

System Approach Concept as Teaching Tool of Strategic Management Fundamentals

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This paper presents the concept of a systemic approach in teaching the fundamentals of strategic management. Basing on the traditional typologies of organizations strategies the general map of strategies was proposed aiming to introduce students to the problems of strategy selection. As the tool for ordering the map of strategies the SWOT/TOWS matrix has been selected. The part of the particular strategies has been taken from typologies of Porter, Bowman and Ansoff. Basing on these typologies two versions of the map of strategies were developed. The first one includes 9 specific strategies and the other – 13. The strategies are grouped into four groups: aggressive strategies, conservative ones, competition ones and recovery ones. The developed maps of strategies allow more flexible analyzing of the strategy selection process and the relationship between them and their evolution.

Keywords: map of strategies, fundamental strategies.

Introduction

The system approach in every science discipline has a number of advantages. One of its core advantages is the ability to systematize the knowledge about the investigated area. It also allows for easier creating mental models related to the researched area. In the case of strategic management this approach refers mainly to certain, chosen areas of narrow investigations. An example of this trend is the typology of strategies proposed by Porter. Basing on the analysis of five competitive market forces (five forces model) he proposed three potentially successful strategic approaches for market competition called the generic strategies¹. These approaches are:

¹ M. E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, The Free Press, New York 1980, p. 35.

- overall cost leadership,
- differentiation,
- focus.

The aim of the first strategy is to achieve cost leadership through the implementation of *a set of functional policies aimed at this basic objective*². This strategy requires construction of aggressive efficient-scale facilities, pursues the cost reduction based on the experience of the organization, strengthens control mechanisms, avoids extreme customer expectations and minimizes costs in all areas of the organization. Porter's second strategy is differentiation, which refers to both products and services. This means the creation of such an offer, which *is perceived industrywide as being unique*³. Differentiation can take many forms. The most common include the creation of: the unique image of a product or brand, the unique characteristics of the product, the unique process, the unique customer service or sales of the same product. Finally, the focus strategy is the strategy focusing on specific groups of customers, processes (segments of the product line) or locations of markets⁴. Its effectiveness is associated with the higher operating efficiency in the narrow strategic area than the competitors one.

Another example of a typology of the organization strategies is the Bowman strategic clock concept⁵. This concept is an extension of the typology proposed by Porter. It is based on two axes of the analysis⁶. The first is the offered price, which is considered in terms of the standard price. This axis is divided into three categories of prices: low, standard, high. The second axis is the value of the offer perceived by the customer. In this category Bowman and Faulkner also distinguished three categories of relation between the value and the price. It makes possible to identify eight generic strategies (Fig. 1). It should be noted that they indicated on the eight strategies in their approach because there is no proposed strategy corresponding to the category of an average price and average value. These eight strategies include⁷:

- differentiation,
- focused differentiation,

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem, p. 37.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 38.

⁵ C. Bowman, D. Faulkner, *Competitive and Corporate Strategy*, Irwin Professional Publishing, London 1996.

⁶ G. Johnson, K. Scholes, R. Whittington, *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, Prentice Hall Financial Times, London 2008, p. 225.

⁷ Ibidem.

