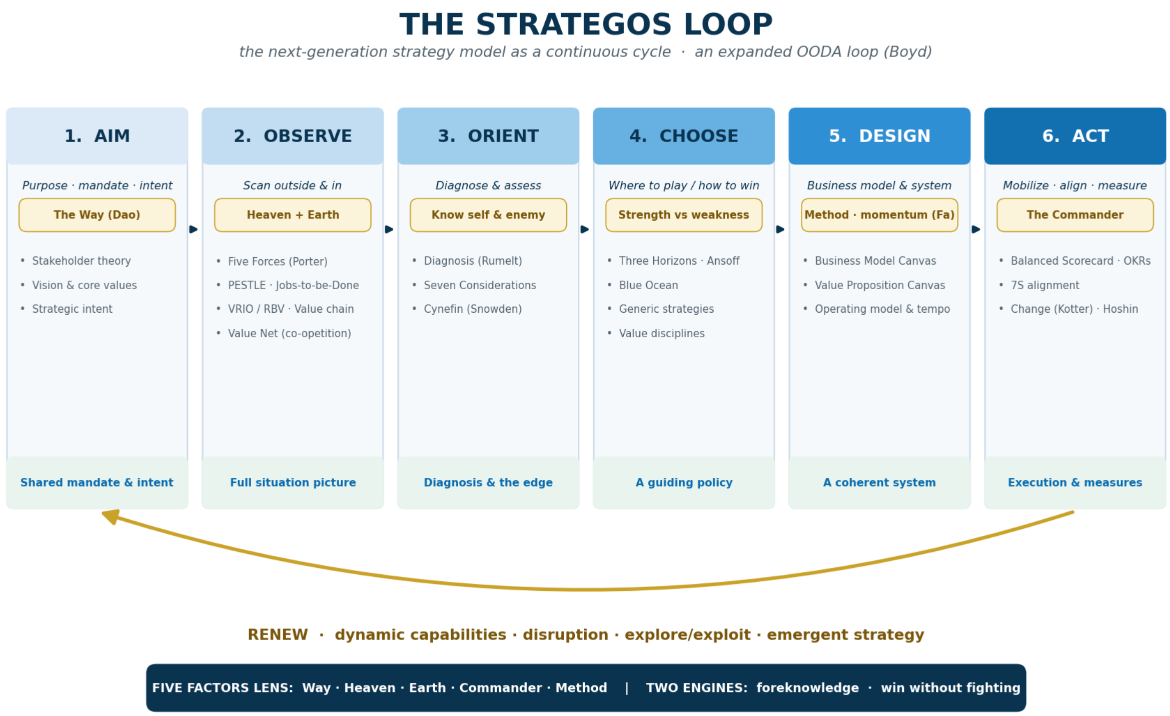
The model is a loop of six movements — AIM, OBSERVE, ORIENT, CHOOSE, DESIGN, ACT — wrapped by a continuous RENEW ring, with Sun Tzu's Five Factors as the lens applied at every turn and two engines running throughout.

- **Read it as a cycle:** the output of each movement is the input of the next; ACT feeds back to AIM.
- **The lens never changes:** weigh the Way, Heaven, Earth, the Commander and Method at every movement.
- **Two engines always run:** know yourself and your rival; win by position, not attrition.

Before working through the movements one at a time, it helps to see the whole. The model has three elements: the six movements that do the work, the lens that is applied throughout, and the two engines that drive it. The diagrams below present the same architecture three ways — as a flow, as a cycle, and as a reference grid — because different readers and different moments call for different views.

The six movements as a flow

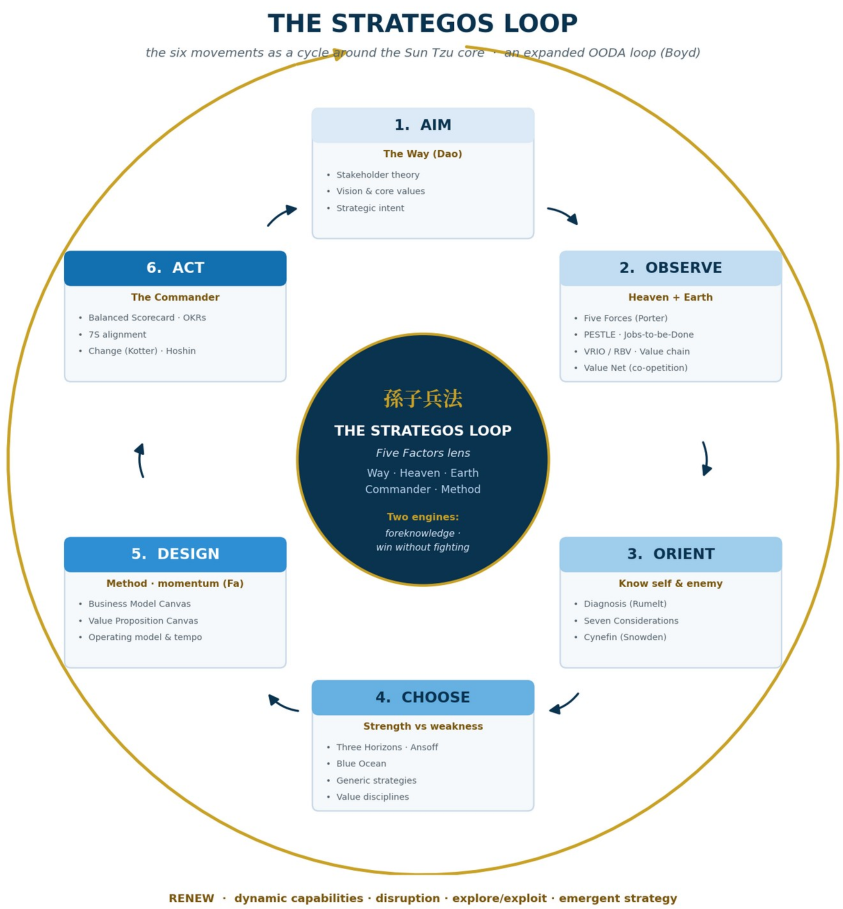
Read left to right, the model is a pipeline that converts purpose into executed strategy, with a loop that returns results to the start. This is the easiest view to follow when explaining the model to a team for the first time.



The Strategos Loop as a linear flow with a RENEW loop-back.

The six movements as a cycle

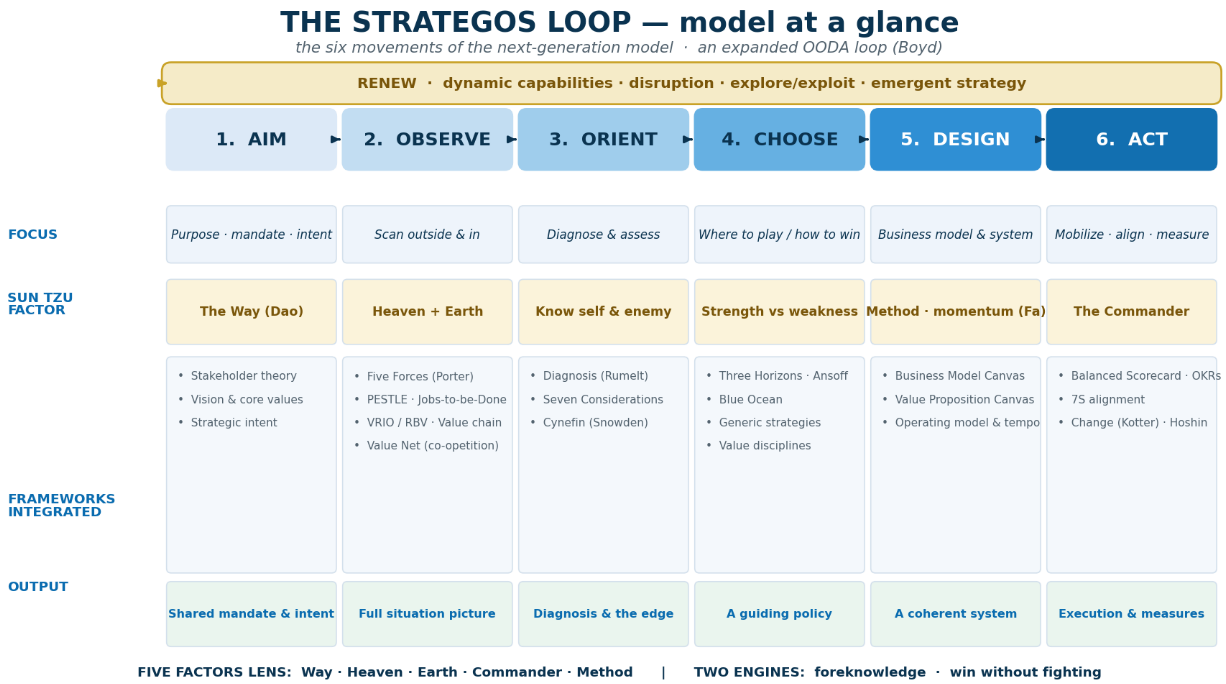
The same six movements, drawn as a cycle around the Sun Tzu core, make the model's true nature clearer: it is a loop, and the philosophical lens sits at its centre, applied at every turn.



The Strategos Loop as a cycle around the Five-Factors core.

The model as a reference grid

For working sessions, the grid view lays every movement's focus, governing Sun Tzu factor, integrated frameworks and output side by side — a single page to keep on the wall during a strategy cycle.



The Strategos Loop as a reference matrix.

What each movement does

Movement	Question it answers	Output
1. AIM	What are we for, and what are we committed to?	A shared mandate and intent
2. OBSERVE	What is really going on, outside and in?	A full situation picture
3. ORIENT	What does it mean, and where is our edge?	A sharp diagnosis and the decisive edge
4. CHOOSE	Where will we play, and how will we win?	A guiding policy
5. DESIGN	How will we create and capture value, and move?	A coherent business and operating model
6. ACT	How will we mobilise, align and measure?	Aligned execution and measures
RENEW	How do we keep the advantage alive?	A living, adapting strategy

CHAPTER 3

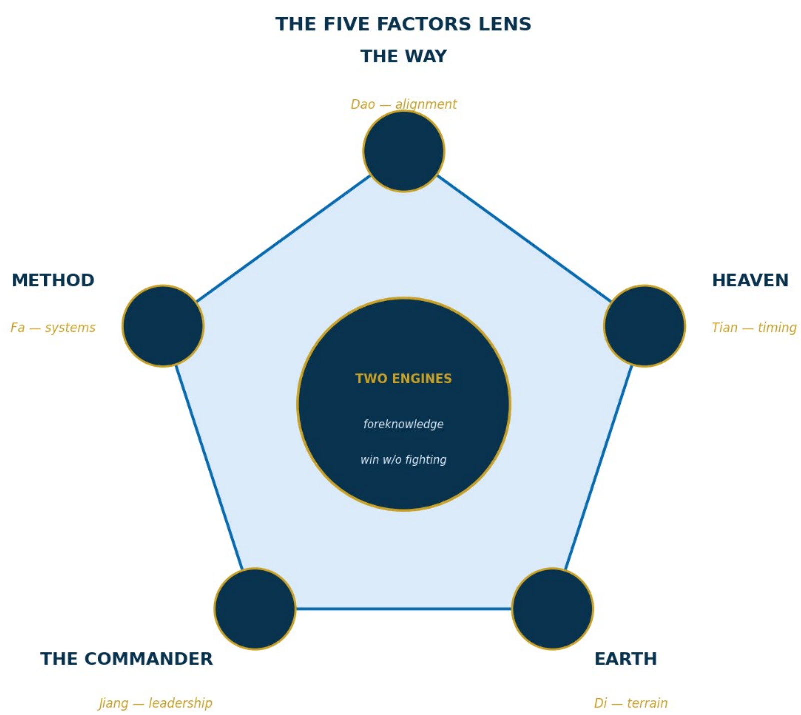
The Sun Tzu Spine: Five Factors and Two Engines

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sun Tzu argued that any contest is governed by five constant factors and won by two disciplines. In this model the five factors are the lens applied at every movement, and the two disciplines are the engines that run throughout.

