

TEACHING TIMELESS TRUTHS THROUGH CLASSIC LITERATURE: AESOP'S FABLES AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

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Strategic management courses focus on top managers' efforts to guide organizations to greater prosperity. Unfortunately, most undergraduate students lack experience with high organizational levels. As a result, such students often struggle to relate to and grasp strategic management concepts. The authors argue that classic literature offers poignant, straightforward, and memorable lessons about strategy. As such, classic literature can be a useful addition to strategy professors' "teaching toolbox." In particular, Aesop's fables are used to illustrate key pedagogical points. The authors conclude with a discussion of other classic works that may be applied to the strategy field and implications for classroom usage.

Keywords: *Aesop; classic literature; fables; strategic management; story telling*

People learn by connecting new ideas and information to their existing schemas and understandings. Thus, student learning about group processes is facilitated by the fact that almost all students have participated in groups. Students remember which groups were more successful than others, and the

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presentation of conceptual material helps them understand why these outcomes occurred. Strategic management professors charged with teaching undergraduates face a challenge because few of these students have experience with “big picture” organizational decisions (W. Weick, 2003). Such professors must find creative ways to overcome students’ lack of familiarity with strategic management in order to effectively teach strategy concepts.

Storytelling can be an effective device in strategic management education because stories help communicate multidimensional concepts in a concise manner (Henricks, 2001; Whitney, 2000). For example, Barnett and Hansen (1996) use the concept of the Red Queen from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* to illustrate today’s competitive landscape. As the young Alice proceeds on her journey, she encounters a life-sized chess game in which she becomes a participant. Much to her dismay, as the tournament progresses, Alice begins to notice that in addition to the movement of the players, the chessboard itself is in motion and even though she is running, she appears stationary. The Red Queen responds that Alice must be from a slow world because in a fast world one must run just to stay still. Other applications of classic literature to illustrate management concepts include Stevenson’s (1996) use of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and *Richard III* to contrast different leadership styles and Bumpus’s (2000) use of the novel *Brothers and Sisters* to teach human resource management.

To build on this idea, we highlight Aesop’s parables. Despite being devised thousands of years ago, these parables are well known, particularly in Western cultures. Renowned teachers (including Aesop and Jesus) have long favored parables as pedagogical tools because parables convey rich lessons in a format that is poignant, straightforward, and memorable. These characteristics suggest parables can help introduce key strategic management topics to students that lack actual relevant experience. Below, we present a number of stories corresponding to the four main strategic management topic areas identified by Summer and colleagues (1990). A firm’s *strategy* reflects choices about the range of businesses the firm operates in and the competitive approach used by these businesses (Porter, 1980; Summer et al., 1990). *Leadership and organization* refers to the role of people, goals, structures, and other organizational elements that can help a firm prosper. The strategic management field assumes that the *environment* influences a firm’s choice of strategies (Dess, Ireland, & Hitt, 1990). All three of these areas are thought to shape organizational *performance*.

A few recent articles have highlighted the appropriateness of Aesop’s work to modern business practices. For example, Covey (1998) applies the story of the goose and the golden egg to effective leadership and management of organizational resources. Hogan (1999) demonstrates that many of

Aesop's pithy phrases can be applied to global brand management. Bruce (2001) applies the story of the tortoise and the hare to exemplify the overly short-term focus most investors have when they view the stock market, despite the fact that the goal that many firms strive for is long-term competitive advantage. Although scattered examples highlighting the relevance of Aesop's ideas to modern practice exist, a systematic attempt to link Aesop's work to strategic management thought has yet to be undertaken.

In the following sections, we demonstrate how the classic Greek fables of Aesop may also be used to illustrate and teach several key principles of strategic management. We briefly retell several of Aesop's fables and apply the stories to each of the four domains that are key to the strategic management field. Appendix A provides a summary of the parables we discuss and an example of the strategic content that can be illustrated by each parable.

