

# From SOFT approach to SWOT analysis, a historical reconstruction

SOFT  
approach to  
SWOT  
analysis

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to revisit the conventional wisdom about a key contribution [i.e. strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis] in the field of strategic management. The societal context and the role of academics, consultants and executives is taken into account in the emergence of SWOT analysis during the 1960–1980 period as a pivotal development within the broader context of the satisfactory, opportunities, faults, threats (SOFT) approach. The authors report on both the content and the approach, so that other scholars seeking to invigorate indigenous theories and/or underreported strategy practices will thrive.

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**Design/methodology/approach** – Applying a historiographic approach, the authors introduce an evidence-based methodology for interpreting historical sources. This methodology incorporates source criticism, triangulation and hermeneutical interpretation, drawing upon insights from robust evidence through three iterative stages.

**Findings** – The underreporting of the SOFT approach/SWOT analysis can be attributed to several factors, including strategy tools being integrated into planning frameworks rather than being published as standalone materials; restricted circulation of crucial long-range planning service/theory and practice of planning reports due to copyright limitations; restricted access to the Stanford Research Institute Planning Library in California; and the enduring popularity of SOFT and SWOT variations, driven in part by their memorable acronyms.

**Originality** – In the spirit of a renaissance in strategic planning research, the authors unveil novel theoretical and social connections in the emergence of SWOT analysis by combining evidence from both theory and practice and delving into previously unexplored areas.

**Research implications** – Caution is advised for scholars who examine the discrete time frame of 1960–1980 through mere bibliometric techniques. This study underscores the risks associated with gathering incomplete and/or inaccurate data, emphasizing the importance of triangulating evidence beyond scholarly databases. The paradigm shift of strategic management research due to the advent of large language models poses new challenges and the risk of conserving and perpetuating academic urban legends, myths and lies if training data is not adequately curated.

**Keywords** SWOT analysis, Americanization, Strategy-as-practice, Management consultants, Anti-histories, SOFT approach

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

“According to SRI’s figures, 200 of the largest corporations only play it by ear. They lack, as SRI defines it, the systematic means by which a company can become what it wants to be”. It’s not that company presidents are derelict. All of them do some kind of planning, and the gifted among them steer remarkably well by instinct. The rest are either too busy and growing busier or, to be blunt about it, do not know how to plan. The hitch is that formalized business planning is an emerging art, practiced as recently as 10 years ago by only a handful of the largest corporations ([BusinessWeek, 1963](#), pp. 54–55).

The Stanford Research Institute (SRI) presented the system of plans to a global audience as a strategic tool for companies to chart their future path, gaining widespread exposure through a featured article in *BusinessWeek*. For promotional purposes, the long-range planning service (LRPS) at SRI strategically showcased Robert F. Stewart’s report, offering a comprehensive framework for business planning ([Stewart, 1963](#)). “Almost everyone in the US industrial environment has heard of the report series made available by the Stanford Research Institute” ([Jantsch, 1967](#), p. 251). This LRPS report stands out as the most frequently cited in the literature, garnering references from prominent scholars ([Ansoff, 1965](#); [Hussey, 1974](#); [Learned et al., 1965](#); [Mintzberg, 1994](#); [Steiner, 1979](#); [Steiner and Miner, 1977](#)). However, this report is currently not publicly available.

In 2016, we embarked on a journey to discover the origins of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis. At the time, we did not know much about the history of long-range planning. Our most substantial clue was found in a Christmas letter penned by Albert S. Humphrey, titled *SWOT Analysis for Management Consulting*. Humphrey provides the following explanation:

“What is good in the present is Satisfactory, good in the future is an Opportunity; bad in the present a Fault, and bad in the future a Threat. Hence S-O-F-T. This was later changed to SWOT – don’t ask. (I’m told that Harvard and MIT claimed credit [ . . . ] not so!)” ([Humphrey, 2005](#), p. 7).

Based on the information that we could find in scholarly databases and on the Internet, we wondered if Humphrey’s letter was a dead end. Fortunately, through the assistance of the

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SRI Alumni network, we acquired a copy of the LRPS report that comprehensively outlines the satisfactory, opportunities, faults, threats (SOFT) approach (Stewart *et al.*, 1965).

In this paper, we present our method of systematically seeking the most robust evidence for the historical journey from the SOFT approach to SWOT analysis, encompassing both theoretical foundations and practical applications. We aim to help management history scholars cultivate and revive indigenous theories and underreported strategy practices. Our study contributes to the ongoing debate about the legitimacy of strategic management as a discipline (Barney, 2002; Hoskisson, 1999; Schühly, 2022), by reassessing the conventional wisdom about a key contribution (i.e. SWOT analysis) in this field. We believe our study fits in the tradition of untangling the strategic management theory jungle and research overtly challenging the traditional narratives surrounding strategy practices (Cummings *et al.*, 2017; Lloyd *et al.*, 2023; Muldoon, 2012). Our research holds significant timeliness and necessity, particularly in an age where large language models (LLMs) have emerged, posing new challenges to the traditional underpinnings of the strategic management discipline (Fernandes and Burcharth, 2024; Jia *et al.*, 2024). In this era, we are witnessing the instantaneous generation of responses to inquiries, thereby diminishing the opportunity for source verification. There is a real danger of creating echo chambers (Ohagi, 2024; Zuber and Gogoll, 2024) in which we change from the old paradigm of strategic management to a new paradigm according to the rules of old, in which we will conserve and perpetuate academic myths, misconceptions and lies (De Bruyckere *et al.*, 2015; Mandard, 2022; Rekdal, 2014).

In our study, we report on a puzzle in the history of strategic planning: how the SOFT approach changed to SWOT analysis. Our first contribution revolves around identifying and presenting the four reasons contributing to the underreporting of the SOFT approach within scholarly literature: conceptual planning frameworks, such as the system of plans, were holistic by design and not intended for the individual publication of strategy tools as separate components; LRPS reports, funded through syndicated research, had limited circulation due to copyright restrictions; SRI's planning library was only available to LRPS clients and special guests and was closed down in the 1990s. Subscribers to the LRPS stored copies of LRPS reports and report summaries bought at the SRI Planning Library in their corporate archives; SOFT or SWOT are catchy acronyms which might explain why these remnants of strategic planning ideas survived even though there was no source material left. The second contribution is the discovery of the present-day SWOT analysis in the  $2 \times 2$  cruciform shape published in the book *Systematic Corporate Planning* (Argenti, 1974). This discovery stands as a distinctive addition to the strategic planning literature, signifying the second generation of SWOT analysis in the field – a development unrelated to any underlying theory or framework. The third contribution highlights the underappreciated role and influence of management consultants in shaping the history of strategy. After the disbandment of the theory and practice of planning (TAPP) research group at the Stanford Research Institute, former clients persistently sought the aid of its consultants for the execution of their continuous formal planning endeavors. Academics, consultants and executives collaborated closely, facilitating a dynamic exchange of knowledge that primarily occurred through formal channels but occasionally occurred through informal interactions. Additionally, our research has uncovered 20 SWOT-like variations used by consultants as environmental scanning techniques since the inception of the SOFT approach in 1965.

What follows is the structure of our paper. The evidence is gathered and organized in three iterations. The primary focus of this paper is to validate the claims presented in Humphrey's Christmas letter through a carefully crafted research question: what factors and developments have shaped the historical evolution of the SOFT approach into SWOT analysis?

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In the first iterations, we scrutinize the scholarly literature to identify the first publication introducing the acronym SOFT (satisfactory, opportunity, fault and threat). In the second iteration, we take a more detailed look at the development of the field of long-range planning and how academia and consultants interacted between 1960 and 1980. In the third iteration, evidence from practice is collected from public and private archives in several languages. We present four cases from former LRPS clients to show how the system of plans framework was used and maintained. In the discussion, we highlight the methodological, practical and theoretical implications of our study. Finally, in the conclusion we present four major conclusions based on our research question, especially advocating a role for management history in the business school curriculum and marking the discovery of source publication for the present-day understanding of SWOT analysis in the well-known  $2 \times 2$  cruciform shape.

### Methodology

In historical studies, it is considered good practice to divide the time horizon into discrete phases (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Erçek and Günçavdı, 2016; Goodrick and Reay, 2011). These distinct phases enable an in-depth examination of the unique characteristics of each phase, as well as the revolutionary changes or paradigm shifts that played a significant role in the transition to the subsequent phase (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018). Following the plea made by management historians for a periodization to understand the historical development of the management discourse (Karsten, 2014; Rowlinson, 2004), we will zoom in on the period *1960 and 1980: Strategic management with a focus on top management* as a discrete-time frame to follow the conceptualization, diffusion and adaptation of the SOFT approach in both theory and practice (Keulen and Kroeze, 2014).

#### *Evidence-based practice*

Evidence-based practice is defined as “making conscientious, explicit and judicial use of best available evidence from multiple sources by asking, acquiring, appraising, aggregating, applying and assessing to increase the likelihood of a favorable outcome” (Barends *et al.*, 2014; Briner, 2018; Mensmann *et al.*, 2022). A basic methodology for interpreting historical sources consists of source criticism, triangulation (Choudhury Kaul *et al.*, 2021; Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Wadhvani *et al.*, 2018) and a hermeneutical interpretation (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014). In three iterations, evidence from a great variety of sources is gathered, triangulated and interpreted. In addition, the approach we propose incorporates elements from an archaeological perspective, urging those studying the history of strategic management to seek out primary sources beyond academic publications that are available in libraries and databases.

#### *Triangulation*

The methodology presented in this paper (see Appendix 1) aims to triangulate different data sources to establish historical links that are not immediately obvious from the scholarly literature. In the social sciences, the method of triangulation is used to mitigate bias and achieve data saturation (Fusch *et al.*, 2018) by using different sources to establish the fidelity of the evidence (Jick, 1979; Webb and Campbell, 1966). Triangulation comes from geometry and involves pinpointing a location by forming triangles from known points. Following the basics of evidence-based practice, after the formulation of the initial research question, the first iteration starts by searching for clues to the source of a strategy practice in the scholarly literature (articles, books and reviews). The second iteration expands the evidence by hand-searching selected scholarly sources, engaging in inquiries with informants,

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conducting interviews with experts, visiting libraries and collecting oral histories. Finally, in the third iteration, archival research is conducted. Archival methods contribute to the robustness, contextuality and holism of any research endeavor, especially in the study of businesses and organizations (Das, 2023; Das *et al.*, 2018). We visited the Norwegian National Archives in Oslo (Norway) to search for correspondence between SRI and NPI (Norwegian Productivity Institute) and the corporate archive of Henkel AG and Co. KGaA in Düsseldorf (Germany). We procured copies from the W.H. Smith PLC Business Archive at the University of Reading, Special Collections (Smith, 1966). Our private archive consists of a historical data set with articles, books and archival information: leaflets, LRPS [1] client lists, LPRS reports, interviews, inquiries, newspaper clippings, oral histories, seminar materials and theses. Furthermore, one of the authors used to collaborate with Albert S. Humphrey on consulting assignments. To appraise the heterogeneity of this historical data set, the four quality criteria for sources have been applied: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Scott, 2016). Articles and books constitute primary sources, thereby fitting all four criteria. The authenticity criterion is important for background information, in this case, a list of participants (mostly LRPS clients) of the executive seminars in business planning (1965–1970) organized by the LRPS at the SRI, the Quinta case. Potential authors have been extracted based on this list. Business Source Complete (Ebscohost) and Worldcat.org were searched for potential publications, and copies from archives were purchased. These LRPS clients turned authors could potentially be a linking pin to scholarly literature (articles and books). Some authors eventually became consultants and made adaptations from the LPRS materials for their clients. Our methodology is a combination of documentary research and qualitative social network research. The veracity of the collected evidence (i.e. the data set for this study) is deemed authentic and verifiable (Gaddis, 2002). With our efforts to navigate the wilds of the strategic management theory jungle and unearth forgotten treasures, we find it fitting to pay tribute to the legendary Dr Indiana Jones. What started as a systematic literature review (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006), soon reached the limits of searching the academic digital library (Hoeber and Shukla, 2022). Guides on practical management history research were in short supply, challenging us to systematically search for evidence beyond the peer-reviewed literature. In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, the famous Dr Indiana Jones notes that “If you want to be a good archaeologist, you gotta get out of the library” (Koepp *et al.*, 2008).