- **The Five Factors:** the Way (alignment), Heaven (timing), Earth (terrain), the Commander (leadership), Method (systems).
- **Engine one:** know yourself and know your rival — foreknowledge, produced deliberately.
- **Engine two:** win without fighting — by position and preparation, not by out-spending.

The distinctive core of this model — the thing that makes it more than a checklist of modern frameworks — is Sun Tzu's spine. It consists of five factors and two disciplines, and understanding them is the key to using the whole model well.



The Five Factors lens and the two engines at the model's core.

The Five Factors as a lens

> *"The art of war, then, is governed by five constant factors, all of which need to be taken into account. These are: the Moral Law; Heaven; Earth; the Commander; and Method and discipline."*

— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)

Sun Tzu names five things that decide any contest, and the model treats them not as a stage to pass through once but as a lens to apply at every movement. At each turn of the loop, ask the five questions. The Way (Dao): are our people aligned to this? Heaven (Tian): is the timing right? Earth (Di): do we understand the ground? The Commander (Jiang): do we have the leadership to carry it? Method (Fa): can we organise, supply and fund it? A movement that scores badly on any factor is a movement in trouble, whatever its other merits.

- **The Way (Dao) — alignment.** The shared conviction that holds an organisation together through hardship. Lives most strongly in AIM.
- **Heaven (Tian) — timing.** The external climate and the moment. Lives most strongly in OBSERVE.
- **Earth (Di) — terrain.** The ground of contest: the market and everything on it. Lives most strongly in OBSERVE and CHOOSE.
- **The Commander (Jiang) — leadership.** The virtues of wisdom, credibility, benevolence, courage and discipline. Lives most strongly in ACT.
- **Method (Fa) — systems.** Organisation, logistics and financial control. Lives most strongly in DESIGN and ACT.

The two engines

Two of Sun Tzu's ideas are not factors to weigh but disciplines to run continuously. The first is foreknowledge: his insistence that victory depends on knowing both yourself and your opponent, and that this knowledge must be manufactured deliberately, from real sources, at cost. The second is his supreme standard — to subdue the opponent without fighting, winning by position, differentiation and preparation rather than by ruinous, direct collision. The first engine drives OBSERVE and ORIENT especially; the second is the test every CHOOSE must pass. Together they are the difference between a strategy that merely spends and one that wins.

> *"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. ... To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."*

— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Why the ancient spine still holds**

Modern strategy has, in effect, rediscovered Sun Tzu's factors under new names. The resource-based view formalises 'know yourself'; competitive analysis formalises 'know the enemy' and 'Earth'; scenario planning formalises 'Heaven'; the leadership and change literatures formalise 'the Commander'; operations and finance formalise 'Method'. Blue Ocean's uncontested space is 'win without fighting' made systematic. Using Sun Tzu's five as the lens is therefore not a decorative flourish; it is a compact, memorable index to the entire modern canon, which is why it anchors the model.

CHAPTER 4

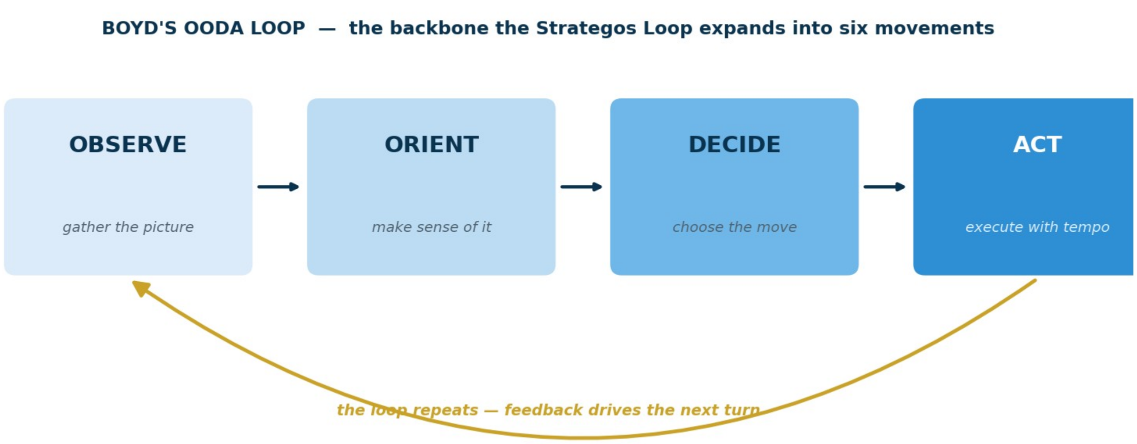
The OODA Backbone: Why Strategy Is a Loop

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The model's cyclical shape comes from John Boyd's OODA loop — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — the decision cycle a military strategist built, himself drawing on Sun Tzu. The Strategos Loop expands OODA's four steps into six to give purpose, design and renewal their due.

- **Strategy is not a plan you finish;** it is a loop you keep turning.
- **Orient is the decisive phase:** how you interpret what you see governs everything downstream.
- **Tempo wins:** the organisation that cycles faster than its rival controls the contest.

Why is the model a loop rather than a funnel or a ladder? Because strategy, in any contested and changing environment, is never finished. The moment a plan meets the market, the market responds, and the plan must adapt. The most useful formalisation of this truth comes from Colonel John Boyd, a fighter pilot and strategist who, studying why some pilots consistently prevailed, distilled decision-making into a repeating cycle: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. Boyd read Sun Tzu closely, and his loop is in many ways Sun Tzu made cyclical.



Boyd's OODA loop — the cyclical backbone the model expands.

Boyd's insight: tempo and orientation

Boyd's loop carries two lessons the model takes to heart. The first is tempo: whoever can cycle through observe-orient-decide-act faster than the opponent gets inside the opponent's decision cycle, acting while the other is still reacting to a situation that has already changed. Speed of learning, not just speed of doing, is decisive. The second is that Orient — the interpretation of what one observes — is the pivotal phase. Two organisations can observe the same market and orient to it completely differently;

the one that orients more truly will decide and act better. This is why the model gives ORIENT its own movement and treats it as the place where foreknowledge is forged.

From four steps to six movements

OODA is lean by design, built for split-second aerial combat. Corporate strategy needs more articulation at two points. Before observing, an organisation must establish what it is for — so the model adds AIM ahead of OBSERVE. And between deciding and acting, a business must design how it will actually create and capture value — so the model splits the ground between CHOOSE and ACT to insert DESIGN. The result is six movements that preserve Boyd's cycle while giving purpose and business-model design the room a company requires.

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **The loop and emergent strategy**

Boyd's loop aligns with Henry Mintzberg's distinction between deliberate and emergent strategy. Mintzberg showed that realised strategy is always partly planned and partly discovered in action, as patterns form that no one intended. A looping model honours this: it plans deliberately in AIM through CHOOSE, but its RENEW ring expects that execution will teach the organisation things its plan did not know, and folds those lessons back in. Strategy, in this view, is neither pure planning nor pure improvisation but a disciplined conversation between the two — which is exactly what a loop enables.

Key terms

OODA loop	Boyd's decision cycle — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — the model's cyclical backbone.
Tempo	The speed at which an organisation cycles through the loop; cycling faster than a rival is a decisive advantage.
Emergent strategy	Strategy that forms in action rather than from prior intention (Mintzberg); accommodated by the RENEW ring.

PART TWO

The Six Movements

A full chapter on each movement of the loop, for scholar and executive alike

MOVEMENT 1

AIM — Purpose, Mandate & Intent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIM establishes what the organisation is for and what it is committed to, before any analysis begins. It reconciles the owners' mandate with the wider stakeholders' interests, fixes an enduring purpose and values, and sets a stretching ambition. Get this wrong and every later movement inherits the error.

- **Output:** a shared mandate and a strategic intent everyone can repeat.
- **Sun Tzu factor:** the Way (Dao) — the alignment that holds people through hardship.
- **Decision for the CEO:** is our aspiration explicit, shared, and matched by the resources we will commit?

What this movement does

Every strategy begins with a will — someone who wants an outcome enough to commit resources to it. AIM makes that will explicit and turns it into something the whole organisation can serve. It has three layers: the mandate (what the owners require), the purpose and values (why the organisation exists and what it stands for), and the strategic intent (the stretching ambition that pulls it forward). Together they answer the first question of strategy: what are we for?

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Foundations: stakeholders, vision and strategic intent**

Three bodies of theory ground this movement. R. Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984) widens the aperture beyond shareholders: an enterprise creates value for and depends upon customers, employees, suppliers, financiers and community, and durable strategy accounts for all of them. Collins and Porras (Built to Last, 1994; 'Building Your Company's Vision', 1996) supply the architecture of enduring direction — a core purpose (the reason for being beyond profit), a small set of core values (principles held even at a cost), and a BHAG, a big, hairy, audacious goal that stretches a decade or more out. Hamel and Prahalad's 'strategic intent' (1989) adds the crucial insight that ambition should exceed current resources: it is the gap between intent and means that mobilises an organisation to become more than it is.

The Sun Tzu principle

> *"The Moral Law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger."*
>
> *— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)*

AIM is where Sun Tzu's first factor, the Way, is built. The Way is alignment — the condition in which people share the purpose of the enterprise so fully that they will carry it through hardship. Sun Tzu ranks it first among the five factors because without it nothing else holds: an army, or a company, whose people do not believe in the cause breaks at the first hard moment. Sun Tzu adds a second discipline here, drawn from his chapter on the cost of war: aspiration must be weighed against means, because a campaign entered without the resources to sustain it ruins the state that pursues it. AIM therefore ends with a test of the ambition against the resources the owners will commit.

The walkthrough: how to run AIM

1. **Map the owners and stakeholders.** List who truly holds the aspiration and who the enterprise depends on. Distinguish active owners from passive, and identify the stakeholders whose support the strategy will require.
2. **Elicit the mandate.** Draw out the owners' expectations across four dimensions: return, growth, time horizon and risk appetite — plus any non-financial aspirations such as legacy, independence or impact. Press for numbers and dates, not sentiments.
3. **Reconcile conflicts into one mandate.** Where owners or stakeholders disagree, name the tension and resolve it into a single, written mandate. An organisation given contradictory aims will hedge itself into mediocrity.
4. **Articulate purpose and values.** State the core purpose in a sentence and identify the few values the organisation will keep even when keeping them costs something. Test each value against a past occasion when it was, or was not, upheld.
5. **Set the strategic intent.** Choose a bold, finite ambition that stretches the organisation beyond its current resources — concrete enough that everyone will know when it is reached.
6. **Align and pressure-test.** Cascade the mandate, purpose and intent into language every level can act on, then test the whole against the means: is this achievable with the resources the owners will commit? If not, change the ambition or the resourcing now.