Using Aesop's Fables to Illustrate Key Concepts

STRATEGY

The Ass and the Grasshopper: The Problem of Resource Immobility

The resource-based view of the firm (RBV) is one of the most influential perspectives within strategic management. The essence of the RBV concept is that unique bundles of resources define firms, and that these idiosyncratic bundles enable some firms to outperform others (Barney, 1991). One central RBV idea can be illustrated with Aesop's story of the ass and the grasshoppers. In this fable, an ass was enchanted by the chirping of some melodic grasshoppers and wished to acquire their skill in this arena. When the ass asked the grasshoppers what enabled them to sing so sweetly, they revealed that only the morning dew nourished them. In an effort to emulate the grasshoppers, the ass began to follow their dietary regiment; subsequently, the ass soon died of hunger.

This fable illustrates the notion of resource immobility. Classic economic thought suggests that any resource that leads to short-term inequilibrium can be imitated through resource acquisition on the open market. From this perspective, the ass should be able to duplicate the grasshoppers' sweet songs. In contrast, the RBV asserts that a firm's *set* of resources is the key to competitive advantage; thus, the purchase of any individual resource may not necessarily lead to competitive advantage and superior performance. As in the fable, a duplication effort fixated on a single aspect may lead to negative outcomes.

The Lion and the Dolphin: A Tale of Mergers and Alliances

Another story tells of an alliance built between a lion and a dolphin as the lion saw the dolphin roaming the surface of the water one day. The lion reasoned that because he was the king of the beasts and the dolphin reigned over the water, they should become friends and allies. The dolphin agreed. Soon the lion became entangled with a wild bull and called upon the support of his friend. Although the dolphin was more than willing to follow through with their agreement, he discovered there was no way for him to leave the sea. The lion soon accused him of being a traitor and the partnership dissolved.

This tale illustrates some of the problems that plague modern-day strategic alliances: Some combinations are simply untenable, often because the partners are incompatible. Although the number of alliances, mergers, and acquisitions has increased dramatically in recent years, many companies have realized that their results have often been less than desirable. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* noted that many of the mergers in the 1990s have resulted in spin-offs, and less than half of a sample of 700 mergers studied by KPMG between 1996 and 1998 actually increased shareholder value (Frank, 2002).

The Lion's Whelp: Applications to Quality

Aesop's fables also provide a unique context for discussing strategic issues such as the importance of quality in production. In one story, all the beasts of the animal kingdom were arguing as to which of the animals could produce the largest number of whelps at birth, and they went to the lioness to settle their dispute. After they asked the lioness how many she had at birth, she replied "one, but that one is a lion." Such a tale demonstrates that even in Aesop's age, quality was recognized as a virtue. Pointing out that Aesop himself, as a slave, had probably realized the value of superior production while performing his daily functions might elucidate this lesson even further. He performed his duties with such diligence and excellence that he eventually earned his freedom (Temple, 1998). Together, this fable and vignette provide evidence that Aesop was more than familiar with the concept of quality and the many advantages quality provided.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

The Miller, His Son, and Their Ass: Lessons in Strategic Direction

One of the strategic management field's contributions is the systematic study of top managers and their role in shaping the organization. One endur-

ing lesson is that managers must set a clear direction. This point is illustrated in the fable of the miller, his son, and their ass. In this tale, a miller and his son were driving their ass to market for sale. They soon encountered a group of girls who mocked them for walking when they could easily ride. After hearing their taunts, the old man immediately instructed his son to mount the animal. Not long after, a group of men were having a serious argument and one of the men suggested that today's generation had no respect for the elderly. Upon hearing this opinion, the father told the boy to dismount the animal and he began to ride. They progressed a short distance farther and met a company of women and children. Several of the women suggested that it was both ridiculous and lazy for the father to ride while the young son is forced to walk alone; once again the two changed positions. Another bystander suggested that they could not believe that the man was the owner of the beast, judging from the way it was weighted down. In fact, it would make more sense for the man and his son to carry the ass. Upon hearing this, the father and his son tied the animal's legs together and carried it on a pole. As they crossed a bridge near town, the townspeople began to gather and laugh at the unorthodox sight. Between the noise and the situation, the beast brayed and kicked until it tumbled off the ropes into the river. With tongue in cheek, we note that the moral of the story is that if you allow others to dictate your actions, you may lose your ass. In other words, a leader should be focused on the primary task at hand and not be swayed by influences from those that are not key to the organization's functioning.