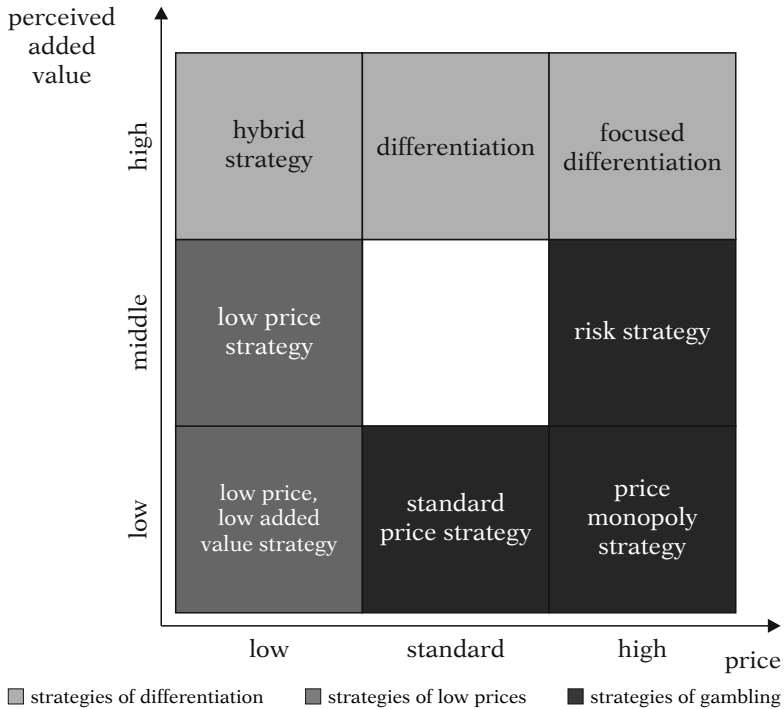
- hybrid strategy,
- low price strategy,
- strategy of low price and low added value,
- risk strategy,
- price monopoly strategy,
- standard price strategy.

The first three strategies are defined as strategies of differentiation. Differentiation as a strategy is the approach in which the organization provides its customers with the standard product that they rate as very valuable. The aim of the organization is to either increase market share or increase the price of the product (establishment the price of premium type). Examples of organizations implementing such a strategy are the manufacturers of branded sports equipment. Focused differentiation strategy is typical for organizations offering luxury products. Prices of products are very high but this is the offer for the rich and snobbish customers. This is the objective of this offer. Apple corporation is a good example of this strategy. Finally, the hybrid strategy is the strategy of building the market image of a purveyor whose valuable offer is characterized by low prices (fair prices). This strategy is based on the sales volume. It is applied among others by discount stores creating loyal customers.

The second group of strategies includes the strategies of low prices. It includes two approaches: a low price strategy and the strategy of the lack of extras (strategy of low price and low added value). The former one refers to products evaluated by the customers as of standard (average) value. This strategy is the strategy of price leadership. One can associate it with the Porter's cost leadership strategy. In the organizations utilizing this strategy the size of the profit is small, which implies the need of precise cost management because the margin of an error is small. This strategy is also based on a very large volume of sales. The example of such a strategy are supermarket chains.

The latter strategy (no extras), is the more specific approach. It means the total sales without the classification of an assortment (called "bargain basement" bin sale). Sometimes it is of a compulsory character. Elements of the success of this strategy are: very large volume of sales and continued acquiring of new customers. This strategy does not create a loyal group of customers. Examples of organizations using this approach are bazaar type shops, such as the so called Chinese shops, offering mass-produced Chinese goods. The offered products are of poor quality, but the offered prices are interesting enough for customers to ignore the poor quality or lack of it. Sometimes the prices are so low that they even compensate for the risk of a single use of the product.

Figure 1. Bowman's strategic matrix



Source: G. Johnson *et al.*, *Exploring Corporate...*, op. cit., p. 225.

Finally, the last group of the strategies are the gambling strategies. They are generally not recommendable, since they lead to the increased market war. The first is the risk strategy. It is based on the average offer preparation offered at the high price. The increasing in prices has no market reasons. It has the nature of a game of chance with the market because the organization counts only on the low level of consumers market knowledge and poor communication channels. If the new price is accepted, that increases the profitability of the organization (win) and if it does not, the organization loses its market share (loss). Risk strategy should be treated as short-term, even if it is winning, because in competitive market it quickly loses its strengths. It is more effective in the case of the lack of access of the market to reliable information. Hence, organizations are trying to conceal information about the actual costs of their activities and processes as they may affect the market perception of the value of their offer. The next strategy is the price monopoly (low valued products offered at a high price). The prerequisite of this strategy is to have a monopoly for a particular product or service. Therefore, the price can be determined

regardless of the economic analysis (of course much higher than the cost level). A negative example of this strategy is the illegal drug dealing. Cost of raw materials and logistics process are disproportionately low in relation to the offered price. The monopoly situation in this case is created by the criminal law. The last strategy in this group is the strategy of standard price for low value products. This approach always leads to a loss of market share. Hence, it should be determined as irrational. It is treated as an emergency strategy, which aims to improve the accounting liquidity of the organization. If it fails, the only solution is to cut prices, which leads to the strategy of low prices.