## Results

### *First iteration: machine searching in Scopus, business source complete and ProQuest business one*

A first attempt to get familiar with the literature involves exploring highly cited papers about SWOT analysis within the Scopus database. The standout articles in the top 10 are *SWOT analysis: Time for a product recall* (Hill and Westbrook, 1997) with 587 references and *exploring SWOT analysis: where are we now?: A review of academic research from the last decade* (Helms and Nixon, 2010) with 513 references. Hill and Westbrook (1997) reported on the use of SWOT analysis in practice by 20 UK manufacturing companies (1993–1994). However, these authors are very cautious when it comes to stating the origins of SWOT analysis. They point to the Harvard Business School in the 1960s, especially the influence of Professor Kenneth R. Andrews. The SOFT approach or the SRI are not mentioned. Helms and Nixon (2010) picked up on SOFT as a synonym for SWOT, referencing the *glossary of techniques in strategic analysis* (Hussey, 1997). Still, these authors do not provide additional clues or information on the history of the SOFT approach.



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The acronym SWOT is part of everyday language in business schools and turns out to be available as a thesaurus term. From our initial search results, we find that SWOT analysis is very popular and used in many contexts, combinations and fields. However, the use of SWOT analysis in a search script does not yield any useful indications of the presence of the SOFT approach or comprehensive insights into traces of SWOT analysis (see [Appendix 1](#)). Moreover, the thesaurus term SWOT analysis appears to have been introduced at different times by publishers: Business Source Complete (1970) and ProQuest Business One (1981). There is no consensus on a single definition.

*Source criticism of the scholarly literature.* “Traditional database searches (e.g. ISI) fail to detect all the papers that have historical dimensions” ([Leblebici, 2014](#), p. 61). This is also the outcome of our quest for clues and best available evidence on the SOFT approach, which starts with an appraisal of thesaurus terms in both Business Source Complete (EBSCOhost) and ProQuest One Business (ProQuest). The scope note of Business Source Complete defines the thesaurus term SWOT Analysis as:

Here are entered works about a strategic planning method used by business enterprises that analyses strengths and weaknesses present within an organization, and opportunities and threats present in the external market.

The broader term is *strategic planning*, and a related term is *competitive advantage in business*. This term is used for *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis and SWOT matrix*. The earliest publication classified with the thesaurus term SWOT Analysis is the Harvard Business Review article *Corporate model: better marketing plans* ([Kotler, 1970](#)). Upon reading this article, it is clear that the article does not address the analyses of strengths and weaknesses present within an organization and/or opportunities and threats present in the external market, and there is no (in)direct reference to a SWOT source. This Kotler article is an example of misclassification [2], where the article is classified with the thesaurus term SWOT analysis.

The scope note in ProQuest One Business defines the thesaurus term “SWOT analysis” as: “Analysis of organizational strengths and weaknesses and of environmental opportunities and threats”. The broader term is *analysis* and the narrower terms are *external analysis* and *internal analysis*. The earliest publication with the thesaurus term “SWOT Analysis” is the Kentucky Journal of Economics and Business article *The Louisville Economic Inventory and Shift-Share Analysis* ([Koebel, 1981](#)). However, this Koebel article does not deal with organizational strengths, weaknesses and/or environmental opportunities or threats, nor is there any (in)direct reference to a SWOT-like source. This is another example of misclassification.

#### *Reviews on SWOT analysis*

Four reviews on SWOT analysis ([Benzaghta et al., 2021](#); [Ghazinoory et al., 2011](#); [Helms and Nixon, 2010](#); [Meeks, 2016](#)) assert that SWOT comes from the Harvard Business School, especially the work of Kenneth R. Andrews, but these authors provide ambiguous and conflicting evidence. Two other reviews are more cautious and point out that it is difficult to trace the genealogy of SWOT and observe that some researchers point to Stanford University, while others point to Harvard Business School, H. Igor Ansoff or even more recent authors in the field of strategic management ([Gürel and Tat, 2017](#); [Madsen and Stenheim, 2016](#)). Relying solely on print media indicators (i.e. citations), these literature reviews on SWOT analysis fail to establish a distinct starting point in the scholarly literature. This suggests that multiple origins likely evolved due to mislabeling, and various iterations of SWOT analysis as a strategic practice have emerged.

*Google N-gram viewer*

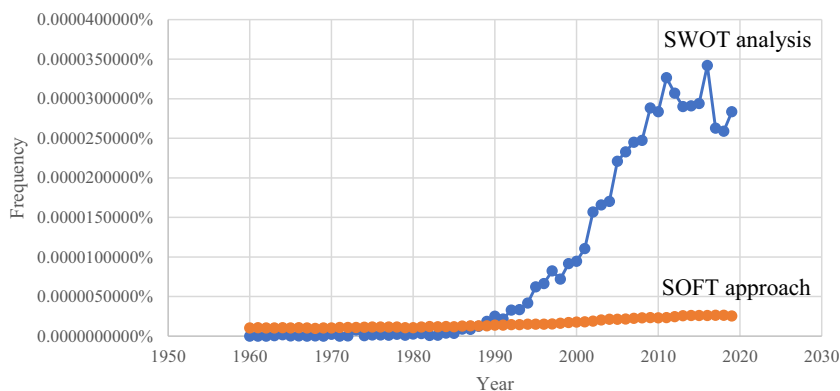
Utilizing an annual count of N-grams sourced from printed materials published between 1500 and 2019 in Google’s text corpora, the Google N-gram Viewer (Madsen and Slåtten, 2022; Sparavigna and Marazzato, 2015) is an online search engine designed to graphically depict the frequencies of specific terms used in books. This tool encompasses diverse languages such as Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Russian and Spanish. Notably, an examination of the term SOFT approach indicates an absence of references to this methodology within books. The term SWOT analysis is hardly mentioned before 1980. After 1980, a bell-shaped curve starts to emerge, peaking in 1996 (see Figure 1). During the discrete-time phase 1960–1980, authors did not use acronyms like SOFT or SWOT as a distinct strategy practice independent of a larger conceptual strategy framework.

*Summary of the first iteration*

The exploration of highly cited papers on SWOT analysis within the Scopus database fails to provide a definitive answer to the inquiry regarding the original publication of the first version of SWOT analysis. Publishers of scholarly databases use the label SWOT analysis in their thesauri. However, this label is so popular that it often leads to false positives due to misclassifications. Six literature reviews on SWOT analysis provide conflicting evidence on the genealogy of SWOT. A quick search using the Google N-gram viewer reveals that books before 1980 do not mention the SOFT approach or SWOT analysis. Our search needs to be expanded. During the second iteration, the search broadens to encompass additional sources and explores the identification of potential authors beyond the initial scope.

*Second iteration: handsearching and expert advice*

The LRPS at the SRI was a subscription service for reports based on syndicated research (1962–1972), where large companies (multinationals) funded proprietary research (in this case long-range planning) in which the subscribers had a shared interest. The SOFT approach is created as a participative appraisal technique, both internal and external, to deal with the planning paradox at the start-up of formal business planning. This environmental planning technique is part of the larger conceptual framework called the system of plans (Stewart, 1963). The SOFT approach was developed by the TAPP group in 1965, under the



**Figure 1.**  
The Google N-gram  
of SOFT approach  
and SWOT analysis  
(2023)

**Source:** Figure by the authors

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leadership of Robert F. Stewart (Nielson, 2020). In the retrospective LRPS report *Setting Corporate Aims*, Stewart defined SOFT as a method to appraise two different types of information: the macro environment and the micro environment: “Because the sources of information differ, it is useful to coordinate, but deal separately, the macro environment and the micro environment” (Stewart, 1971a, p. 6). Every business operates within the macro environment, which encompasses factors such as the geopolitical landscape, the national economic outlook and sociological and demographic trends. The microenvironment is the corporation’s day-to-day interface with the world and, apart from readily available internal resource statistics and performance indicators. Observation and diagnostic attention should be placed on learning from the eyes, ears and minds of the whole management hierarchy, known as the “corporate mind” (Stewart, 1971a, p. 8; Stewart *et al.*, 1965). To further verify the truthfulness of Humphrey’s claims, we consulted experts, explored targeted planning journals and zoomed in on books, conference proceedings, reports, newspapers, theses and trade journals. We looked out for traces of the LRPS, SRI, the System of Plans or the SOFT approach.

#### *Handsearching planning journals*

The Long Range Planning journal started in 1968. The first editorial advisory board included internationally known experts, most of them colleagues and frequent collaborators of Robert F. Stewart and SRI’s TAPP research group. Several early journal contributions were written from a practice perspective and drew on Stewart’s planning philosophy (system of plans) in general and formalized planning in particular. For example: *corporate appraisal* (Hussey, 1968), *entrepreneurial planning* (Malmlöv, 1972; McConnell, 1970, 1971a, 1971b; Smalter, 1968), *organized planning* (Ringbakk, 1969) and *participative planning* (Humphrey, 1974). In the early 1970s, three major approaches to strategic planning were compared and discussed, named the Stanford, American Management Association and Harvard methods (Unterman, 1974). The first approach referenced as the Stanford method refers to the framework for business planning called the system of plans (Stewart, 1963). Although the author’s conclusions were limited to a variation of the Stanford method and do not reflect the original LRPS material on formalized planning, it does prove that the system of plans framework was very prominent in practice. The Harvard Business Review and the Planning Review both do not make any references to Albert S. Humphrey, LRPS, Robert F. Stewart, SRI or the Systems of Plan.

Another example of adaptation of the strategy practice SWOT analysis can be found in the article *Managing strategic surprise by response to weak signals* (Ansoff, 1975). Ansoff, who met Stewart in 1952 at Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, never referred to the body of knowledge of the TAPP research group. However, it is evident that he makes extensions on their work, for instance, “Threat/Opportunity Analysis” and “Opportunity-Vulnerability Profile”. According to the Ansoff anthology (Antoniou and Sullivan, 2006), Ansoff was also an international consultant and sold “The Ansoff methodology” to a wide range of industries and organizations’ sizes like Baekert, FN Herstal and La Bourgeois et Nivel (Belgium), IBM and Promon (Brazil), Northern Telecom (Canada/US), The Pearl River Co. (China) and Eurequip (France). Ansoff’s interest in the consulting world left academics behind, creating the so-called “Ansoffian gap” (Moussetis, 2011, p. 103).

At SRI, the next generation of corporate long-range planning emerged, which explored scenario planning building on the system of plans (Stewart, 1963, 1971a) and is holistic in nature (Schwartz and Mitchell, 1976). An important expansion of this work is the concept of vulnerability analysis (Hurd and Riggs Monfort, 1979), an addition to the OT part (development planning) of the SOFT approach, which was published in *Managerial Planning*.