The Horse and the Groom: Applications to Organizational Structure

Another important lesson in organizational leadership can be gleaned from Aesop's story of the horse and the groom. In this tale, a dishonest manager of a livery stable used to steal and sell a certain horse's oats for personal profit on a regular basis. While engaging in this dishonest practice, he would continue to groom the horse to make him appear to be in good condition. After this treatment progressed for a time, the horse told the groom that if he wanted him to look well, he should groom him less and feed him more.

Two lessons can be gleaned from this parable. The first is that managers should be careful to take the actions that will promote the outcomes they ultimately wish to achieve within their organization. Steven Kerr's (1975) classic article titled *On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B* reminds managers that, historically, organizations have often created a disconnect between organizational goals and the actions of individuals within the organization who are supposed to promote those goals. For example, Kerr notes

that universities hope that professors will devote substantial effort to their teaching duties, but they reward professors almost entirely for research and publications. A second lesson can be taken from contemporary corporate governance problems. The Enron scandal and others have illustrated that the problem of making your work look good while hiding massive corruption is truly a classic dilemma that creates deleterious circumstances for organizations.

The Bundle of Sticks: Applications to Vision and Mission

A lesson in vision and mission applicable to modern organizations can be learned from the story of the bundle of sticks. In this story, a farmer illustrates the importance of unity to his three sons, who were constantly fighting. To teach them a lesson, the farmer called his sons together and asked them to place a bundle of sticks before him. After tying them together, he asked each of his sons to try to break the bundle, and each tried to no avail. Finally, the father untied the bundle and gave his sons the sticks to break one by one, which they did with great ease. The father explained to his sons that if they remained united, it would be extremely difficult for their enemies to defeat them; however, if they continued to be divided among themselves, they will be as easy to break as the sticks.

This story can be readily applied to some of the challenges faced by the modern-multidivisional organization. When top management sets a clear direction, the organization can excel; on the other hand, when politics and infighting become the norm, the organization will encounter considerable difficulties and likely decline. For example, General Motors can be used to illustrate the problems that may accompany organizations that lack clear leadership. General Motors' current state of direction is far from the unified strategic plan first introduced by Alfred Sloan (Bourgeois, Duhaime, & Stimpert, 1999). The genius of Sloan's original plan was that there was no conflict between the different GM models (Sloan, 1963). For example, in 1921, the lowest car in the GM line (i.e., Chevrolet) cost between \$450 and \$600. The most expensive car in this line cost less than their least expensive Oakland (now Pontiac), which ranged in price from \$600 to \$900. Under more recent leadership, however, GM's strategic direction has resulted in considerable confusion among their makes and models (Stern, 1995). In essence, GM competes with itself at many price points, suggesting that GM management could benefit from remembering the lesson of the bundle of sticks.

ENVIRONMENT

The Oak and the Reed: Adapting to Competitive Environments

The story of the oak and the reed helps to illustrate critical issues in the domain of the environment. In this tale, a mighty oak tree was uprooted in a harsh storm and was carried downstream where many reeds were growing. The oak was amazed and astonished that so many small and rather frail reeds had survived the storm whereas his might had failed him in the same circumstances. The reed suggested that these events were not surprising because fighting against the storm destroyed the oak, but the reeds survived by yielding and bending to the slightest change in the wind. This story illustrates the importance of adapting to, rather than resisting or ignoring, some shifts in the competitive environment. For example, rather than fretting about how the Internet lowered the barriers to entry in the brokerage industry, Merrill Lynch embraced the new technology by creating its own online trading business.

The Crow and the Pitcher: A Story of Innovation

The familiar tale of the crow and the pitcher also serves to illustrate the need to develop innovative approaches to compete in novel environments. In this story, a crow on the verge of dehydration spies a pitcher of water from a distance. Upon closer examination, the crow discovered that there was so little water in the pitcher that it was impossible for him to get a drink. The crow tried every means conceivable, and even considered breaking the pitcher. Finally, he spotted some small pebbles near by, gathered them, and dropped them one by one into the pitcher where the water gradually rose to the brim. In the end, he was able to quench his thirst with ease. The crow was able to adapt to the unique environment and sustain his life by finding new methods for attaining water. Similarly, organizations must learn innovative ways if they are to survive today's ever-changing economic environments. For example, Rubbermaid has an explicit goal that 30% of their sales will come from products that were not in existence 5 years ago (Bourgeois et al., 1999).

