# Management by strategic principles
## building *social-strategic-competence* for leadership

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## Key Words

Strategy, leadership, principle, grounded theory, strategic studies, social-strategic competence, ploy

## Abstract

*This article provides a preliminary report about an interdisciplinary research project which is being conducted with the aim of compiling a system of strategic principles. The disciplines that contribute to the findings are economics, qualitative research, strategic studies and classical martial arts. Strategic principles are universally applicable patterns of human behavior, the application of which can be observed in every area of life. In certain contexts they are described as ploys. Their existence in real life is never disputed, but they are hardly ever described in scientific literature, although they are the vocabulary of strategy in social interaction. The research goes back in time and analyses the principle-based teachings of a number of classics of world literature, some of them preserved for a long time only in forgotten manuscripts, which cover a time span of more than 2500 years and stem from four civilizations. With the help of the accumulated data base inferred from this knowledge a systematic framework of strategic principles is being developed which will be the basis of a training concept for supervisors, managers and decision makers. The set of strategic principles including counter-principles will help them to develop social-strategic-competence which is not limited to one discipline, one civilization or one historical environment.*

## 1. **Introduction**

Every supervisor or manager involved in operational business will be familiar with the following situations: (1) Employees try to prevent their supervisors from getting an insight into their work quota or their real work pressure. (2) A customer in retail business angrily complains at the counter precisely when the shop is most crowded, thereby leaving the sales people in a dilemma of either giving in to possibly unjustified demands or of quarrelling in public, which might create a bad impression on other customers. (3) During negotiations in international business one of the chief negotiators makes use of a personal interpreter although he understands the negotiating language.

What do these situations have in common? There is an actor (protagonist; the employee (1), the customer (2), the chief negotiator (3) and a counterpart (antagonist; in (1) the manager, in (2) the salesperson, in (3) another negotiator). Furthermore, the protagonist applies a method to reach an advantage but the antagonist is not conscious of what is actually happening at that moment – to put it another way – the protagonist applies a ploy.

In economic theory ploys are basic elements of the five definitions of strategy and part of the *"power school concept"* (Mintzberg/Ahlstrand/Lampel; (2005) p. 11; p. 233ee). In other publications about management ploys are hardly described as strategic tools. But this statement is just valid for the Western civilisation, as will be demonstrated in East-Asian countries, the

application of ploys – in translations of Chinese classics often called "stratagems" (von Senger 1; (2010) p. 12ee) – is more common and not understood as dishonorable or underhanded. In fact the association of Westerners with the concept of ploys is predominantly negative and that is probably the reason why scholars hardly ever deign to consider them a legitimate object of study.

But ploys are all around us, in business as well as in private life, and everyone applies them, some players more, some less, thus they are inseparable from social interaction. It is important to mention that the application of ploys not necessarily requires full consciousness, on the contrary, very often the person applying a ploy both acts and is driven on deeper psychological levels. Moreover, it is more important to pay attention to the fact that the application of ploys very often creates significant advantages for the protagonist.

As ploys are a part of daily business, the question arises of how to deal with them? How should one react when one recognizes that the counterpart is applying a ploy seeking to gain an advantage? And returning to the three situations – what could be suggested as a "counter-ploy" for the supervisor, for the salesman or for the negotiator in order to defend their interests and avoid being cheated? The insecurity of many managers regarding an appropriate and efficient reaction to ploys is surely one reason for high stress-loads in modern business life.

If managers are not able to deal with such situations without being upset, this has to be considered a lack of competence. The next logical step then is to ask where and how such essential skills can be learnt? The curricula of modern study courses in business administration or economics do not address these subjects at all. Often not even soft skills, which are generally accepted as essential, are sufficiently covered in the syllabi, a fact that H. Mintzberg criticizes (Mintzberg (2005) p. 40ee). In his opinion one reason why modern MBA-education in some parts fails is that students are insufficiently prepared for the tasks an executive of the 21st century is confronted with. But also other disciplines, e.g. social sciences or psychology do not show real interest in making ploys an object of research. Therefore it is fair to say that in formal education it is hard to discover what one is looking for. On the informal side of education there is a way to acquire such skills, e.g. with the help of an experienced mentor. Mentoring programs are a method in leadership education that companies gladly apply to prepare management trainees for their further tasks. Up to now, experts in terms of ploy application and resistance have probably rather been executives with a natural talent or autodidacts, but not scholars who have dealt with the subject academically.

Still, it would be shortsighted to set up training for ploy-application in an academic context for undergraduate students without life and business experience. It should if anything be the job of training agencies offering tailor-made seminars for professionals. Some of them have already included selected and popular ploys and their application in their concepts, for example in negotiation or communication seminars. They normally label them "tools" or "methods", but in fact they are ploys. The standard requirement to be met is that if knowledge about ploys and applications of ploys are used, then they are to be embedded into a holistic concept. The professional application of ploys always happens in a strategic context and it cannot be separated from general interaction between human beings. As a result, strategic and social-scientific knowledge must be considered to, when creating a meaningful teaching concept. Such an educational concept would help managers to fulfill their daily business duties in a more efficient and probably in a more relaxed way.