The two examples presented (Porter's typology and the Bowman clock) show how varied may be the approaches to the problem of building the organization strategy typologies. Moreover the presented typologies do not include all the basic strategies of the organization. One can point to the Ansoff strategy matrix as an example. The number of different strategies elaborated by different organizations in different market and inner conditions is large. One of the reasons seems to be the lack of proper ordering rules. Every investigator presents mainly his point of view presenting only the strategies that are compatible with it. So the need for the general view on strategy typology and mutual relations is important. The next chapter presents the concept of such an approach basing on the most popular tool from the area of strategic management.

1. SWOT/TOWS matrix as an ordering tool

The most general tool used in the strategic analysis of an organization is the SWOT matrix. It was founded as the SOFT matrix as a tool of firm analysis⁸. It was developed in the sixties by the Albert Humphrey team⁹. In the SOFT matrix only the time aspect was considered and not the configuration of the internal and environmental factors of the organization as in the SWOT matrix¹⁰. From the perspective of the present it considered the solution that is satisfactory for the organization (and its stakeholders), or those solutions that are faulty in the operation of the organization. In the future, however the attention was drawn to the opportunities and threats. In 1964, Urick and Orr changed one of the factors, namely the faults for weaknesses and the whole analysis they

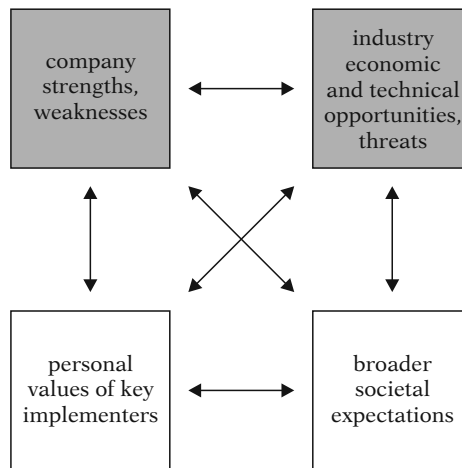
⁸ <http://rapidbi.com/created/swotanalysis/>.

⁹ <http://www.businessballs.com/swotanalysisfreetemplate.htm>. Together with Albert Humphrey the team was created by: Marion Doshier, Otis Benepe, Robert Stewart and Birger Lie.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. This aspect presents the sentence: *What is good in the present is Satisfactory, good in the future is an Opportunity; bad in the present is a Fault and bad in the future is a Threat.*

called SWOT¹¹. Categories, which include SOFT/SWOT matrix are: products, processes, customers, distribution, finance and management¹². Currently the anagram SWOT is read as: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The first two relate to the analyzed inner characteristics of the organization and the other two are the characteristics of the environment. This way of understanding this matrix was presented in 1969¹³. It is based on developed by Edmund Learned, Carl Christiansen, Kenneth Andrews and William Guth's a strategic planning model. From their names it is referred as the LCAG model. This model is shown in the Figure 2. SWOT matrix elements form the upper part of the LCAG model. In addition, the model takes into account the personal characteristics of strategy implementers and the expectations of a society seen in a broader perspective than that which is considered using the opportunities and threats factors.

Figure 2. LCAG model



Source: M. E. Porter, *The Contributions of Industrial...*, op. cit., p. 610.

