

Ancient Knowledge for a New Cooperation Strategic Model: A Bridge to the Oriental and Occidental School's of Strategic Thinking

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ABSTRACT— *In this paper we describe how the strategos must deal with balance and dynamic tension generated by the possible intromission of “illusory” and “past” elements in his strategic decision making for cooperation or competition. This possibilities weaken the collapsing alternative of searched reality, as well as remembering past problems rearmed in the present decision making, which doesn't do more than limiting the possibilities (digging past difficulties, as if they still exist is, at least, a waste of time). Looking towards the future (there is no other possibility in the strategic field), knowing how to select what is relevant from the past for decision making is an act of balance, wisdom and survival for the companies and countries in the whole world.*

Keywords— strategy, strategist, strategic thinking, wisdom, decision making, cooperation, strategic competition

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of an elemental cohesion regarding the unity of life origin (and why not, also its ending), as evident as it is in traditional cultures, such as the Egyptian, Incan or Mayan – to whom if the conscience of many human beings focuses on making flow the planet energy- harmonizing processes could be less traumatic- or the works that are currently developed by Princeton University (Jahn, 2009) on *interlaced reality* and *global consciousness*; it still seems difficult to deliver and understand for modern men, who are dazzled more by the material outcome form creations than by the possibilities of creation that mental harmony provides. It is a developing evolution process. Subjects are able to perceive based on an information spread increase, related to dematerialization states of daily reality, as well as there are remarkable changes in categories proposed by human development theoreticians. Indeed, the materialist evolution process and “just emergent” has never been enough to explain life in a comprehensive way and even less, it has been able to explain completely *relative reality* (Bohm, 2000) in which we are located and coexist.

In the current world, where masses are conformed and confused with appearances more than with the perceived “reality” -education and generally accepted early behavior models do the needed work for the true evolution, the essential one, the one from the *soul*- delays everything that is lacking for the collective. In this way, “learning” and the impoverished daily reality, leave no other choice for the collective than trusting in what their senses allow them to “see ore decoding those who build their path” (Garrido & Mintzberg, 2007) in order to move forward from the physical aspect of reality, and go farther (creating on each step), looking for what it is central and unique in essence (subject is aware of its uniqueness, on itself and most religious traditions remind it). If it's true that what is essential finally gets uncovered before those who are prepared, then we will still have to wait for true emergent *evolution* (under no circumstances, *revolution*) in women and men who study, work and make decisions in a modern world, dealing with an understandable delay within the so called “occidental world”.

Considering that the transcendent essence that pushes subjects to materialize their energies upon their visions and dreams of development, it has been portrayed in the case of the Strategic Schools of Philosophy which seem more interesting for us in the East (Sun Tzu, Sun Bin, Lao Tsé and Mao) and in West (Von Clausewitz and De Jomini). We have a starting point handed down to us by these known masters and philosophers in the art of strategy. The work of the *strategos* (Garrido, 2012a) does not respond to a purely material eagerness at all: there is a powerful intuitive equilibrium that explains the achievements in that work. In part, it is this *equilibrium* what the Greeks called the “general's wisdom” (Paret, 1986), *strategike sophia* or *estrategon sophia*, and to its expression is probably what Von Clausewitz called “*coup d'uel*” (Howard & Paret, 1922): a flash that assertively lights the vision for decision making, upon the *link* or integral connection of who reaches said state in decision making, moreover, with the challenge of connecting knowledge in a

coherent, integrated and systemic way, because the observer is not an “expert in parts and pieces” (Sengue, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004).

For this reason it is expected that the high level- decision maker, not only is the bearer of certain *breadth* of knowledge, but fundamentally, of *deep* knowledge for the appropriate direction of his/her objectives. Apparently, that historically told ability of going deeper into the intuitive-rational or material-spiritual *right equilibrium* in decision making is precisely what will make the difference about the strategist in taking the right choice of routes for the construction of a possible future, in all kind of organizations, institutions, companies and countries.