## 1.1. Back in Time – Solution through Stragegic Principles

As a full-fledged comprehensive concept does not exist yet, a pioneer program will have to be set up based on academic groundwork. The discipline normally dealing with this subject matter is Strategic Studies. Although this discipline is traditionally focused on war and conflict research, it can significantly contribute to the success of such a project, as the classic literature employed in this field contains all the necessary theoretical knowledge. This knowledge is not coordinated as the classics and their teachings represent independent works from different times and cultures. But they all have something in common. They describe universally applicable action patterns. This theoretical knowledge, which is to be turned into skills, has been described in corresponding contexts and referred to in various ways. Sun Tsu, the Chinese military leader (300 B.C.), calls it *tactics and strategies*, Musashi, the famous Samurai, talks about *principles* and Thomas Cleary uses the expression *strategic principles* in his translation of the writings of the Japanese military leader Yamamoto Kansuke (1501-1561) (Cleary (2012) p.11).

"Strategic Principles" is the most appropriate expression for these patterns as it expresses their universal applicability and their dependence on strategic contexts. Therefore this term will be used in the following.

Before starting the research process it makes sense to get a better understanding of strategic principles, their function, application and in particular the way they were taught. For that reason we will have a look at Classical Martial Arts (which should not be mixed with the term "Modern Martial Arts" today often designating East-Asian arts like Karate, Judo, Taekwondo, Kendo etc. as well as very modern offshoots like Mixed Martial Arts etc.). Whenever the term Classical Martial Arts is used in the following, its semantics will be narrowed down to a small group of traditional Japanese Martial Arts Schools, which operate and teach in a way which does not aim at victory in a tournament, but which tries to convey the principles necessary to survive in reality. This group comprises the old Japanese samurai schools, also called "Koryu" (old school). They represent an independent teaching philosophy and their methods should not be confused with those of modern Olympic disciplines like Judo or Taekwondo, although these partially developed from Koryu arts. But modern styles have less and less in common with the teachings of the old samurai-schools. (Threadgill; (2009) p. 16)(Friday (1997) p. 5e) Most of them have meanwhile become extinct, but there are a few that survived. These preserved the heritage – the old teaching methods – of their inventors for future generations. Two of them, the *Kashima Shinryu School* and the *Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu School* (TSYR) allow an insight into their teachings and help to better understand *principle-based teaching* and the methodology underlying the system.

The basis of every school is a very polished curriculum that matured over centuries. The origins of them go back to the times before 1600, when Japan was engaged in permanent conflicts and wars. After that period, when Japan was relatively peaceful again, the schools passed on the practical knowledge accrued in an era of conflict and fighting, systemized and cultivated it and packed it into a curriculum for further samurai education (Friday; (1997) p. 14ee). The core of these curricula in TSYR are the principles (Threadgill; (2009) p. 166ee) also called the *"Underlying Concepts"* (Ura no Waza), e.g. *Destabilization* (Kuzushi), *Superior Position* (Tsukuri) or *Blending* (Awase). They are embedded, whether singled out or in combination, in techniques and partner exercises that were specially invented for their internalization. The goal of this method is to convey an extensive repertoire of principles to the students, from which they can pick the fitting ones in case of emergency, thereby allowing a tailor-made solution. This makes the students very flexible; they do not have to react with prepared and rehearsed techniques, which might have worked well in training, but are not applicable to the given

situation. Standardized solutions only fit standardized types of problems, but reality teaches that in the end no situation is the same.

A characteristic teaching method of the Koryu-schools is *Shuhari* (Takamura-Essay; (1986)). According to this teaching method the students have to pass three stages to develop a certain competence. At the beginning the students have to train with an exercise within the framework of very strict guidelines. The teacher neither allows deviations nor variations. After a certain period the teacher allows some degree of freedom and the student is permitted to make variations. In the third stage the teacher dissolves the framework and forces the student to find his or her own way based on personal strengths and weaknesses. The goal of this method is to make sure that the principles are clearly understood und internalized before a realistic application can be considered.

Furthermore, principles are trained and applied at different levels of human action (Friday; (1997) p. 62ee). Beginners in Kashima Shinryu, as well as in other Koryu-schools start on the body-level, which means they learn the principles in the course of physical exercises, with or without weaponry. Advanced students have to transfer the principles to a mental level. This means developing the skill to apply the principles to tactical and strategic tasks. Finally there is the spiritual level. The student has completely internalized the principles in body and mind; they are an integral part of his or her personal way of thinking and acting. It is no longer necessary to be conscious of the principles one is applying in a decisive situation.