In the early eighties Heinz Wehrich pointed out the faulty use of the SWOT matrix in business. In his opinion the strategic analysis remained at the stage of appointment the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. But no effort was undertaken to identify possible strategies resulting

¹¹ Ibidem. On the seminar about long-term planning in Dolder Grand, Zurich.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ E. P. Learned, C. R. Christensen, K. R. Andrews, W. D. Guth, *Business Policy: Text and Cases*, Irwin, Homewood 1969.

from the four factors of the SWOT matrix¹⁴. So he proposed the SWOT/TOWS approach¹⁵. One can mention that Wehrich pointed out that factors for the SWOT/TOWS analysis should be sought among the following groups: economic, social, political, demographic, products and technologies and the market and competition. Some of these factors also appear in the PEST analysis, which refers to the analysis of the environment on the macro scale. It includes the following factors: political, economic, social and technological¹⁶.

In the SWOT/TOWS approach Wehrich introduced additional analysis of correlation between internal and external factors. Thus he pointed out four possible strategic options¹⁷: strengths-opportunities (SO), strengths-threats (ST), weaknesses-opportunities (WO), weaknesses-threats (WT). These options indicate the four general mega-strategies. Also they are described as: maxi-maxi, maxi-mini, mini-maxi and mini-mini strategies. In the case of the SO strategy the objective should be to *maximization* the strengths of the organization using the opportunities of the environment or *maximization* the opportunities using the strengths of the organization. All resources of the organization should be directed to expand its market offer. Whereas the ST strategy tends to *maximize* the objective strengths of the organization in the context of diagnosed threats or to *minimize* diagnosed threads using the strengths of the organization, the other two strategies relate to the organization dominated by weaknesses. The aim of the WO strategy is to *minimize* the diagnosed weaknesses using the opportunities or to *maximize* opportunities in the context of the diagnosed weaknesses. One possible option is the cooperation with other organizations. Finally, the aim of the WT strategy is to *minimize* organization weaknesses in the context of the identified threats or to *minimize* the impact of threats in the context of the identified weaknesses. These four strategies can be defined as: aggressive (SO), conservative (ST), competitive (WO) and correction (WT). Obłój describes these groups of strategies as: aggressive, conservative, competitive and defensive¹⁸.

¹⁴ <http://www.v7n.com/forums/marketing-forum/31483-swot-analysis-history.html>. According to the Wehrich opinion on the forum on the SWOT/TOWS history.

¹⁵ H. Wehrich, *The TOWS Matrix ...*, op. cit.

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEST_analysis. The mentioned group of factors is completed also with next other factors like: law (SLEPT analysis), environment (PESTEL, PESTLE analyses), ethical and demographic (STEEPLE, STEEPLED analyses). The other approach is the STEER analysis, which includes nest factors: social-cultural, technological, economic, ecological and factors regulating the business activity or the EPISTEL analysis (factors: environmental, political, informative, social, technological, economic and law).

¹⁷ H. Wehrich, *The TOWS Matrix-A Tool for Situational Analysis*, "Long Range Planning" 1982, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 60.

¹⁸ K. Obłój, *Strategia organizacji*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2001, p. 182.

It should be also considered the SPACE matrix (*Strategic Position and Action Evaluation*)¹⁹ that is similar to the SWOT/TOWS matrix. In this matrix are considered two groups of factors: internal and external, the same as in the SWOT matrix. In terms of internal factors stand out: the financial strength (for example, the rate of return, profitability, liquidity, leverage) and competitive advantage (for example, market position, ability to create innovation, product life curve). The external factors are: the stability of the environment (for example: inflation, unemployment, national income) and the strength of the industry (this term includes factors included in the Porter's model of five forces).