The Ass Loaded With Salt: Interpreting Environmental Change

Another classic Aesop tale helps to illustrate the types of problems that can arise when individuals fail to adapt to the environment. In this story, there was once a huckster who learned there was some cheap salt being sold at the seaside, and he drove his ass there to buy some. While driving the overloaded beast home, the ass accidentally slipped and fell into the river, dissolving his

payload. The ass was happy at this turn of events, as he was then able to walk home with ease. Some time later, the huckster again went to the seaside, and then proceeded to load the ass with more salt than before. On the way home this time, the ass fell into the river on purpose, once again dissolving his load. Disturbed by the loss, the huckster tried to devise a way to cure the ass from performing this trick. On their next journey, he placed a load of sponges on the beast. When the ass tried his trick, his load doubled instead of lightened. Like the ass, managers may fail to adjust their thinking in reaction to important changes. For example, in a study of the banking industry, Reger and Palmer (1996) found that managers tend to use outdated maps when making sense of their current competitive situation.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The Dog and the Shadow: Managing Organizational Growth

Strategic management's ultimate concern is organizational outcomes. To illustrate this important area, a familiar fable tells the story of a dog that had stolen a piece of meat and was crossing a river to get home. When the dog saw his reflection, he leaped at the opportunity to double his holdings, and eventually lost everything he had. This mistake seems to be a common one made by many managers who haphazardly set growth as the primary performance target; this may be ill advised, as one recent study that found that 70% of the time, the firm with the highest amount of market share did not have the highest rate of return (Minter, 1998).

The Fox and the Grapes: An Illustration of Performance Attribution Biases

Yet another classic Aesop tale conveys the story of the fox and the grapes. In this story, a famished fox found himself in a vineyard full of tempting grapes. Unfortunately, the grapes were located well out of his reach. He tried multiple times to reach the fruit but failed after each attempt. Finally, the fox concluded to himself that the grapes were probably sour and undesirable, and not worthy of further efforts. A similar action can be found in many companies who justify their failings by blaming external circumstances. For example, managers across a number of industries regularly blame exogenous factors such as the weather, even when it is not a particularly bad weather year (Ansberry, 1996). Students should recognize this potential problem so they can guard against it in their own careers.

The Hare and the Hound: Adversity and Long-Run Survival

A final story that can be tied to organizational performance is that of the hare and the hound. In this story, a hare was frightened from a bush by a hound and as the chase persisted, the hare got farther and farther away. At one point during the chase, a goatherd mocked the hound for allowing such a scrawny hare to outrun him so easily. The hound responded to the goatherd by explaining that it is one thing to run for your dinner, and another to run for your life. This fable demonstrates that adversity can be a useful catalyst for superior performance. This is an important lesson because frequently the organizations that are able to exhibit sustained competitive advantage and superior performance have gained advantage by overcoming smaller losses and developing an ability to respond to adversity (Sitkin, 1992).

OTHER EXAMPLES APPLIED TO STRATEGY CONCEPTS

Aesop's classic stories demonstrate the power of such narratives for enhancing strategic concepts; however, the possibilities for applying literature are extensive. In this section, we provide additional examples of stories, fables, and myths that can be applied to strategic management pedagogy. To maintain continuity, we provide examples from each of the domains of strategy previously discussed. Appendix B provides a list of each of the domains of strategy and additional stories corresponding to each domain.