More than two thousand years ago, said equilibrium is what was captured in the decisions of wise generals (*strategos*), who came from the spiritual tradition of the East Asian’s Taoism, and who from the military world with a constant effort exerted the equilibrium between the material and spiritual aspects of mankind. This was a greater challenge that was left into the kingdom generals hands (in the case of Sun Tzú into Wei’s), who received philosophical and spiritual teaching at an early age.

For Eastern school, it is *Tao (The Way)* what allows the complete unfolding of the ancestral wisdom in life overall and particularly, in the battlefield. In Western School (especially early Greece) it will be the knowledge conditions (*strategike episteme*) and the wealth of the *strategos* (Army general and Landowner) what throughout time will bind together *strategike sophia* or the general’s wisdom (Greek Byzantine period, 330 BC). In both traditions (Eastern and Western), we find persistent lines of fundamental agreements among which stand out –for purposes of the present work– as the main task of the strategist to conceive strategy and take care that its manifestation will be expressed in concrete actions with a “sense of urgency” (Kotter, 2000) as we would say today. However, said main tasks to be exercised are inextricably conditioned to *personal qualities* and *conditions* of those who really exercise strategic functions. This is what makes the strategist (and the school’s) so important and his/her equilibrium conditions in the decision making process: “the strategic equilibrium depends largely on the *strategist equilibrium*” (Garrido, 2013, p. 105).

2. THINKING STRATEGICALLY FOR A NEW COOPERATION

Mintzberg (2009) point out the strategic planning as a “format of refilling” and they refer to strategic thinking as a “design of the strategic architecture”, pointing at the creativity, exploration and comprehension of the discontinuities. The author clears up that “strategic thinking is not an alternative nomenclature to put all the things that fall down under the umbrella of strategic management; it is a way of particular thinking with clearly perceptible characteristics”. In previous works (Garrido, 2009), we have already indicated that strategic thinking for us is: “a teaching system of perception and vision of reality that goes beyond what is noticeable”. Therefore, from our point of view, strategy is a result thereof (each worldview suggests a particular vision of the world: mechanic vision, economic vision, holistic vision, for example).

This true *flash of comprehension* generates a new range of connections, similarities and differences, reason and unreason, in volumes only limited by the thinker-observer’s own limitation to execute this act of perception of cognitive wholeness (rational, emotional and integral). Thus, thought is our first stop to define what we are dealing with, how to provoke a new range of *links* that enriches the strategic possibilities of our decisions? We could indicate- as we do it in our own MBA courses- that strategic thought is a *chaining of current and future value* equivalent to the strategy’s DNA or, as we usually call it in our works, “it is the equivalent to the musical essence, because the score is not the music, like planning is not the strategy” (Garrido, 2012b) and the true *input* of strategic planning. In that sense, the strategist makes an active contemplation of the context, which improves the quality proportionally to the stability and predictability thereof, upon his analytical-systematic quality to contemplate, reflects, decides and acts (so we can say that the thought solution had a sense of action; the result must intelligently move the company forward to reach a favorable situation - maneuver-, as a result from this output, which concretely must lead us to make a decision and find the solution).

2.1. The strategist does not “compete”

First of all, we have to mention that the word “competition” as defined in the RAE (Royal Spanish Academy) forces us to think about the actor (strategist) facing another actor (competitor or competition); it even states in its fourth meaning: “situation of companies that are rival within a market by supplying or demanding a same product or service” (Mintzberg, 2007). The thesis supposes that only upon such “competition”, the need of designing a strategy arises “to be different and compete”, according to Porter (2008). In other words, if we consider this starting point as true, we would suppose that strategy will depend on the existence of a competitor, person or enterprise, to be such (and this is not the original idea in the strategic field or in the way of mastery in some discipline).