Depending on the combination of internal and external factors also four mega-strategies are possible²⁰. Financial strength and strong industry indicate the possibility of the aggressive strategy. It could be realized for instance through the market development or market penetration. Thus, it resembles the aggressive strategy of the SWOT/TOWS. Financial strength and stable environment indicate the conservative strategy. It involves the development of the competitive offer that allow achieving and maintaining the financial stability. In addition the tight cost control is important. This strategy directly corresponds to the conservative strategies from SWOT/TOWS matrix. The third is the combination of strong competitive advantage and industry. These factors point to the competitive strategy. This strategy can be implemented, e.g., by obtaining financial resources, creating alliances or improving production processes or through marketing activities. One can link it with the strategy of competition in the SWOT/TOWS matrix. Finally, the last of the mega-strategies is the defense strategy. It corresponds to a combination of factors such as competitive advantage and stable environment. Its elements are the different types of restructuring allowing for better matching of activities of the organization to market requirements. This strategy can be compared with the correction strategy.

2. General classification of organization strategies

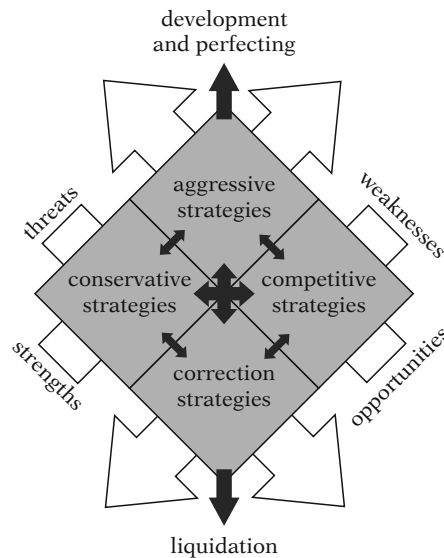
The presented analysis allows for the adoption of the model of four general strategies, which includes the following elements: aggressive strategies, conservative strategies, competitive strategies and correction strategies

¹⁹ <http://www.maxi-pedia.com/SPACE+matrix+model+strategic+management+method>.

²⁰ L. E. Swayne, W. J. Duncan, P. M. Ginter, *Strategic management of Health Care Organizations*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2006, p. 300.

(defensive). The arrangement of these strategies are presented in the Figure 3. This system is a kind of a map of strategic approaches. As desired (on top of the map) are shown the aggressive strategies. The arrow up suggests the possibility of continuous improvement and perfecting within this group of strategies. The organization that carries out this strategies is, among others, Hewlett Packard Corporation. The part of this strategy, in the case of HP, is the leadership in product innovation. On the lower level are placed other two groups of strategies: conservative and competitive. The arrows between the that groups show how the strategy may change with the changes of the organization and its environment. Thus, aggressive strategies may turn into conservative strategies (with an increase of threats) or competitive strategies (with an increase of weaknesses). They can also change in the correction strategies if both of these factors are cumulated. An example of this last situation are changes in the General Motors Corporation, nationalized in 2008 as a result of the crisis ²¹.

Figure 3. A set of four general strategies of an organization



Source: own elaboration.

Accordingly, as mentioned before, on the lowest level of interest are classified the correction strategies. The arrow down indicates that one of its

²¹ GM Corporation filed for bankruptcy June 1, 2009. A month later (July 11) was purchased by the U.S. Treasury Department and now works as the GM Company.

elements is the complete liquidation of an organization. The obvious is the ability to move from less desirable strategies towards more desirable ones. E.g., the Rolls-Royce Corporation in 1973 carried out in cooperation with the British government – the corrective procedure involving the nationalization of the company and its partition into two separate companies: the engines manufacturer and car manufacturer. Currently, the first one company (engines manufacturer²²) in terms of power is in the second place in this industry in the world. So in this case the correction strategy it is possible to reach the area of aggressive strategies. It should be noted that the fate of RR car manufacturer turned out differently.