At this point it makes sense to explain the subject by means of an example: The first principle that a student learns in TSYR is "Kusushi", it means the destabilization of an opponent in order to reduce his *(in the following the opponent will be assumed to be male)* options of activity. The student learns to put the opponent off balance by means of destroying his body structure or changing his position in space. This weakens him. Kusushi on the mental level, aims at destroying the mental stability of the opponent, for example through verbal aggression, disinformation or unsettling him. This will cause a condition of unbalance and thus reduce his room for maneuver; at best he is paralyzed for a moment. The transfer of Kusushi to the spiritual level means that all behavior like gestures, facial expressions, voice, movement of one's limbs etc. towards the opponent, mainly carried out unconsciously and instinctively, should lead to him being permanently unbalanced. The opponent does not feel secure due to the accumulation of single activities, but the decisive point is that he cannot describe why. This is the highest level of principle application and in the context of the chosen example a way to avoid conflicts before they start.

Strategic principles are the smallest elements that, in combination, accumulate to techniques, tactics and strategies. The combinatory possibilities are endless, which makes an applicator very flexible and enables him to come up with an appropriate and poised reaction to every type of problem. Thus, they are the vocabulary of strategy in social interaction.

After this excursus let us now go back to the original term "ploy". Strategic principles, single or combined, can be applied as ploys, but they represent far more.

### 2.2 The Research Process – Defining the Literature of Reference

Given all of the information about strategic principles available, it would be interesting to find out if their number is limited or endless. For that reason the first question to be answered is: "How many strategic principles exist?" Parallel to this question it is necessary to find sources where these principles are described. The classical literature dealing with strategic studies has already been mentioned. This will be the first source of information to be investigated. Some of

these works are world-famous. So in the first step the following works of literature are defined as a point of departure for the present research project:

The classical works about war: *Sun Tsu – the Art of War* – was published 500 B.C. It contains instructions about tactics and strategies for intelligent warfare. About a hundred years later the Greek *Thucydides* (400 B.C) wrote a very detailed historical document about the *Peloponnesian War*. The German *Carl von Clausewitz* is the third classic that focused exclusively on war in his book – *On War* – (1832). As strategic principles occur in social interaction, the focus must be broadened to include further literature of the genre *"fürstenspiegel"* – the classical guides for kings and other leaders: Thus we include the different publications of the Roman *Lucius A. Seneca,* the tutor and advisor of Emperor Nero, as well as the book "*The prince*" of the Italian *Nicolo Machiavelli* (1532) and the less known work "*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*" written by Spanish Jesuit *Baltasar Gracian* (1650), containing 300 maxims for successful relations between humans. To widen the angle of perspective further authors and their literature from Japanese samurai culture were chosen: The first author to be considered is the famous Swordsman *Myamoto Musashi* and his book "*Five Rings*" (1650) and the samurai and teacher *Yagyu Munenori*, who wrote the book "*Way of the samurai – instructions for strategic acting*". The third Japanese is *Yamamoto Tsunetomo* and his well-known book "*Hagakure*"(1715). To include the Islamic Civilization the little known work of the Arab *Ibn Zafar* – "*Water of Comforts*" (1200) was included in the list of primary sources, from the methodical point of view an excellent textbook for political rulers, as well as its equivalent from Ancient Indian Civilisation, the "*Arthashastra*" of the Indian statesmen and philosopher *Kautylia* (300 B.C.), who lectured on how to rule a state, thus primarily written for kings. Last but not least, to complete the list of literature to be scrutinized, the *36 Chinese stratagems* written by unknown authors. This selection of authors and their literature provides a pretty good cross-section both in terms of historical eras and civilizations; additionally they describe the subject from very different perspectives (see illustration1). It can be assumed that through detailed examination of these writings an extensive overview of strategic principles can be generated.
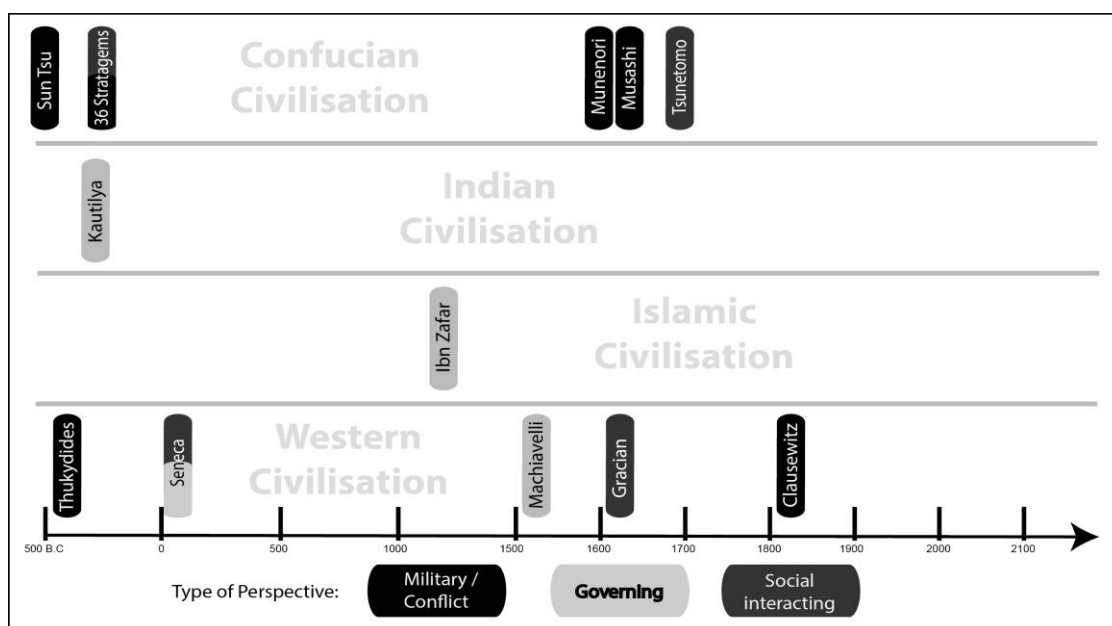