As we have stated in previous lines, the voice “*strategos*” was born and systematized in Greece (classical Byzantine period, 330 b C) along the need of taking care of borderlands (precisely why first Romans historians called strategies the lands under the control of Athens’ *strategos*. Although such origin was linked to land patrimony –evidently pragmatic- it is covered by “deep and rich traditions of the Greek-Athenian school” (Ricart and Garrido, 2012, p. 67-101), which

explores the motivation why men wander on his spiritual and philosophic evolution. Therefore, strategic actions as well as war traps have been present in different periods of human history and in different places throughout the world. They became doctrines, principles and systems which generate teachings and build thinking schools based on authors and masters' teachings and disciplinary formation. If we recovered the available history from the strategist actions, it emerges a sort of logbook with no systematic rigor. However, it is an acceptable knowledge that was collected through time from each strategist who has conducted actions with strategic or tactic effects; it has been unintentionally fed from the rich Eastern School and the Western School of strategic thinking (in this work we have permanently referred to the Eastern School with a certain admiration and supremacy from Western's, what is chronologically explained by historical moments in which each one is developed and our impression on the philosophical contributions that the Eastern School has provided from a historical point of view and, to this work in particular. Besides, the Eastern School is the one that inherited us a world view that stops astonished before the world, which in Aristotle words, it explains the birth of wisdom. This is a short mind detention in world vision to separate India and Greece from the rest).

Therefore, when we speak about "schools of strategic thinking" in the way of Mintzberg (1998), we are reviewing centuries of experience and history (some of them told orally, others completely or partially written). They have been inherited as "strategic principles" and sometimes come from the deep philosophy they are part of, or they are expressed upon practical experiences (usually referred to the battlefield). This tradition, on its oral component- such as it occurred in Greece, for example- is inherited from *strategos* to *strategos*, "frequent in handcrafters or masters schooling where the art of war is born" (Paret, 1986). *Strategic thinking* is part of the "strategic school", which assumes some shared and systematized way of thinking by a collective of masters and apprentices (Garrido, 2012a). For each strategic thinking school, there is a specific way to do things and solve problems that make them different from the others (even taking into consideration the continuous and natural intersections). As stated by Ghemawat's (2007), "historical perspective organizes changes in strategy conceptions, according to how the participants of this field imagined it or applied it (...), and it allows us to identify patterns; otherwise everything would be a chaotic tangle of ideas".

Overall, the Western school is characterized by a pragmatic derivation of peace and war principles, also oriented by a clear need of looking after borderlands and land order. In Rome, Frontinus (who is not considered as a thinker, but rather a collector) who after developing treaties and aqueducts undertook the task of trying to systematize the knowledge in tactics and strategic decisions of generals in a work called "*Stratagemata*". This was a collection of Roman and Greek examples through which the author addressed that "general should be an old man in character, which means that his moderate advices shall be taken into consideration".

On other part of the globe called the Eastern School, strategic thinking was deeply influenced by the philosophic traditions that welcomed them. It is clear that this spiritual and philosophical perspective that shows us the way of living (Tao) is present in each right expression of the ways that Eastern strategos will usually take to command their armies. We chose some influential Taoist ideas for generals or strategos' decision making: *reality*, the world is just a map of what exists and what might exist.

External experiences are useful for feeling the world and the inner experiences; to understand it. Both experiences are the same within the Tao: they are just different among men. A strategos born in the Eastern philosophical cradle has had an early contact with these truths and subsequently, has been influenced on how he sees the world: for him, decision making on war or peace have a transcendental (spiritual) sense, therefore, he understands the urgency to comprehend the world that "exists and might exist" upon his own decision making. In this sense, Guivert's contribution is related to how we could "spiritualize our battle", developing a warrior's spirit and motivating others to achieve the superior objective (Palmer, 1986). In regards to *dualities*: "life and death are abstractions of the growing process. Difficulty and easiness are abstractions of progress; close and far are abstractions of location; strength and weakness are control abstractions, music and speaking are harmony abstractions; before and after are sequence abstractions" (Hansen, 2009). Based on these principles, strategos harmonizes his way towards the art of war guided by a sense of growth including the fact that losing or not lives on the battle- even his own- shall not hinder said growth. This allows that only what is essential and relevant stays in control: "the strategic sense, not its abstractions" (Garrido, 2013).