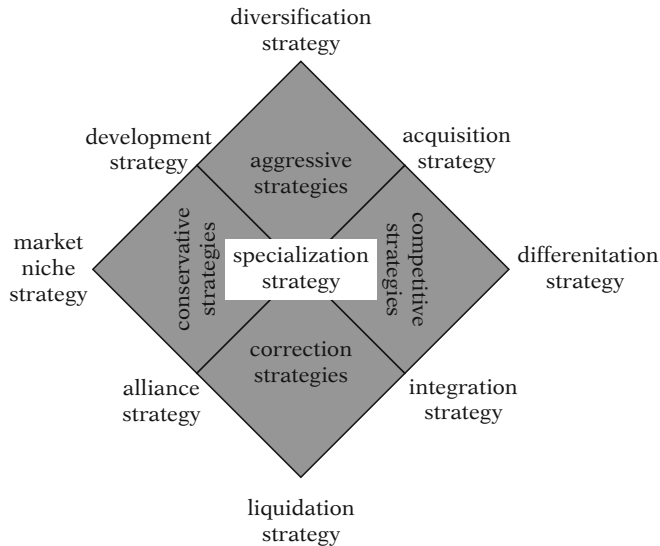
The present system of basic strategies can be seen as a specific map that allows to deploy the specific strategies. On the other hand, it shows the inter-relations of different strategies. It helps to understand how complex is the problem of determining the strategy of the organization and what kind of dynamics occurs at this point. Moreover, the map allows for imaging the problems of strategy determining.

3. Detailed map of the organization strategies

The map of specific strategies is a kind of a detailed guide showing not only their location in a relation to the groups of basic mega-strategies, but also defines the general characteristics identified in the context of the general strategies. Basing on the literature researches and own investigations nine specific strategies that have been located on the proposed map of strategies have been chosen. This map is shown in the Figure 4. In this way, the first-level strategy map has been elaborated. It should be noted that the strategies located on the border areas of the general strategies are ambivalent. They are characterized by both the elements associated with one or another group of general strategies. In this context, the most specific is the specialization strategy, showing characteristics of all four groups of general strategies. Also there are distinguished four strategies specific to each of the four general groups of strategies. These strategies include: diversification strategy (aggressive strategies), market niche strategy (conservative strategies), differentiation strategy (competitive strategies) and liquidation strategy (correction strategies). These strategies form the vertices of the square area representing the described map of strategies.

²² <http://www.rolls-royce.com/about/index.jsp>.

Figure 4. Map of specific strategies (1st level)



Source: own elaboration.

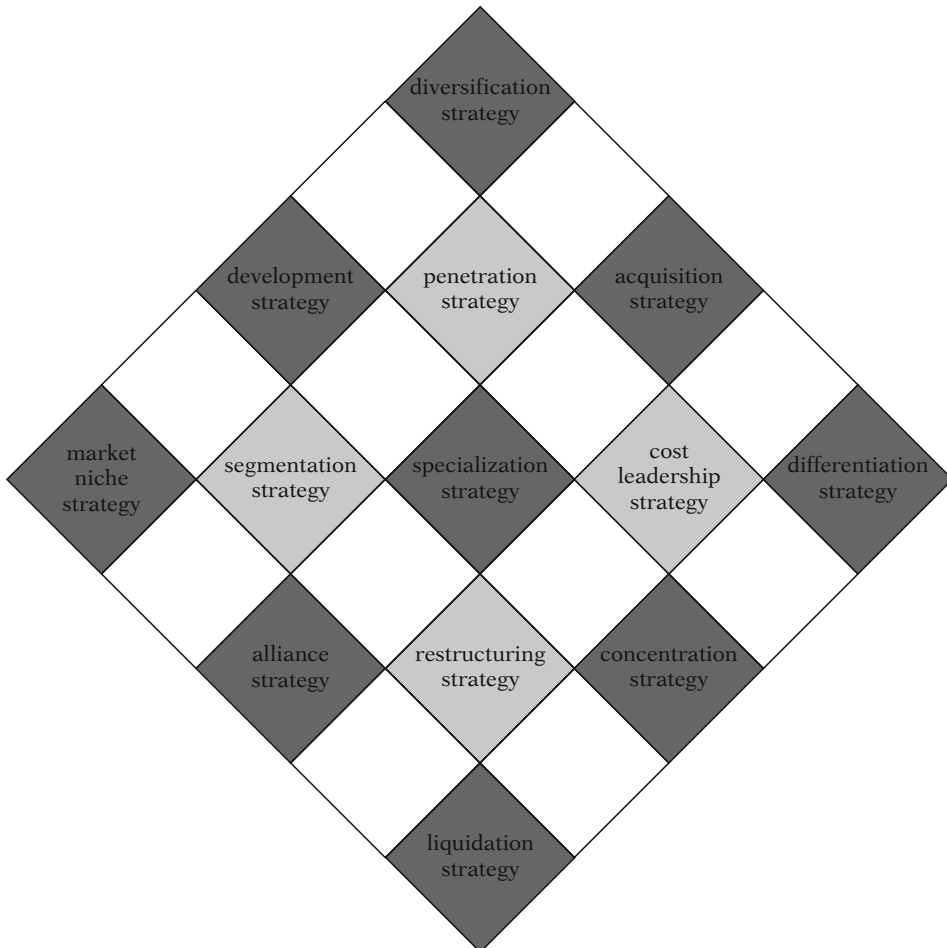
The aggressive strategies are identified by the following four specific strategies: diversification, acquisition, development and specialization. Of these four strategies typical for this group is the strategy of diversification. Acquisition strategy is the aggressive-competitive strategy and the development strategy is the aggressive-conservative one. Accordingly, as mentioned above, the specialization strategy represents the mixed characteristics of all four main group of strategies. The conservative strategies are represented by the following four specific strategies: market niche strategy, development strategy, alliance strategy and the strategy of specialization. The specific strategy for this group is the market niche strategy. The development strategy is common with the group of aggressive strategies and the strategy of alliance with the group of correction strategies. On the same level of the map are competitive strategies. These include: differentiation strategy, acquisition strategy, integration strategy and specialization strategy. The specific for competitive strategies is the differentiation strategy. The acquisition strategy is partly an aggressive one. And the integration strategy is common with the group of correction strategies.

