

Chapter 25

Historiographical Analysis



Ch25. Historiographical Analysis

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Short Description

- Historiographical analysis applies a common research methodology used in history studies to strategy analysis.
- It attempts to understand strategic issues relative to their origins and evolution in order to more clearly understand the present.



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Background

- Origins in 19th Century
- Articulated to address two issues (Iggers, 1987):
 - The actual process of historical writing; and
 - Methodological and theoretical issues related to this process.
- Historiographers are conscious of the 'Four Cs': context, causes, continuity, and change (Rampolla, 2001).
- 1960s Alfred duPont Chandler was one of the first economic historians to apply historiography to the study of strategic management.
- Since then, advances in historiography to the field of strategic management have been erratic.



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Strategic Rationale and Implications

- The primary purpose for using historiographical methods for is to build business theories that revisit the past in order to explain current strategic issues.
- Goodman and Kruger (1988): Areas where historiographical analysis is helpful:
 - Research question development.
 - Variable selection and evaluation.
 - Theory construction.
 - Hypothesis generation.
 - Formulation of conclusions.



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Strengths and Advantages

- Diversity of sources.
- Asks new questions or approaches old questions in different ways.
- Examines the relationship between contexts, causes, continuity, and changes.
- Analytical development and decision making are improved by principles of:
 - Strategic challenge
 - Skepticism



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Weaknesses and Limitations

- Lack of objectivity.
- Can suffer from 'prior hypothesis bias'.
- Validity is dependent on one's view of history.
 - Linear
 - Circular
 - Chaos
- Technique may lack structure.
- Problematic if the analyst uses the conclusions to predict the future rather than to better understand the current position.



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Process for Applying the Technique

- **Step 1** – Develop a general proposition
 - Examples of general propositions:
 - Underlying factors responsible for the prevalence of alliances in a particular industry.
 - Specific reasons for the industry leader's success with a particular type of technological platform.



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Process for Applying the Technique

- **Step 2** – Collect primary information
 - Primary sources include: (first draft of history)
 - Eyewitness accounts
 - Accounts from people close to the issue
 - Published speeches
 - Experiments
 - surveys
 - original photographic records
 - Often the most valuable source of information.



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Process for Applying the Technique

- **Step 3:** Collect secondary information
 - Typical sources of information include: (second draft of history)
 - Newspapers
 - The internet
 - Magazines
 - Corporate publications
 - Annual & analyst reports
 - Trade publications
 - Academic cases
 - Important to remain objective.



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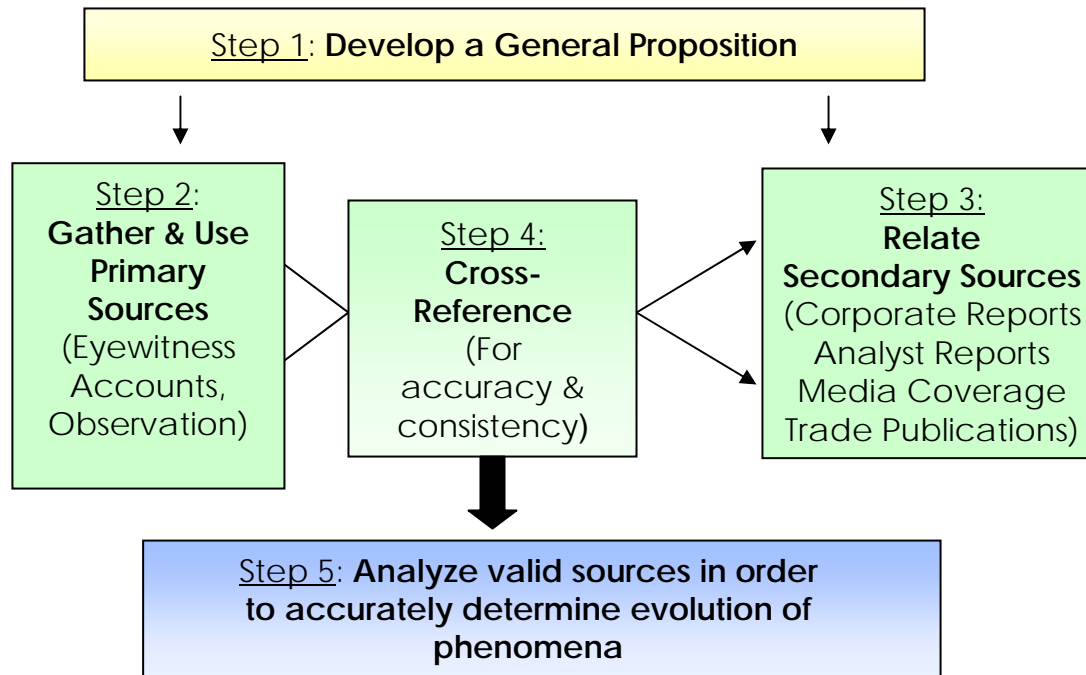
Process for Applying the Technique