Continuing with *dualities*, the Tao (Hansen, 2009) teaches the general to develop conditions that improves his strategic wisdom (similar model to Greek *strategike sophia*): "wise men controls with no authority; he lets all things to ascend and fall; feeds but does not interfere; gives without being asked and is satisfied". These teachings would be transferred into the general's life and battlefield, understanding that we are at the Eastern cradle, where cultural life and value patterns coincide between control and battalion: one thing is to give orders and the other is that they are complied with.

In Eastern philosophy, explanations based on conditions and nature flows suggest the appropriate performance of the being. The Tao explains how in the nature of a wise man some truths reside: "nature is not kind; it treats all things impartially. Wise man is not kind; he treats all people *impartially*". The *strategos* must observe the environmental conditions as well as his impressions and, in this way, let flow the impartial nature of things for a better decision. It is interesting how the I Ching philosophy has influenced decision making and the recommendations derived from its deep

teachings written in texts that collect millenary orientations for a better performance on the battlefield (there is no philosophical or spiritual comparison with works and teachings born in Western schools of strategic thinking). In Sun Tzu work “The Art of War” (Sawyer, 1994), we recognize for instance, teachings that enable the wise general to “observe his body as accidental”, so that he does not waste energy in short-term objectives.

2.2. Regarding *wealth* and *value*

Teachings lead the strategos to understand that the most important things in the universe are those which indeed *are not things*. Inner/outer paradox instruct us through the following teaching: “thirty radiuses join in the middle; thanks to the hole, we can use the wheel. Mud is shaped in a vase form; thanks to the hole, we can use a glass. Walls are built all over the world; thanks to doors, we can use the house” (I Ching). *Wealth* comes from what exists, but what’s *valuable* comes from what doesn’t exist. The strategos formed in Eastern school and who has dedicated efforts to shape his strategic wisdom, will recognize the value of what is under the apparent wealth of material effects (on the battlefield, for instance) and valuable rewards blooming before wisdom’s eyes.

Finally, the Tao advises us “calm owns agitation”, evidencing the relevance of who runs a company. Therefore, the manager, director or strategist must develop the capacity to keep the balance when uncertainty or agitation moves the environment and the supervised ones. According to the words of Tao: “who runs a large company shall not act lightly or agitated; by acting lightly, he loses contact with the world; by acting with agitation, he loses contact with himself”. (may be reading Sun Tzu carefully will provide us the possibility of recognizing the applications of the Tao’s teachings, which remind us wisdom principles of the general: “Those who know men are wise. Those with self-knowledge are luminous”).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the Western school (characterized by a pragmatic derivation of peace and war principles) and in the Eastern school of strategic thinking the *strategos* develops an adaptation process to the path and during the exercise of anticipated adaptation is where the principal part of his courage for decision making resides for the ability of going deeper into the intuitive-rational or material-spiritual *right equilibrium* in decision making, is precisely what will make the difference about the strategist in taking the right choice of routes for the construction of a possible future, in all kind of organizations, institutions, companies and countries.

In decision making (for cooperation or competition), the *strategos* knows he must deal with balance and dynamic tension generated by the possible intromission of “illusory” and “past” elements. Illusory possibilities weaken the collapsing alternative of searched reality, as well as remembering past problems rearmend in the present decision making, which doesn’t do more than limiting the possibilities (digging past difficulties, as if they still exist is, at least, a waste of time). Looking towards the future, knowing how to select what is relevant from the past for decision making is an act of balance, wisdom and survival.

For someone to explore and research in the strategic field, and for someone who practices in the business world, the problems and difficulties are valuable opportunities to practice the nice exercise of finding solutions, improving mental tuning and exercising the contact with his essence of future decision making, at present value.

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