TOOL **The AIM Canvas**

A single page capturing the output of this movement. Complete each field with the leadership team and revisit it whenever ownership or ambition changes.

- **Mandate:** return · growth · time horizon · risk appetite · non-financial aims.
- **Purpose:** the reason we exist beyond profit (one sentence).
- **Values:** the few principles we keep at a cost.
- **Strategic intent:** the bold, finite ambition that stretches us.
- **Alignment test:** can every leader repeat the above, and does the ambition match the means?

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: a brewery reconciles its owners**

A regional craft brewery has two owners: the founding family, which prizes independence, quality and the jobs of long-serving staff, and a growth investor three years into a seven-year hold who wants scale and an eventual sale. Left unreconciled, the two pull the brewery apart — the family resists the expansion the investor demands.

In AIM the tension is named and resolved into one mandate: profitable growth that preserves independence and the brand's quality reputation, over a seven-year horizon, with moderate leverage. The purpose — 'brewing the beer our region is proud of' — and a value of 'never cheapen the product to hit a number' are made explicit, which reassures the family and disciplines the investor. The strategic intent — to become the definitive craft brewery of its three-state region within a decade — stretches both. Every later movement now serves a single, shared aim rather than two competing ones.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **The unstated aspiration.** Owners assume everyone knows what they want; the strategy serves a goal no one articulated.
- **Conflicted ownership left unresolved.** Contradictory signals produce a hedged, mediocre strategy.
- **Ambition untethered from means.** A bold goal set without the resources to reach it guarantees a draining, failed campaign.
- **Values as decoration.** Values that are never used to make a hard decision teach everyone to ignore them.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving AIM**

- ☐ Our mandate states return, growth, horizon, risk and non-financial aims — in numbers and dates.
- ☐ All significant owners and stakeholders are reconciled into one aim.
- ☐ Our purpose and values are explicit, and the values have survived a real cost.
- ☐ Our strategic intent stretches us and is concrete enough to know when it is met.
- ☐ The ambition is matched by the resources we will actually commit.

Key terms

Mandate	The reconciled statement of what the owners require: return, growth, horizon, risk and non-financial aims.
Strategic intent	A stretching ambition that deliberately exceeds current resources (Hamel & Prahalad).
Core purpose / values / BHAG	The enduring reason to exist, the costly-to-keep principles, and the bold decade-scale goal (Collins & Porras).

Exercises

1. Complete an AIM Canvas for your organisation. Which field was hardest to fill honestly?
2. Name the sharpest tension among your owners or stakeholders. Is it reconciled into one mandate?
3. State your strategic intent. Does it stretch you beyond your current resources, as Hamel and Prahalad advise?
4. Identify one core value and a specific occasion it cost you something. If none, is it a value or a preference?

MOVEMENT 2

OBSERVE — Scan Outside and In

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBSERVE gathers the raw picture the strategy will rest on, looking outward at the environment, industry and customers, and — crucially — inward at the organisation's own resources and capabilities with equal rigour. Its discipline is honesty: the picture must be of the world as it is, not as it is convenient to imagine.

- **Output:** a full outside-in and inside-out situation picture.
- **Sun Tzu factors:** Heaven (timing) and Earth (terrain), plus the first half of 'know yourself'.
- **Decision for the CEO:** do we understand our industry's economics and our own real capabilities, or are we guessing?

What this movement does

OBSERVE is where foreknowledge begins. It scans four external domains and audits the organisation internally, so that the diagnosis in the next movement rests on evidence rather than assumption. The model insists that the inward look be as disciplined as the outward one — the most common analytical failure in strategy is a rich external analysis paired with a flattering, superficial view of one's own capabilities.

The Sun Tzu principle

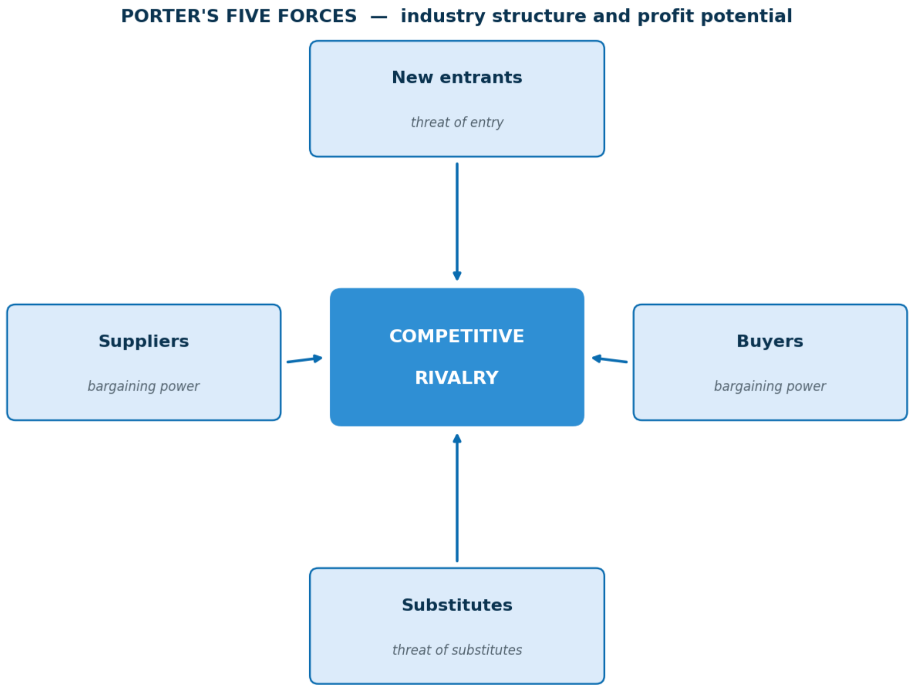
> *“Earth comprises distances, great and small; danger and security; open ground and narrow passes. … He who knows them will conquer; he who knows them not will surely be defeated.”*
>
> *— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)*

OBSERVE serves two of Sun Tzu's factors. Heaven is the external climate and timing — read here through the macro-environmental scan. Earth is the terrain of contest — the market and industry, which Sun Tzu insists a general must know so thoroughly that he chooses where to fight. And OBSERVE begins the first engine, foreknowledge, with its harder half: the honest audit of one's own strength. Sun Tzu's 'know yourself' is not encouragement to feel confident; it is a demand to see one's weaknesses before the enemy exploits them.

Foundations: five lenses on the situation

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **The external lenses**

Three frameworks structure the outward scan. PESTLE catalogues the macro forces — political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental — that form Sun Tzu's Heaven. Porter's Five Forces (1979) analyses industry structure and, decisively, where profit is possible: the bargaining power of buyers and suppliers, the threat of new entrants and substitutes, and the intensity of rivalry. And customer analysis — segmentation, targeting and positioning, deepened by Christensen's Jobs-to-be-Done — asks not who customers are demographically but what job they hire a product to do. Brandenburger and Nalebuff's Value Net (1996) adds complementors to competitors, mapping the whole game around the firm.



Porter's Five Forces — used in OBSERVE to read industry structure and profit potential.

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **The internal lenses**

The inward audit draws on the resource-based view. Barney's VRIO test (1991) asks which of the firm's resources are Valuable, Rare, costly to Imitate, and supported by Organisation — for only such resources yield sustainable advantage. Prahalad and Hamel's core competencies (1990) identify the capabilities that span multiple products and resist imitation. Porter's value chain (1985) disaggregates the firm into the activities where cost and differentiation actually arise. Together these turn 'know yourself' from a slogan into an audit.

The walkthrough: how to run OBSERVE

1. **Scan the macro-environment.** Catalogue the significant PESTLE forces over your planning horizon, judging each for direction, speed and — the question most often skipped — timing.
2. **Analyse the industry.** Run Porter's Five Forces to locate where profit pools sit and where structural pressure is greatest. Ask which forces are strengthening or weakening.
3. **Read the customer.** Segment the market and, for the segments that matter, articulate the job customers are really hiring you to do, and where that job is unmet or changing.

4. **Map the value net.** Identify not only competitors but complementors and the ways the game could shift through co-operation as well as competition.
5. **Audit your resources.** Apply VRIO to your significant resources and capabilities. Be ruthless: a resource that is valuable but common confers no advantage.
6. **Identify core competencies and value-chain economics.** Name the few competencies that span your business and resist imitation, and locate on the value chain where your cost and differentiation actually come from.
7. **Synthesise the picture.** Assemble the outward and inward findings into a single situation picture, flagging the points that most demand interpretation in ORIENT.

TOOL **The OBSERVE dossier**

A structured brief with six sections — PESTLE, Five Forces, Customer/Jobs, Value Net, VRIO audit, Value chain — each a page. The discipline is that every claim cites evidence, and the internal sections are scored as candidly as the external ones. The dossier is the input to ORIENT.

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: a grocery chain looks in the mirror**

A regional grocery chain scans its environment and finds a technological shift to online ordering, an economic squeeze on household budgets, and a national discounter entering its region — a Five Forces picture of rising rivalry and buyer power. The outward analysis is sobering but familiar.

The value of OBSERVE comes from the inward audit. Applying VRIO, the chain discovers that its genuine, rare, hard-to-imitate resource is not price — where it is structurally beaten — but a dense network of small-format neighbourhood stores and deep local supplier relationships, which the national discounter cannot quickly replicate. That single honest finding, invisible without a disciplined internal audit, will shape everything downstream: the chain will not fight on price, but on convenience and local character, its true empty ground.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Outside-only analysis.** A rich external scan paired with a shallow, flattering internal view — the model's single most common failure.
- **Listing without judging.** A catalogue of trends and forces with no assessment of which matter, how much, or when.
- **Confusing valuable with rare.** Counting a capability as an advantage when competitors have it too; only VRIO-positive resources confer advantage.
- **Static snapshot.** Treating OBSERVE as an annual ritual rather than a continuous watch, so fast-moving forces arrive unannounced.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving OBSERVE**

- ☐ We have judged our macro forces for direction, speed and timing — not just listed them.
- ☐ We know where the profit pools and structural pressures sit in our industry.
- ☐ We can state the job our key customers hire us to do.
- ☐ We have applied VRIO honestly and named our genuinely rare, hard-to-imitate resources.

☐ Our internal audit is as candid as our external one.

Key terms

Five Forces	Porter's analysis of industry structure and profit potential via buyer/supplier power, entry, substitutes and rivalry.
VRIO	Barney's test of whether a resource is Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and Organised — the source of sustainable advantage.
Jobs-to-be-Done	The progress a customer is trying to make, for which they 'hire' a product (Christensen).
Value Net	The map of customers, suppliers, competitors and complementors around a firm (Brandenburger & Nalebuff).

Exercises

1. Run a Five Forces analysis of your industry. Which force most limits your profitability?
2. Apply VRIO to three of your resources. Which, honestly, are rare and hard to imitate?
3. State the job your most important customers hire you to do. How is that job changing?
4. Where is your internal audit most likely to be flattering, and how could you test it against evidence?

MOVEMENT 3

ORIENT — Diagnose and Assess

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ORIENT turns the raw picture from OBSERVE into understanding. It compares you honestly against your rivals, matches the decision approach to how knowable the situation is, and produces the two things the rest of the loop depends on: a sharp diagnosis of the real challenge, and the decisive edge you will build on. Boyd called Orient the decisive phase; so does this model.