- **Step 4:** Select the best sources for the third draft
 - Select those sources that best address the general proposition.
 - Sources then represent the raw material for the ‘third draft of history’.
 - Analyze to find common threads amidst mass of data.
 - Threads are then woven into a theoretical tapestry that supports the original proposition.

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Process for Applying the Technique

- The Historiographical Process:





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Process for Applying the Technique

- **Step 5: Reporting**
 - Historiographical analysis is inductive.
 - Will gain richer appreciation of the present conditions and strategic issue.
 - Should be continuous because history is continuous.
 - Read from as many different sources as possible.



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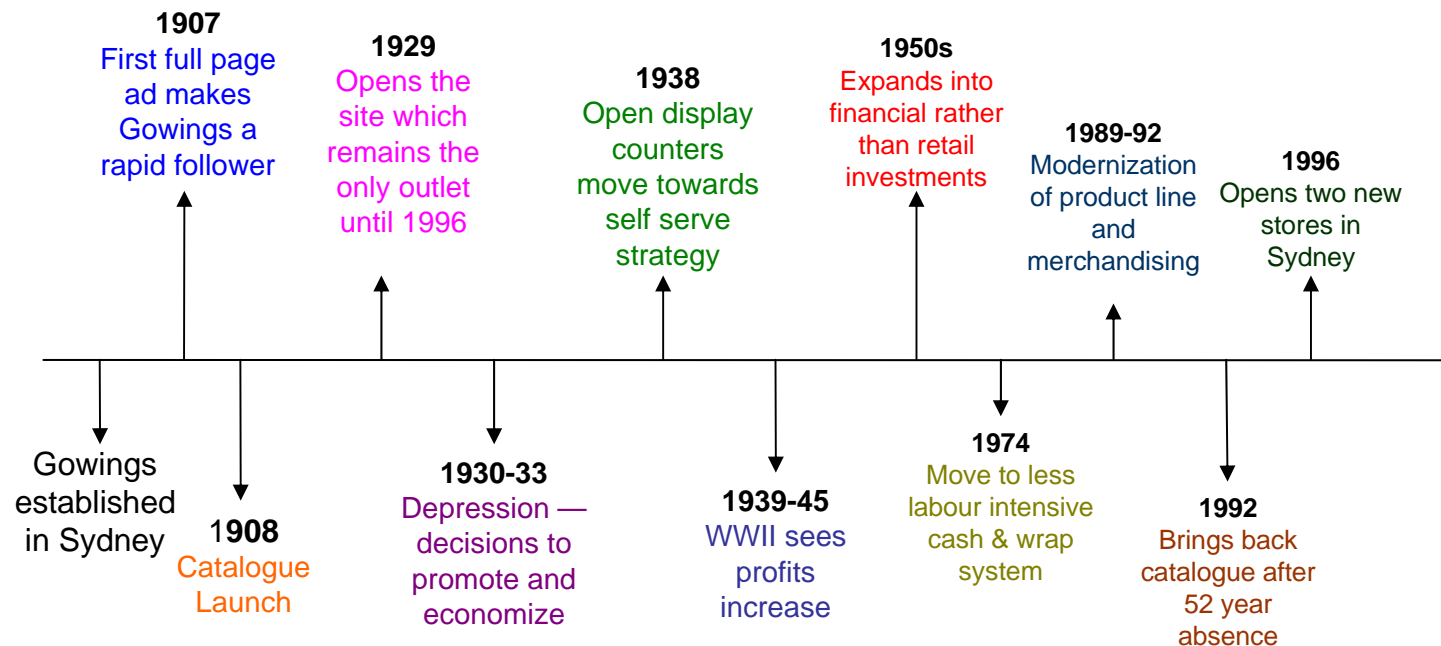
Case Study: Australian Menswear Retailer

- Gowing Brothers had been a prominent competitor in the Sydney menswear market since 1868.
- Researchers employed historiographical analysis to answer the question, 'What leads to retail success over extended time periods?'
- 3 CSFs were identified for the industry:
 1. Clear market positioning.
 2. Distinct periods of expansion or modernization.
 3. Capabilities allowing excellent operational management of the retail mix.