Finally, the last the group of presented strategies include correction strategies. This group consists of further strategies: specialization strategy, alliance strategy, a strategy of integration and liquidation strategy. The last one is specific for this group. It should be noted that, although some strategies

recur in different groups, they may be interpreted differently depending on the assignment to the particular group of general strategies.

The more detailed map of strategies could be obtained by including next levels of analysis. It could be done by the application of a more complex matrix. In this way one can take into consideration more specific strategies. In the Figure 5 is shown the map of the higher level with the size of 5 (the map in the Figure 4 has the size of 2).

Figure 5. Map of specific strategies (higher level)



Source: own elaboration.

These maps could be utilized as a teaching tool in the form of a “board game”. It is the tool similar to the popular business games applied among

others for teaching management decisions. Students during exercises could determine the present position of an organization and the proper strategy. Next they could analyze the necessity for changing the strategy according to changes of their environment and inner possibilities. In this way they could understand the complexity of the problem of strategy making. Moreover the work with this map help them to understand the dynamics of the strategy formulation and implementation. One should also state that this tool could help also to systematize the problems that should be taken into account in the course of fundamentals of strategic management.

It should be noted that the area of aggressive strategies (upper corner of the map) refers to the strategies proposed in 1957 by Ansoff and creates his matrix of strategies.²³ Referring to the proposal of Ansoff it can be demonstrated that the development strategy can be implemented taking into consideration both the market and the product development. Hence the right-hand corner of the map represents Porter's typology presented in the introduction (three generic strategies with concentration strategy as focus one). Thus it can be concluded that the presented concept of the map of strategies develop the previous approaches and does not create the own separate vision.