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In *Business Horizons*, Ghemawat asserts that the acronym SWOT comes from the Harvard Business School and is based on Andrews' strategy framework. "In 1963, a business policy conference was held at Harvard that helped diffuse the concept of SWOT in academia and in management practice" (Ghemawat, 2002, p. 42). In 2016, Ghemawat reiterated the assertion that SWOT analysis was developed by Learned, Andrews, Christensen and Guth (Ghemawat, 2016, p. 747). In response to questions from us about the sources for this claim, Ghemawat writes that he learned this from conversations with Kenneth R. Andrews (Ghemawat, 2017). The authors searched for evidence to corroborate this claim by ordering copies of the *Symposium on Business Policy (1963)* from the Baker Library (see Appendix 1). Based on this evidence and the additional confirmation provided by Professor Guth (2017), we are compelled to reject Ghemawat's claim. This raises the question of how our discovery reflects on the most cited paper on SWOT analysis (Hill and Westbrook, 1997). Unexpectedly, the envelope from the Baker Library search included an "easter egg" which added more insight to our research. We found correspondence between Albert S. Humphrey and Kenneth R. Andrews.

### *An unexpected connection*

Both Humphrey and Andrews shared an interest in executive development, and Humphrey wanted Andrews to know about the course material that TAPP had developed over the past two years (i.e. executive seminars in business planning). In February 1967, Albert S. Humphrey, director of executive seminars in planning, sent a letter to Professor Kenneth R. Andrews. He suggested that the TAPP seminar materials on Business Planning could be used in the MBA coursework. Humphrey encouraged the Harvard Business School to finance attendance, ideally for the Dean, to obtain TAPP's formal planning course material both for the school's administration and as a dedicated course program (Humphrey, 1967b). In response, Professor Andrews wrote that he thought it would be an attractive idea for someone from the Harvard Business School to attend an upcoming SRI executive seminar in planning. Most likely, someone from the faculty. He also asked, "could you either waive the tuition component of your substantial fee, or in some manner provide use with an 'educational rate'?" (Andrews, 1967, p. 1). This tuition fee was \$1,850 for six days, which included all of the teaching materials from the seminar.

Humphrey replied that SRI had always refused to waive tuition fees, which had been tried before by UCLA and George "Gus" Steiner, but to no avail. Humphrey ended his letter by saying "One way around this might be to go through the enclosed listing of names of attendees and if you know one of them, he might just turn over the material to you" (Humphrey, 1967a, p. 1). From letters and interviews, it is evident that academics had their own unique methods of obtaining LRPS reports and TAPP seminar materials. Humphrey and Andrews were in contact and knew of each other's work. We found additional confirmation in the book *Business Policy Text and Cases*:

The Stanford Research Institute takes a different path when it equates strategy with the ways in which the firm, reacting to its environment, deploys its principal resources and marshals its main effort in pursuit of its purpose (Learned *et al.*, 1965, p. 18).

### *Executive seminars in business planning (1965–1970)*

Between 1965 and 1970, the TAPP research group organized executive seminars in business planning in the San Francisco Bay Area for their clients, but also private seminars for clients worldwide. The aim was to teach their clients "How to plan". In the seminars, the participants received an overview of the latest long-range planning literature and the latest advancements in formal planning based on evidence from private consulting to LRPS clients. Directors from large client companies, such as Donald J. Smalter, planning director

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of International Minerals and Chemical Corporation, were asked to give guest lectures alongside experts in the field of business planning, like Professors H. Igor Ansoff and Henry B. Eyring and other knowledgeable subject specialists. In the UK, we encountered newspaper clippings referencing a seminar [3] for senior management at Bradford University in 1966. Notably, Professor H. Igor Ansoff discussed the state-of-the-art in corporate planning (Aris, 1966; *The Guardian*, 1966).

We compiled a list of participants from the executive business planning seminars in our private archive to identify possible authors. We distinguished between attendees, guest speakers and seminar leaders (see [Appendix 1](#)). Throughout this paper, we will cite articles and books by some of these guest speakers and seminar leaders.

The LRPS's Planning Library, situated at the SRI headquarters in Menlo Park, California, was diligently maintained. "It is accessible to the institute's staff, subscribers to the LRPS, and selected guests. Its principal advantage is that it keeps the original articles or photocopies in the files, which are arranged according to the LRPS report (a thick file for each of the reports – more than 280 by mid-1966 – containing an annotated copy of the report and all the background material used for it), and also according to several general subjects such as 'forecasting', 'planning', 'analytical methods', etc." (Jantsch, 1967, p. 96). "The companies circulated the single-page summaries and kept the full (LRPS) reports in a central place, sending them out only when asked for" (Jantsch, 1967, p. 253). Extra copies of the report summaries could be bought at SRI's Planning Library for \$2.

SRI had branch offices in Bangkok, Chicago, Detroit, Huntsville, New York, Stockholm, Washington, Tokyo and Zurich (Jantsch, 1967; SRI, 1972). SRI's office in London was situated in the Rothshield House near Whitegift Center Croydon. The existence of the planning library also demonstrates how the strategy practice SOFT approach/SWOT analysis was available for larger organizations (as well as for academics and elite consultants) but not for small and medium-sized businesses. The LRPS reports are proprietary, so they cannot be easily consulted for reference. For copyright protection, SRI lawyers submitted LRPS reports to the Library of Congress, but these LRPS reports are currently either missing or lost. By sifting through the client list of LRPS from our private archive, we managed to locate corporate archives that might still contain LRPS reports. This turned out to be true in two cases (see [Appendix 1](#)). Locating the Henkel and Co. AG KGaA and the W.H. Smith and Son cases underscores the value of archival research in management history research (Russell, 2019; Tennent, 2021).

#### *Urwick Orr and Partners*

Having triangulated the evidence within our data set, our findings revise two previous assertions regarding the diffusion of the SOFT approach and the evolution from SOFT to SWOT (Nyarku and Agyapong, 2011; Whittington, 2019). First, it is claimed that consultants from Urwick Orr and Partners changed the letters from SOFT to SWOT while attending a seminar in 1964 at the Grand Dolder Hotel in Zurich, where Albert S. Humphrey presented his research (Chapman, 2019). Second, allegedly "Urwick Orr and Partners then promoted SWOT analysis into a widespread practice through their work with British clients such as W.H. Smith during the 1960s and 1970s" (Whittington, 2019, p. 38). Our archival research uncovers compelling evidence that requires a rebuttal of these two initial claims. The first edition of SRI's executive seminars in business planning was organized in 1965 in Palo Alto (Humphrey, 1980), which makes it impossible for Urwick Orr and Partners consultants to have attended an SRI seminar in Long Range Planning in Belgium or Switzerland in 1964. The combination of the terms strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was developed and tested in the SRI executive seminars in business planning in 1966 (Humphrey, 2005) and first published in LRPS report 329, *The Evolution of Corporate*

*Planning* (Ansoff and Stewart, 1967). SRI consultants and planning practitioners interacted during conferences, roundtables or speeches inside or outside of SRI.

Second, according to evidence found in the W.H. Smith business archive, some clues suggest that Urwick Orr and Partners consultants drew inspiration from formal planning methodologies developed by the TAPP research group at SRI. “During February and March 1966, roundtables of planning were held in Menlo Park, Chicago, New York and Europe” (W.H. Smith PLC, 1966). This was months after the LRPS report *Formal Planning: The Staff Planner’s Role at Start-Up* (Stewart et al., 1965) was published. This evidence is corroborated by a letter from William B. Royce, then director of the TAPP group where he writes to Birger Lie of the Norwegian Productivity Institute in Oslo: “Roundtables on provisional planning, which Bob Stewart and I will be giving in London, on February 28<sup>th</sup>, and in Zurich on March 2<sup>nd</sup>” (Royce, 1966, p. 2). In the e-mail archive for the book *SRI: A Heritage of Innovation: SRI first half century* (Nielson, 2005), two (unnamed) Urwick and Orr consultants emerge, who attended the SRI’s executive seminars in business planning (Royce et al., 2001). One of these consultants is probably John Humble. Humble was a Management By Objectives (MBO) expert and director of Urwick Orr and Partners in London. The inputs in exhibit 1 are two arrows: 1. external threats and opportunities and 2. internal strengths and weaknesses. After attending the roundtable on planning at SRI-London in 1966, Humble most likely incorporated these ideas into his new book (Humble, 1967). Unfortunately, without a source reference.

Due to the similarities in Urwick Orr and Partners consulting products, Albert S. Humphrey complained that he had trouble selling the ideas developed by the TAPP research group, which he took with him to London [4] (Humphrey, 1973, 1974, 1997). With his Business Planning and Development boutique, he was competing directly against Urwick Orr and Partners. Support for Humphrey’s complaints can be found in the article *Management training and the smaller company: SWOT analysis* (Stait, 1972) and the manual *Improving Management Performance: a guide to “SWOT” analysis* (Mottershaw, 1974).

*Publishers.* In the book *Formal Planning Systems – The State of the Art* (Lorange, 1974), a table with an overview can be found with the nine strategic planning models by leading authors in the early 1970s (see Table 1). The landmark book *Business Policy – Text and Cases* (Christensen et al., 1973; Learned et al., 1965, 1969) from Harvard Business School, which at the

(Lorange, 1974: p. 6)	(Steiner, 1979: p. 348)
1 Policy formulation and administration (Smith and Christensen, 1962)	1 Strategic planning systems: a framework for analysis (Lorange and Vancil, 1977)
2 Administrative behavior (Simon and Barnard, 1947)	2 Corporate planning (Hussey, 1974b)
3 Corporate strategy (Ansoff, 1965)	3 PIPOS framework (Ringbakk, 1970)
4 The practice of management (Drucker, 1954)	4 Planning and control systems: a framework for analysis (Anthony, 1965)
5 Technological forecasting in corporate planning (Jantsch, 1968)	5 System of plans (Stewart, 1963)
6 Management control systems (Vancil, 1967)	6 Anatomy of corporate planning (Gilmore and Brandenburg, 1963)
7 Planning and control systems: a framework for analysis (Anthony, 1965)	
8 Top management planning (Steiner, 1979)	
9 System of plans (Stewart, 1963)	

Source: By the authors

**Table 1.**  
Overview of strategic  
planning models by  
leading authors  
(1974–1979)

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time, is already in the third edition, does not make the list. One plausible explanation might be that it was not considered a conceptual framework for long-range planning, in contrast to the other two Harvard Business School books *Policy and Administration* (Smith and Christensen, 1962) and *Planning and Control Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Anthony, 1965). Another explanation might be that *Business Policy – Text and Cases* was primarily designed as a textbook for case-based learning at the Harvard Business School. Doctoral research has centered around SRI's system of plans, incorporating personal interviews with experts and LRPS reports (Fosbrook, 2017; Johanson, 1969). According to the book *Strategic Planning – What Every Manager Needs to Know* (Steiner, 1979), the system of plans is still one of the most used corporate planning frameworks until the 1980s.

#### *Trade journals and newspapers*

Triangulation of evidence from extant sources and fieldwork helps provide further insight, and we have revealed links between executives who published planning practice in newspapers, like Peter Bennett of W.H. Smith PLC. Albert S. Humphrey, as a former member of the TAPP research group went into private consulting (Printing Trades Journal, 1973a, 1973b) and joined several boards of companies like K.F. Beer GmbH, Norflex, San Bros Enterprises and Sleeveprint (Financial Times, 1979, 1983, 1986, 1987) where he invested or got payment in shares to implement team action management (TAM) (Groom, 1984; Trafford, 1973). Humphrey rebranded the LRPS methodology to participative planning, which was featured in the article *everybody's finger in the pie* in the Financial Times (Trafford, 1973). In his article *participative planning – a team action planning (TAP) system* (Humphrey, 1973), Humphrey suggested that TAP, which was later renamed to TAM, can be used in management by objectives approaches. He describes TAP as a process by which a company's business plan and budget is produced. The steps in TAP look similar to the provisional planning steps developed by the TAPP research group and Humphrey still refers to the SOFT approach (Humphrey, 1973, p. 18).