- **Output:** a diagnosis that names the real obstacle, and the decisive edge.
- **Sun Tzu engine:** foreknowledge — know yourself and your rival.
- **Decision for the CEO:** have we named the real problem, or are we treating symptoms?

What this movement does

OBSERVE gathers facts; ORIENT makes sense of them. It is the pivot of the whole loop, because two organisations can hold the same facts and interpret them completely differently — and the one that orients more truly will choose and act better. ORIENT does three things: it compares the organisation against its rivals across the factors that decide contests; it judges what kind of situation this is, so the right decision method is used; and it distils everything into a diagnosis and an edge.

The Sun Tzu principle

> *“Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. ... If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”*

— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)

ORIENT is where Sun Tzu's foreknowledge is forged and his temple calculation performed. He proposes, at the very start of the Art of War, a structured comparison — seven considerations by which victory can be forecast before a contest begins. He insists the reckoning be honest and thorough, because the general who counts many advantages wins and the one who counts few loses. ORIENT operationalises this directly through a scorecard and an honest assessment of self against rival.

Foundations: diagnosis, comparison and context

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Rumelt, the Seven Considerations, and Cynefin**

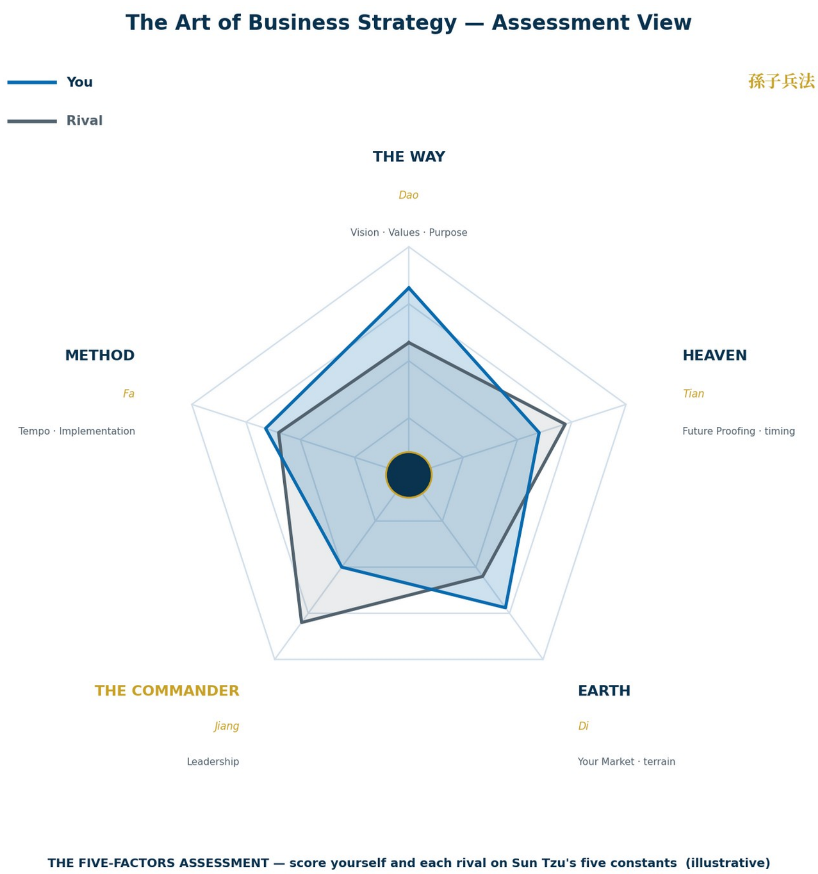
Richard Rumelt (Good Strategy/Bad Strategy, 2011) argues that the first and most neglected element of any real strategy is a diagnosis — a clear account of the crux of the challenge, which most 'strategies' skip in favour of goals. ORIENT makes diagnosis mandatory. Sun Tzu's Seven Considerations supply the comparative scaffold: which side has the stronger alignment, the abler leadership, the advantages of timing and terrain, the tighter discipline, the greater strength, the better-trained people, and the more consistent incentives. Dave Snowden's Cynefin framework (1999) adds a vital check: is the situation simple, complicated, complex or chaotic? The right approach differs by domain — best practice works in the simple, expert analysis in the complicated, safe-to-fail experiments in the complex — and applying the wrong one is a common, invisible error.

The walkthrough: how to run ORIENT

1. **Frame the decision.** State precisely what you need to understand to choose well. Analysis without a question is mere collection.
2. **Score the Seven Considerations.** Rate yourself and each serious rival on the seven, using the OBSERVE evidence. Force the self-assessment to be as candid as the competitor assessment.
3. **Plot the comparison.** Render the scores as a Five-Factors radar so the asymmetries — where you lead and where you lag — are visible at a glance.
4. **Place the situation in Cynefin.** Judge whether the challenge is complicated (analyse it) or complex (probe it with experiments), and choose your method accordingly.
5. **Write the diagnosis.** In a few sentences, name the crux — the real obstacle or opportunity that everything else turns on. This is Rumelt's diagnosis, and it disciplines the whole loop.
6. **Distil the edge.** Converge the analysis on the one decisive advantage — where your genuine strength meets a real, defensible, well-timed opportunity that rivals cannot easily contest.

TOOL **The Five-Factors assessment (radar)**

Score your organisation and each rival from 1 to 5 on Sun Tzu's five factors, using evidence, and plot both. The gaps are your strategic asymmetries: build on the factors where you lead and can bring them to bear on favourable ground; avoid contests decided by factors where you badly lag; and set improvement targets for critical deficiencies. The radar does not make the decision, but it frames it exactly as Sun Tzu would.



The Five-Factors assessment: your profile against a rival's, revealing the asymmetries strategy builds on.

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: the honest scorecard**

A specialist equipment maker scores itself and its two main rivals across the Seven Considerations. The exercise is uncomfortable: it rates itself well on alignment and leadership, and the evidence supports it, but it is forced to admit it lags badly on discipline and consistency of incentives, and is the weakest of the three on resources.

Placed in Cynefin, its core market is 'complicated' — knowable through expert analysis — but an adjacent digital opportunity is 'complex', calling for experiments rather than a master plan. Its diagnosis writes itself: the crux is that the firm's real advantage (engineering credibility and customer alignment) is being squandered by weak execution discipline, while a resource-rich rival is winning by default. The edge is clear — credibility on favourable ground — and so is the improvement target: fix discipline. A rival that skipped this honest orientation keeps assuming its balance sheet guarantees victory.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Flattering self-assessment.** Rating yourself generously breaks the more important half of foreknowledge and guarantees surprise.
- **No diagnosis.** Jumping to goals and actions without naming the real crux — Rumelt's definition of bad strategy.
- **Wrong method for the domain.** Applying rigid analysis to a genuinely complex, unknowable situation, or

endless experimentation to a knowable one.

- **Analysis paralysis.** Treating ORIENT as a place to gather more data rather than to decide what the data means.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving ORIENT**

- ☐ We have scored ourselves against rivals on the Seven Considerations, honestly.
- ☐ We know our largest asymmetries — where we lead and where we lag.
- ☐ We have judged what kind of problem this is and chosen the right method.
- ☐ We can state the diagnosis — the real crux — in a few sentences.
- ☐ We have named our decisive edge.

Key terms

Diagnosis	The clear account of the crux of the challenge; the first element of real strategy (Rumelt).
Seven Considerations	Sun Tzu's comparative scaffold for forecasting a contest.
Cynefin	Snowden's framework for matching the decision approach to the situation's domain.
Edge	The decisive advantage on which the strategy will be built.

Exercises

1. Score yourself and your main rival on the Seven Considerations. What is the largest gap in each direction?
2. Write your diagnosis in three sentences. Does it name a crux, or merely restate a goal?
3. Place your current challenge in Cynefin. Are you using the right method for that domain?
4. State your decisive edge. Does your current strategy actually build on it?

MOVEMENT 4

CHOOSE — Where to Play and How to Win

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHOOSE makes the two great strategic decisions: where the organisation will compete, and how it will win there. It selects favourable ground from a disciplined set of growth options, commits to a clear competitive position rather than a slogan, and states a guiding policy — all tested against Sun Tzu's standard of winning by position rather than by out-spending.

- **Output:** a guiding policy — where to play and how to win.
- **Sun Tzu ideas:** strength versus weakness; win without fighting; direct and indirect.
- **Decision for the CEO:** does our strategy win by position, or does it depend on out-spending someone stronger?

What this movement does

With a diagnosis in hand, CHOOSE converts understanding into commitment. It answers two questions that together constitute the core of strategy: where will we play, and how will we win? 'Where to play' selects the markets, segments and positions to compete in; 'how to win' selects the basis of advantage there. The movement ends with a guiding policy — a clear, overarching approach that channels action — and with the win-without-fighting test applied.

The Sun Tzu principle

> *"In war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. ... To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."*

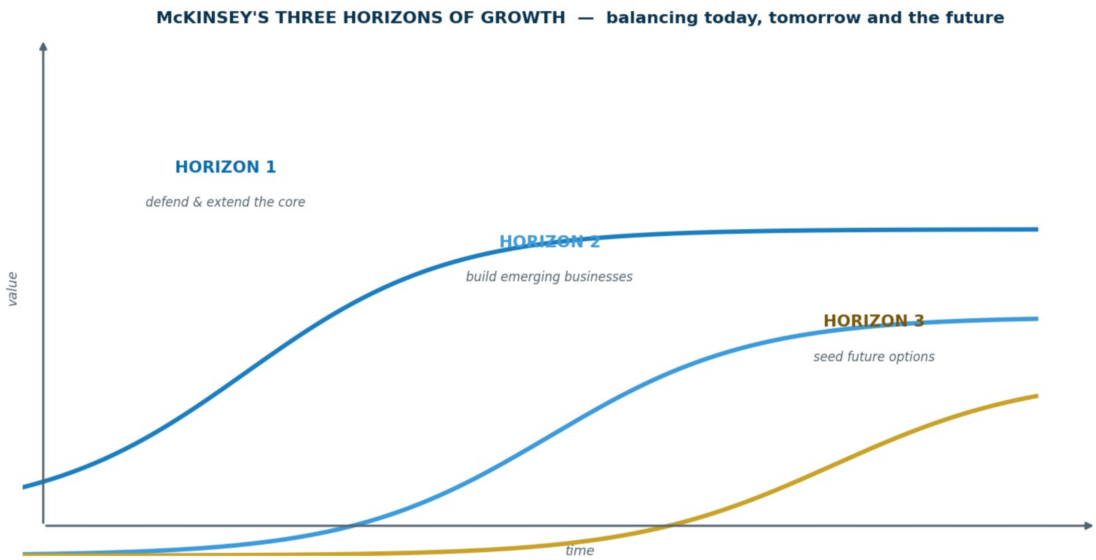
— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)

CHOOSE is governed by Sun Tzu's doctrine of strength and weakness and his supreme standard of winning without fighting. The counsel is to avoid the enemy's strength and strike at the empty, undefended ground — to compete where your strength meets a rival's weakness rather than where you would collide head-on. And the highest skill is to arrange matters so victory is nearly settled before open conflict: to win by differentiation, position and preparation rather than by matching a stronger rival spend for spend. A strategy that depends on out-resourcing a larger competitor is precisely the attritional fight Sun Tzu warns against.