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Case Study: Australian Menswear Retailer

- The researchers analyzed primary and secondary sources and subsequently created a timeline:





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Case Study: Australian Menswear Retailer

- Each of these decisions were put into a historical context relative to what rivals were doing in the same timeframe.
- They were then used to assess critical success factors.
- After evaluating the fit with the framework, the researchers came to the following conclusion:
 - Flexibility as opposed to constancy of market positioning was determined to be a moderate CSF (CSF 1);
 - Expansion and modernization were determined to be a strong CSF (CSF 2); and
 - Operational management was determined to be a medium to strong CSF (CSF3).



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Case Study: Australian Menswear Retailer

- Framework was found to have a close but not perfect fit to Gowings' experience.
- The study highlighted the significance of a clearly defined market position and the ability to respond to dynamic market conditions.
- Organizational capabilities related to good relationships with customers, staff and vendors were also identified.
- CSFs specific to retail categories were identified as several unique capabilities.

Adapted from: Miller, D. and B. Merrilees, 'Gone to Gowings' – an analysis of success factors in retail longevity: Gowings of Sydney, ' *The Service Industries Journal*, 2000, January, 20(1) pp.61-85.



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- **FAROUT Summary**

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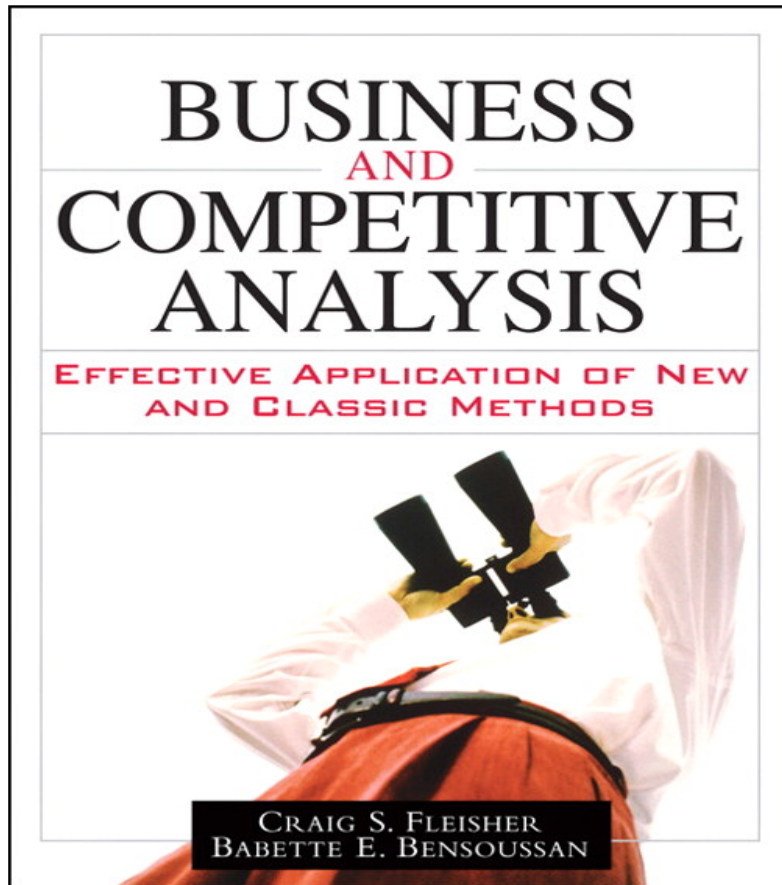


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Related Tools and Techniques

- Blindspot Analysis
- Critical Success Factor Analysis
- Industry Analysis
- Issue Analysis
- Stakeholder Analysis
- STEEP Analysis
- Strategic Group Analysis

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For More About **Historiographical Analysis** and 23 Other Useful Analysis Methods, see:

Fleisher, Craig S. and Babette E. Bensoussan

Business and Competitive Analysis: Effective Application of New and Classic Methods

FT Press
FINANCIAL TIMES

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