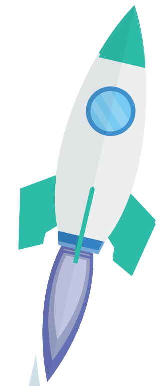

plan to execute

an executive handbook to develop and execute strategy

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About the author...

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Jeff is the Vice President of Strategy Development and Execution. He has worked for SupplyCore, an Inc 5000 fastest growing companies eight-time awardee, as a consultant or full time since 1992. Jeff has been a member of the leadership team during SupplyCore's unprecedented growth, which is attributed to strong strategic planning and execution.

Jeff was also a college Professor and MBA Director for 29 years and taught Strategic Planning at for the MBA students. Jeff is also an author, having authored numerous case studies for textbooks, papers for academic conferences, articles for the Rockford Chamber monthly newsletter, and article and textbook reviews.

Jeff has worked with a variety of for-profit, not-for-profit, and government organizations as a leadership and strategic planning consultant. He has also been an active trainer in the areas of strategy execution and leadership development for all levels of organizational personnel. Jeff uses his volunteer time to serve on the boards of local, regional and national professional and not-for-profit organizations.

Introduction

What did you do today to work towards the achievement of your organization's strategic goals? What did your colleagues do? If you were to ask this question of yourself and others in the organization, would the answer be "Nothing," or worse yet "What are the strategic goals?" Such answers are sadly common but unacceptable in any organizational environment and particularly a competitive, high growth one.

The most important factor in determining your organization's success is whether you can effectively execute your strategy, Or put another way, whether you can eliminate the strategy-execution gap. Simply put, better performing organizations are nearly always better at executing strategy.

The aim of this handbook is to provide a practical guide for successfully developing and executing strategy. The handbook does not reinvent the wheel but rather consolidates and simplifies existing research and best practices in a practical and succinct manner.

In emphasizing execution, the handbook will:

- Provide an overview of the Strategic Planning process from development through execution.
- Help the reader decide who decides, free up and allocate, and prioritize strategies.
- Emphasize the need for transparency in order to empower your employees to take ownership of accomplishing the tasks necessary to reach strategic goals.
- Discuss what is NOT effective strategy execution.
- Aid in the elimination of the strategy execution gap by using the right technology to support the process. The concepts and methods which drive execution should be inherent in the technology deployed.

?

What did you do today to work towards the achievement of your organization's strategic goals?

1 first things first: mission, vision and values

In order to develop an effective strategy, you first need to know, and agree on, where you are (mission), where you are going (vision) and what you will and will not compromise to get there (values). Too often companies confuse and combine the three concepts and create statements which are vague, muddled, and boring. These three elements provide focus and ground the strategy. Without clear mission, vision and values strategy flounders.

A mission statement describes an organization's "core purpose."[1] Its character and identity. An organization's mission should reflect its past and present.[2] Missions answer the question 'why,' as in why do we exist?

A vision statement is an organization's "envisioned future." It is aspirational and details what an organization wants to do.[3] The vision answers the question 'where,' as in where are we going?

Values describe how an organization and its employees will act in living its mission and achieving its vision.[4] Values set the parameters of behaviors and interactions both internally and externally and help set the context of your organizational culture. Values answer the questions 'what and how' and what will not be compromised on the road from mission to vision. They also answer, "How do we expect to conduct ourselves on our planning execution journey?"

