

The ACS Business War-Gaming Bibliography

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Introduction

ACS has conducted hundreds of [business war games](#) on six continents. Those war games have helped companies make or save billions of dollars, and they have helped thousands of strategists [become better strategists](#).

About half of our business war games have been on behalf of *Fortune* 500 companies, in a wide variety of industries, addressing specific decisions. The others have been in educational programs at conferences and universities.

ACS has written many articles and essays on business war-gaming based on that real-life experience in problem-solving and skills-building. This Bibliography summarizes those articles and essays. It provides links to full text online.

Unless noted otherwise, all were written by ACS Founder Mark Chussil.

If you're short on time (and who isn't), start here

A description of [ACS business war games](#), including stories from actual war games.

[Why Business War Games Work: You Ask Better Questions, You Get Better Answers](#), Competitive Intelligence Magazine, October/December 2012

Business war games, in my experience, provide outstanding insights that greatly impact bottom lines. But why? What is it about business war games that produces insights that evidently elude other approaches?

["Rally the Troops" and Other Business Metaphors You Can Do Without](#), Harvard Business Review, November 24, 2016

Perhaps it's the language we businesspeople use. Capture market share. Steal customers. Defend position. Rally the troops. Establish a beachhead. Counterattack. Alas, the war metaphor even invades the business war games I conduct in my practice. I tried calling them "strategy games" but people looked at me as though I were a draft dodger.

Articles and essays about business war-gaming

[Business War Games](#), SCIP.Online, November 2002

Business war games can be hugely and dramatically effective, and yet few managers know how to design or select a business war game, or how and when a business war game can add value. This article presents key concepts and options for any company interested in business war games.

[Don't Let Your Mistakes Go to Waste](#), Harvard Business Review, March 1, 2016

We all know that our gotcha culture demands perfection. We all know too that mistakes are inevitable even as risk-taking is necessary. The solution is not to tolerate mistakes or avoid risk. The solution is to confirm less and challenge more. That means we need more than opportunities to make cheap mistakes; we need to understand why we made the mistakes.

[Honey, We Shrunk the Industry: An Automotive War Game](#), Competitive Intelligence Magazine, July/August 2009

A business war game. Five automotive teams: Ford, GM, Hyundai, Toyota, Volkswagen. One set of customer judges, one set of investor judges. Three market segments. Fascinating, unexpected results.

The teams were smart and they wanted to win. Yet collectively their decisions subtracted value from the industry: four out of five would have been better off if they'd done nothing at all and repeated last year's moves for two more years. The fifth team had problems of its own – appearing to be successful, but leaving many billions of dollars on the table.

[Honey, We Shrunk the Industry Again: Another War Game About Automobiles](#), October 2009

We've run it again: a business war game on the automobile industry. It was to demonstrate war-gaming, not to solve the industry's problems. That said, it revealed a lot about what goes right and what goes wrong when people develop competitive strategies.

[House, MBA: What Strategists Can Learn from TV's Nastiest Doctor](#), October 2019

What can we learn about business diagnosis from TV's nastiest doctor? Quite a bit. We take a look at Safeway and Supervalu pricing on our rounds.

[Learning Faster Than the Competition: War Games Give the Advantage](#), The Journal of Business Strategy, January-February 2007

Business war games help managers anticipate, respond to, and even induce change. They're needed because the greater the change the more trends don't hold, experience doesn't fit, benchmarks don't apply, and previous strategies don't work. There is no universally accepted meaning for the term "business war game," let alone the practice of business war-

gaming. This article discusses how to assess and implement a business war game for your company.

[Question What You “Know” About Strategy](#), Harvard Business Review, July 30, 2016

Fortunes are made by noticing such practices and challenging the assumptions behind them. Companies are lost by hardening common practices into shackles. Fortunately, breaking rules is free. All you need is curiosity, attentiveness, and the courage to challenge conventional wisdom.

[Taking the Stress Test: Not Only for Banks](#), May 2009

Don't we all wish that the stress tests of banks had been done, say, a year and a half ago? The case for running our own stress tests on our businesses.

[The Seven Deadly Sins of Business War Games](#), SCIP.Online, May 2003

Having conducted business war games for dozens of the world's largest companies, we've learned a lot about what to do, and what not to do. This article (which includes a bonus deadly sin, for a total of eight) helps strategists design business war games that work.

[The War \(Game\) Metaphor: Or, My Discomfort with What I Do](#), November 2010

This is something I've learned from all those war games: Watch out for the war metaphor in your strategic thinking, and challenge it if you see it. The challenge doesn't cost you anything. You can always go back to the war metaphor if you really think it works.

[There's a Mental Model in Your Head](#), Competitive Intelligence Magazine, January 2020

This article is about the reflexive, self-evidently true mental models that you, I, and every other businessperson on Earth use to make business decisions. It is about gaining competitive advantage by recognizing, challenging, and refining our mental models and the computer models based on them.

It matters because there is always a model when we make decisions. Always. That's one of the five rules of models. We'll meet the other four later.