Many of the “early reports were frequently leaked by clients, to journals to industry publications or quoted in speeches, which headlined SRI forecasts on industry or technological developments” (Royce, 1985, p. 6). Traces of the consultancy praxis of SRI sometimes ended up in trade journals (BusinessWeek, 1961, 1965, 1967), which indirectly discussed the system of plans framework (Forbes, 1969, 1964).

#### *The present-day understanding of SWOT analysis*

By manually scrutinizing Long Range Planning journal articles, we came across the Argenti System, credited to John Argenti – an independent consultant in the UK and a book reviewer for Long Range Planning. In his book *Systematic Corporate Planning* (Argenti, 1974, p. 109;170) the contemporary SWOT analysis is innovatively introduced in a distinctive cruciform shape (see Figure 2). Argenti clarifies that his book is not intended as a practical guide but rather as a fusion of corporate planning principles and technologies, serving as a comprehensive literature review. He synthesizes insights from various influential authors in the field of corporate planning [5].

#### *The legacy of the theory and practice of planning research group after closing down*

According to Bill Guns, CEO and president of Strategic Business Insight (SRI's Business Intelligence division successor, since 2001), “over the course of a decade, not a single client request was received for a backup of the Datalogs that contained the evidence for the LRPS reports” (Guns, 2020). All Datalogs and supporting materials were trashed during a consolidation of office space to save money. SRI forced LRPS to close the remainder of the Planning Library in the 1990s to move the SRI library to that space, which they eventually

also closed. LRPS reports ended up in corporate archives and private collections and cannot be found anymore in the Library of Congress or The Dora Library. In the Norwegian book *Ledelse Med Plan* (Ringbakk, 1970, p. 106) we found leads that suggested the existence of copies of the SRI microfilms (i.e. Datalogs) residing in the Norwegian Productivity Institute (Norsk Produktivitetinstitutt) archive. During our visit to the National Archives (Riksarkivet) in Oslo, we found that the SINTEF multiphase flow laboratory resides in the same building as the former Norwegian Productivity Institute. We asked the SINTEF archivist if the microfilms were still in the archive, but they were not and eventually the trail of the microfilms went cold. The hardcopies of the LRPS reports probably went to Norwegian libraries when NPI moved out and the microfilms with SRI's Datalog abstracts are either destroyed or missing.

*The Americanization of Europe post world war II*

A reconstruction of the evolution from the SOFT approach into SWOT analysis over time shows that many elite management consultants had access to the LRPS reports, either through academics, fellow management consultants or large corporations who subscribed to the LRPS. Once a management model or an organizational paradigm achieves dominance, it is seen as common sense and shapes human decisions (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018, p. 115). Some of them published variations of the SOFT approach, without acknowledging the sources (see Table 2). Before vilifying these management consultants, it is worthwhile to note that views on citation practices and intellectual property have changed over time. What is now considered questionable research practices was perceived differently in the 1970s (Aksnes et al., 2019). Due to this practice, Professors Kotler and Johnson, distinguished textbook authors on business school topics, find themselves unable to pinpoint the origin of their first encounter with SWOT analysis when asked (Johnson, 2023; Kotler, 2023).

*Summary of the second iteration*

The second iteration provides a more nuanced analysis of the business policy field, offering a finer-grained perspective. Stewart's system of plans planning framework is still one of the most used corporate planning frameworks until the 1980s. New evidence from archival research updates two previous claims about the origins of SWOT analysis. SOFT approach was published in 1965, which rules out the possibilities that consultants from Urwick Orr and Partners altered the letters from SOFT to SWOT during a seminar at the Grand Dolder Hotel in 1964. We present credible evidence (archival material, books and reports) indicating

**Exhibit 7.2 Cruciform Chart for Dove Dishwashers**

<p><b>Strengths</b> Well established company Product of high repute \$200 000 capital available</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b> Small company Single product in one market</p>
<p><b>Threats</b> Strong competition</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b> Kitchen waste disposer</p>

Source: Courtesy of John Wiley & Sons – Books

**Figure 2.**  
Cruciform chart for  
Dove dishwashers  
(Argenti, 1974,  
p. 109). Reproduced  
with permission



**Table 2.**  
Overview of  
variations on the  
SOFT approach  
(1965–1980)

Author(s)	Model or tool	Framework	Relationship
01 <a href="#">Stewart (1963)</a>		System of plans	Robert Franklin Stewart was recruited by the Stanford Research Institute from Lockheed Aircraft Corporation where he had pioneered Long-range planning at its development planning department (1953–1961). The SRI System of Plans authored by Stewart, was announced to the world in <a href="#">Business Week</a> to show the world how to organize long-range planning ( <a href="#">Business Week, 1963</a> )
02 <a href="#">Stewart et al. (1965)</a>	SOFT approach	System of plans	Stewart was program manager of TAPP-LRPS at SRI (1962–1971) charged to research planning theory and best practices to create a method-logy on “how to plan” for LRPS client companies
03 <a href="#">Ansoff and Stewart (1967)</a>	Gap analysis (objectives, threats and opportunities, performance projections and strengths and weaknesses are all brought together in an evaluation of the prospects for the firm)	System of plans	SRI hired H. Igor Ansoff as an academic advisor to write the LRPS report 329 “The Evolution of Corporate Planning”.
	Corporate appraisal		H. Igor Ansoff, George A. Steiner and Robert F. Stewart had first met at Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in 1956, building Lockheed’s Long Range Planning organization at the Corporate Development Planning Department ( <a href="#">Steiner, 1963</a> )
04 <a href="#">Hussey (1968)</a>		System of plans	
05 <a href="#">Kami (1969)</a>	Gap analysis	System of plans	David E. Hussey worked as corporate planning officer at Elders and Fyffes Ltd., a subscriber to the long-range planning service
06 <a href="#">Hargreaves (1969)</a>	Corporate planning cycle	Unknown	Michael Kami was corporate planning officer at IBM, a subscriber to the Long Range Planning Service
07 <a href="#">Humble (1967)</a>	Critical analysis	Unknown	Hargreaves was director of P.A. Management Consultants Ltd. No apparent SRI connection
08 <a href="#">McConnell (1970, 1971a, 1971b)</a>	Determination of a family (or hierarchy) of objectives	Organized entrepreneurship (a redub of System of Plans)	John Humble was a director at Urwick, Orr and Partners Ltd. Urwick and Orr consultants were likely participants in LRPS/TAPP seminars and roundtables in London, 1966 and Zurich, 1967 ( <a href="#">Royce et al., 2001</a> ; <a href="#">Smith, 1966</a> ) Douglas McConnell worked at SRI for LRPS/TAPP as senior marketing economist

(continued)



Author(s)	Model or tool	Framework	Relationship
09 Ringbakk (1970)	External opportunities and threats, internal corporate strengths and weaknesses	PIPOS framework	Kjell-Arne Ringbakk worked as assistant Professor at the San Diego State College and conducted industry research for SRI
10 Stait (1972)	Strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats	IMP approach	Nicolas H. Stait was a senior partner at Urwick, Orr and Partners
11 Steiner (1972)	Opportunity-threat-risk analysis	The strategic planning process	See explanation at nr. 03
12 Humphrey (1973)	Strengths, faults, threats and opportunities (SOFT)	Participative planning or Team action planning (TAP), inspired on the system of plans	Albert S. Humphrey was president of Business Planning and Development in London and a former core member of the LRPS/TAPP research group at SRI
13 Argenti (1974)	The cruciform chart: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (see Figure 2)	Argenti system	John Argenti is a British author and used to work as an independent management consultant. He wrote articles and books and reviewed new books on corporate planning for Long Range Planning journal (1969–1997). He had access to authors, articles, reports and SRI materials
14 Humphrey (1974)	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats inherent in the operation	Participative planning	Idem as nr. 12
15 Mottershaw (1974)	SWOT analysis	IMP approach	Ian Mottershaw worked as a consultant for Urwick Orr and Partners
16 Ansoff (1975)	Threat/opportunity analysis	Strategic issue management system (SIMS)	H. Igor Ansoff was an academic advisor for the board of SRI
17 Ansoff (1975)	Opportunity-vulnerability profile	Idem	Idem as nr. 16.

(continued)

Table 2.

SOFT approach to SWOT analysis

Table 2.

Author(s)	Model or tool	Framework	Relationship
18 O'Conner (1976)	SWOPT	Unclear	The management research division of the Conference Board commissioned a research report for long-range planning, especially how to develop division plans
19 Currill (1977)	Gap analysis	Unclear	It appears to be an adaptation of SRI's organized entrepreneurship
20 King and Cleland (1977)	Strategic database (SDB)	Unclear	There are references to Peter Drucker and Russel Ackoff, which might indicate indirect SRI connections
21 Steiner and Miner (1977)	WOTS-UP analysis	Situational audit, as part of strategic planning, influenced by LRPS/TAPP seminar materials for the Quinta Corporation case study	See explanation at nr. 03
22 Hurd and Riggs Monfort (1979)	Vulnerability analysis	System of plans	Douglas Hurd worked as a researcher at SRI International. Riggs Monfort III worked as a consultant at SRI International
<b>Legend</b>			
02	Satisfactory and faults in the existing operations and opportunity and threats in the future operations, resulting in an Impact analysis		
03	Objectives, threats and opportunities, performance projections and strengths and weaknesses are brought together in an evaluation of the prospects of the firm		
05	In 5 steps: where are we now?, where are we going?, where are we really going?, where do we want to go? and how big is the gap?		
19	The planning gap approach in six steps		
<b>Source:</b> Table by the authors			

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that consultants from Urwick Orr and Partner were dispatched on behalf of their own clients, most likely to a roundtable session for LRPS clients in London or Zurich in 1966. The prototype of SWOT analysis took shape in 1966 during the executive seminars in business planning. Humble and colleagues drew inspiration from this event for the development of their own consulting practice. The first time Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is published together in the context of formal planning is in LRPS 329 (Ansoff and Stewart, 1967). However, this technique is labeled gap analysis. Several practical variations of the SOFT approach have been published by management consultants who were also subscribers to the LRPS. Management consultants tried to establish their own brand and promoted their ideas about Business Policy by publishing articles in practitioner-oriented journals like BusinessWeek, Forbes, Fortune, Harvard Business Review and the new journal called Long Range Planning. Editor Bernard Taylor recruited international planning experts to his editorial board. This is why we have several articles with variations of (parts) of the System of Plans in Long Range Planning. Despite best efforts to keep the information proprietary, sometimes consultants found LRPS reports lying around in the offices of client companies.

In the book *Systematic Corporate Planning* (Argenti, 1974) we rediscovered the first publication of the modern-day version of SWOT analysis. This discovery marks the second generation of SWOT analysis, separate from the TAPP heritage. Today's strategy literature inadequately covers or insufficiently reports on this knowledge. In the third iteration, we thoroughly explore the detailed evidence found within corporate archives of former clients of the LRPS, encompassing both public and private entities, as well as sources in languages other than English.

#### *The third iteration: four long-range planning service client cases from praxis*

Historical inquiries into the impact of management consultants, as explored by Matthias Kipping (Kipping, 1999), shed light on their role in the "Americanization" phenomenon across Europe (Berghahn, 1986; Hilger, 2000) and Japan in the post-World War II era (Barjot, 2003; Kipping and Tirasoo, 2002). Notably, the examination of the Marshall Plan's influence is enriched by contributions from scholars (Bjarnar and Kipping, 1986; Kipping, 1996; Kudo *et al.*, 2004), providing comprehensive insights spanning the time frame of 1965 to 1980. We found some clues about the opportunities for American consultancies in Europe in Fortune (Albrook, 1969; Freedgood, 1965; Guzzardi, 1965).