Foundations: where to play, and how to win

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Growth options and competitive position**

Two clusters of theory inform the two choices. For where to play: Ansoff's matrix (1957) frames growth as combinations of existing/new products and markets; McKinsey's Three Horizons (1999) balances defending the core, building emerging businesses and seeding future options; and Kim and Mauborgne's Blue Ocean (2005) urges the creation of uncontested market space through value innovation — Sun Tzu's empty ground made systematic. For how to win: Porter's generic strategies (1980) force a choice among cost leadership, differentiation and focus, warning against being 'stuck in the middle'; Treacy and Wiersema's value disciplines (1995) offer a parallel choice among operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy. Rumelt supplies the container: a guiding policy that gives coherence to the actions that follow.



McKinsey's Three Horizons — used in CHOOSE to balance where to play across time.

The walkthrough: how to run CHOOSE

1. **Generate where-to-play options.** Derive candidates from the diagnosis and asymmetries, using Ansoff and the Three Horizons to span near and far, and Blue Ocean to look for uncontested space.
2. **Test each for empty ground, defensibility and timing.** Prefer ground where your strength meets a rival's weakness; discard opportunities you could not hold, or that fight a stronger rival's strength; and check each against the timing read from OBSERVE.
3. **Choose the position — how to win.** Commit to a clear basis of advantage using generic strategies or value disciplines. Refuse to be 'stuck in the middle': a position that tries to be all things wins nothing.
4. **Write the guiding policy.** State, in a sentence or two, the overarching approach that will channel all subsequent choices — Rumelt's guiding policy.
5. **Apply the win-without-fighting test.** Ask directly: does this win by position and preparation, or does it depend on out-spending a stronger rival? If the latter, change the ground until the answer is the former.

TOOL **The CHOOSE one-pager**

A single page stating: (1) where we will play — the specific markets, segments and positions, with those we will deliberately not contest; (2) how we will win — the chosen position and basis of advantage; (3) the guiding policy; and (4) the result of the win-without-fighting test. If any of the four is vague, the strategy is not yet made.

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: the challenger that refused the fight**

A challenger food brand faces an entrenched leader with far greater advertising and shelf power. The tempting where-to-play — the supermarket shelf — is fortified ground where the leader's resources decide the outcome, and a direct 'how to win' of matching its advertising would lose.

In CHOOSE the brand instead selects empty ground: direct-to-consumer subscription and specialist retail, channels the leader neglects, where story and quality outweigh shelf dominance. Its how-to-win is differentiation and customer intimacy, not price. Its guiding policy: 'win the customers who care most, on the channels the leader ignores, before it notices.' The win-without-fighting test passes — the strategy does not depend on out-spending the leader but on choosing ground where its advantages do not count. This is Sun Tzu's doctrine applied exactly.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Chasing size over emptiness.** Targeting the biggest market regardless of how fortified it is, and exhausting yourself against stronger incumbents.
- **Stuck in the middle.** Refusing to choose a clear position, so the strategy is neither low-cost nor genuinely differentiated.
- **Goals mistaken for strategy.** Producing a list of targets with no guiding policy and no chosen basis of advantage.
- **Failing the win-without-fighting test.** Quietly depending on out-spending a stronger rival, and not asking the question until the money runs out.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving CHOOSE**

- ☐ We have named where we will play — and, explicitly, where we will not.
- ☐ We have committed to a clear how-to-win position, not a slogan.
- ☐ We have a guiding policy that will channel subsequent choices.
- ☐ Our choice favours empty ground where our strength meets a rival's weakness.
- ☐ The strategy passes the win-without-fighting test.

Key terms

Where to play / how to win	The two core strategic choices CHOOSE makes.
Guiding policy	The overarching approach that channels action; the second element of Rumelt's kernel.
Value innovation	Blue Ocean's simultaneous pursuit of differentiation

	and low cost to create uncontested space.
Value disciplines	Treacy & Wiersema's choice among operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy.

Exercises

1. State where you will play and, explicitly, where you will not. Is the second list empty? If so, you have not chosen.
2. Name your how-to-win position using generic strategies or value disciplines. Are you 'stuck in the middle'?
3. Write your guiding policy in one sentence.
4. Apply the win-without-fighting test to your current strategy. If it fails, sketch a version that passes.

MOVEMENT 5

DESIGN — The Business Model and the System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DESIGN fills the gap between deciding and doing. It turns the guiding policy into a coherent business model — how value is created, delivered and, crucially, captured — and into an operating model that can actually supply, fund and move at the required speed. A strategy that cannot be turned into a working, reinforcing system is not a design but a wish.

- **Output:** a coherent, mutually reinforcing business and operating model.
- **Sun Tzu ideas:** Method (Fa); position (Xing) and momentum (Shi); speed.
- **Decision for the CEO:** how exactly do we make money doing this, and can we move fast enough to win?

What this movement does

CHOOSE decides where and how to win; DESIGN builds the machine that will do it. It specifies the value proposition precisely, assembles the business model that captures value from it, checks that the organisation's activities reinforce one another rather than merely coexist, and lays out the operating model — the systems, supply and tempo — that will move the strategy. This movement is the model's answer to a chronic failure: strategies that leap from a bold choice straight to execution without ever specifying how the business actually creates and captures value.

The Sun Tzu principle

> *"In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns. Rapidity is the essence of war."*

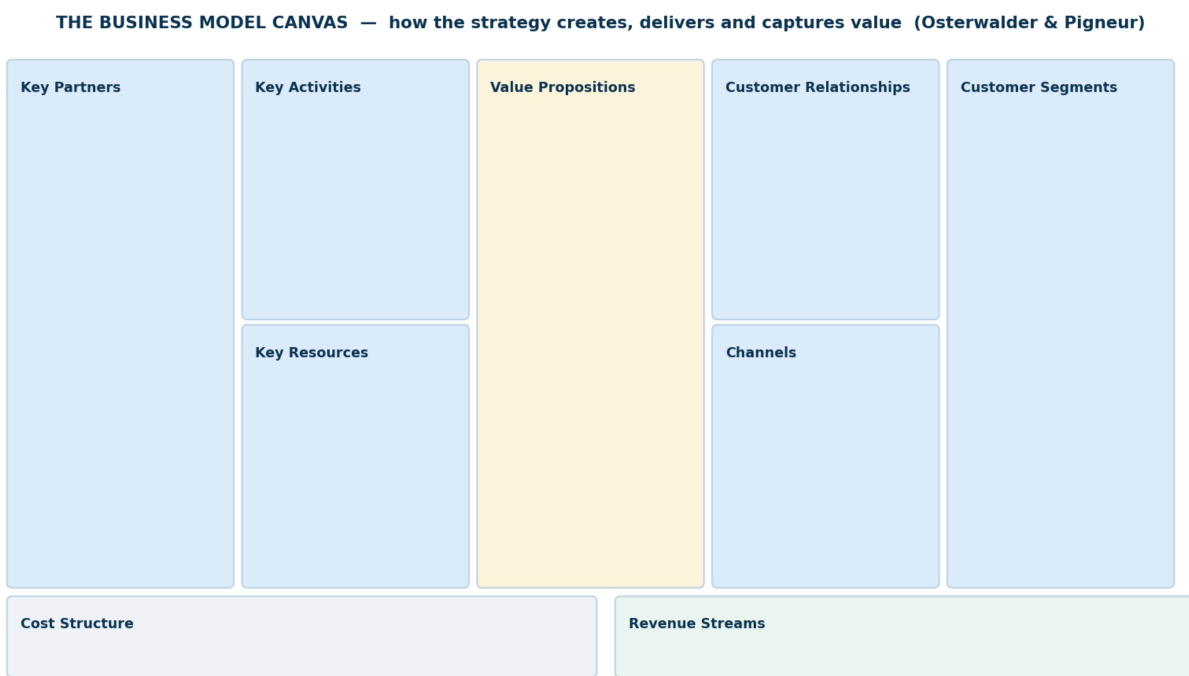
— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)

DESIGN embodies Sun Tzu's fifth factor, Method — the marshalling of the force and the control of expenditure — together with his insistence on speed and his concepts of position and momentum. Method is the unglamorous machinery that lets a plan move: organisation, logistics, financial control. Speed is decisive: the faster organisation seizes the opening before rivals react. And Sun Tzu distinguishes position (xing), the arrangement of advantages that makes a force hard to defeat, from momentum (shi), the stored energy that makes its action irresistible. A good design builds both into the business.

Foundations: business model, value proposition, and fit

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Osterwalder, Porter, and the operating model**

Alexander Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas (2010) maps how an organisation creates, delivers and captures value across nine building blocks — customer segments, value propositions, channels, relationships, revenue streams, key resources, activities, partnerships and cost structure. Its companion, the Value Proposition Canvas (2014), tests the fit between what the offer provides and the customer's jobs, pains and gains. Porter's work on strategic fit (1996) adds a decisive test: advantage comes not from individual activities but from an activity system whose parts reinforce one another, making the whole hard to imitate. The operating model — capacity, supply, cost control and tempo — is Sun Tzu's Method in modern dress.



The Business Model Canvas — used in DESIGN to specify how the strategy creates, delivers and captures value.

The walkthrough: how to run DESIGN

1. **Sharpen the value proposition.** Use the Value Proposition Canvas to confirm the offer relieves real customer pains and creates real gains for the jobs identified in OBSERVE.
2. **Build the business model.** Complete the nine blocks of the Business Model Canvas, paying special attention to revenue streams and cost structure — how value is captured, not just created.
3. **Test activity-system fit.** Check that the choices reinforce one another. The best designs are systems of complementary activities that a rival cannot copy piecemeal.
4. **Design the operating model.** Specify the capacity, supply chain, systems and financial control required — Method (Fa). Confirm you can supply and fund the strategy to its conclusion.
5. **Engineer tempo.** Identify and remove the bottlenecks between decision and delivery. Speed is a capability to be built; sequence the rollout to reach the market before rivals react.
6. **Build position and momentum.** Arrange the business for durable advantage (position) and concentrate resources and timing so the decisive move carries overwhelming force (momentum).

TOOL **The Business Model & Value Proposition Canvases**

Complete the Value Proposition Canvas first (does the offer fit the customer's jobs, pains and gains?), then the Business Model Canvas (how does the whole business create, deliver and capture value?). Finish with two stress tests: the fit test (do the nine blocks reinforce one another?) and the Method test (can we supply, fund and move fast enough to deliver this?).

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: designing the model behind the choice**

The challenger food brand from the previous chapter has chosen its ground (neglected channels) and its position (differentiation and customer intimacy). DESIGN now builds the machine. The Value Proposition Canvas confirms that subscribers' real 'gain' is discovery and convenience, not the lowest price. The Business Model Canvas reveals that a subscription revenue stream, not one-off retail sales, is how value is best captured — changing the cost structure and the key activities toward retention and content.