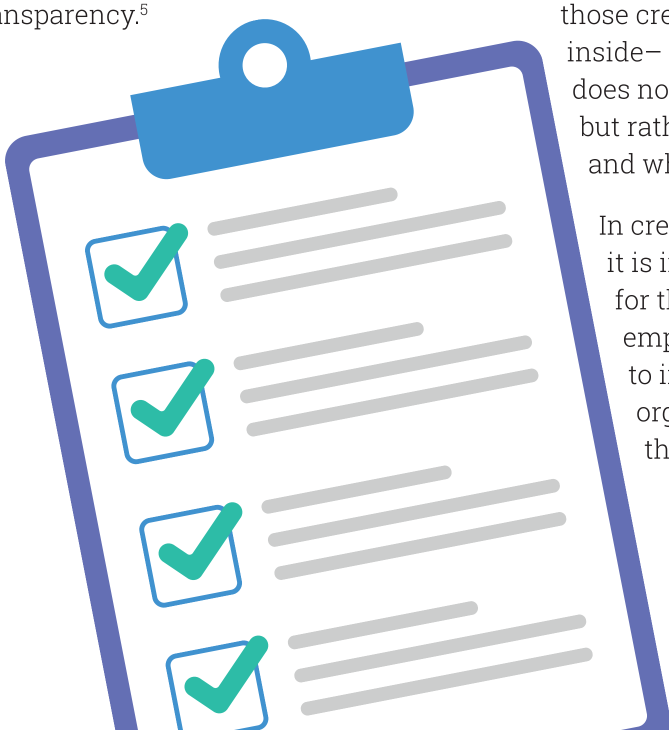
A pyramid model for strategy development and execution.

PetSmart provides a good example.

Mission Every day with every connection, PetSmart's passionate associates help bring pet parents closer to their pets so they can live more fulfilled lives.

Vision We love pets and we believe pets make us better people. PetSmart will be the trusted partner to pet parents and pets in every moment of their lives.

Values Do the right thing; Teamwork; Customer-focused; Accountability; Rigor; and Transparency.[5]



Developing Mission and Values

Developing mission, vision and values is the first step in the strategic planning process. In developing mission and values, one word, or concept, is paramount– authenticity.[6] Those both within and outside of an organization will know if an organization's mission and values are inauthentic or abandoned. And as typical corporate PR disasters commonly illustrate, such failures can be devastating.

In getting to an organization's authentic self, those creating the mission and values must look inside– to the organization's soul. As such, one does not ask what should the organization be, but rather, must focus on the who, what, how and why of an organization as it is.[7]

In creating an authentic mission and values, it is important to remember the audience for these statements is an organization's employees. The statements are created to inspire and guide those within the organization and must permeate through the entire organization.

Examples of Mission and Vision Statements

Google

Mission: To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.
Vision: To provide access to the world's information in one click.

LinkedIn

Mission: To connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful.
Vision: To create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce

Patagonia

Mission: Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.
Vision: A love of wild and beautiful places demands participation in the fight to save them, and to help reverse the steep decline in the overall environmental health of our planet.

mission

Questions to answer when developing an organization's **mission**

Why does the organization currently exist?

Why is the organization important?

What problem does the organization solve?

Why do I personally work for this organization?[8]

Q&A

values

Questions to answer when developing **value statements**

What is our organization's culture and what values accurately represent this culture?

What values do I as am employee bring to work each day?

What values do our customers desire?

If things changed and a value became a competitive disadvantage, would we still adhere to that value?[9]

In answering these questions, there will no doubt be numerous values deemed to be "worthy." However, most organizations limit values to three to five.

Value statements are permanent and do not easily change. Further, they have to be communicated and emphasized throughout the organization so employees know exactly what is prioritized. So... less is more. This trimming down may be challenging, with some "worthy" values being eliminated.

For example, for financial planners, lawyers and home cleaners, trust is likely to be a core value. When someone entrusts you with their life savings, looks to you to solve their worst problem, or allows you into their home, trust is a crucial component of successfully doing your job and meeting your customers' expectations. But if an organization is a wholesaler tasked with delivering goods quickly and cheaply, then trust, while certainly a "worthy" value, may not be mission critical.

Further Characteristics of Mission and Values

Mission and values should not easily change. They should be fixed for long periods of time. This doesn't mean the statements themselves– what goes on an organization's website– cannot change. But rather the essence of the mission and values should not change regularly. The inflexibility of an organization's mission and values is liberating. It creates an organization ethos where all but the mission and values can and should change. This is easily understood when we think about our own lives. Who we are– our values– do not change as we navigate the continual challenges we face in our lives.

The creation of mission and values is not a wordsmithing exercise.[10] While exceptionally important, the previously shown questions show that this should be an exercise in self-reflection and at achieving authenticity. PetSmart's mission is to bring people closer to their pets. The actual statement could change – but this core purpose most likely will not.