**Illustration1: Relevant classical authors according to era, civilisation and perspective**

The question might arise whether or not to also include modern academic literature or even fiction dealing with strategy; the question would have to be answered negatively because on closer inspection modern publications turned out to predominantly refer to the classics, therefore they can only be regarded as secondary literature. An example is the famous British Military Strategist *B. H. Liddell Hart* (1895-1970). His book entitled "*Strategy*" processes inter alia the writings of *Von Clausewitz* (Hart; (1991) p. 144ee).

### 2.3 Choosing a Method of Research

Thus the list of literature to be analyzed has been completed. It is important to keep in mind that the goal is not to extract *strategies* from literature; the main focus is rather on the *principles* on which these strategies are based. At this point a metaphor from chemistry might illustrate what is meant: the *strategic principles* correspond to the *atoms*, the *strategies* the *molecules*.

The next step is choosing a systematic research method. It also has to be taken into consideration that the selection of literature is vast and above all it is not homogeneous. All classics wrote within their historical contexts and used different literary forms of description. Thukydides for example presents the principles in the form of narrations; Ibn Zafar embeds principles in fables and additionally points out maxims, while Sun Tsu displays strategic instructions. Furthermore some of the material is hard to understand for a modern Western reader. Another consideration that affects the issue of the most fitting research method concerns the academic ambitions that underlie the whole project. The whole process and its result should be verifiable, reproducible and generalizable, and all findings must be empirically corroborated.

As it is all about social interaction, a method of qualitative research is suitable. And here the *Grounded Theory*, a very pragmatic and systematic methodology has been selected, as it fulfills the requirements expressed in the considerations above and because it is scientifically recognized. The *Grounded Theory* is a research method originally invented by B. Glaser and A. Strauss in the 1960s (Strauss/Corbin; (1998) p. 9e). It is a methodology which consists of different methods in combination with the aim of developing a theory based on phenomena, expressed in empirical data like interviews, documents etc.. The central idea behind this is that for all evaluations and interpretations it must be possible for them to be traced back to the original data, to prevent the researcher from inventing a theory himself – thus the findings must be "*grounded*" in empirical data. Although the primary target of the present project is not to develop a theory, but to create an overview about existing strategic principles, the method has proven very useful. In the following the research process based on the application of the Grounded Theory and its different elements will be demonstrated in a slightly modified way.

### 2.4 The Research Process - Application of the Grounded Theory

At the beginning of the research process there is the question – *what is being searched for?* There is no definition of strategic principles available which would *facilitate* the process. For that reason the *Grounded Theory* recommends the researchers keep permanent questions in the back of their minds while collecting the data (Strauss/Corbin; (1998) p. 74ee). To get a first idea one has to remember what has already been found out about principles: (1) they occur in social interaction, (2) they are applied on different levels of human activity, (3) they can be applied as ploys, and (4) they follow a goal. As a result we can formulate the following questions that will underlie all further steps of research:

1) Is it possible to realise the sense of the action or can it be developed by means of context knowledge?
2) Who are the actors (protagonist and antagonist)?
3) What are the goals of the action?

4) Can we identify a certain cunning; an opacity of the intention, not directly visible for the antagonist?
5) How does the underlying mechanism work?
6) Are the text passages ambiguous, are different interpretations possible?
7) Is it possible to generalize the mechanism?

These questions help to identify the relevant phenomena. The next step of the research process is coding. Coding can be subdivided into three sub-steps, open coding, axial coding and theoretical coding the latter is left out as its original purpose is to create a theory.

Open Coding (Strauss/Corbin (1998) p.101ee) is a very analytical activity, the researcher identifying relevant passages, isolating them and creating first categories. This categorization is the formulation of an abstract concept extracted from the references through separating the core from the context. Examples of such concepts are: *deception, subliminal transfer, steering of focus* or *emotionalizing*. Thus in the database of the project every reference of a classical source is given a "label", which describes a concept which later might serve as the basis for a further process.