In the domain of strategy, O. Henry's *The Ransom of Red Chief* is an appealing tale to illustrate the perils of untimely, unstudied, and perhaps hostile acquisitions. In the story, two scalawags scheme to capture the only son of a well-to-do citizen in a small town in Alabama and hold him at ransom for a sum of \$2,000. Much to the captors' dismay, the 10-year-old turns out to be more than a handful, inflicting both physical pains and mental anguish on the two men. After the first night, one of the men pleads with the other to reduce the planned ransom amount. Meanwhile, the boy's father realizes the desperate position the captors would soon be in and offers the rogues to take the boy off their hands for \$250. The outlaws agree that in the end the deal is more than fair. This short story is useful for developing the idea of the dominant logic (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). Top managers often see acquisitions as offering much better fits than they actually do.

In the domain of leadership and organization, Hans Christian Anderson's *The Emperor's New Clothes* illustrates the classic problem of groupthink. Collectively, virtually all of the Emperor's subjects confirm his belief that his new suit is the pride of the kingdom, whereas the subjects individually realize that the Emperor is wearing nothing but his undergarments. The illusion is

only brought to light when a small child points out the obvious. Such tales are salient as today's CEO is often depicted as isolated from reality and surrounded by "yes men" (and women).

In relation to the environment, H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* is useful for illustrating the idea of an environment as a closed system. Wells tells the story of a time traveler who voyages to the distant future. He encounters the Eloi, a tribe of people who are trapped in a culture where they are largely dependent on the Morlocks, a carnivorous race who provide clothing for the Eloi, but devour them at will. This story can be used to drive home the challenges of adapting to and changing institutional environments—systems that seem insane to outsiders but perfectly acceptable to those accustomed to the system.

In relation to performance, the classic story of *David and Goliath* illustrates problems that can arise when an individual's decision biases impede judgments when evaluating performance (Palmer & Short, 2001). Goliath's schema for a formidable opponent was a tall, strong, accomplished field warrior like himself. Seeing that David did not match this schema, he judged the boy to be of no consequence and challenge. Of course, Goliath's ultimate demise is well documented. In retrospect, if Goliath had made a more thorough investigation, he would have discovered that David had demonstrated his prowess with a slingshot by killing bears and lions while guarding over his family's flocks. The idea of being blindsided by smaller, sleeker foes is as contemporary a threat today as the dilemma described by this well-known tale.

Implications for Classroom Use

The fables continue to add value because they serve as excellent stories. Such storytelling has numerous benefits, including information sharing, increasing innovation, and evoking emotions and images while imparting enduring truths (Morgan & Dennehy, 1997). The value of Aesop's fables and other memorable tales is maximized when pairing the classic truths with the most current and relevant business examples. Stories of corporate scandal, questionable mergers, and firm uniqueness are easy to find on a daily basis. It has been our experience that applying classic truths to "front page" business news provides the most effective means of delivery for such stories. Indeed, the appeal of using classic tales is that their relevance and ease of application is so natural. At the same time, however, educators should be cautioned to remember that Aesop's fables and other tales are just that—stories generated to express a single, simple truth. In this section, we outline some possibilities

for integrating fables and stories into the classroom; we also point out instances where educators may need to exercise caution when introducing such tales.

The introduction of allegories is important because exercises for enhancing student creativity are often sparse in strategic management courses (W. W. Weick, 2003). Stories serve as memory-trigger devices and enrich strategic concepts, and it is important to use the stories in a timely fashion when integrating them into classroom lectures. For example, such fables might be used as a catchy introduction to liven up seemingly "dry" conceptual material. As an educator, the Socratic method (what *does* this fable tell us about strategic management today?) could also be beneficial. Such tales could also be used as a conclusion to provide students with a parting shot of wisdom at the end of a given lecture, especially in illustrating the timelessness of certain ideas and relationships.

Fables may also be used as a mechanism to foster more critical thinking among students of strategic management. Although the message of a fable can be used as a memorable proverb to enhance student learning, such stories should be used cautiously and in light of their limitations. Failure to recognize the limitations of fables may actually deter student learning. Consider the phrase "putting all your eggs in one basket" popularized by Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. This idea could easily apply to business-investment strategies. Although this phrase is so well known as to almost be cliché, when Markowitz (1952) applied this idea to popularize portfolio diversification in the 1950s, this concept was seen as revolutionary. On the other hand, the concept of portfolio diversification does not necessarily apply to corporate-level diversification, where considerable transaction costs at the corporate level and lack of synergy among business units can be a detriment to firm performance (Lubatkin & Chatterjee, 1994). Thus, any advice to avoid "putting all your eggs in one basket" should be prefaced by the context of such prescriptive wisdom.