The mission and values of an organization must be communicated to an organization's employees. Put another way, it must permeate throughout the entire organization. Thought should be put into how the mission and values will be communicated to an organization's employees and how the mission and value will be reinforced.

Leadership is crucial. An authentic mission and values can be developed, written down and communicated to an organization's employees, but without leadership living the mission and values– they will mean nothing. Leadership should reinforce the mission and values by acting appropriately and recognizing others in the organization who regularly do the same. Also, as difficult as it may be, someone who doesn't fit the organization's mission or live its values should not be retained.

Developing Vision

Vision is distinct from mission. An organization's vision should be audacious.[11] A vision statement should tell employees and the outside world where the organization wants to go. It is why an organization's mission– while crucial– is not enough. A mission statement only tells employees who, what and why an organization is. Employees also need to know where an organization is going.

There are three primary components to developing effective vision statements.

First, the audacious goal. What does the organization want to accomplish one, five ten or even 30 years from now?[12] Google's vision is a good example of an intrepid one: "Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."[13] Most readers of this handbook remember a time when this statement would have seemed preposterous. Yet Google has nearly realized this vision. Today you can get virtually all of the information in the world in a few clicks. The accomplishments of the disrupters of today– Amazon, Apple, Uber and Airbnb– provide further examples of just how bold a vision can be.

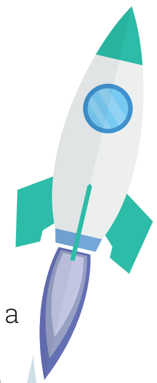
Second, vision must be measurable. Put another way, will the organization and its employees know when they have achieved the goal?

Third, an organization's vision must inspire. Thus the words used matter more than that of a mission or value statement. To accomplish this, vision statements must contain vivid language.[14] It should paint a picture of what the organization will be like when the vision is accomplished. In addition to Google, the modern "space race" provides an example of an inspiring (and also audacious and concrete) vision statement. SpaceX, Blue Origin and Boeing all have the same basic vision: "To land a person on Mars."[15] This statement is certainly audacious as it is currently unclear whether it is even possible. It is measurable– it will be accomplished when a person is on Mars, and is also inspiring. Someone walking on Mars, as they did on the Moon, is something most people, including those companies' employees, can imagine and would find inspiring.

vision

Three primary components to developing effective vision statements

1. Set an audacious goal
2. Must be measurable
3. Must be inspirational



The importance of vivid language is particularly salient when viewed in contexts other than the business world. In Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have A Dream" speech, King did not say "the United States goal should be racial equality in all facets of life." No. He said: "I have a dream that my children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."[16] Does there exist a more inspiring, and important, vision statement?

Of course, not every organization is as noteworthy as Google or SpaceX, nor pursues the social significance of racial equality. As an exercise, let's use our three components to develop a vision statement for a fictitious marching band from a suburb of Chicago. The band is well respected within their region and consistently place in the top three in regional competitions. But new leadership wants to take the marching band to new heights. And as part of that process, they decide to develop a strategy. Its mission has already been created and is: To Entertain and Be Unforgettable. But they have no vision.

The president asks the band's leaders where the band should be in five to seven years. Worthy goals are offered but the president keeps probing, with an eye towards audaciousness. The vision begins to take shape and becomes: "To be the most well-known and entertaining marching band east of the Mississippi River."

This vision is audacious, inspiring and through social media analysis or otherwise, can be measured.

2 developing strategic goals

After developing an organization's authentic mission and values and an audacious vision, the next step is developing strategic goals. This process includes **(1)** choosing a strategy framework, **(2)** preparation, and **(3)** creating the strategy.

This handbook uses the phrase "**strategic goals**" for those goals or objectives which come out of the strategic development process.

The terms and definitions of mission, values and vision are fairly universal but across strategy development, the terminology varies greatly. A detailed discussion defining and comparing the various terms used is beyond the scope of this handbook. For the sake of clarity, this handbook will use the phrase "strategic goals" for those goals or objectives which come out of the strategic development process. An organization then develops "plans" and "actions," which are the specific tasks required to achieve the strategic goals.