Crucially, the activity-system test shows the pieces reinforce: the subscription funds rich customer data, which sharpens the product, which deepens loyalty, which lowers acquisition cost — a self-reinforcing loop a shelf-based rival cannot copy without abandoning its own model. The operating-model check catches a tempo risk — fulfilment cannot yet scale — so the brand fixes it before launch rather than stalling mid-campaign.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Value created but not captured.** A compelling offer with no clear revenue model; the firm builds demand it cannot monetise.
- **A pile of activities, not a system.** Choices that coexist but do not reinforce, leaving the strategy easy to imitate piecemeal.
- **Assuming the operating model.** Committing to a strategy the organisation cannot actually supply, fund or move fast enough to deliver.
- **Ignoring tempo.** Designing for elegance rather than speed, and arriving after the window has closed.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving DESIGN**

- ☐ Our value proposition demonstrably fits the customer's jobs, pains and gains.
- ☐ We know exactly how we capture value, not just how we create it.
- ☐ Our activities reinforce one another as a system.
- ☐ We can supply and fund this strategy to its conclusion.
- ☐ We can move fast enough to win the opening.

Key terms

Business Model Canvas	Osterwalder's nine-block map of how a firm creates, delivers and captures value.
Value Proposition Canvas	The test of fit between an offer and the customer's jobs, pains and gains.

Activity-system fit	Porter's principle that advantage comes from mutually reinforcing activities, not single ones.
Operating model	The capacity, supply, systems and tempo that deliver the strategy — Sun Tzu's Method.

Exercises

1. Complete a Business Model Canvas for your strategy. Which block is weakest — and is it a value-capture block?
2. Do your key activities reinforce one another, or merely coexist? Give one example of each.
3. Can you supply and fund your current strategy to its conclusion? Where is the constraint?
4. Where is your slowest step from decision to delivery, and what would halve it?

MOVEMENT 6

ACT — Mobilize, Align and Measure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACT executes: it mobilises people behind the strategy, aligns the organisation's structure, systems and culture to it, leads the change required, and installs a measurement system so the organisation knows whether it is winning and can adapt. This is where momentum is released — and where most strategies quietly die for want of alignment and measurement.

- **Output:** aligned execution, cascaded objectives, and a live measurement system.
- **Sun Tzu ideas:** the Commander; momentum (Shi); discipline with care; coherent action.
- **Decision for the CEO:** is the whole organisation aligned to this, and will we know early if it is failing?

What this movement does

ACT turns a designed strategy into results through the organisation. It has three tasks: mobilise and align — put the right people, structure, systems and culture behind the strategy; lead the change that any real strategy demands; and measure — install the metrics and cadence that reveal whether the strategy is working and feed the RENEW loop. Rumelt's third element of strategy, coherent action, lives here: the specific, coordinated steps that carry out the guiding policy.

The Sun Tzu principle

> *"Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys. … The energy developed by good fighting men is as the momentum of a round stone rolled down a mountain thousands of feet in height."*
>
> *— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)*

ACT is governed by Sun Tzu's Commander and his concept of momentum. He joins two ideas usually held apart: strictness — clear standards and constancy in reward and consequence — and genuine care for those who are led. The synthesis is a force that is both disciplined and devoted, and only such a force generates momentum, the stored energy that makes a well-led organisation's action irresistible. A demoralised or misaligned organisation has no momentum however good its plan.

Foundations: alignment, change and measurement

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **7S, Kotter, the Balanced Scorecard and OKRs**

Execution rests on three literatures. Alignment: the McKinsey 7S framework (1980) holds that strategy must be consistent with structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values — change one and the others must follow, or the strategy is rejected like a mismatched transplant. Change: Kotter's eight steps

(1996) describe how to lead an organisation through transformation, from establishing urgency to anchoring new approaches in the culture. Measurement: Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard and strategy maps (1992–2004) measure strategy across four linked perspectives — financial, customer, internal process, and learning and growth — so that leading indicators are watched, not only lagging financials; and OKRs (Grove; Doerr) and Hoshin Kanri cascade objectives into a rhythm of execution and review.

The Balanced Scorecard / strategy map — used in ACT to measure strategy across four linked perspectives.

The walkthrough: how to run ACT

1. **Mobilise leadership and people.** Put your strongest people on the decisive ground, align their incentives to the strategy, and ensure every team can connect its work to it.
2. **Align the organisation (7S).** Check that structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values all support the strategy; correct the ones that do not, because a single misalignment can defeat a sound plan.
3. **Lead the change.** Use Kotter's discipline — urgency, a guiding coalition, a clear vision of the change, early wins, and anchoring in the culture — to carry people through the transition.
4. **Build the measurement system.** Construct a balanced scorecard and strategy map so you track leading as well as lagging indicators across all four perspectives.
5. **Cascade objectives.** Translate the strategy into OKRs or Hoshin objectives, so every level has clear, aligned goals and a review rhythm.

6. **Set cadence and release momentum.** Establish the regular rhythm of review and adjustment, then concentrate effort and time the decisive push so the organisation moves with force rather than dribbling its energy away.

TOOL **The strategy map and OKR cascade**

Build a one-page strategy map linking objectives across the four scorecard perspectives, so everyone can see how learning and process improvements drive customer and financial outcomes. Then cascade a small number of Objectives and Key Results from the top team downward, keeping them few, measurable and aligned. Review on a fixed cadence — quarterly for OKRs, more often for leading indicators — and feed what you learn into RENEW.

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: momentum built and released**

A software firm with a sound strategy to win a vertical market succeeds in ACT because it attends to all three tasks. It puts its best people on the vertical and aligns their incentives; a quick 7S check catches that its support structure and hiring profile were built for a different customer, and it fixes both before they undermine the push. It leads the change with visible urgency and early wins.

Its measurement system pairs a lagging financial target with leading indicators — trial-to-paid conversion, time-to-value, expansion revenue — on a balanced scorecard, and it cascades three crisp OKRs. Because leading indicators are watched, an early dip in time-to-value is caught and corrected in weeks, not quarters. The aligned, motivated, well-measured organisation gathers momentum — each win feeding the next — and takes the market a rival with an equal plan but no alignment or measurement loses.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Strategy thrown over the wall.** A plan handed to the organisation without aligning people, incentives and structure to it — and it stalls.
- **Alignment ignored.** Structure, systems or culture left inconsistent with the strategy, which is then quietly rejected.
- **Lagging metrics only.** Watching financial results that report the past, with no leading indicators to steer by.
- **No cadence.** A strategy launched and then unmonitored, so drift goes unnoticed until results disappoint.

CEO CHECKLIST **before leaving ACT**

- ☐ Our best people and their incentives are on the decisive ground.
- ☐ Structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values all support the strategy (7S).
- ☐ We are leading the change deliberately, with urgency and early wins.
- ☐ We measure leading and lagging indicators across all four perspectives.
- ☐ We have a fixed review cadence that feeds our renewal loop.

Key terms

7S	McKinsey's framework for aligning strategy with structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values.

Balanced Scorecard	Kaplan & Norton's measurement of strategy across financial, customer, process and learning perspectives.
OKRs	Objectives and Key Results — a method for cascading and tracking aligned goals.
Momentum (Shi)	The stored energy of a disciplined, well-led, well-measured force.

Exercises

1. Run a 7S check on your current strategy. Which element is least aligned?
2. List your top three leading indicators. If you have none, what would they be?
3. Cascade your strategy into three OKRs for the top team. Are they few, measurable and aligned?
4. What is your review cadence, and does what you learn actually feed the next cycle?

PART THREE

Renewal

How the loop keeps turning

CHAPTER 13

RENEW — Keeping the Advantage Alive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RENEW is the ring around the whole loop: the discipline that keeps strategy alive after execution begins. It senses change, learns from what execution reveals, balances today's business against tomorrow's, and feeds results back to AIM. Without it, a strategy that was right becomes, in time, exactly wrong.

- **Output:** a living, adapting strategy — and the inputs to the next turn of the loop.
- **Sun Tzu idea:** never repeat the tactics that won last time; adapt to endless variety.
- **Decision for the CEO:** are we sensing and adapting continuously, or defending a plan the world has moved past?

What RENEW does

Every advantage erodes. Competitors imitate, technologies shift, customer needs move, and the very success of a strategy invites the response that will undo it. RENEW is the model's answer. It is not a seventh movement performed after the others but a continuous discipline wrapped around all six: sensing the environment for change, treating execution as a source of learning, maintaining a portfolio of bets across time horizons, and returning what is learned to the start of the loop. It is what makes the model a loop rather than a plan.

The Sun Tzu principle

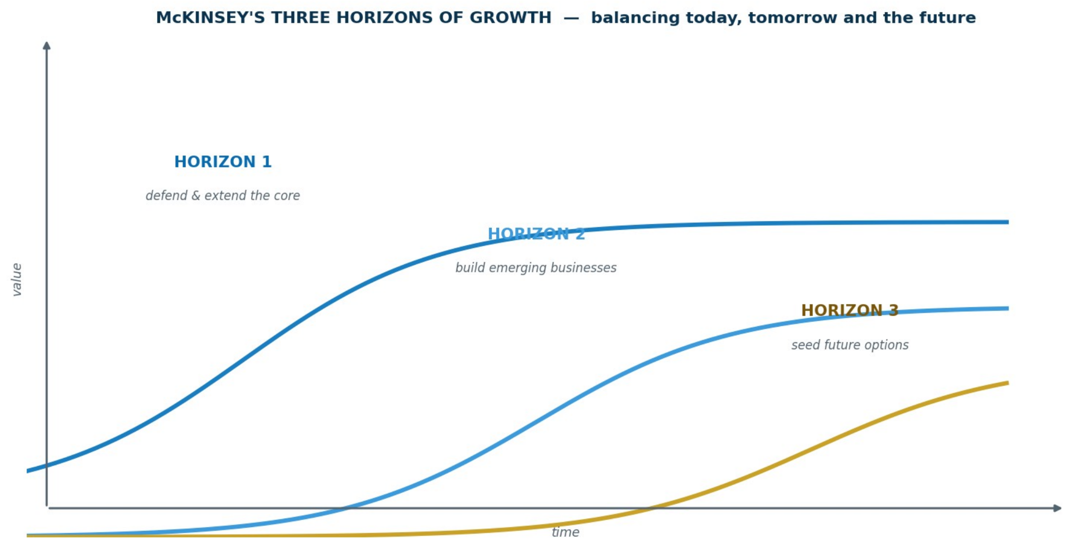
> *"Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances."*
>
> *— Sun Tzu, The Art of War (trans. Giles, 1910)*

Sun Tzu is emphatic that no victory is repeatable by rote. Circumstances vary without end, opponents adapt, and yesterday's winning move becomes today's expected one. He likens the skilled strategist to water, which has no constant shape but takes the form of the ground it meets. RENEW is this counsel institutionalised: the organisation reads its results honestly, adapts its methods rather than repeating them, and preserves strength for the next campaign rather than exhausting itself proving the last one.

Foundations: the dynamic view of strategy

THEORY & FOUNDATIONS **Teece, Christensen, March and Mintzberg**

Four ideas ground RENEW. David Teece's dynamic capabilities (1997) name the higher-order capacity to sense opportunities and threats, seize them, and transform the organisation accordingly — the capability of changing capabilities. Clayton Christensen's disruptive innovation (1997) explains why successful firms are toppled from below and why watching S-curves and low-end entrants matters. James March's distinction between exploration and exploitation (1991), and O'Reilly and Tushman's organisational ambidexterity, describe the balance every firm must strike between running today's business and inventing tomorrow's. And Mintzberg's emergent strategy reminds us that much of what works is discovered in action, not planned — so execution must be mined for the strategy it reveals. McKinsey's Three Horizons gives the portfolio a shape.



The Three Horizons portfolio — RENEW keeps bets alive across today, tomorrow and the future.