Summary

That concept of the map of organization strategies has been developed with the intention to create the aid in teaching fundamentals of strategic management. This map allows not only for the perception of the complexity of the problem of strategy elaboration but also for understanding the relations between general elements of the system of strategic management (internal and environmental factors). With reference to the classical SWOT/TOWS matrix it helps to realize the existence of the relationships between the assessment of the situation of an organization and its environment and the possible concepts of strategies. Thus it leads to fulfill the postulate that led Wehrich when he was creating the SWOT/TOWS approach that this analysis do not end with identifying the four main elements (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) but with identifying the main strategy for realization. Second, the map refers to relations between specified mega-strategies and shows possible directions of evolution of a strategic approach with the change in assessment of

²³ I., Ansoff, *Strategies for Diversification*, "Harvard Business Review" 1957, Vol. 35, Issue 5, p. 114.

the parameters of an organization and its environment. On this aspect Wehrich also drew the attention²⁴, indicating the dynamics of the TOWS analysis.

In addition, the concept of the map, in its more detailed form (Figure 4, 5) in a transparent way shows the diversity of organizations strategies and their relationships. Through its form, taking into account also the empty areas, it shows that are possible other forms of strategies of an organization, apart from indicated. The example of a such strategy could be the “blue ocean” strategy which is a form of conservative mega-strategies. It can be showed that it combines elements of market niche strategy, segmentation strategy and development strategy²⁵. The approach based on the concept of strategy maps also allows for an analysis of possible ways of the evolution of specific strategies. This evolution takes the form of “wandering” around the map of strategies which is guided by the changing parameters of the organization and its environment, which is shown in the Figure 3. It is also possible to illustrate such changes with the examples of strategy changing in different market and inner conditions. The present economic crisis is a good example of strategy dynamics and evolution.

It could be concluded that the presented concept of the map of strategies combine the several approaches from the area of strategic management. At the general level it is the SWOT/TOWS approach and at lower level they are concepts of Porter’s generic strategies, the Ansoff matrix and the Bowman strategy clock. Thus, it allows to acquaint students not only with these scientific achievements in the field of strategic management, but also teach them about the complexity and diversity of strategic management. It also allows to show the relations between the organization’s strategy and the factors that determine it. Thus, it helps students to create the image of elements and relationships forming the system of strategic management. All these components allow to make this approach the effective tool for teaching the fundamentals of strategic management. Additionally it should be stated that many elements of the presented concept are well known but in this concept of the map they are firstly gathered together and firstly the relations between all of them (not only between chosen) are determined to obtain the efficient teaching tool.

²⁴ H. Wehrich, *The TOWS Matrix ...*, op. cit., p. 60.

²⁵ W. C. Kim, R., Mauborgen, *Strategia Błękitnego Oceanu. Jak stworzyć wolną przestrzeń rynkową i sprawić, by konkurencja stała się nieistotna*, Wydawnictwo MT Biznes, Warszawa 2005.

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Резюме

Концепция системного подхода как инструмента для обучения основам стратегического управления

В статье представлена концепция системного подхода в обучении основам стратегического управления. Опираясь на традиционные типологии стратегий организации, автор предложил общую карту стратегий, задача которой – помочь студентам понять сложность проблематики выбора детальной стратегии действий. В качестве инструмента упорядочения карты избрана матрица SWOT/TOWS. Зато часть детальных стратегий почерпнута между прочим из типологий Портера, Броумана и Ансоффа. На базе упомянутых типологий разработаны две версии карты стратегий. Первая включает 9 детальных стратегий, а вторая 13. Стратегии сгруппированы в четыре категории: агрессивные стратегии, консервативные стратегии, стратегии конкуренции и корректировочные стратегии. Разработанные карты стратегий

позволяют более наглядно анализировать процедуры выбора стратегии, а также взаимосвязи между ними и их эволюцию.

Ключевые слова: карта стратегий, основные стратегии.

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Aleksander Gwiazda is an employee in the Faculty of Design, Management and Manufacturing of the Institute of Engineering Processes Automation and Integrated Manufacturing Systems of the Mechanical Engineering Department of the Silesian University of technology. His area of the scientific activity is the theory of management and its practical application. Mainly he is interested in sociological roots of the management science and the functional analysis of the management process. His main practical application of the theoretical models is concerns the problem of management of the process of Polish mining industry restructuring. He published two scientific monographs and almost 50 scientific papers concerning the problems of the management process.