Operational Effectiveness is not Strategy

Michael Porter's article "What is Strategy" is a must read for anyone tasked with developing strategy. The article does not necessarily advocate for a certain framework for strategy development but rather, discusses what strategy is and is not. Porter specifically distinguishes between "Operational Effectiveness" and "Strategy." He argues that because operational effectiveness can be emulated by other companies, it can only take you so far, and it can be copied.

Porter instead suggests that Strategy is creating and achieving sustainable competitive advantage by "preserving what is distinctive about an organization."

This high-level view of strategy is significant because it ties in much of what is discussed in this handbook.

For example, in order to emphasize and monetize what is distinctive about an organization, it must have a strong sense of its mission and values.

Choosing a Strategy Framework

After establishing mission, vision and values you next choose a strategic philosophy or framework. In doing so, an organization leader faces a choice: make that decision alone or allow the trusted people within the organization to aid in making the choice. Using this handbook and other trusted resources, an organization's leader can confidently make this decision and proceed with the leadership team in developing the strategic plan.

There are numerous philosophies or frameworks for developing strategy. There is no one best way to develop strategy, but it does help to have a roadmap so a specific framework can help. You can use your own or one of the more common strategy frameworks. Balanced Scorecard, Objectives and Key Results, and Blue Ocean Strategy, are briefly introduced below. Most organizations are best served by using one of these or another and adapting it to fit its specific needs.

Balanced Scorecard

Arguably the most common framework is the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) method developed by Robert S. Kaplan and Daniel P. Norton.[17] BSC has been adopted by hundreds of organizations worldwide and has spawned its own separate industry of consulting companies and books about it.

At the heart of the BSC method is the broadening of strategic planning beyond strictly financial measures. It forces an organization to look beyond the balance sheet. The BSC method divides up the strategic objections by perspective.

Balanced Scorecard

Key 'BSC' questions for management

1. **Financial**
To succeed financially, how should we appear to our stakeholders?

2. **Customer**
To achieve a vision, how should we appear to our customer?

3. **Internal Business Process**
To satisfy our stakeholders and customers, what business processes must we excel at?

4. **Learning and Growth**
To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?[24]

Objectives and Key Results

Next, the Objectives and Key Results method (OKR),[18] while not new, has gained recent popularity because of Google and other companies' success with its use.[19] OKR is focused on measurable goals. In OKR, if a strategic goal doesn't have a corresponding measurement, it simply isn't a goal at all.

OKR has two components. **Objectives** are memorable qualitative descriptions of what you want to achieve. Objectives should be short, motivational and engaging. **Key Results** make up the set of metrics used to measure the progress towards and achievement of the Objective. Each Objective will typically have no more than three to five Key Results.[20]

The core concepts underlying OKR are first, it is agile. The strategic goals typically involve shorter cycles for completion. Second, OKR is simple. It shouldn't take a weekend retreat or months of weekly meetings to complete. The focus is on achieving the goals, not developing them. Third, the goals should be transparent within all levels of an organization. Fourth, and a more complex concept is that of "bidirectional goal setting."[21] This means that the goals are simultaneously bottom-up and top-down.

'Red' Oceans

Market fighting over the same, and shrinking, resources and customers

'Blue' Oceans

Companies should search out "uncontested market space."

"...simultaneous pursuit of differentiation and low cost."

Blue Ocean Strategy

The last philosophy or framework is the "Blue Ocean Strategy."[22] Blue Ocean Strategy holds that companies should search out "uncontested market space" or "blue oceans" rather than challenging similar and competing companies – or, the "red oceans." The "red" symbolizes the blood in the water as a result of competing companies fighting over the same, and shrinking, resources and customers.

This philosophy is particularly relevant when supply exceeds demand in a particular market. And while it may be easy to discount this philosophy based upon such a qualifier, the creators of the Blue Ocean Strategy make a compelling case: The current speed of innovation and the ensuing efficiencies will result in more crowded and brutal red oceans.

At the heart of the success of a Blue Ocean Strategy is the **"Simultaneous pursuit of differentiation and low cost."[23]** The basic concept is that as an organization is differentiating itself, it is simultaneously reducing its costs. This is done by eliminating or reducing the factors on which an industry competes. For example, one of the organizations Blue Ocean's creators use as an example is **Cirque de Soleil**. Unlike traditional circuses, Cirque de Soleil does not use animals– a differentiator which also saves this brand a tremendous amount of money (while avoiding negative consumer sentiment) and therefore is able to create a blue ocean where there is no direct competition.

