



CHESS

IT'S ALL ABOUT SETTING UP THE END-GAME THEN EXECUTING A DECISIVE TACTICAL SEQUENCE

US Grand Master Bobby Fischer said "chess is life". The game endures because, just as in life, focus, strategy, tactics, anticipation and decisiveness are necessary to win. Chess is also business.

In Chess the objective is clear – capture your opponent's king. From this clarity everything else flows. And each game passes through three distinct phases:

(1.) In the opening phase you aim to take control of the centre of the board and to position your principal pieces for best strategic advantage. In short you choose and optimise your team, setting them up for the middle game.

(2.) In the middle game you thin out the board to create space for your principal pieces. Just as it is hard to run in a crowd, a crowded board restricts the reach and mobility of your strongest pieces and therefore their effectiveness.



Implicit in this phase is a plan to have fewer of your *own* pieces; not just fewer of your opponent's. You concentrate power in and extend the reach of the team that will deliver your end-game. At the same time you work to weaken your opponent by eliminating their principal pieces or containing them in less advantageous parts of the board.

(3.) By the end game you have a direct line of sight on which pieces are at work and their relative strengths. Your focus moves to the systematic execution of thought-through tactics to capture the king.

Chess is business played out in a microcosm. It rewards success, there are clear consequences of failure, plans are necessary but the ground changes so agility and decisiveness are crucial.

A Chess game resolves *because* the objective is clear. "Capture the king" is succinct; there is no scope for 'interpretation'; it is constant; and

there is an objective criterion for success. If your business objective lacks this clarity, what follows will likely flounder. Do we always insist on this level of clarity?

Any significant project, like Chess, has an opening phase where key individuals are brought into play. But do we attend to optimising their relative influence and power?

Few initiatives start in a 'green field': most require rationalisation of parallel (albeit well intentioned) activities to create momentum - the middle game. This may mean simply alignment but, perhaps more often than we like, steps are required to weaken competing strategies to limit the risk of failure. Do we act decisively on these occasions?

Do we set up end-games well where the roles are now clear and there is a clear path to the end objective? Even then, how often do we see an objective given away by an attempt to 'leap to checkmate' in a single move rather than a choreographed sequence of tactics?

In short, should we be encouraging our senior teams to play chess?

This ER began as a meditation on the folly of 'single-move' & 'straight to end-game' plans.

But it occurs to me that two important tactics in Chess are 'misdirection' and 'sacrifice'. The former distracts your opponent with an apparent strategy whilst you execute another. The latter sees you give away your queen to draw your opponent into a fatal mistake.

This made me wonder: "are we right now in the midst of a grand game of chess? And have I properly understood the end-game?"



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