*Case 1: Owens Corning fiberglass corporation (United States).* In 1959, Owens-Illinois was one of the 74 initial charter participants of the LRPS (Nielson, 2005). Based on the evidence in the private TAPP archive, SRI provided consulting services to Owens Corning Fiberglass Corporation as soon as SRI changed its "no consultancy policy". In a speech, along with a slideshow, James Webel explained Stewart's System of Plans (Webel, 1969). We created a vignette for illustrative purposes (see Appendix 3).

*Case 2: Henkel AG and Co. KGaA (Germany).* Henkel and Cie GmbH. can be found on the SRI's client list (Appendix 2). "Henkel commenced its cooperation with SRI in May 1963" (Hilger, 2000, p. 51). Careful measures were taken by SRI consultants to prepare Henkel for the implementation of formalized long-range planning. SRI, or more precisely LRPS, started implementing long-range planning for the Persil/Henkel Group in late 1966. At this time, J. Knight Allen, J. Morse Cavender and Robert F. Stewart were crisscrossing Europe, hosting round tables for customers and organizing executive seminars in business planning. Allen and Stewart returned to the USA in January 1967 to prepare the report introducing formal long-range planning into the Henkel/Persil group. This report was rediscovered in the corporate archive of Henkel AG and starts with a situational analysis: "The Institute

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reviewed Persil/Henkel's markets and competition, products, management approaches, financial performance and development activities during the Phase I study."

As a result, the strengths and limitations most significant to the company's future from a planning point of view were identified. These strengths and limitations are discussed in detail in the following sections of the report' (Allen *et al.*, 1967, p. 5). Cavender helped to set up the staff planning department at Henkel/Persil and served as its first director. He worked there until the early 1980s [6]. The System of Plans framework, including the SOFT approach, was translated into German. Previous research has already investigated the mystery of how and why American consultants got hired by Henkel and their impact from SRI on the German industry (Hilger, 2000, 2003, 2004). With the help of an overview of SRI-related documents in the Konzernarchiv der Henkel AG and Co. KGaA, we discovered an excerpt of the LRPS report 448 setting corporate aims (Stewart, 1971b). We now have two examples of LRPS report summaries in our data set. This finding corroborates our earlier analysis of the planning library.

*Case 3: the Norwegian Productivity Institute (Norway).* In 1963, a working committee comprising prominent Norwegian corporations, spearheaded by Alf Hernes, NPI's Head of Technical Section, decisively endorsed the signing of a 'distribution agreement' with SRI's LRPS. This agreement was on behalf of NPI's corporate members, facilitating access to the LRPS's research reports. The agreement, initially spanning three years, saw renewals in both 1966 and 1969. Under this arrangement, NPI could seek support from SRI faculty for seminars and conferences on business planning. Additionally, a collaborative agreement addressing specific research issues was established. As part of an agreed exchange program, NPI sent their Long-Range Planning coordinator, Birger Lie, to SRI during 1964–1965. Lie collaborated with the TAPP group, led by Robert F. Stewart. Notably, during the first three European Executive Business Seminars in Planning held in Zurich (1967–1968), six Norwegian companies participated, including Christiania Spigerverk, Den Norske Creditbank, DeNoFA Lilleborg and Norske Folk Insurance. Additionally, companies such as Elkem, Kongsberg Våpenfabrikk, Kværner Brug and Norsk Hydro sought direct assistance from SRI faculty independently. We found a report of several client meetings at Norske Folk Insurance, with detailed instructions for the SOFT approach in Norwegian (Lie, 1968). We created a vignette for illustrative purposes (see Appendix 4).

*Case 4: W.H. Smith PLC (United Kingdom).* In the special collection from the University of Reading, we found the W.H. Smith PLC business archive. P.W. Bennett, managing director of W.H. Smith in London was on the attendee list to the executive seminars in business planning in 1967. We discovered that he also published a case study about participation in planning, with the help of Albert S. Humphrey (Bennett, 1974). Humphrey consulted for W.H. Smith and Son in London (1965–1973), since he joined the TAPP research group at SRI in Menlo Park and later when he settled in London. W.H. Smith became the launching customer for TAM, which was a 17-step variation by Humphrey on the System of Plans. We created a vignette for illustrative purposes (see Appendix 5).

### Summary of the third iteration

The third iteration original material on the presence and influence of the system of plans resurfaced. In the Henkel and Co. AG KGaA archive, we found a finished strategic plan, authored by Robert F. Stewart himself. We also found a summary from LRPS report 448, which corroborates our previous findings about LRPS clients and the Planning Library. The vignette from Owens Fiberglass Corporation illustrates that the System of Plans was truly groundbreaking. General Norstad, a renowned planner at the time, preferred SRI's formal planning framework over any other planning framework (from military or leading consultancies). The W.H. Smith case demonstrates how Albert S. Humphrey continued to

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develop the original materials from the executive seminars in business planning which he took with him to London. The LRPS Planning library has the whole body of knowledge on Formal Planning, including background studies and data logs, available up to the 1990s. Even though the report format to disseminate information became obsolete, LRPS clients kept it in their corporate archives.

### Discussion

Since the publication of the SOFT approach in 1965, the called System of Plans framework evolved due to input from practice (consultancy, Executive Seminars in Business Planning and Research). Various names were tested, like *Good Stewardship* and *Organized Entrepreneurship*. The LRPS, a syndicated research subscription service, distributed reports to multinational clients. Theory developed by the TAPP research group was first tested and implemented at two client companies before it became part of the LRPS reports. Charter members of the LRPS (both sponsors and subscribers) were often consulted to develop research topics. Simultaneously, the SOFT approach, along with stakeholder group analysis and value analysis, constitutes the initial stage, referred to as provisional planning, in the implementation of a formal planning framework. These techniques were often renamed, tested and updated. Executives and their staff planners from around the world attended LRPS seminars on business planning between 1965 and 1970. This is a great example of the interaction between theory and practice.

This paper has methodological, practical and theoretical implications for the field of management history. Some readers may wonder: why do our findings matter now? We have shown that using bibliometric techniques as a research method for historical examinations of strategy practices presents considerable limitations. A comprehensive content analysis of scholarly papers is constrained by the fact that older papers are frequently preserved as photocopies. The misclassification of articles in scholarly databases remains problematic and is hard to correct. This is an important discussion, especially in an age of AI-powered LLM. These algorithms are “trained” with input from human raters who rank the output of these models on “truthfulness”. We can only speculate about the methods by which academic urban legends will be identified and rectified in the future. Especially the triangulation when there is no readily available evidence available as input. We need new mechanisms to curate the training data of algorithms when the peer review process fails to detect erroneous data, political bias and pseudoscience (Keding, 2021; Motoki *et al.*, 2023; van Dis *et al.*, 2023).

From a practical perspective, this paper can help to update scholarly literature on the historical journey from the SOFT approach to SWOT analysis. Our discoveries ought to be incorporated to enhance and update existing articles and book chapters discussing tools for environmental scanning in general, with a specific focus on the journey of SWOT analysis. We advocate management history as a mandatory element in every business school curriculum (Cummings and Bridgman, 2011; Tabor Hartley, 2006; Whitney Gibson *et al.*, 1999), based on historical accuracy and verifiable facts with a holistic explanation of the sign(s) of the times warranting solutions to emergent business challenges. The best available evidence can surface “through the coordinated efforts of several stakeholders” (Czakon, 2019, p. 21). These groups of people interact with the firm – such as “customers, employees, lenders, owners, and suppliers – and have a direct stake in the company’s progress or survival” (Stewart *et al.*, 1963, p. 6). However, evidence from the literature shows the influence of management consultants on the strategic discourse of a firm as well. This raises the question: What happened in the 1980s that sparked new interest in the idea of SWOT analysis? This discrepancy in interest and the time lag requires more attention from scholars interested in the diffusion and institutionalization of strategy and management practices. Our study shows that contemporary strategy and management practices often

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have deep roots that stretch back decades, all the way to ancestral (and largely forgotten) concepts such as the SOFT approach. Future research might uncover serendipitous links between the SOFT approach and Aguilar's environmental analysis, another old strategy practice (Aguilar, 1965, 1967). Our study found adaptations and translations of the SOFT approach in British, German and Norwegian firms. The French and Italian management literature has not yet been searched for more information on the Eurequip matrix, and this link still needs to be explored. The LRPS also had clients in Spanish-speaking countries, like Mexico and Spain. Future research should investigate the diffusion of the SOFT approach in the Spanish literature. Present-day SWOT analysis is translated into Spanish as DAFO (Debilidades, Amenazas, Fortalezas, Oportunidades) or Análisis FODA (Encina and Vigo, 2020; Villas Boas Mello *et al.*, 2022). "In the 1970s, Royce was director of SRI East Asia, and was the founding director of the Japan Society for Corporate Planning" (Royce, 1994, p. 23). The office was located in Tokyo. It is unclear what happened to this society, but traces of the SOFT approach or present-day variations in archives of Japanese companies (England and Lee, 1971; Hayashi, 1978). Such studies of local variations of these strategy practices could potentially be of great theoretical interest. They may illustrate the trajectory of concepts and ideas as they spread across space and time. Environmental scanning was part of their business strategy routine (Reilley, 1955), and companies were already looking inside (internal) and looking around (external) in the 1950s. Future research on semantic confusion could, for example, explore the gradual linguistic differences between limitations, stresses, risks and threats. For instance, the LCAG is an acronym of the first letter of the surnames from the authors Edmund P. Learned, C. Roland Christensen, Kenneth R. Andrews & William D. Guth (or Andrews Strategy Framework) is persistently misattributed as the SWOT analysis. When and why this change in the literature occurred is unclear.

Finally, several methodological challenges are associated with studying strategic management ideas and practices (Strang and Wittrock, 2019). These challenges become even more pronounced when researching the early development of relatively old strategy practices, where the pivotal events took place more than 50 years ago. The SOFT approach and its descendants have been developed in the USA and the UK. Still, the LRPS has distributed ideas about how to start a formal planning organization around the world.

## Conclusion

Until now, Albert S. Humphrey's final Christmas letter appeared to be a dead end in management history, with assertions that seemed impossible to corroborate. With our evidence-based methodology for scholars of strategic management history, we have managed to unveil the true history of SWOT analysis and uncovered which factors and developments shaped the historical evolution of the SOFT approach into SWOT analysis. Based on our findings, we have reached four main conclusions:

- (1) First, we conclude that the SOFT approach is underreported in the literature for several reasons:
  - SOFT approach/SWOT analysis was never designed as an individual strategy tool. It was essentially Stewart's resolution to the planning paradox at the start-up of formal planning in conjunction with stakeholder group analysis (Stewart *et al.*, 1963, 1965).
  - The LRPS reports were proprietary research. The SOFT approach was available to a small group of academics and some elite consultancies in the 1960s and 1970s who worked for multinational firms. Therefore, due to copyright restrictions, there was a limited flow of practice-driven theories such as the SOFT approach to



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academia. Humphrey was never sued for copyright infringement by SRI, because he was a member of the core of the TAPP research group.