No matter the framework chosen...

...an organization's strategy should define where it is, where it intends to go, and what it needs to do to get there.

Prepare

While seemingly obvious, an effective strategy development should be deliberate and therefore requires preparation, meditation and deep thought. Developing an effective strategy requires total commitment and laser focus of the leadership team.

After the proper amounts of time and thought have been invested, and a rough plan developed, it is imperative to get the right people in the same room. This group should be a team tasked with developing and owning the plan. This group is likely to be upper management but does not have to be. It can include people outside the organization such as other key stakeholders and may include other nvested contributors in the organization.[25]

Once the group is chosen, it must resolve to agree on leadership's commitment and focus, with complete "buy in." They must know why strategy is essential, how it will be created, when it should be completed and what will be done with it after it has been developed. They also must be given the time, resources and access to those within and outside of the organization with the information necessary to develop the strategy.

An honest evaluation of the current state of the organization is also required. Two methods to consider are *SWOT* and *Porter's Five Forces*.

S.W.O.T.

The most common method to do this is a SWOT analysis—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. The graphic below shows the questions addressed in a SWOT analysis.

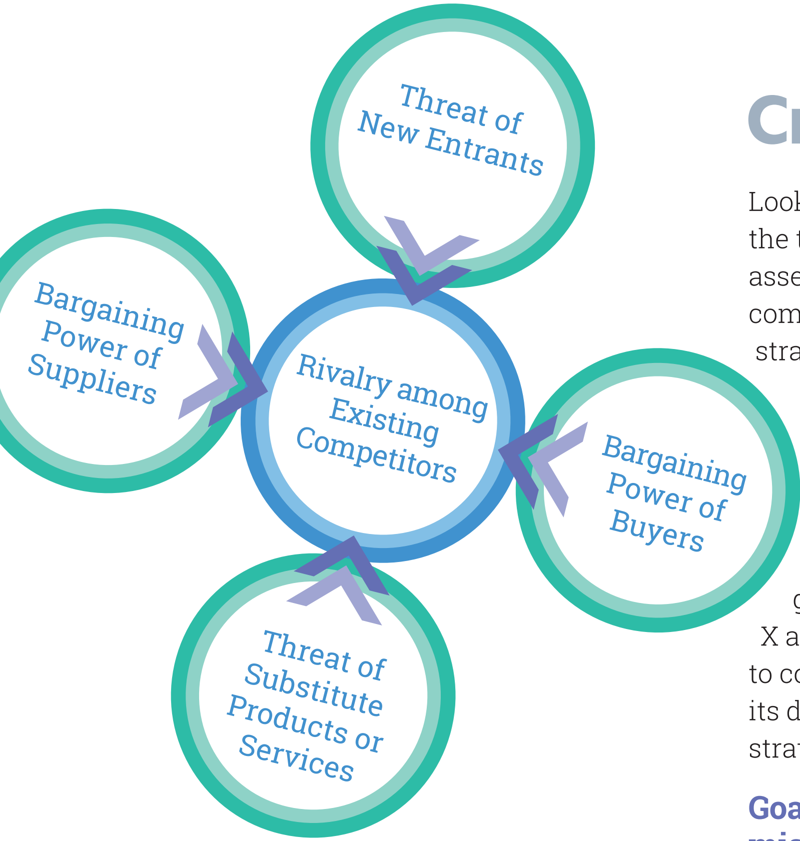
SWOT Analysis

Strengths: What are your organization's strong points?

Weaknesses: What are the weak points?

Opportunities: Where are the biggest opportunities?

Threats: What are the largest threats to the organization?



Porter's Five Forces

Porter's Five Forces, provides another method for an honest evaluation of the organization. Porter suggests an organization's leadership should look at itself through the lense of five competitive forces: **(1)** threat of new entrants, **(2)** threat of substitute products or services, **(3)** the bargaining power of suppliers, **(4)** the bargaining power of buyers and **(5)** industry rivalry.[26]

Create

Looking back, the framework has been chosen, the team is in position and there is an honest assessment of where the organization is competitively. It is now time to create the strategic goals.