The next step is axial coding (Strauss/Corbin (1998) p.123ee). The main purpose is to create relations between the references by using the concepts already defined. References that represent the same or a similar concept are clustered in the form of key categories, which leads to a first categorization of the whole material. These key categories or clusters are the basis for the formulation of the strategic principle. At this point the whole reference comes back in play as its context is necessary to define the radius of the principle, i.e. the range of its application, furthermore the underling goals of the references are picked up for comprehensive presentation of the principle. During this step of the process it becomes obvious that clusters have to be broken up again and material needs to be regrouped, as references often have a multiple nature, i.e. they fit into more than one cluster. The aim is to create a cluster-structure which minimizes multiple relations, but it is clear that they cannot be avoided completely. This fact makes the whole project very complicated. Illustration2 illustrates the open and axial coding:
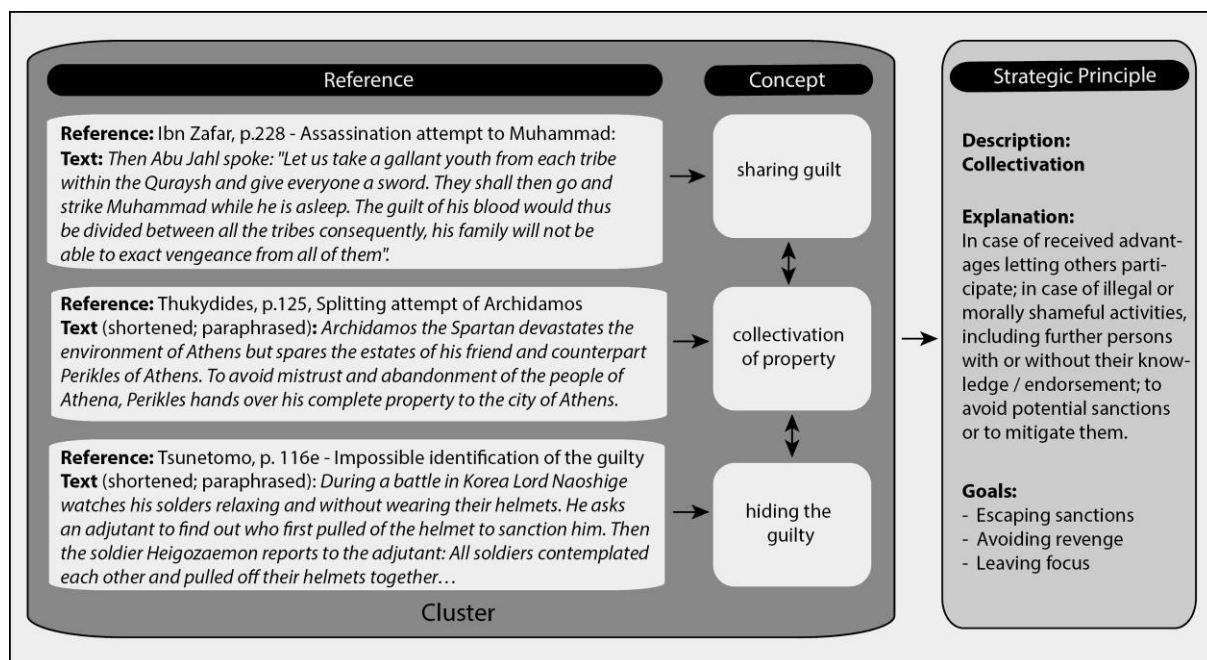