Articles and essays indirectly about business war-gaming

[A Tournament Pits Strategists Against Each Other to See What Works](#), Harvard Business Review, June 8, 2015

It'd be helpful to run experiments. Unfortunately, there's no such thing as a double-blind randomized controlled trial in business. What placebo would businesses take? What businesses would sign up to take it?

I've been working on a different approach. If we can't experiment on real-life strategists running real-life businesses, how about if we experiment on real-life strategists running simulated businesses? We can find out how strategically people think and how well they perform.

[Getting Smart and Not Predicting the Future](#), Competitive Intelligence Magazine, January 2020

We don't know as much as we think we do. The sad proof is all around us. Think, for example, about the big-name companies that have slipped, slumped, and sunk.

Here's one thing they have in common: None of them wanted to slip, slump, or sink. Here's another: All of them were led by smart, motivated, data-rich people who wanted to soar. Like businesspeople around the world, they were well aware of the usual dangers — short-term focus, excessive cost-cutting, inattention to customers, and the dreaded "D" word — and they thought they knew what to do. And yet.

[Gross Galactic Product: Growth Rates, Stock Prices, and Thinking Differently in a Crisis](#), October 2008

How big would Google be if its recent growth weren't "as bad as some had feared"? We know growth doesn't go on forever, but our quest for bigger and better every year leads to trouble. How can executives know when they cross the line from building up to propping up to puffing up?

[How the Very Best Strategists Decide](#), Harvard Business Review, October 24, 2016

How did the plan get so far? The company didn't have a death wish, and its strategists weren't deficient. The problem was that their strategy development and internal reviews, like those in many companies, didn't account for competitive dynamics.

[I Didn't Know You Could Do That: Disaster in Simulations Leads to Progress in Real Life](#), August 2008

The best insights often come from surprises, and the best surprises often come from simulations. Here we'll talk about surprises in both business and crisis simulations, and actionable insights.

[Millions of Pricing Simulations](#), February 2009

Have you ever seen 36,270 what-if's on your strategy ideas? Have you ever seen your 36,270 what-if's compared in a universe of 5,658,120 simulations? That's what ACS did for over 150 strategists competing in the [Top Pricer Tournament](#). *Note: the 150 and 36,270 were accurate at the time the article appeared. Today's numbers are almost 2,000 and almost 2 million.*

[No One Can Think Outside the Box](#), Harvard Business Review, June 5, 2016

Agility is much in demand. It doesn't, or at least shouldn't, merely mean hair-trigger reflexes. *Something happened! Do something, quickly!*

Agility means doing something *smart*, quickly. Here are some get-smart-fast methods I've learned while war-gaming and simulating Fortune 500 companies. Each of them involves noticing and switching boxes.

[Paying for Bad News](#), Competitive Intelligence Magazine, April-June 2012

I'm not saying the Closed Minds, Distorted Markets, and Stormy World themes are wrong. I am saying I don't think the evidence establishes they're right. They might be right, but they're not right yet. Until they are right I believe it's worth considering other perspectives.

[Practice Makes Much, Much Better](#), Homeland Defense Journal, July 2007

Nobody ever intentionally makes bad decisions, yet bad decisions get made. Nobody ever writes a plan that they expect will fail, yet plans fail. We have a choice: We can learn from experience, or we can learn before experience. We can learn where it's dangerous, or we can learn where it's safe.

[Putting the Lesson Before the Test: Using Simulation to Analyze and Develop Competitive Strategies](#), with David J. Reibstein. A chapter in *Wharton on Dynamic Competitive Strategy*, George S. Day and David J. Reibstein (editors), John Wiley, 1997. *Putting the Lesson Before the Test* was reprinted by *Competitive Intelligence Review* and *Marketing Research*.

Simulation can play a powerful role in developing and analyzing competitive-strategy options. Using simulation, managers have developed successful strategies, anticipated events that later occurred in real life, and learned about strategy, and their own businesses, at each step of the simulation process. Simulations give managers something that athletes have always had: the ability to practice before facing actual competitors.

[Resisting Change: Overcoming Impediments to Creativity](#), July 2008

As human beings we are all familiar with the dig-in-our-heels sensation of resisting change. How do we know in which changes we ought to invest our time and treasure?

[Strategy Cyborgs and Ten Gigasims](#), November 2019

Everyone who enters the Top Pricer Tournament thinks their strategies will work. We know that because no one says, "I've got a good strategy and I've got a bad strategy, I think I'll use the bad strategy." But performance in the Tournament has varied widely.

[The How-Likely Case: When the Most-Likely Scenario Isn't Likely at All](#), May 2010

Strategists commonly analyze best-case, worst-case, and most-likely scenarios before making a significant strategy decision. That covers about 0.000007618% of the possibilities. I am not making up that number.

[The Imagination Multiplier](#), December 2018

The key step is to focus less on post-mortems and more on pre-mortems. There's limited value in second-guessing "what happened" in retrospect. There's far more value in multiplying our imagination in advance, when we can raise the quality of our decisions and the astuteness of our bets before we bet real money.