The walkthrough: how to run RENEW

1. **Install sensing.** Put in place the watch-points, market listening and competitor tracking that detect change early — foreknowledge, kept continuous.
2. **Mine execution for learning.** Treat every result, especially every surprise, as data about the strategy. Ask what the market is teaching that the plan did not know.
3. **Balance the horizons.** Maintain a portfolio across Horizon 1 (defend and extend the core), Horizon 2 (build emerging businesses) and Horizon 3 (seed future options), and rebalance as the core matures.
4. **Decide to scale, persevere or kill.** On a fixed cadence, make honest portfolio decisions — double down on what is working, fix what is fixable, and stop what is not, freeing strength for the next move.
5. **Feed the loop.** Return the lessons to AIM and ORIENT: update the mandate if conditions have changed, refresh the diagnosis, and begin the next turn better informed than the last.

TOOL **The renewal dashboard**

A standing review, run quarterly, with three panels: a sensing panel (the watch-points and what they now show), a learning panel (what execution has taught since last review), and a horizon panel (the portfolio of bets across the three horizons, each marked scale / persevere / kill). Its output is a short list of adaptations fed back into the loop.

WORKED EXAMPLE **Worked example: adapting after the first turn**

A year into executing its regional strategy, a services firm reviews results in its renewal dashboard. Sensing shows a regulatory change arriving sooner than expected (a Horizon-2 accelerant). Learning shows that one element of its go-to-market underperformed, while another exceeded plan. Its horizon panel shows the core (H1) healthy, one emerging bet (H2) ready to scale, and two H3 experiments — one worth continuing, one to kill.

Rather than repeating its exact playbook in the next region, the firm adapts: it scales the H2 bet, kills the dead experiment to free resources, and updates its diagnosis for the new region's different terrain. The loop turns, and the next campaign begins better informed. This is Sun Tzu's water taking the shape of new ground — and Teece's sensing, seizing and transforming in practice.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Set and forget.** Executing a plan without sensing or learning, until the world has moved past it.
- **Exploitation only.** Optimising today's business while starving tomorrow's — the classic path to disruption.
- **Repeating the winning play.** Reusing last cycle's tactics mechanically into changed conditions.
- **No honest kill decisions.** Letting failing bets linger, draining the strength needed for the next move.

CEO CHECKLIST **running RENEW**

- ☐ We have live sensing and watch-points, not an annual scan.
- ☐ We treat execution results, especially surprises, as strategic learning.
- ☐ We hold a balanced portfolio across the three horizons.
- ☐ We make honest scale / persevere / kill decisions on a cadence.
- ☐ What we learn actually changes the next turn of the loop.

Key terms

Dynamic capabilities — The capacity to sense, seize and transform — the capability of changing capabilities (Teece).

Ambidexterity — Balancing exploitation of today's business with exploration of tomorrow's (March; O'Reilly & Tushman).

Three Horizons — A portfolio view balancing the core, emerging businesses and future options (McKinsey).

PART FOUR

The Complete Walkthrough

One company through one full turn of the loop, with its working papers

CHAPTER 14

A Complete Turn: The Meridian Instruments Case

This chapter follows one organisation through a single, complete turn of the Strategos Loop, reproducing the working papers it produces at each movement. Meridian Instruments is a composite built to teach, not a real company, but every artifact is the kind a real leadership team would create. Read it as a demonstration of the whole model in motion — and as a template for your own turn of the loop.

CASE SETUP **The situation**

Meridian Instruments is a mid-sized maker of precision measurement instruments, respected for engineering quality but losing share to a larger, better-funded competitor. It has grown complacent. Its board has demanded a strategy. What follows is Meridian working down — and around — the loop.

Movement 1 — AIM

Meridian's two owners hold conflicting aims. AIM reconciles them and sets a stretching intent.

TOOL **Meridian's AIM Canvas**

- **Mandate:** profitable growth that preserves independence; seven-year horizon; moderate leverage; return sufficient for the investor's exit without a forced sale.
- **Purpose:** 'measurement the world can trust.'
- **Values:** engineering integrity; never ship a number we don't believe.
- **Strategic intent:** become the reference standard in two chosen instrument categories within a decade.
- **Alignment test:** passes — ambition is bold but matched by a planned capital raise the investor supports.

Movement 2 — OBSERVE

Meridian scans outside and, unusually for it, audits itself with equal rigour.

- **Heaven (PESTLE):** a technological shift to connected, software-enabled instruments; a regulatory tightening of measurement standards — a tailwind for a quality player.
- **Earth (Five Forces):** the mass instrument segment is crowded, with high rivalry and strong buyer power dominated by the large rival; a regulated-laboratory segment is less contested.
- **Customer (Jobs-to-be-Done):** regulated labs 'hire' instruments to guarantee compliance and defensible data, not merely to measure — a job the rival's standardised products serve poorly.

TOOL **Meridian's VRIO audit (extract)**

Resource	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Verdict
Engineering & metrology depth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained advantage
Brand credibility for accuracy	Yes	Yes	Partly	Advantage
Scale / cost position	Yes	No	No	Competitive disadvantage
Software capability	Yes	No	No	Gap to close

The audit is decisive: Meridian cannot win on scale or software as it stands, but its metrology depth and credibility are genuinely rare and hard to imitate — and exactly what regulated labs value.

Movement 3 — ORIENT

Meridian scores itself against its two main rivals on the Seven Considerations and writes its diagnosis.

Consideration	Meridian	Rival A	Rival B
Alignment & purpose	4	3	3
Leadership ability	4	4	3
Timing & terrain advantage	4	3	2
Discipline & consistency	2	4	3
Strength & resources	2	5	3
People & capability	4	4	3
Consistent incentives	2	4	3

ORIENT OUTPUT **Meridian's diagnosis and edge**

Cynefin placement: the core regulated-lab market is 'complicated' (knowable by expert analysis); the connected-instrument opportunity is 'complex' (best probed by experiments).

Diagnosis: Meridian's genuine advantage — metrology credibility and alignment to the regulated-lab customer — is being squandered by weak execution discipline, while a resource-rich rival wins by default in a segment Meridian should own.

Edge: trusted, compliance-grade measurement for regulated laboratories, at the moment regulation and connectivity make it most valuable — ground the larger rival cannot easily contest.

Movement 4 — CHOOSE

TOOL **Meridian's CHOOSE one-pager**

- **Where to play:** regulated laboratories needing connected, compliance-grade instruments (Horizon 1–2). Explicitly NOT the mass-market segment, where the rival's scale decides.
- **How to win:** product leadership and customer intimacy — differentiation on trust, compliance and data, not price.
- **Guiding policy:** 'own the compliance-critical laboratory, where our credibility counts and the rival's scale

does not.'

- **Win-without-fighting test:** passes — the strategy avoids the rival's strength (scale) and strikes its weakness (rigid, non-compliant products).

Movement 5 — DESIGN

Meridian designs the business and operating model behind the choice.

- **Value proposition:** instruments plus a compliance-data platform that makes audits effortless — relieving the lab's real pain (defensible data) and creating a real gain (time and risk saved).
- **Business model shift:** from one-off instrument sales toward instruments plus recurring compliance-software subscriptions — capturing value continuously, not once.
- **Activity-system fit:** subscription data sharpens the product and deepens lock-in — a loop the rival's transactional model cannot copy piecemeal.
- **Operating model / Method:** a tempo gap is found — software delivery is too slow — so Meridian acquires a small software team before committing, rather than stalling mid-campaign.

Movement 6 — ACT

Meridian mobilises, aligns and measures.

- **Align (7S):** structure and incentives, built for mass-market volume, are re-pointed at the regulated-lab segment; the new software team is integrated; the discipline gap flagged in ORIENT is addressed with clearer standards and consistent incentives.
- **Change (Kotter):** urgency established with the board's mandate; early win — a lighthouse laboratory client — secured and publicised.
- **Measure (Balanced Scorecard):** leading indicators — certification progress, lighthouse wins, software delivery velocity — watched alongside lagging revenue.

TOOL **Meridian's top-level OKRs (year one)**

- **O1:** Establish Meridian as the compliance instrument of choice.
- **KR1:** sign three flagship regulated-lab clients.
- **KR2:** achieve compliance certification within twelve months.
- **KR3:** ship the first connected instrument on schedule with 99.9% data-integrity.

RENEW — one year on

At the first annual review, Meridian's renewal dashboard shows the core (H1) healthy, the connected-instrument bet (H2) ready to scale into a second category, and its certification effort had been underestimated — a lesson. Rather than repeating the exact playbook in the second category, Meridian adapts it to that category's different regulatory terrain, scales the H2 bet, and updates its diagnosis. The loop turns. Meridian has, in Sun Tzu's phrase, won first and then engaged — and then adapted.

LESSON **What the walkthrough demonstrates**

Notice the dependencies. The honest VRIO audit in OBSERVE made the diagnosis possible; the diagnosis defined the edge; the edge shaped the choice; the choice exposed the tempo gap in DESIGN; fixing it enabled ACT; and the critical measures secured victory before full commitment. Skip any movement and the chain breaks. The model's power is not in any single movement but in the coherence between them — and in the loop that never stops.

PART FIVE

Implementation & Governance

How to introduce the model, who does what, and on what cadence

CHAPTER 15

Running the Model in Your Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A model is only as good as its use. This chapter is the practical guide to adopting the Strategos Loop: how to run a first cycle, the cadence that keeps it alive, who owns what, and how to fit it to the planning and budgeting you already do. Start small, run one honest loop, and let the discipline earn its place.

- **Cadence:** a full loop annually, a renewal review quarterly, sensing continuously.
- **Ownership:** the board sets AIM; the CEO owns the loop; a facilitator runs the process; teams execute.
- **First step:** run one complete loop on a single real decision — do not boil the ocean.

Introducing the model

Do not attempt to install the whole apparatus at once. The fastest way to discredit a strategy model is to turn it into a bureaucratic ritual before it has proven its worth. Instead, choose one real, important strategic question and run it through a complete, honest loop over a few weeks. The discipline will surface things the organisation did not know — almost always in OBSERVE (the internal audit) and ORIENT (the honest scorecard) — and those discoveries are what earn the model its place. Scale it from there.

The cadence

The loop operates on three nested rhythms, and confusing them is a common error. The full loop is run roughly annually, as the strategy cycle. RENEW is reviewed quarterly, adapting the strategy in flight. And sensing runs continuously, because the environment does not wait for the calendar. The annual loop sets direction; the quarterly review adjusts it; continuous sensing catches what neither anticipated.

Rhythm	Frequency	What happens
Full loop	Annual	Work all six movements; set the year's strategy and its measures.
Renewal review	Quarterly	Run the renewal dashboard; scale, persevere or kill; adjust OKRs.
Sensing	Continuous	Watch-points and market/competitor listening feed the reviews.

Roles and responsibilities

- **The board / owners** own AIM: they set and reconcile the mandate and hold leadership accountable to it — then grant the authority to lead (Sun Tzu's sovereign-general compact).
- **The chief executive** owns the loop as a whole: ensures each movement is done honestly and that the movements cohere.
- **A strategy owner or facilitator** runs the process: convenes the sessions, holds the discipline of each movement, and maintains the artifacts.
- **The leadership team** does the analytical and design work of OBSERVE through DESIGN, and leads ACT in their areas.
- **Teams** execute ACT and are the richest source of the emergent learning that feeds RENEW.

