

Strategy is dead.

Why are we running our companies as if we were at war? Why do we talk about conquering markets, defeating competition, rallying our teams—using terms like strategy and tactics, all of which have their roots in warfare? Is there not another way?

Of course there is.

Introduction

I always get to where I'm going by walking away from where I've been

- Winnie the Pooh

For decades, organizations have relied on traditional business strategies, mapping out long-term plans based on past trends and assumptions of stability. The core idea behind these approaches is straightforward: predict what is coming and control the outcome. Yet this method rests on a flawed premise — that the future will behave like the past.

It does not.

The world today is fundamentally different. We live in hyperconnected, complex systems where local events can ripple across the globe in unpredictable ways. Hyperconnectivity was already a major topic at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2012, described as an inevitable trend shaping the future. The European Commission later observed that this interconnected world is revolutionizing how we work, produce, and live. Knowledge, governance, and even the concept of freedom are being reshaped by digital networks.

The reality of hyperconnectivity has been starkly illustrated in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflicts have demonstrated how seemingly isolated incidents can disrupt global systems overnight. A health crisis in one region can shut down supply chains, destabilize economies, and alter the way people live and work.

Yet despite these profound shifts, organizations continue to rely on outdated tools like strategy — tools designed for a more predictable, linear world. Traditional strategy assumes a stable environment where progress follows a clear cause-and-effect trajectory. However, this cause-and-effect logic disintegrates the moment an unexpected variable enters the system — be it a pandemic, a conflict, or a technological leap.

In a world of constant flux, organizations must move beyond attempts to control outcomes and instead build systems that can adapt and thrive in uncertainty.

Which raises the question: Why are we still using the tools of the past to navigate the futures?

The Art of War

Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions.

-Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The word strategy has its roots in warfare. Derived from the ancient Greek word strategos, meaning "general," it originally referred to the art of military command. For centuries, strategy was about outmaneuvering enemies, securing territories, and winning battles. Military leaders devised tactics to predict enemy moves, control resources, and achieve victory. This mindset of winning through planning and control carried over into the business world, where companies saw markets as battlefields and competitors as enemies to be conquered.

One of the most influential texts in business strategy remains Sun Tzu's The Art of War, underscoring how deeply rooted the metaphor of warfare is in corporate thinking. Yet while Sun Tzu emphasized adaptability (for example the quote at the start of the section), traditional business strategies have often focused on control and predictability.

Business strategies emerged as an answer to the increasing complexity of the world. After WWII with all the new countries on the map, the geopolitical environment got increasingly uncertain. No wonder that the acronym VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) was coined in that period. Strategy was the linear response by the mechanistic mind - let's erase uncertainty by strategizing. This view overlooks that complexity is not an illness to be cured or a problem to be solved, but an inherent systemic feature we need to work with.

Let's be honest: The metaphor of "winning the war" has overstayed its welcome. It belongs to a world where competition was clear, and outcomes were expectable. That is not the world we live in anymore. We live in a landscape of constant flux. It's not about planting your flag or building a fortress. It's about navigating through the ever-shifting currents, responding to what emerges, and recognizing that control is an illusion.

In short, if your strategy relies on "winning," you've already lost.

From Warfare to Gardening

To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow

- Audrey Hepburn

The modern world isn't a battlefield where victory is defined by borders crossed and enemies defeated. It's more like a garden. Success doesn't come from forcing a plan onto the world; it comes from creating the right conditions for growth. You plant seeds, tend the soil, and nurture what emerges. From "The future of management is teal" by Frederic LeLaloux:

In the Teal paradigm, founders and leaders view the organization as a living entity, with its own energy, sense of direction, and calling to manifest something in the world. They don't force a course of action; they try to listen to where the organization is naturally called to go. None of the organizations I researched has a strategy document. Gone are the often dreaded strategy formulation exercises, and much of the machinery of midterm plans, yearly budgets, cascaded KPIs, and individual targets. Instead of trying to predict and control, they aim to sense and respond.

Gardens can't be controlled. They grow in unpredictable ways, influenced by weather, pests, and seasons. But they can be cultivated. This is the shift organizations need to make: from waging war on uncertainty to working with the evolving ecosystems they're part of.

Or as described in "The future of management is teal" when a successful strategy-less company, FAVI, tries to explain their approach: *FAVI uses a metaphor to explain this. Other companies look five years ahead and make plans for the next year. They prefer to think like farmers: Look 20 years ahead, and plan only for the next day. A farmer must look far out when deciding which fruit trees to plant or which crops to grow. But it makes no sense to plan a precise date for the harvest. One cannot control the weather, the crops, the soil; they all have a life of their own. Sticking rigidly to plan, instead of sensing and adjusting to reality, leads to having the harvest go to waste, which too often happens in organizations.*

Traditional strategy assumes that control is possible. It rests on the idea that the future can be predicted, mapped, and conquered. But this assumption falls apart in a world of constant change and hyperconnectivity.

It's not about drawing a straight line to a fixed goal anymore.

It's about continuously adjusting to what's emerging, nurturing possibilities, and letting go of the illusion of control.

In the words of Donella Meadows; environmental scientist, educator, and writer: *We can't control systems or figure them out. But we can dance with them.*

The dance isn't about conquering enemies. It's about moving with the rhythm of change, co-creating value, and contributing to the broader systems we're part of. Because in a complex world, success isn't something you win—it's something that grows.

Futures thinking: A Generative Approach

Traditional strategy assumes that the future is one destination and that we can draw a straight line to reach it. But in reality, the future is never singular. It unfolds in multiple directions, influenced by countless variables we can't predict or control.

A generative approach doesn't try to lock in a fixed future. Instead, it focuses on alignment in the present while keeping multiple future pathways open.

But alignment doesn't mean wandering aimlessly. It requires a shared direction—a sense of where we're heading together, even if we don't know the exact path. This is where futures thinking becomes essential. Futures thinking isn't about predicting what will happen; it's about holding a range of possibilities in mind and ensuring that present actions remain flexible enough to respond to emerging opportunities.

In markets, this means moving beyond the idea of defeating competitors and recognizing that we share these spaces with others. Generative thinking asks us to contribute to the ecosystem, learning from competitors rather than trying to control the market.

Competitors aren't just threats—they can be sources of learning and inspiration. Markets aren't fixed landscapes—they're living systems that evolve as we engage with them. A rigid strategy limits possibilities. But alignment allows us to stay flexible, explore futures, and adapt as new pathways open.

Generative thinking asks:

- What are we aligned on right now?
- What signals are we seeing in the market?
- What actions can we take today to open future possibilities?

It's about building coherence without forcing control. Generative thinking acknowledges that alignment isn't static. It shifts as we learn, adapt, and sense what's emerging—not just within our organization but across the markets we operate in. It requires us to replace fixed power hierarchies with fluid, natural hierarchies.

Because futures aren't fixed—they're created in motion. And alignment is what helps us move forward together, toward shared possibilities.

Let go of strategy - cultivate growth

We can build successful companies without strategies. We can use our competitors for inspiration, for learning and maybe even for collaboration. And we need to stop dreaming about control, targets, timelines. Instead, there will be opportunities arising that we can grab or let go, explorations that can lead to success or learning. There is no single person that has all the answers, so we will need to work together.

The futures do not care about your strategy. They are already forming. The question is: are you ready to move with them?