



Application 1.2

CHESS AND BUSINESS STRATEGY

Miguel Illescas (*)
EDAMI

Chess is an age-old game, considered to be the paradigm of intelligence in general and of strategy in particular. Financial institutions, large corporations, and other businesses constantly use it as a catchword. Chess involves the recreation of a military engagement, whereby the game provides the players with the opportunity to become generals in command of an army of pawns and pieces that move about the board according to a pre-determined set of rules. As luck plays no part and the difficulty inherent to the game lies on the boundaries of the limits of human intelligence, chess is in a position of superiority over other similar board games. As a combination of sport, science, and art, it provides a three-pronged educational tool of enormous practical value: intellectual training (e.g., memory and logic), character building (e.g., decision-making, dealing with success and failure), and instruction in values (e.g., respect for rules and for one's opponent).

Although tactics and calculation are the game's major components, the real skill lies in mastering its strategic concepts, which provide two types of instruction: generic and specific. The main generic aspects involve the need for an in-depth analysis of the present: a player needs to assimilate as much information as possible regarding their current position and assess it thoroughly before going on to consider specific moves. Some of the game's numerous contributions include situational analysis and contemplating multiple scenarios, as well as developing a strategic mindset.

There is also a set of specific instructions, and a clear parallelism may be drawn between the strategic moves in chess and strategy in general, which means they are invaluable when applied to the field of strategic management. The following are a number of examples of specific skills:

- **Pre-empting an opponent's move:** inductive and deductive procedures; each move responds to a plan, whereby our strategy informs our own moves, while we in turn seek to deduce our opponent's strategy from their moves. A strategy needs to adapt to each new circumstance through a process of analytical reassessment and feedback.
- **Exploiting weak points:** a strategy of amassing forces; following the expected stalemate between attack and defence, freedom of action is used to open a new front that the opponent cannot defend in time.
- **Principle of control of the centre and its actions:** rebuffing attacks on the flanks by means of a timely counterattack through the middle. Stabilising the centre before undertaking flanking operations.

The world chess champions are also the foremost exponents of the development of strategy. Steinitz said: "The right to attack belongs to the side that has a positional advantage", Lasker: "The aim is to find the best move against a specific opponent, bearing in mind their characteristics and playing style", and Capablanca: "Exploiting an advantage is one of the main weapons of the stronger side: the aim is to seek ever greater and more permanent advantages". Thus, the strategic laws that govern the world of chess have gradually been laid down over the centuries. These laws can be extrapolated to any field of human





endeavour in which there is a battle of wills fought through intelligence. Such is the case with business strategy.

(*) International Chess Grandmaster. Trainer of the World Champion Vladimir Kramnik and Principal of the EDAMI chess school (www.edami.com).

Date of application: August 2022

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