**Illustration 2: From references to principles through open and axial coding**

Another element of the Grounded Theory is systematic comparison (Strauss/Corbin (1998) p.93ee). Especially in this project it is required of the researchers to return permanently to the basic data during the whole process, especially in unclear cases or when new aspects appear. It becomes clear that all the described steps of research do not happen successively, they happen simultaneously, the whole process is a matter of uncountable loops in which all the data must be at the researcher's disposal at every moment. This requires the researcher to proceed in a very conscientious and disciplined way. To ease the work the original project has been realized by means of an electronic database making it possible to jump easily to every data record and to insert single and multiple relations. To make the method of systematic comparison easier to understand see illustration3. It describes the growing of the system of strategic principles. The process starts with the first identified reference that forms the first principle. The second identified reference is verified if it fits an already defined principle: if yes, it is located there (case 1), if not, it forms a new principle (case 2), and so on. If a reference can be located within a defined principle, all the related references of the principle need to be reviewed again, as well as the principle definition itself for fine-tuning purposes. The researcher follows this procedure until the references of the empirical data supply no more new principles, but only additional references for already defined principles. Then saturation is reached. During the research process, saturation was reached after examination of the tenth classic book, all literature analyzed after that only supplied more references, but no new principles.
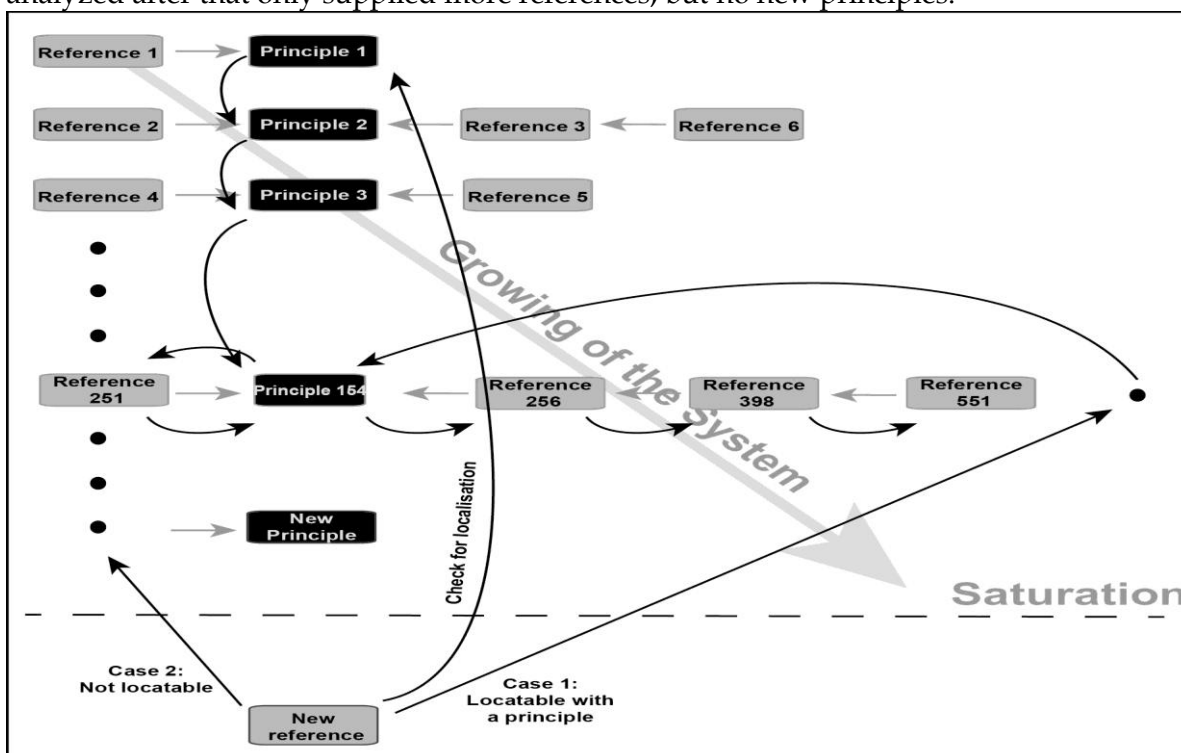


**Illustration 3: Growing of the system by means of systematic comparison**

Once the range of principles has been fixed, the Grounded Theory has served its purpose and further analysis within the new system has to be developed. While working with the empirical data it becomes apparent that the principles are connected with each other. On the one hand there are similarities between them, on the other hand they can function as "counter-principles", i.e. principles to be used to protect oneself against the application of another principle. The latter possibility is very interesting as the question: - *how can one react when the antagonist is applying principle X? -* is always present. Is there a counter-principle that can be

applied to foil the antagonist's activities? The answer to these questions can be found when contemplating the goals of the principles. For example the principle "*last stand*" can be applied by the protagonist to demonstrate the antagonist's maximum fighting spirit and to motivate one's own fellows to fight up to the end, as there is no way out. A goal in this case is to increase fighting morale. The principle "*porous siege*" presenting selected ways out of a hopeless situation to the antagonist aims at reducing the opponent's willingness to fight by giving him hope, which will change his focus. So the principle "*porous siege*" acts in this case as a counter-principle to "*last stand*". After a detailed analysis, the whole system features countless relations between the principles that can be processed by means of the electronic database. Illustration4 illustrates the network with connections which is being developed.
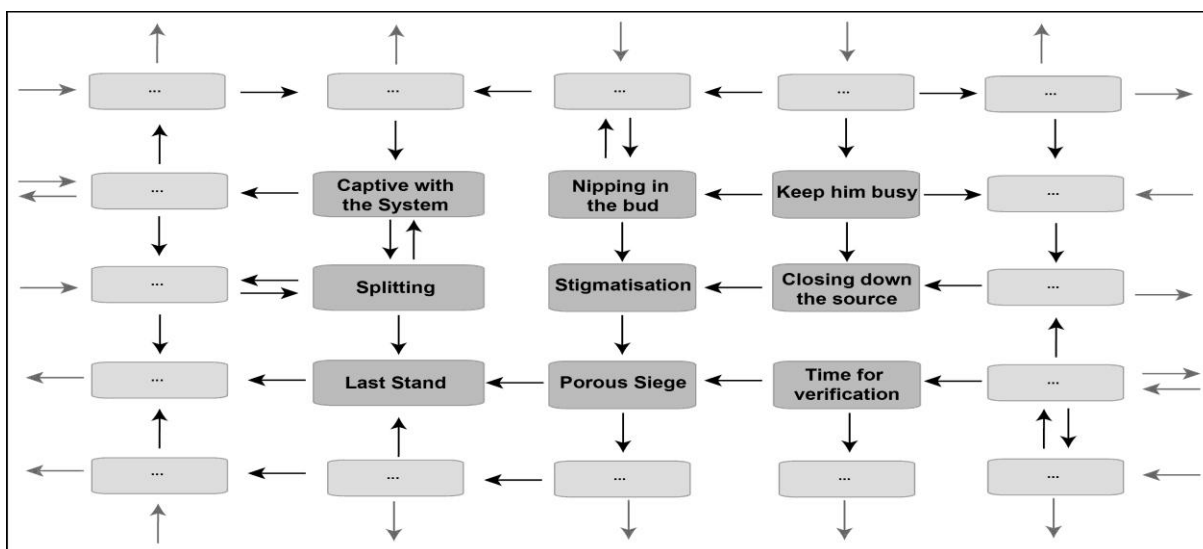