Your strategic goals should usually be the two to five major areas your organization wants to focus on and that will move the organization towards reaching the vision. The formula for the wording should be the goal plus the measure(s). We will achieve X as measured by Y. Each goal should be easy to connect to your vision statement. And while its drafting is not meant to inspire per se, the strategic goals should be inherently motivating.

Goals should be checked against the mission, vision and values to make sure there is consistency. If not, there is something wrong– and it is likely the strategic goals. If an organization's mission and values are authentic, then the strategic goals should also be entirely consistent. Beware, if the goals are not going to get an organization closer to achieving its vision, then they are probably too conservative or misaligned.

After the strategic goals are chosen and formulated, the actions items or tactics must be created. Tactics should be very specific and actionable. Unit, team or division tactics should be created as well as individual tactics for employees. And consistent with OKR, the determination of the appropriate tactics should be done in a "bidirectional" fashion.[27] Those at the "bottom" will be performing the lions' share of the required tactics, and thus, should have a hand in creating the tactics. This is also a great way of communicating the strategic goals and creating employee ownership of their execution.

Lastly, the strategy should be depicted visually and ideally on a single page. There are numerous creative ways in which this can be done and the framework chosen will dictate the way in which the strategy is visually depicted.

Further Considerations in Strategy Development

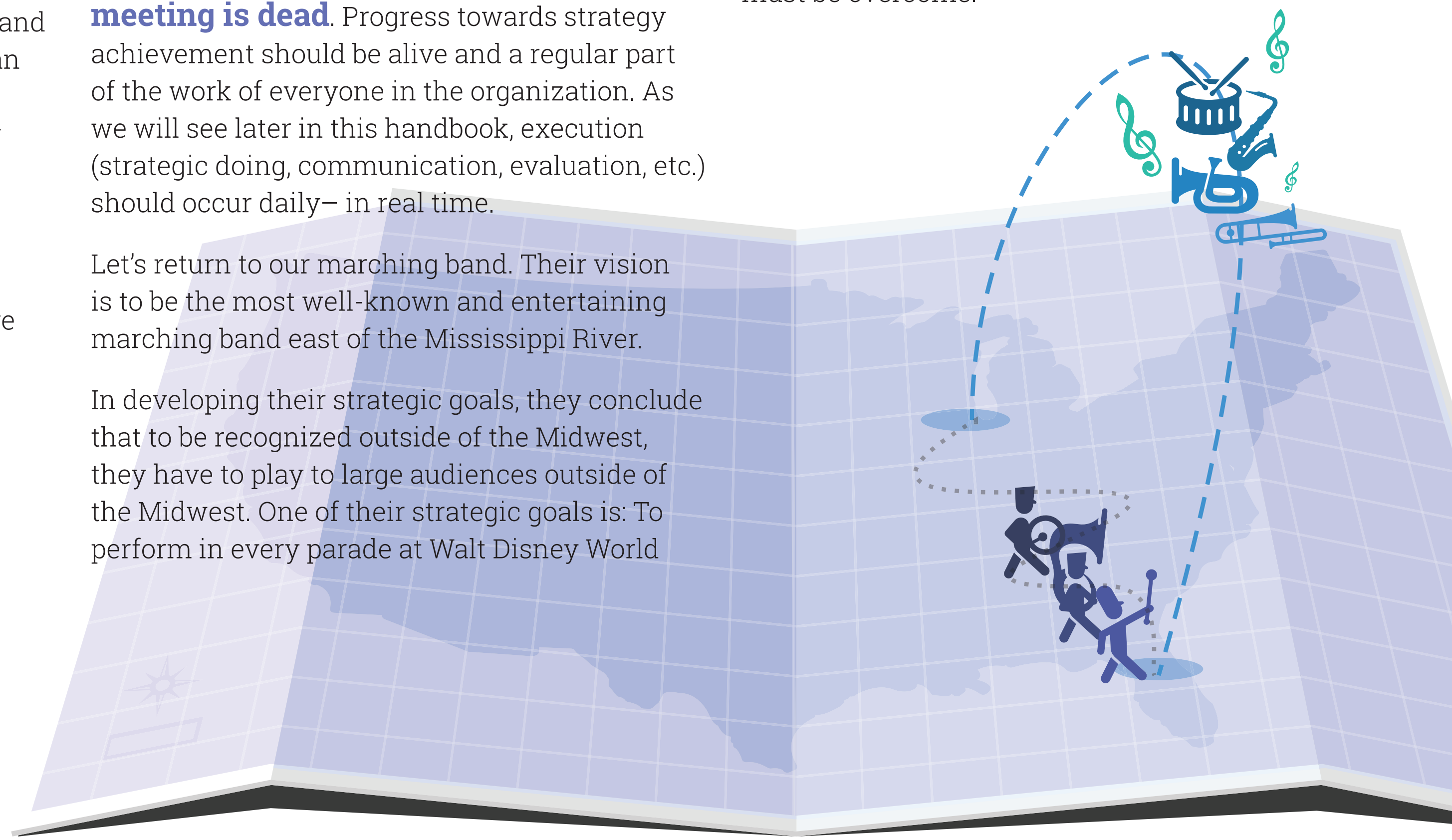
Developing strategy should not be viewed as making a plan. A plan is easy to change or worse, ignore. Rather, the process should be set up so that choices must be made.[28] Strategy development should challenge assumptions and past practices so that honest comparisons can be made regarding strategic alternatives. But then a choice must be made and the strategy development team should be empowered to make the necessary choices, and have the credibility so those within an organization will trust those choices. This requires strong leadership and a culture that allows for failure and aggressive resource allocation because choices are riskier than incremental plans.