Casting this issue more broadly in terms of pedagogy, we suggest that professors can leverage the insights of Karl Weick's (1979) GAS concept. Weick asserts that any conceptual explanation can only achieve two objectives from among generalizability, accuracy, and simplicity. More specifically, he contends that any effort to target two of the objectives automatically sacrifices the third. Thus, professors and students should remember that stories and proverbs are by their very nature biased toward being generalizable and simple, but bring limitations in terms of accuracy. Taking the discussion one step further, we suggest that learning is maximized when students consider explanations of a phenomenon that serve different objective combinations. Case

studies often provide explanations that are accurate for the firm examined and relatively simple, but the conclusions drawn may not generalize to other settings. Many theoretical models apply broadly and accurately reflect organizations, but are fairly complex. Given these arrays of strengths and limitations, we suggest that the use of each of three tools (fables, cases, and theoretical models) may foster better understanding of key strategic management issues for students. Most instructors use cases and models already; we offer fables as a complementary tool with unique strengths.

One approach to incorporate the wisdom of fables while seeking to enhance student learning and develop critical thinking would be to have students actively debate the value of certain fables in terms of their ability to explain strategic concepts and principles. For example, the resource-based view of the firm is a key concept in strategic management that many educators have found to be difficult to integrate into strategic management curriculum (Schneider & Lieb, 2004). After an introductory lecture on the resource-based view, students could be presented with a list of fables or asked in a more general manner to suggest fables that might be used to illustrate some of the key ideas related to the concept.

The idea of sustained resource commitment could be illustrated with the story of the tortoise and the hare. Although the hare would seem to have an advantage due to natural speed, his arrogance and lack of determination caused him to lose the race to the much slower tortoise and provide us with the admonition that "slow and steady wins the race." Aesop's fable of the miser also provides some insight into the conceptual underpinnings of the resource-based view. In this tale, a miser sells all of his property, converts it to a single lump of gold, and buries it in the ground. One of the miser's workers steals the gold, causing great anxiety for the miser. The miser's neighbor, however, suggests that the miser should just place a large stone in the hole because the miser had no intention of using the gold anyway. The moral of this story is that the value of any resource is more of a function of its usage rather than mere accumulation.

Students could debate which fable adds more to the spirit of the resource-based view. Likewise, students could be encouraged to examine cases where lessons from one fable may contradict another. Inasmuch as the fable of the tortoise and the hare suggests that "patience is a virtue" whereas the parable of the miser suggests that "time is of the essence," students might be asked to opine times where and when the wisdom of one fable is more applicable to organizational decision making than other stories.

Applying fables is appealing because they can easily be incorporated into existing course materials and used to reinforce strategic concepts. Given time

constraints and the amount of material already earmarked for strategy content, it is unlikely that strategic management educators will have the luxury of assigning fables or stories to an already heavy load of reading materials. In fact, we have never assigned students fables or other stories in our classes. In our classes, however, we often discuss current articles in the business press at the beginning of each class. Students are encouraged to present recent articles and articulate how they tie into previously assigned textbook or lecture materials. Students are given considerable discretion in regards to the outlets and mediums from which they acquire the news, but they must frame their article in terms of recently covered course materials, and we place a premium on unique articles and stories that will stand out in their minds and the minds of their classmates. We believe that asking students to apply fables or stories to their articles would bring valuable insight to course discussion and provide an additional mechanism to help students remember course content and its application.