**Illustration 4: Schematic network of principles and their interconnection as counter-principles**

### 3.1  Results of the research

As a result of the research process, a total amount of 592 references has been identified. Out of these, 175 principles have been formulated. The number of relations between them has not been counted so far as new possibilities might emerge. In nearly all cases a principle can be based on two or more references of the classics. Keeping the initial research question in mind, it is still unclear as to whether *all* strategic principles have been found, considering the possibility that certain principles exist but were never described in one of the classics. Given the saturation reached during the investigation it seems nevertheless not too far-fetched to formulate the statement that by and large, the system is complete.

With regards to a later application of the strategic principles the database has been used to add application categories to every principle. E.g. for business studies the categories *Leadership, Marketing, Negotiation, Conflict* and *Communication* are especially interesting. Furthermore a categorization with regards to the type "application-reason" has been carried out. A second categorization by motivation of every principle features information about when the principle is useful, e.g. in the case of *steering others, conflict management, deception, unveiling* or *protection*, it can be stated that all additional information in the system supports further application.

Beside the development of a system of strategic principles a hypothesis about strategic principles emerged: In the majority of the cases the principles were based on similar references

written by different classic authors with different cultural backgrounds from different epochs. There was no real indicator that a core mechanism belonged to a specific civilization. Thus a preliminary conclusion can be drawn, which can be formulated as in a working hypothesis: *strategic principles are timeless and culture-independent.* From a logical point of view this should be the case. At this point the explanations about Martial Arts and the different levels of principle application should be kept in mind: Westerners can learn and exercise Japanese Martial Arts; their bodies have the same number of bones and muscles. As the basic human needs and desires are just as similar everywhere on this planet, why should there be a difference in *basic strategic principle*s? What can be expected, though, are differences in the application of these basic principles in different cultural environments. But the underlying mechanism is the same.

At the end of this chapter, summing up the review of the whole research process as well as the findings, the following definition of strategic principles might be appropriate:

*"Strategic Principles are universal patterns of social interaction the aim of which it is to gain an advantage for the protagonist while the antagonist is not conscious of the underlying mechanism."*

## 3.2 Value for Readers – Developing Social-Strategic-Competence

Skills cannot be taught, they must be developed. This sentence expresses the special role of the student; his or her understanding and willingness are the decisive factors for success. The role of the teacher is to survey the developing process carefully and to interact at certain points by assisting or by giving new input. For that reason the development of a skill rather belongs to the realm of informal learning.

The direct "*gain*" for the reader of this article is to start the ball rolling. Especially supervisors and managers should be encouraged to change their mindsets. It is all about thinking in patterns. When people are able to think in patterns their thought processes become more effective and flexible. Moreover, this will save mental storage capacity and therefore it will relieve our brains.

The patterns of social interaction are all around us, every day, everywhere, if executed in a conscious or unconscious manner. The methods described here can be applied by every person even in everyday life: Observing carefully the activities of the other human beings around you and analyzing the underlying principles might help us to either help them or – if they turn out to be antagonists, to find a counter-strategy.

The final aim of the research project as described here, however, is more ambitious: *It is the development of a multifunctional toolbox applicable in manager training.*

What often causes stress for decision makers is the fact that timeframes to make decisions are getting shorter and shorter. The effect is a rising risk of misjudgment of situations due to lack of information or lack of understanding about the behavior and goals of other agents. Furthermore, decision makers are frequently unaware of all of their options. This does not only cause stress, it also leads to wrong decisions. Thinking in patterns helps to reduce the percentage of wrong decisions. Through the careful analysis of human behavior beforehand, a realistic evaluation of one's own options for action and the synthesis of an appropriate strategy for action, decision makers will become more effective and efficient.