When deciding on how many strategic goals to have– less is more. The process of trimming the strategic goals down to a smaller number forces the organization to focus on the most compelling and disrupting goals.

Finally, the quarterly strategy review meeting is dead. Progress towards strategy achievement should be alive and a regular part of the work of everyone in the organization. As we will see later in this handbook, execution (strategic doing, communication, evaluation, etc.) should occur daily– in real time.

Let's return to our marching band. Their vision is to be the most well-known and entertaining marching band east of the Mississippi River.

In developing their strategic goals, they conclude that to be recognized outside of the Midwest, they have to play to large audiences outside of the Midwest. One of their strategic goals is: To perform in every parade at Walt Disney World during its busiest two-week stretch– Spring Break. Naturally, one of the tactics to reaching this goal is getting from Chicago, Illinois to Orlando, Florida in time to play the first parade of Spring Break. The space between Chicago and Orlando is a literal strategy-execution gap which must be overcome.



3 the strategic plan is done... are we?

The strategic objectives and supporting tactics have been developed. Now what? Put it in a binder and set a meeting in three months for the quarterly review? Of course not. Successful strategy execution is neither event driven nor housed in a dusty binder.

There are five "musts" critical to strategy execution: **(1)** Be Transparent; **(2)** Clarify Decision Rights; **(3)** Create Resource Liquidity and Allocate Appropriately; **(4)** Prioritize Tactics; and **(5)** Continually Monitor, Evaluate and Adapt. This last "must" is discussed in Chapter 4.

Be Transparent

The necessity of communicating the strategic plan is so obvious it seemingly need not be said. A strategic plan cannot be executed if it is not known.[29] But too often the strategic plan is "shelved" and worse, it doesn't make it beyond organization executives or middle management. Or it is only emailed to all employees with some promise of follow up that never materializes. The strategic plan should be known and understood by all employees AND everyone in the organization should understand where they fit into the plan

The free flow of information is integral to the execution of the strategy and at the heart of the other concepts discussed in this chapter, particularly clarifying decision rights.[30] These "musts" cannot be achieved without communication and transparency through all levels of an organization.

Clarify Decision Rights

The establishment and communication of clear decision rights and roles is the most important factor in strategy execution. "Decision rights" simply means "who can make a particular decision."[31] Lack of ownership over decision making is often so institutionalized that a significant culture change is necessary to streamline and clarify the decision making process.

A relatable factual scenario will illustrate how problematic and devastating unclear decision rights can be to an organization's ability to execute strategy.