A facilitation guide: the strategy offsite

A useful way to run the first full loop is a structured offsite, with the movements as the agenda. The sequence matters: resist the near-universal urge to jump to CHOOSE before the honest work of OBSERVE and ORIENT is done.

1. **Pre-work (before the room).** Assemble the OBSERVE dossier — PESTLE, Five Forces, customer/jobs, VRIO audit, value chain — so the session interprets evidence rather than trading opinions.
2. **Session 1 — AIM.** Confirm or reconcile the mandate, purpose, values and intent. Do not proceed until there is one shared aim.
3. **Session 2 — OBSERVE & ORIENT.** Walk the dossier; score the Seven Considerations honestly; place the situation in Cynefin; write the diagnosis and name the edge. This is the hardest and most valuable session.
4. **Session 3 — CHOOSE.** Decide where to play and how to win; write the guiding policy; apply the win-without-fighting test.
5. **Session 4 — DESIGN & ACT.** Sketch the business and operating model; set the 7S alignment agenda, the scorecard and the first OKRs; agree the cadence.
6. **Close — commitments.** Leave with named owners, dates and the review rhythm. A strategy without owned, dated commitments is not yet real.

Fitting the model to existing planning

The loop does not replace budgeting or operational planning; it directs them. The output of a full loop should set the assumptions the budget then resources, and the OKRs from ACT should align with the operating plan rather than competing with it. Where an organisation already runs an annual plan, the loop sits in front of it, ensuring the plan serves a real strategy rather than merely extrapolating last year.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Ritual over substance.** Running the movements as a form-filling exercise, losing the honesty that gives them value.
- **Jumping to CHOOSE.** Skipping the hard diagnostic work and leaping to answers — the failure the sequence

exists to prevent.

- **Confusing the rhythms.** Treating the annual loop as the only touchpoint, so the strategy goes stale between cycles.
- **Owner interference.** Owners who set the mandate and then override execution, hollowing out the leadership they appointed.

CEO CHECKLIST **adopting the model**

- ☐ We have run one complete, honest loop on a single real question.
- ☐ We have set the three rhythms — annual loop, quarterly review, continuous sensing.
- ☐ Roles are clear: board owns AIM, CEO owns the loop, a facilitator runs it.
- ☐ Our offsite resists jumping to CHOOSE before OBSERVE and ORIENT are done.
- ☐ The loop's output directs our budget and operating plan, not the reverse.

PART SIX

Reference

Templates, glossary, academic notes and sources

REFERENCE A

Templates & Working Papers

Blank versions of the model's core tools. Copy them into your own documents and complete them for your organisation.

1. AIM Canvas

- **Mandate** — return · growth · time horizon · risk appetite · non-financial aims
- **Purpose** — the reason we exist beyond profit (one sentence)
- **Values** — the few principles we keep at a cost
- **Strategic intent** — the bold, finite ambition that stretches us
- **Alignment test** — can every leader repeat the above, and does the ambition match the means?

2. OBSERVE Dossier (one page each)

- **PESTLE** — macro forces, each judged for direction, speed and timing
- **Five Forces** — buyer/supplier power, entry, substitutes, rivalry; where profit sits
- **Customer / Jobs-to-be-Done** — segments and the job each hires you to do
- **Value Net** — competitors and complementors
- **VRIO audit** — resources scored Valuable / Rare / Inimitable / Organised
- **Value chain** — where cost and differentiation actually arise

3. Seven-Considerations Scorecard

Score your organisation and each rival 1–5 on each row; the largest gaps are your asymmetries.

- Alignment & purpose (the Way)
- Leadership ability (the Commander)
- Timing & terrain (Heaven & Earth)
- Discipline & consistency
- Strength & resources
- People & capability
- Consistent incentives & accountability

4. CHOOSE One-Pager

- **Where to play** — markets/segments/positions we will contest (and those we will not)
- **How to win** — chosen position / basis of advantage
- **Guiding policy** — the overarching approach in a sentence
- **Win-without-fighting test** — does this win by position, or by out-spending?

5. Business Model & Value Proposition

- **Value Proposition Canvas** — fit of offer to customer jobs, pains and gains
- **Business Model Canvas** — the nine blocks, with attention to revenue streams and cost structure
- **Fit test** — do the blocks reinforce one another?
- **Method test** — can we supply, fund and move fast enough?

6. ACT: Scorecard & OKR Cascade

- **Strategy map** — objectives linked across financial, customer, process, learning perspectives
- **Leading indicators** — the early signals that predict success
- **OKRs** — a few objectives, each with measurable key results
- **Cadence** — the fixed review rhythm

7. Renewal Dashboard

- **Sensing panel** — watch-points and what they now show
- **Learning panel** — what execution has taught since last review
- **Horizon panel** — the portfolio across H1/H2/H3, each marked scale / persevere / kill

REFERENCE B

Glossary

7S	McKinsey's framework aligning strategy with structure, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values.
Ambidexterity	Balancing exploitation of today's business with exploration of tomorrow's.
Balanced Scorecard	Measurement of strategy across financial, customer, process and learning perspectives (Kaplan & Norton).
Business Model Canvas	Osterwalder's nine-block map of how a firm creates, delivers and captures value.
Cynefin	Snowden's framework for matching the decision approach to the situation's domain.
Diagnosis	The clear account of the crux of a challenge; the first element of real strategy (Rumelt).
Dynamic capabilities	The capacity to sense, seize and transform (Teece).
Edge	The decisive advantage a strategy is built on.
Five Factors	Sun Tzu's constants: the Way, Heaven, Earth, the Commander, Method — the model's lens.
Five Forces	Porter's analysis of industry structure and profit potential.
Guiding policy	The overarching approach that channels action (Rumelt).
Jobs-to-be-Done	The progress a customer 'hires' a product to make (Christensen).
Momentum (Shi)	The stored energy of a disciplined, well-led force.
Movement	One of the six phases of the loop: AIM, OBSERVE, ORIENT, CHOOSE, DESIGN, ACT.
OKRs	Objectives and Key Results — a method for cascading and tracking aligned goals.
OODA loop	Boyd's decision cycle — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — the model's backbone.
Position (Xing)	The arrangement of advantages that makes a force hard to defeat.
RENEW	The continuous discipline of sensing, learning and adapting that wraps the loop.
Strategic intent	A stretching ambition that exceeds current resources (Hamel & Prahalad).
Three Horizons	A portfolio view balancing core, emerging and future

	businesses (McKinsey).
Two engines	Foreknowledge (know yourself and your rival) and winning without fighting.
Value innovation	Blue Ocean's simultaneous pursuit of differentiation and low cost.
VRIO	Barney's test of Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, Organised resources.
The Way (Dao)	Sun Tzu's first factor: alignment of people with purpose.
Win without fighting	Securing the objective by position and preparation rather than costly, direct conflict.

Academic Notes & Limitations

For the scholarly reader, intellectual honesty requires stating what this model is and is not, and where reasonable critics would push back.

What kind of model this is

The Strategos Loop is a synthesising meta-framework, not a novel theory. It makes no new empirical claim; it organises established frameworks into a coherent sequence anchored by an ancient philosophy and a decision-cycle. Its value is integrative and pedagogical: it gives practitioners a single, navigable structure and gives students a map of how the major frameworks relate. It should be judged as one judges a synthesis — by coherence, completeness and usefulness — not as one judges an empirical hypothesis.

Known critiques of the components

- **Porter's frameworks** have been criticised for assuming relatively stable industry structures, less apt in fast-moving or platform markets.
- **The resource-based view** is charged by some with tautology (a resource is valuable because it yields advantage, and yields advantage because it is valuable) and with limited predictive power.
- **Blue Ocean** is critiqued for survivorship bias and for underplaying how quickly blue oceans turn red.
- **The Balanced Scorecard** can ossify into a measurement bureaucracy that measures what is easy rather than what matters.
- **Stage/loop models generally** risk implying more linearity and rationality than real strategy exhibits — the very critique Mintzberg levelled at planning.

Limitations of the synthesis itself

- **Over-proceduralisation.** Any structured model can become a ritual that substitutes process for judgement. The remedy is to treat the movements as prompts for honest thinking, not forms to complete.
- **The deliberate/emergent tension.** The loop leans deliberate; the RENEW ring is its concession to emergence, but a genuinely turbulent environment may demand far more improvisation than a cycle implies.
- **Context dependence.** The model suits an organisation with enough stability to run a cycle; a startup in pure discovery may need a lighter, faster, more experimental approach (which the model can accommodate by shortening the loop and weighting RENEW).
- **Cultural framing.** The military metaphor, while apt, can be over-literalised; competitors are rarely enemies and customers are never to be conquered. The metaphor is a lens, not a licence.

When not to use it

The model is least useful in two situations: genuine chaos, where Cynefin counsels acting first to establish order before any analysis is possible; and pure early-stage discovery, where the product and market are so unknown that experimentation must dominate and elaborate planning wastes time. In both, run a stripped-down loop weighted heavily toward OBSERVE, ORIENT and RENEW, and revisit the full model as stability returns.

REFERENCE D

Sources & Further Reading

Sun Tzu quotations follow the public-domain Lionel Giles translation (1910). Frameworks are attributed to their originators as scholarship. Selected seminal works:

Sun Tzu — The Art of War (trans. L. Giles, 1910).

Boyd, J. — the OODA loop (briefings and 'Patterns of Conflict', 1970s–1990s).

Porter, M. — Competitive Strategy (1980); Competitive Advantage (1985); 'What Is Strategy?', HBR (1996).

Barney, J. — 'Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage' (1991); Wernerfelt, B. (1984).

Prahalad, C.K. & Hamel, G. — 'The Core Competence of the Corporation' (1990); 'Strategic Intent' (1989).

Teece, D. — 'Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management' (1997).

Rumelt, R. — Good Strategy / Bad Strategy (2011).

Kim, W.C. & Mauborgne, R. — Blue Ocean Strategy (2005).

Treacy, M. & Wiersema, F. — The Discipline of Market Leaders (1995).

Christensen, C. — The Innovator's Dilemma (1997); Jobs-to-be-Done writings.

Osterwalder, A. & Pigneur, Y. — Business Model Generation (2010); Value Proposition Design (2014).

Kaplan, R. & Norton, D. — The Balanced Scorecard (1996); Strategy Maps (2004).

Doerr, J. — Measure What Matters (2018); Grove, A. — High Output Management (1983).

Mintzberg, H. — 'Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent' (1985); The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning (1994).

Snowden, D. & Boone, M. — 'A Leader's Framework for Decision Making' (Cynefin), HBR (2007).

Brandenburger, A. & Nalebuff, B. — Co-opetition (1996).

Freeman, R.E. — Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach (1984).

Collins, J. & Porras, J. — Built to Last (1994); 'Building Your Company's Vision' (1996).

Baghai, Coley & White — The Alchemy of Growth / Three Horizons (McKinsey, 1999).

Kotter, J. — Leading Change (1996); Peters & Waterman / Pascale — the 7S framework (1980).

March, J. — 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning' (1991); O'Reilly & Tushman on ambidexterity.

Ansoff, H.I. — 'Strategies for Diversification' (1957).

The Strategos Loop — The Complete Manual & Walkthrough. A synthesis of Sun Tzu's Art of War and the modern strategy canon. Sun Tzu quotations from the Giles translation (1910), public domain. Frameworks attributed to their originators. Edition 2026.