In the course of the research project, the processes and teachings of the academic discipline strategic studies has several times been the focus of attention. For that reason we call the skill the student is supposed to develop with the help of the above- mentioned toolbox: *Social-Strategic-Competence*.

Let us now return to the very beginning of this article and reconsider the three samples of ploy-applicators and try to suggest possible reactions in each of these cases: In the case of the

personal interpreter, the negotiator (3) is hiding his ability to understand the language of the negotiation, thus applying the principle "*hidden talents*". The ensuing translation process gives him twice the time for reflection and reaction. His goal is to gain time and additionally to point out his superior position, as he is accompanied by an assistant. When recognizing this pattern one can counter with the principle "*Flying a kite*", i.e. one can direct the discussion directly to the chief-negotiator through visual contact and try to cause emotional effects through well-chosen questions or statements. Should he react, the masquerade will break down which will cause him embarrassment.

In the case of the customer (2) the principle "*Front Stage*" is being applied. By involving the audience around him while complaining he destabilizes the salesman. The goal of this activity is to put the counterpart under pressure and to increase the likelihood of concession. A good tactic in reaction is to separate the customer from his audience, thus relieving some of the pressure. This can be done by changing the location or timing of the dispute. The counter-principle in this case is "*Back Stage*". The employee (1) uses the principle "*Invisible Structure*". By preventing others from getting insights into his behavior he tries to thwart all steering efforts by his supervisor, which might result in additional workload. The supervisor could apply the principle "*Control through Contact*", the goal of which is to create transparency and to evoke a feeling of control. This can be realized by a framework of close-meshed reporting duties.

Here, the reader should take into consideration that the chosen examples are rather simple. The purpose of presenting them is to create an understanding about their function and the application of strategic principles. Real situations often require a combination of strategic principles to which the antagonist usually tries to react. This engages a free flowing process and makes solutions sometimes very complex.

## 4. Limitations and Further Discussion

The research process about strategic principles featured one problem. From an academic point of view it is always recommended to work with original manuscripts. All the classics wrote in their native languages and in some cases the original manuscript is missing. For this reason it was necessary to use the available literature and translations in English or German. Especially the Japanese Classics had undergone a translation process from Old-Japanese to modern Japanese before they were translated into Western languages. It can be assumed that translation here meant interpretation as well, which has surely led to some misinterpretations and a certain distance to the original thoughts. This fact was known from the very beginning. For that reason one of the initially formulated questions to be kept in mind while collecting the data base focused on the original sense of the reference. If the sense was not clearly reconstructable or ambiguous, then the reference was not considered. Therefore some references are not included, which, however, was not considered a serious problem. The methodology of the Grounded Theory is especially designed to filter out spurious evidence; moreover, the whole research process was characterized by permanent redundancy. As a rule, the principles could be defined through other references.

Moral and Ethics definitely deserve a thorough treatment when investigating strategic principles, as these can be applied in both a harmless or highly reprehensible manner. The classics feature a very heterogenic perspective. In the eyes of Machiavelli moral has no place in a concept of successful leadership, Ibn Zafar, on the contrary, puts a lot of emphasis on ethics and therefore advises the ruler permanently to consider the ethical perspective (Kechichian/Dekmejian (2003) p. 97ee). The two classics represent two poles; the other classics can be located at some point in between. Indeed, ethics is not inherent in strategy teachings. In

the first phase of the project, however, the main issue was to find out what the strategic principles *are*. Their combination, application in full-fledged strategies, possible ways to teach them as well as ethical issues will be part of the following stages of the project.

## 5. Outlook

The result of this research represents an extract of twelve classics from four different civilizations over a period of 2500 years. Their teachings have been condensed to a system of 175 interactive principles and this system represents a comprehensive curriculum. This curriculum can be used as a basis for further research. It can be used in particular for the development of training concepts for leadership, for marketing, communication etc. But also outside the world of business, professionals can be educated in the application of strategic principles to make their daily work easier. All professions that act in the field of social interaction, such as the police, the military or security services can benefit from this knowledge. The challenge in this case is to combine the curriculum with other necessary competences (e.g. rhetoric) and in particular with appropriate teaching methods.

Another question for further research is – *where do these principles come from*, and *why did they develop apparently independent of cultural influences*? Some of the patterns can be observed in the animal world too. For example, ants apply the principle *"Alliance"* as they are not capable of surviving alone. More sophisticated patterns can be identified by observing the strategies of carnivores hunting in packs, such as wolves, orcas or octopuses. At this point the research subject becomes part of anthropological studies.

The question as to the application of the findings comes last. There are various purposes the system can be used for. With its help it is possible to analyze discourses of conflicts or strategic processes in detail to find out preferable patterns of action of strategic players as well as identifying their weak spots. Following the analysis, a synthesis of tactics and strategies is possible by combining the principles. Furthermore, strategic principles can be used for evaluation or for the verification of strategies.

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