- The Planning Library closed in the early 1990s and crucial information was destroyed. Information from archival research in client companies from LRPS (if they still exist) might provide a fuller historical understanding.
  - The intuitive nature of acronyms like SOFT or SWOT make them stick in people's minds ([The Economist, 2009](#)). This could be a possible explanation for why there is a time lag between the conception of the SOFT approach and remnants of the original in the SWOT analysis. Source materials were hardly available, but they were used and shared in practice and remained outside of the academic purview.
- (2) Second, the present-day conception of SWOT analysis as a  $2 \times 2$  matrix appears for the first time in the book *Systematic Corporate Planning* ([Argenti, 1974](#)). This finding is new to the current strategy literature and marks the second-generation SWOT analysis. There is no theoretical connection with the System of Plans or the SOFT approach.
  - (3) Third, the role and influence of management consultants is underreported in the history of strategy planning. Our paper illustrates the need to debunk academic urban myths and make the strategy practices taught in business schools relevant to practice. Our analysis sheds light on the social network around the strategy practice of environmental scanning. We compiled a list of 20 SWOT-like variations as an environmental scanning tool, since the publication of the SOFT approach. These variations support Koontz' observation of a management theory jungle due to semantic confusion ([Koontz, 1961, 1980](#)). We have performed a qualitative social network analysis by mapping the names of participants (academics, consultants and executives) with companies and potential publications. Triangulation of evidence from extant sources and fieldwork helps provide further insight, and we have revealed links between executives who published planning practice in newspapers, like Peter Bennett of W.H. Smith PLC. Albert S. Humphrey, as a former member of the TAPP research group went into private consulting and joined several boards of companies where he invested or got payment in shares to implement TAM or as he also called it Participative planning. In the early 1970s, Urwick Orr and Partners consultants published two SWOT-related works, without making any reference to SRI, LRPS, TAPP or the SOFT approach.
  - (4) Fourth, we have presented four cases that show that multinational companies (Fortune 500) were fully immersed in the implementation of the conceptual planning framework called the System of Plans and provide several examples of the SOFT approach in different languages (English, German and Norwegian). These companies subscribed to the LRPS and enlisted the help of management consultants from SRI's LRPS department, especially the TAPP. Long after the TAPP research group had moved on. The original LRPS reports were kept in a central corporate archive and abbreviated versions of the LRPS report were sent out to the client organization. Extra copies could be ordered from SRI's Planning Library up until the 1990s where Datalogs with background information on LRPS reports were kept. Much of the original LRPS reports and data files are either lost or destroyed.

The outcomes of our study highlight the need for scholars to explore the collective intellectual heritage of strategic management and its predecessor business policy (or long-range planning). This exploration is important to understand the origins and

evolution of the foundational concepts, tools and key ideas that have shaped the field. If we cannot appreciate a nuanced understanding of the origins of key ideas (i.e. SOFT approach/SWOT analysis) then our “doing” of strategic management is uninformed and superficial at best.

### Notes

1. Since its inception in 1959, the purpose of the Long Range Planning Service (LRPS) was: “to research and report on economic, technological, social, and political changes occurring in the business environment and their potential impacts on business, as a basis for making better plans and decisions” (Royce, 1985, p. 4). In 1962, Robert F. Stewart became the leader of a new group in LRPS, on the Theory and Practice of Planning (TAPP).
2. The first iteration in our methodology is the use of thesauri. Articles that are misclassified under a thesaurus term lead to a false positive. The same principle applies for papers that are not labeled with the correct thesaurus term, which then can only be found through handsearching. Misclassification can occur for several reasons. To name a few: human error (Gross *et al.*, 2015), machine learning (Stein *et al.*, 2017) or historical changes in technologies used in library science (Miksa, 2021).
3. David E. Hussey met H. Igor Ansoff for the first time at this seminar on corporate planning (Hussey, 1991).
4. SRI never pursued a lawsuit for copyright infringement, because Humphrey had been part of the core TAPP research group and had been director of executive seminar in planning from 1967 to 1970 (Guns, 2020).
5. Russell L. Ackoff, R.G. Anderson, H. Igor Ansoff, J.T. Cannon, N.W. Chamberlain, B.W. Denning, D.W. Ewing, D.R.C. Halford, H.W. Henry, D.E. Hussey, R.L. Katz, E.C. Miller, D. Novick, R. Perrin, B. Payne, A. Presanis, K-A. Ringbakk, B.W. Scott, G.A. Steiner, I. Stemp, B.H. Walley, E. K. Warren, E.H. Weiwurm, G.F. Weiwurm and H.D. Wolfe.
6. Research for the anniversary book with the working title “150 Jahre Henkel” is in progress under the supervision of Professor Joachim Scholtyseck from the University of Bonn.

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Type	Sources	Description/results
Scholarly articles	<i>1<sup>st</sup> iteration: Scholarly articles and books</i>	
	Business source ultimate Proquest business one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scopus</li> <li>Date: January 22, 2024</li> <li>Search within article title, abstract, key words</li> <li>Search document: SWOT and analysis</li> <li>Sort by: Cited by (highest)</li> <li>Results: 8,569 found</li> </ul>
Scholarly articles	Proquest business one	Business source ultimate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Date: March 20, 2023</li> <li>Search string: (DE "SWOT analysis")</li> <li>Limiters: 19,650,101–198,001,231</li> <li>Results: 1, after review: 0</li> </ul>
Scholarly articles	Proquest business one	ProQuest business one
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Date: March 20, 2023</li> <li>Search string: MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("SWOT analysis")</li> <li>Limiters: 19,650,101–198,001,231</li> <li>Results: 0, after review: 0</li> </ul>
Scholarly articles	Proquest business one	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> iteration: handsearching and expert advice</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handsearching Academic search complete</li> <li>Business horizons</li> <li>Business history review</li> <li>California management review</li> <li>Harvard business review</li> <li>Journal of general management</li> <li>Long range planning</li> <li>Managerial planning</li> <li>Planning review</li> <li>Long Range Planning first editorial board</li> <li>B. Taylor (editor), P. Baynes, B.W. Denning, D.E. Hussey, T. Kempner, R. Maxwell and H.F.R. Perrin</li> <li>Long Range Planning first editorial advisory board</li> <li>L. Adler, H. Albach, H.I. Ansoff, P.R. Day, Y.K. Han, J.B. Quinn, W.W. Simmons, P. Skalina, D.J. Smalter, G.A. Steiner, M. Verhulst and K. Warren</li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table A1.**  
An evidence-based methodology for management history research

Table A1.

Type	Sources	Description/results
		LRPS client list
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the attendee of the Executive Seminars in Business Planning (1965–1970), the following attendants/authors are identified: P.W. Bennett</li> <li>On the guest speaker list</li> <li>H.I. Ansoff, N.W. Bandler, O.J. Renepe, E.R. Bindseil, J.A. Border, J.D. Briggs, R.J. Bruce, H.A. Childs, A.M. deVoursney, W.M. Duke, A.R. Eagle, C.A. Efferson, R.C. Eisenach, H.B. Eyring, G.J. Feeney, T.J. Forbath, A.V. Ganges, I. Goldman, E. Maroti, J.H. McPherson, G.M. Prince, R.L. Purcell, D.J. Smalter, N.A.H. Stacey, C.W. Taylor, R.H. Ward and C.P. Webb</li> <li>Seminar leaders           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. S. Humphrey, D.A. Hurd, A.E. Lee, B. Lie, W.S. Royce, R.W. Smith, R.F. Stewart, M.C. Sotomayor, W.T. Sutphen and V. von Schuller- Götzburg</li> </ul> </li> <li>Attendees of the Executive Seminars in Business Planning (1965–1970) in long-range planning came from the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, South Wales, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands and represented 224 companies</li> <li>According to the SRI International website: some 35 seminars attracted 500 different companies between 1965–1971. <a href="https://srialumni.org/halloffame-archiv.html">https://srialumni.org/halloffame-archiv.html</a></li> <li>“Amerikanisierung” deutscher Unternehmen (Hilger, 2004)</li> <li>Business Strategy (Ansoff, 1969)</li> <li>Introducing corporate planning (Hussey, 1971)</li> <li>Improving business results (Humble, 1967)</li> <li>Ledelse med plan (Ringbakk, 1970)</li> <li>Long-range planning for management (Ewing, 1958, 1963)</li> <li>Strategic market planning (Abell and Hammond, 1979)</li> <li>Strategic planning: what every manager must know (Steiner, 1979)</li> <li>Systematic corporate planning (Argenti, 1974)</li> <li>Managerial long-range planning (Steiner, 1963)</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proceedings of the long-range planning service client conference, February 7th–9th, 1962 (Bruce, 1962)</li> </ul>
Books	<p>SRI International alumni website</p> <p>Academic libraries Amazon.com Abebook.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Albert S. Humphrey wrote the last letter about the origins of SWOT analysis in the SRI alumni newsletter (Humphrey, 2005)</li> </ul>
Conference books	Abebook.com	
Conference proceedings	Academic search complete and free hand search on the Internet	
Corporate website	SRI alumni	

(continued)



Type	Sources	Description/results
Newspapers	The Financial Times The Guardian The Sunday Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don L. Nielson wrote about previous research on the origins of SWOT analysis in the SRI alumni newsletter (<a href="#">Nielson, 2020</a>)</li> <li>• Keywords used: Albert S. Humphrey, soft approach, SRI, SWOT analysis, Urwick, Orr and Partners Financial times</li> <li>• Appointments: Albert S. Humphrey appointed as director of Sleeve-print (<a href="#">Financial Times, 1987</a>)</li> <li>• Appointments: Albert S. Humphrey appointed as director of Norflex (<a href="#">Financial Times, 1986</a>)</li> <li>• Appointments: Albert S. Humphrey appointed as nonexecutive director of San Bros Enterprises (<a href="#">Financial Times, 1983</a>)</li> <li>• Appointments: Albert S. Humphrey appointed director of K.F. Beer Gmbh (<a href="#">Financial Times, 1979</a>)</li> <li>• Everybody's finger in the pie (<a href="#">Traford, 1973</a>)</li> <li>• How teams can score corporate goals (<a href="#">Groom, 1984</a>)</li> </ul> <p>The Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate planning (<a href="#">The Guardian, 1966</a>)</li> <li>• Education for industry (<a href="#">The Guardian, 1968</a>)</li> <li>• Seminar for Company directors (<a href="#">Summer, 1966</a>)</li> </ul> <p>The Sunday Times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisons: corporate path to profit (<a href="#">Arts, 1966</a>)</li> <li>• LRFS report 250: Formal Planning: The Staff Planner's Role at Start-Up (<a href="#">Stewart et al., 1965a</a>)</li> <li>• LRFS report 329: the Evolution of Corporate Planning (<a href="#">Ansoff and Stewart, 1967</a>)</li> <li>• LRFS report 448: Setting Corporate Aims (<a href="#">Stewart, 1971a</a>)</li> </ul>
Reports	Long-range planning service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American consultants in the German consumer chemical industry: the Stanford Research Institute at Henkel in the 1960s and 1970s (<a href="#">Hilger, 2000</a>)</li> <li>• Time frame (1960–1980) Keywords used: Business Consultants, Conferences and Conventions, Management Consultants, SRI, Stanford Research Institute, System of Plans</li> </ul>
Researchgate.net	Stanford research institute	Articles:
Trade journals	BusinessWeek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing farther and sharper (<a href="#">BusinessWeek, 1963</a>)</li> <li>• SRI pulls hard on the growth reins (<a href="#">BusinessWeek, 1967</a>)</li> <li>• Stanford research: New strategy for the sixties (<a href="#">BusinessWeek, 1961</a>)</li> <li>• What management consultants can do (<a href="#">BusinessWeek, 1965</a>)</li> </ul>
	Forbes Magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time frame (1960–1980): Keywords used: Business Consultants, Conferences and Conventions, Owens Corning Fiber Glass, Management Consultants, SRI, Stanford Research Institute, System of Plans</li> </ul> <p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and the arts (<a href="#">Forbes, 1963</a>)</li> </ul>

(continued)

SOFT approach to SWOT analysis

Table A1.

Table A1.