[Tripling Sales: A Conflict](#), June 2013

Due diligence may not protect you from frenzies of advocacy. At its worst, it's like signing an ill-advised legal document because the spell-check said it was okay. Think it doesn't happen? Remember that no one invests in a strategy or business expecting it to fail, yet somehow smart people invest in strategies and businesses that fail.

[True-Due Diligence: Or, Avoiding Failure When Due Diligence Says You'll Succeed](#), November 2010

The outcome was not only to resolve the classic conflict of top-management stretch goals versus product-management practicality. It was also to preclude the equally classic conflict that comes later, the one about underperforming versus overexpecting.

["We Are Fully Prepared"; Or, Why Plans Fail](#), Crisis Times, April 2006. Reprinted in *Contingency Planning & Management* – Global Assurance, March 2007.

We often ask – especially after a disaster – how we can hold people more accountable or get rid of those incompetents who failed to implement the plan. But maybe, to quote former Intel CEO Andy Grove, "That is not the right question." Maybe the right question, therefore, is why did people believe we were prepared when we were not? And how can we do a better job of preparing for crises, or even preventing them?

[What If? How to Create a Great Strategy](#), Competia Magazine, December 2002

What if you could answer your what-if questions before you make a key strategy decision? What if you could realistically and rigorously test your options before you committed real money? What if you could raise the odds that you'd make wise decisions and create a great strategy? As this article describes and illustrates, that's what strategy simulation is for. So: what if you investigated strategy simulation?

[What We Know That Ain't So](#), Crisis Times, February 2006. Reprinted in CSOnline.com, NAMIC online, and in NAMIC's In magazine. NAMIC is the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies.

This is the true story of how a multinational company successfully avoided a business crisis. The moral of the story applies as well to government as it does to industry.

An event that threatens a business's survival is a crisis. Not every crisis arrives with a neon light announcing "Crisis! Crisis!" Sometimes, like a cancer, it grows slowly. Did Sears pay attention when Sam Walton opened his first store? Did General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler worry when Japanese econoboxes came to America in the 1970s? Based on results, apparently not. Today Wal-Mart is seven times the size of Sears, and GM, Ford, and Chrysler are desperately fighting for their lives.

[When I Was Wrong](#), November 2008

This essay starts with a shocking pricing tournament and proceeds to the challenges faced by President-elect Obama and the titans of industry. All of us are human and so all of us will be wrong. What's important is when we make our mistakes.

[With All This Intelligence, Why Don't We Have Better Strategies?](#), The Journal of Business Strategy, January-February 2005

With all our skills, data, enthusiasm, opportunities, knowledge, motivation, and power, why do we produce strategies that fail? This article discusses the inherent shortcomings in conventional models and human thinking that make it easy for even the best strategists to fall into bad strategy decisions. It concludes with practical advice to help strategists improve creative thinking and decision-making.

[You've Got the Data. Now What?](#) A chapter in *Starting a CI Function*, Ken Sawka and Bonnie Hohhof (editors), The CI Foundation, 2008

Most strategy challenges cannot be solved — emphasis on solved, not merely "responded to" — with data and information alone. Instead, they must be solved by combining intelligence (knowledge) with intelligence (human decision making). This book chapter discusses hidden traps that bedevil strategy decision-making: conventional tools, overconfidence, innumeracy, monsters, and obviousness.

About the Author

[Mark Chussil](#) is Founder of [Advanced Competitive Strategies, Inc.](#), and Adjunct Instructor at the Pamplin School of Business at the University of Portland.

A highly rated and entertaining speaker who can run a billion simulations before breakfast, Mark conducts workshops about strategic thinking in corporations, at conferences, and in MBA programs. A pioneer in business war-gaming and strategy simulation, and a 40-year veteran of competitive strategy, Mark's technologies have won a patent and a best-in-class award. He has designed strategy simulations and conducted business war games for dozens of *Fortune 500* companies, in many industries, around the world.

Mark's business war games and simulations have helped ACS clients add billions of dollars to their bottom lines. His programs on strategic thinking have helped thousands of strategists become better strategists.

Mark has written three books, chapters for five others, and numerous articles in the *Harvard Business Review* online and elsewhere. He has been quoted in *Fast Company*, *Harvard Management Update*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other publications. His most-recent book, co-authored with Benjamin Gilad, is [The NEW Employee Manual: A No-Holds-Barred Look at Corporate Life](#). Harvard Business School has given Mark's book [Nice Start: Questions Only You Can Answer to Create the Life Only You Can Live](#) to alumni returning for reunions, and had Mark address two HBS reunions.

Mark earned his M.B.A. at Harvard University and his B.A. at Yale University. He was elected a Fellow of Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals ([SCIP](#)) in 2013. He served on the Board of Directors of [Friends of the Children](#) for eight years and chaired the pro bono Community Partners program of the [Harvard Business School Association of Oregon](#) for five years.

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