Fables and stories are useful in strategic management pedagogy because of their simplicity. Students need not be familiar with Aesop to appreciate the message of the fables. Certainly, students from non-Western cultures may not always be familiar with Aesop's fables and they may need to be provided some context for the stories. Students from other backgrounds can bring a unique cultural understanding of international business and literature by introducing "classics" from their own culture and applying them to business phenomena. A good example is the fable of the blind men and the elephant that was developed in India. Each of six men touches one part of the elephant and draws a different conclusion about what kind of object he is encountering. A man who touches the elephant's side believes an elephant is like a wall whereas a man who touches a tusk believes the elephant is like a spear. The six argue about what exactly an elephant is, not realizing that each has drawn an incorrect conclusion but that each in fact has a piece of the truth. Only by combining their insights can the men understand the nature of elephants. This fable has important implications for top management team members from different functional backgrounds attempting to make a strategic decision. Going one step further, the fact that the fable was the basis for a poem by a 19th-century Western author (John Godfrey Saxe) could be used by instructors to launch a discussion of some of international commerce's positive (e.g., cultural exchange) and negative (e.g., colonialism, such as Great Britain's in India) aspects.

The aforementioned applications of classic literature to strategic management pedagogy have largely been targeted toward the traditional undergradu-

ate curriculum. Yet, such fables and stories may also add value to a range of delivery methods and educational levels. For example, applying fables could be useful for maintaining student interest in discussion groups when teaching an online section of strategic management. Educators who use the case method might be encouraged to instruct students to find a relevant story, myth, or fable that succinctly illustrates at least one of the main lessons from the case they analyzed. Using the stories might be a confidence builder for professors that are unsure of themselves as a function of never having been executives themselves, and it may be safer for faculty lacking “real-world” experience to draw conclusions from the stories than it is for them to draw conclusions from cases.

Application of fables also may be beneficial when used with audiences that do have considerable decision-making experience, such as executive-education class members. Executive-education groups vary in their group culture, and professors need to take that into account. For example, we would be wary of using the stories with a generally cynical group. However, we see the stories fitting well with upbeat, highly engaged groups. At a minimum, the stories could be used as good “icebreakers” at the beginning of a session, or to grab the audience’s attention when a session’s momentum seems to be waning.

Conclusion

The application of classic literature to modern business applications reveals that such stories are as compelling today as they were centuries ago. Perhaps this should come as no surprise given that many great writers, such as Shakespeare, were also astute businessmen whose lives provided exemplars of sound business practices (Mockler, 2002). Teaching strategic management requires a delicate balance between articulating classic truths while also highlighting the complexities created by the modern competitive environment. Illustrating strategic management lessons via the exposition of classic literature creates a vehicle that naturally facilitates such balance. Although they were first told more than 2,500 years ago, Aesop’s fables are timeless in their ability to convey many truths that can be applied to contemporary strategic management in a concise and eloquent manner. Despite considerable merits, business students are rarely exposed to classic literature in a business context (Benson, 1992). It is our hope that this article will reverse this trend by providing 16 stories and related practical suggestions to our peers.

Appendix A

Summary Table of Applying Aesop's Fables to Strategic Management Domains

<i>Strategy Domain</i>	<i>Illustrative Fables</i>	<i>Strategy Content Area</i>
Strategy	<i>The Ass and the Grasshopper</i> <i>The Lion and the Dolphin</i> <i>The Lion's Whelp</i>	The resource-based view of the firm Mergers and alliances Quality
Leadership and organization	<i>The Miller, His Son, and their Ass</i> <i>The Horse and the Groom</i> <i>The Bundle of Sticks</i>	Strategic direction Organizational structure Vision and mission
The environment	<i>The Oak and the Reed</i> <i>The Crow and the Pitcher</i> <i>The Ass Loaded With Salt</i>	Adapting to competitive environments Innovation Interpreting environmental change
Performance	<i>The Dog and the Shadow</i> <i>The Fox and the Grapes</i> <i>The Hare and the Hound</i>	Managing organizational growth Performance attribution biases Adversity and long-run survival

Appendix B

Summary Table of Additional Literature Applied to Strategic Management Domains

<i>Strategy Domain</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Illustrative Story/Fable</i>	<i>Strategic Content Summary</i>
Strategy	O. Henry	<i>The Ransom of Red Chief</i>	Troubled acquisitions/the dominant logic
Leadership and organization	Hans Christian Anderson	<i>The Emperor's New Clothes</i>	Top management isolation from reality
The environment	H. G. Wells	<i>The Time Machine</i>	Trappings of institutional environments
Performance	Traditional	<i>David and Goliath</i>	Biases in performance interpretation

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