Type	Sources	Description/results
	Fortune Magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen. Norstad tries his hand at corporate strategy (Forbes, 1964)</li> <li>• Nobody wants to stick his neck out (Forbes, 1966)</li> <li>• The general and the genius (Forbes, 1969)</li> </ul> <p>Time frame (1960–1980): Keywords used: Business Consultants, Conferences and Conventions, Management Consultants, SRI, Stanford Research Institute, System of Plans</p> <p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultants: the men who came to dinner (Guzzardi jr., 1965)</li> <li>• Europe's lush market for advice (Albrook, 1969)</li> <li>• The pirates of management (Strycker, 1961)</li> <li>• The churning market for executives (Freedgood, 1965)</li> <li>• Up up the organization (Miller, 1970)</li> <li>• PhD thesis: how scenarios became corporate strategies: alternative futures and uncertainty in strategic management (Fosbrook, 2017)</li> <li>• PhD thesis: a systematic approach to corporate planning (Johanson, 1969)</li> <li>• Mottershaw, I.A., 1974 Improving management performance: a guide to "SWOT" analysis (Mottershaw, 1974) emerged in The Library of Trinity College (Dublin, Ireland)</li> <li>• McPherson, J.H., 1967. A creativity booklet: The industrial planning process and creativity. Part of the Frontiers in Planning Seminar, Long Range Planning Service, Stanford Research Institute (McPherson, 1967) emerged in National Repository Library (Varastok-Kirjasto Depäbbloteket, Kuopio, Finland)</li> <li>• Archivist at SINTEF multiphase flow laboratory, Norway</li> <li>• The book <i>Ledelse Med Plan</i> (Ringbakk, 1970, p. 107) mentions that all background research on Long Range Planning (SRI) is available for subscribers to the Long Range Planning Service on microfilms in London, Oslo or Zürich. SRI had offices in London (Croydon), Stockholm (Norway) and Zürich (Switzerland). The reference to Oslo is refers to a copy of the so called "SRI Datalog", which the Norsk Productivitetstiftutt (NPI) kept</li> <li>• SINTEF multiphase flow laboratory (Oslo) is situated on the same address as the Norwegian productivity institute (NPI), which also has an corporate archive that has not moved. Unfortunately, the microfilms could not be found</li> <li>• TNPI published a series called "NPI nytt" from 1958–1981, including special articles and abstracts from reports Libraries that have access are The Norwegian National Library and NTNU Dora Library</li> <li>• Global professor of management and strategy at the Leonard N. Stern school of Business, New York, United States</li> <li>• Correspondence via e-mail about evidence to support the claim that SWOT originates from Harvard Business School (Ghemawat, 2002, 2016). On the June 7, 2017 Professor Ghemawat responded "Would have been a conversation with Ken Andrews, but unfortunately, not in a position to look for my detailed notes"</li> </ul>
Theses	Bretton Fosbrook	
Worldcat.org	Richard Johanson Ian Mottershaw	
Inquiries (e-mail/ Facebook/ meeting in person or phone)	Joseph McPherson  Elin Greta Fridthjofsdottir	
	Pankaj Ghemawat	

(continued)

Type	Sources	Description/results
	Gerry Johnson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor emeritus of strategic management at Lancaster University Management School, United Kingdom</li> <li>• Correspondence via e-mail and a telephone call followed by a letter summarizing the outcomes of the telephone call. On the 24th October 2023 professor Johnson responded that he agreed with the summary and added “My own view is that SWOT was probably used by a consultant in the 50 or 60 s and its use proliferated because it is simply a helpful (though not very useful) tool to address the obvious”</li> <li>• Professor emeritus of marketing at Kellogg School of Management Northwestern University, United States</li> <li>• In a letter to Professor Kotler, we asked where he learned about the SWOT analysis for the first time. On October 19, 2023 he responded that “I regard SWOT as an essential step in any consulting to help a company improve its performance. I don’t know which consulting firms emphasized SWOT analysis”</li> <li>• Retired Urwick and Orr consultants (London)</li> <li>• Provided some clues on Urwick Orr and Partners publications in the UK (slough)</li> <li>• Retired vice president of SRI’s computer science and technology division, Menlo Park, United States</li> <li>• Dr. Nielson shared the source materials used for his book <i>A Heritage of Innovation: SRI’s First Half Century</i> (Nielson, 2005) put is in contact with other SRI alumni</li> <li>• Professor of modern and contemporary history at the University of Bonn, Germany</li> <li>• Scholtyseck and his team conduct archival research at Henkel for the project ‘150 Jahre Henkel’, which is due in 2026. During our site visit on February 22, 2023, at Henkel AG and Co. KGaA, we met and talked about our SRI’s involvement, specifically the work of J. Morse Cavender. He referred us to earlier work on the Henkel Archive by Professor Susanne Hilger</li> <li>• Corporate archivist at Henkel and Co. AG KGaA, Düsseldorf, Germany</li> <li>• Seidel helped to look through most of the archival information, written in German, relating to the involvement of SRI and SRI consultants at Henkel AG and Co. KGaA</li> </ul>
Interviews	William D. Guth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor emeritus of management and strategy at Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York, United States</li> <li>• Two recorded interviews (2016–2017) with Professor Dr. William D. Guth, which have been confirmed in a detailed letter via Google Hangout (with transcript)</li> <li>• President, and CEO of strategic business insights, Menlo Park, United States</li> <li>• Several informal interviews (2016–2021) with Bill Guns about the history of TAPP/LRPS and the beginning of BIP</li> </ul>
	Peter Lorange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President, and CEO of the Lorange Institute of Business, Zürich, Switzerland</li> <li>• One recorded interview (Lorange, 2023) on January 19, 2023 with Professor Dr. Peter Lorange about getting access to the work of the Long Range Planning Service (LRPS)</li> <li>• Series IV. Harvard Business School and Harvard University. Conferences, and Symposia. 1946–1993</li> </ul>
Public archives		

(continued)

Table A1.

Table A1.

Type	Sources	Description/results
3 <sup>d</sup> iteration: archival research Corporate archives	Baker library historical collections (Boston, United States)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Box 13, Folder 21 Stanford University</li> <li>• Box 14, Folder 13 Urwick, Orr and Partners Ltd</li> <li>• Box 72, Folder 7 HBS; Business Symposium: April 7–11: Correspondence, 1963–1969</li> <li>• Hardcopies from the Kenneth Andrews Papers 1946–1995 collection were obtained with information about the Business Policy meeting held in 1963 at Harvard University</li> </ul>
	National Archives of Norway (Riksarkivet, Oslo, Norway)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date: August 30, 2022</li> <li>• Boxes L0009_0011–0013, 0039, 0072 and 0271, L0404-0407, L0476, L1295-1300 (everything related to Stanford Research Institute or Birger Lie, who worked at the Norsk Produktivitetsinstitutt (NPI))</li> <li>• Instructions: Manual for preparing the planning issue form (no. 1); Manual for grouping and structuring planning issues into families of issues (SOFT approach), all translated in Norwegian, were found</li> <li>• Letters: A letter from Birger Lie to Robert F. Stewart about his year at SRI (1965), a letter from Birger Lie to E. Riggs Montfort III requesting extra copies of LRPS report 250 Formal Planning – the Staff Planner's Role at Start-Up (Stewart et al., 1965), a letter from Albert S. Humphrey to Birger Lie about adapting the Quinta case to a European setting (1966), a response letter from Birger Lie to Albert S. Humphrey about the way the Quinta case evolved is now synthetic and not based anymore on "real company history" (1966)</li> <li>• Scanned the digital versions of the Catalogues of Copyrights for reports filled for copyrights by the Long Range Planning Service. Perused <a href="http://www.bc.gov/">www.bc.gov/</a> for hardcopies of LRPS reports in storage</li> </ul>
Private archive	Library of Congress (Washington D.C., United States)	
	3 <sup>d</sup> iteration: archival research Corporate archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>LRPS/TAPP client case 2, Henkel and Co. AG KGaA</i>: Archiv. Holding 271 / 269; Memoranden J.M. Cavender (Stanford Research Institute) zur neuen Unternehmensorganisation von Henkel 1969 bis 1973; Archiv. Holding 314 / 121: SRI (Stanford Research Institute); LUP (Langfristige Unternehmens-planung/Long Term Planning)</li> </ul>
Private archive	TAPP archive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>LRPS/TAPP client case 1, Owen Corning Fiberglas Corporation</i>: Webel, J.B., 1969. Introducing the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) Planning System at Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corporation; Webel, J.B., 1969. Briefing slides to Accompany "Introducing the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) Planning System at Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corporation" and Webel, J.B., 1969. Intercompany correspondence regarding the Corporate Planning Cycle</li> <li>• <i>LRPS/TAPP client case 3, Norwegian Productivity Institute (NPI)</i>: Report on session for group sessions on long-range planning at Norske Folk (Lie, 1968), Norwegian instruction for provisional planning (Christensen, 1969) and a book chapter on European productivity institutes (Amdam and Yttri, 1998)</li> </ul>
		(continued)

Type	Sources	Description/results
Special collections	The Ansoff Institute Stanford University Libraries Special Collections (San Francisco, United States)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ansoff Institute (Hussey, 2001), which has been dormant</li> <li>• Via <a href="https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/f6t1nb1j1/">https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/f6t1nb1j1/</a>, the guide to the Lemnart Eugene Root papers (1923–1983) was found. Collection M0635</li> <li>• Box 1, folder 9 (Autobiography of L.E. Root)</li> <li>• Box 4, folder 6 (California Institute of Technology)</li> <li>• Root, L.E. and Steiner, G.A., 1956. The Lockheed Aircraft Corporation Master Plan, pp. 239–259 in Long Range Planning for Management, edited by D.W. Ewing</li> <li>• Root, L.E. and Steiner, G.A., 1956. Development planning for management decision, presented at the American Management Association Conference on Systems Planning and Control in New York</li> <li>• Steiner, G.A. and Root, L.E., 1959. Linear Organization Charts, California Management Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, 11–19</li> </ul>
Microfilm	University of Reading Special Collections (London, United Kingdom)	<p><i>LPRS/TAPP client case 4, W.H. Smith and Son.</i> • Background materials about W.H. Smith and Sons (a client of LPRS/TAPP and later Albert S. Humphrey) are part of a collection with the reference WHS W5 in the Museum of English Rural Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WHS W1: Binder (PWB): SRI Seminar; 5–11 Feb 1967. WHS W 1, (dated 1967)</li> <li>• WHS W2: Binder (PWB): SRI Seminar; 5–11 Feb 1967 (notes), (dated 1967)</li> <li>• WHS W3: Binder (PWB): SRI Seminar; 5–11 Feb 1967 (case study 1965)</li> <li>• WHS W4: Binder (PWB): SRI Seminar; 5–11 Feb 1967 (bibliography, July 1965)</li> <li>• The SRI Planning Library (antsch, 1968) is described. Experts provided additional background information.</li> </ul> <p>These planning libraries were available at SRI offices around the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Datalog is a monthly bulletin, containing abstracts of recently completed SRI studies; that is sent to industrial and other organizations who subscribe to SRI's Long Range Planning Service (LRPS)" (Maier <i>et al.</i>, 2018, p. 3)</li> <li>• Via <a href="http://www.nb.no/items/c58146f666470f3eidd67609dcb603736?searchText=sri%20npi%20mikrofilm">www.nb.no/items/c58146f666470f3eidd67609dcb603736?searchText=sri%20npi%20mikrofilm</a></li> </ul> <p>The book Samkatalog over utenlandske teknisk- naturvitenskapelig periodika: beholdning av løpende periodika i norske biblioteker (1963) is referenced containing material from Stanford Research Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The microfilms are illusive. They are either destroyed or misplaced</li> </ul>

Source: Table by author

Table A1.

## PRIOR PARTICIPANTS

Following is a list of companies having participated in prior  
SRI Executive Seminars in Business Planning:

### UNITED STATES

#### INDUSTRIAL

Alcan Aluminum Corporation  
Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation  
American Cyanamid Company  
American Machine & Foundry  
Company  
Amoco Chemicals Corporation  
Amsted Industries, Inc.  
Ansul Company, The  
Appleton Coated Paper Company  
AVM Corporation  
Bethlehem Steel Corporation  
C. Brewer and Company, Limited  
Carrier Corporation  
J. I. Case Company  
Celanese Corporation  
Coca-Cola Company, The  
Colt Industries, Inc.  
Columbian Carbon Co.  
Consolidated Papers, Inc.  
Container Corporation of America  
Deere & Company  
Del Monte Corporation  
Di Giorgio Corporation  
Dow Chemical Company, The  
Dynatronics, Inc.  
Eastex Inc.  
Electro-Optical Systems, Inc.  
Eli Lilly and Company  
Faultless Starch Company  
Foxboro Company, The  
Geigy Chemical Corporation  
General Dynamics Corporation  
Givaudan Corporation  
Green Giant Company  
Hammond Corporation  
Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc.  
Howmet Corporation  
HRB-Singer, Inc.  
Hyster Company  
International Paper Company

Interstate Electronics Corporation  
S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc.  
Kelsey-Hayes Company  
Kern County Land Company  
Kerr-McGee Corporation  
Keystone Steel & Wire Company  
Koch Convertograph Company  
Kraft Foods  
Leach Corporation  
Ling-Temco-Vought, Inc.  
LTV Aerospace Corporation  
LTV ElectroSystems, Inc.  
Lyon Metal Products, Inc.  
Mead Corporation, The  
Miller Electric Manufacturing Co.  
Milprint Inc.  
Minute Maid Company  
Mobil Oil Corporation  
National Biscuit Company  
Nationwide Papers, Inc.  
Nicolet Paper Company  
Olympia Brewing Company  
Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation  
Pacific Car and Foundry Company  
Philip Morris, Inc.  
Philip Morris Industrial  
Polymer Industries, Inc.  
PPG Industries, Inc.  
Fullman Incorporated  
Quaker Chemical Corporation  
Reeves Bros., Inc.  
Samsonite Corporation  
Simpson-Lee Paper Company  
Simpson Timber Company  
Sperry Rand Corp.  
Spokane Pres-to-Log Co., Inc.  
Tenneco Inc.  
Timken Roller Bearing Company, The  
Union Oil Company of California  
United Gas Corporation  
U. S. Plywood - Champion Papers, Inc.  
Univac

Walker Manufacturing Company  
Wallace-Murray Corporation  
Warnaco, Inc.  
Westinghouse Electric Corp.

#### ACCOUNTANTS AND CONSULTANTS

Ernst & Ernst  
McKinsey & Company, Inc.

#### FINANCIAL

Brown Brothers Harriman & Co.  
Continental Illinois National Bank and  
Trust Company of Chicago  
Continental National American Group  
First National Bank of Boston  
First National City Bank  
Fund American Companies, The  
Insurance Company of North America  
Investors Diversified Services, Inc.  
New England Merchant National Bank  
North American Reinsurance  
Corporation

#### WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

Canteen Corporation  
Dayton Corporation  
Fisher Scientific Co.  
Manning's, Inc.  
Sperry & Hutchinson Company

#### TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC UTILITIES

Colorado Interstate Gas Company  
Northern Illinois Gas Company  
Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Co.  
Puget Sound Power & Light Company  
United Air Lines, Inc.

#### AGRICULTURE, MINING, CONSTRUCTION

Chemical Construction Corporation

(continued)



## PRIOR PARTICIPANTS

(continued)

### OTHER COUNTRIES

#### INDUSTRIAL

Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG)  
AB Atomenergi  
Bowater Paper Corporation Limited, The  
Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited, The  
Brown, Boveri & Cie. A.G.  
Butterley Brick Company Ltd., The  
CBR (Cimenteries et Briqueteries Réunies)  
Chemcell Limited  
Christiania Spigerverk  
CIBA Limited  
Coca-Cola Export Corporation, The  
Compagnie de Saint-Gobain  
Corn Products Latin America  
Deggendorfer Werft und Eisenbau, GmbH  
A/S De-No-Fa og Lilleborg Fabriker  
Domtar Ltd.  
Dunlop Company Limited, The  
Electric Furnace Products Company, Ltd.  
Empresa Geral de Fomento  
Erie Resistor Limited  
Esolko Ltd.  
Esso Africa, Inc.  
Esso Chemical S.A.  
Esso Standard Italiana S.p.A.  
Farbenfabriken Bayer AG  
J. R. Geigy S.A.  
L. Givaudan & Cie., S.A.  
Guest, Keen & Nettelfolds, Limited  
Gutehoffnungshütte Aktienverein  
Hawker Siddeley Canada Limited

Heberlein & Co., AG  
Henkel & Cie. GmbH  
Hoesch AG  
E Hoffmann-La Roche & Co. A.G.  
Hojalata y Lamina, S.A.  
Imperial Chemical Industries Limited  
International Computers & Tabulators, Ltd.  
International Publishing Corporation  
Jacobs Kaffee GmbH  
AB Karlstads Mekaniska Werkstad  
Oy Kaukas Ab  
Koninklijke Nederlandsche Gist en Spiritusfabriek N. V.  
Landis & Gyr A.G.  
Lepetit S.p.A.  
Ley's Malleable Castings Co. Ltd.  
A. F. Møller  
Morganite Research and Development Limited  
Oerlikon-Bührle Holding AG  
Oy Nokia Ab  
Ing. C. Olivetti & C. S.p.A.  
C. A. Parsons & Company Limited  
Péchiney Cie  
Pirelli S.p.A.  
Preussag A.G.  
Química General, S.A.  
Rolls-Royce Limited  
Salvenerderierna  
Savonneries Lever  
Société des Chaux et Ciments de la Suisse Romande  
Steel Company of Wales Limited, The  
Sulzer Brothers Limited  
Swiss Aluminium Ltd.  
Turner & Newall Limited  
Unilever Limited

#### BANKING, FINANCE, INSURANCE

Algemene Bank Nederland N.V.  
Banco Hispano Americano  
Bank of Ireland Group  
Canada Trust Company, The  
Den Danske Landsmandsbank A.S.  
Framtiden Livförsäkringsaktiebolag  
Lloyd's Register of Shipping  
Nordiska Föreningsbanken  
Norske Folk Livs- og Pensjonsforsikring A/S  
Den norske Creditbank  
A. Sarasin & Cie  
Stockholms Enskilda Bank  
Swiss Reinsurance Company

#### WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

Kaufhof AG  
J. Lyons & Company Limited  
La Rinascente  
W. H. Smith & Son Limited  
Söderberg & Haak

#### TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC UTILITIES

Air Canada  
Burda Druck GmbH  
Canadian National Railways System  
Northern Electric Co. Ltd.  
RAI — Radiotelevisione Italiana  
Svenska Radio AB

#### ACCOUNTANTS AND CONSULTANTS

Bouaine, Funck & Cie  
Industrial Market Research Limited  
Norsk Produktivitetinstitutt  
Research and Marketing Limited

**Notes:** List of prior clients of the Executive seminars in planning (Long Range Planning Service, 1970)

**Source:** By author

### Appendix 3. Owens corning fiberglass vignette

Owens Corning Fiberglass (OCF) was built and operated for 30 years under the personal direction of a "genius entrepreneur". There was no formal planning system. During November and December 1967 several alternative approaches to a corporate planning system were evaluated at the direction of the newly elected chairman and chief executive – General Norstad. The general, as one of the foremost planners produced by this country, was convinced of the value of advanced planning and determined to introduce a corporate planning system covering both the short, mid and long-range planning periods. Seven separate planning approaches were reviewed and explored.

The SRI system was recommended and eventually approved by the chairman and the president. A series of briefings followed for members of OCF's management committee by the director of corporate planning and a briefing by consultants from SRI – Mr Robert Stewart and Mr Manuel Sotomayor on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1967. A consultant contract with SRI was approved on January 2, 1968. We were off and running with a new system of planning at OCF.

Using an approach called the "SOFT analysis" was the first step in the introductory cycle is a total analysis of the business at all levels by the existing management structure. This SOFT analysis is designed to determine what is good or bad about the firm's operations in the present and future

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time frames. This is expressed by the managers as Satisfactory or Fault in the present or Opportunity or Threat in the future. The first letters of these four words give the analysis its name. The analysis is conducted by preparing a simple form 1 which identifies each planning issue by describing the issue, providing references or facts bearing on the issue and by listing the ranges of possible action and resources required.

Based on work by Mr James B. Webel, vice-president corporate planning OCF, 1969.

*Source:* By author

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#### **Appendix 4. Norsk Produktivitetsinstitutt – NPI vignette**

The Norwegian Productivity Institute (Norsk Produktivitetsinstitutt – NPI) was established in 1953 as a productivity center for the Norwegian industry and a liaison with the European Productivity Agency (Amdam and Yttri, 1998). NPI's interest in Long Range Planning was ignited in 1961 when three representatives from the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) visited Oslo to introduce the institute's upcoming Long Range Planning Service (LRPS) tailored for American and European businesses. In 1963, a working committee comprising prominent Norwegian corporations, spearheaded by Alf Hernes, NPI's Head of Technical Section, decisively endorsed the signing of a "distribution agreement" with SRI-LRPS. This agreement was on behalf of NPI's corporate members, facilitating access to the research reports issued by SRI's LRPS. The agreement, initially spanning three years, saw renewals in both 1966 and 1969. Under this arrangement, NPI could seek support from SRI faculty for seminars and conferences on business planning. Additionally, a collaborative agreement addressing specific research issues was established. As part of an agreed exchange program, NPI sent their Long-Range Planning coordinator, Birger Lie, to SRI during 1964–1965. Lie collaborated with the Theory and Practice of Planning group, led by Robert F. Stewart. For its member companies, ten hardcopies of each LRPS report specific to long-range planning were ordered and distributed on demand among the participants. The LRPS report titled "Formal Planning – The Staff Planner's Role at Start-Up" (Stewart et al, 1965), which introduced the "SOFT approach," garnered significant demand and was permanently acquired by many NPI members. The procedures of the SOFT approach were translated into Norwegian and used by NPI consultants upon request when assisting regional companies with their business planning.

Based on National archive material and the book *Missionaries and Managers* (1998).

*Source:* By author

#### **Appendix 5. W.H. Smith PLC vignette**

W.H. Smith and Son, the UK newsagent, bookseller and stationer hired SRI-TAPP in 1969 to find a practical and participative way to develop their long-range planning function for its 24 divisions and 160 senior managers in retailing, wholesaling, property, training and management services. Every November, senior managers in the various Smith divisions gathered for a five-day session to draw up plans for the next five years.

It's a tremendous morale booster said Peter Bennett, the Canadian-born chairman of W.H. Smith. Things are beginning to happen which people down the line know they have been partly responsible for creating (Trafford, 1973). In September 1970, Bennett hired Albert S. Humphrey, who just started his own consulting boutique in London, to spread the system through the whole group.

Bill Coffey, general manager of Hambleton Press, a W.H. Smith subsidiary in Huntingdon UK, explains: The process sets out to create three positive conditions: first it identifies the strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities inherent in the firm. Second it enables management to formulate realistic action plans over a period of time to take advantage of strengths and opportunities and eliminate the threats and weaknesses. Third, it produces a framework within which action plans

are actually carried out with immediate and measurable benefits. The process is designed for use at any self-contained company or division and it is being used with equal success both at the center of W.H. Smith and its component companies ([The Publishing Industry Training Board, 1972](#)).

Based on articles in the PITB (1972) and the Financial Times (1973).

*Source:* By author

### **About the authors**

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Finn Birger Lie is principal at Jafin Invest S.L. management consultancy located in Bilbao, Spain and custodian of the TAPP Research Archive. His areas of expertise and research interests lies within design, entrepreneurship, management history and strategic planning in the digital era.

Dag Øivind Madsen is a Professor at the USN School of Business, University of South-Eastern Norway. His main research area is the diffusion and evolution of management tools and techniques.

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