Imagine four colleagues who go to lunch together every Friday. Around 10:30 am each Friday one of the four sends the following email: "Where are we going for lunch today?" The next hour is filled with emails containing suggestions and commentary on those suggestions. The group meets at the exit at 11:45 with no decision made. They discuss for another ten minutes and eventually, through compromise and exasperation, pick a restaurant which everyone is equally unhappy with. Then someone asks, 'Who's driving" and the process begins anew.

The problem, each member of the lunch group has the "right" to choose the restaurant. Clarifying decision rights will easily solve this frustrating scenario. The solution: each member of the group rotates picking the restaurant each week. The only rules, the same restaurant cannot be chosen twice in a row and if it's your turn to pick the restaurant, you drive.

This prevents the other members of the group from having to expend mental energy and waste time debating the choice of restaurant (or cleaning their car). Sure, they can lobby for a certain restaurant if they desire, but they can also just show up at 11:45 a.m. ready to eat.

It is easy to see from this simple scenario how lack of clarity in decision rights can paralyze strategy execution efforts.

The process of clarifying decision roles and the inherent free flow of information that must follow is an opportunity for an organization's leaders to foster trust and give ownership to lower levels of employees. In doing so, a more nimble, agile and happy group of employees will emerge adept at executing strategy.

If nothing else, there can be no doubt– no ambiguity– as to who has the right to make a tactical decision in support of a strategic objective. Clarifying decision rights will break through the primary barrier keeping your organization from executing its strategy.

RAPID Decision Making

Rogers and Blenko, in "Who Has the D?" suggest identifying and assigning five decision making roles: **Recommend, Agree, Input, Decide** and **Perform** (RAPID).[32]

Those who "input" are consulted in creating a proposal and justifying a decision. The input is typically given to those who recommend.

Those who "recommend" are responsible for gathering input and analyzing data to make a proposal.

Those who "agree" are empowered to say "yes" or "no" to the proposal or to modify it. This should be a fairly limited number of people and utilized for only high risk decisions.

The who "decide" do just that. They make the decision and drive their organization to action.

After a decision is made, the "performers" get to work executing the proposal decided upon.[33]

Create Resource Liquidity

Allocate Appropriately

An organization cannot expect its strategies– its big moves– to be executed without allocating sufficient resources to those tasked with executing the strategy. But in order to do this, resources have to be liquid enough that they can be shifted to align with the developed strategies.

Thus, before an organization can allocate its resources appropriately, it must undergo the difficult task of creating resource liquidity. Just like a real estate investment firm has to have cash on hand to timely seize upon an opportunity, an organization has to have the freedom to timely direct its resources in support of its strategic objections.

Once liquidity is achieved; the resources must be allocated appropriately. For example, a strategy focused on two business units will almost surely fail if the resources are given out equally to all of the five business units in that organization. The two business units should receive a disproportionate share of resources.

Resource allocation requires guts. Leaders have to tell certain people within their organization that they are getting less while others will be getting more. But great strategy is worthless and cannot be executed if the resources do not align with the strategic goals.

Prioritize Tactics

While there may be times when strategic objectives may need to be prioritized, most often it is the tactics themselves that require prioritization. Sometimes, it will be obvious which tactics have to be done first. Most often however, the tactics have to be prioritized.

Our marching band example provides an analogy to tactical planning. There is a necessary sequence of steps to get the band from Chicago to Orlando. Understanding both the importance and urgency of the sequence is crucial to success. The band must determine the number of people who are going, how much equipment is necessary, vans needed to be rented, and a departure and return date must be determined. And of course, money needs to be raised.

These tactics must be prioritized. A possible prioritization: The first step is to determine the funds required, and the method(s) in which they will be raised. Then determine the dates of departure and return. Then, the vans need to be rented. Risk! The total number of people going is not yet determined. Because the vans will need to be rented during Spring Break, the risk of not being able to rent enough vans is very real. Action needs to be taken due to priority. An estimated number of participants will have to suffice. The call to various van companies is made and vans are booked. That is execution! The biggest risk to getting there is neutralized and further, renting the vans serves as motivation for everything else. The first steps have been taken that tells everyone, "This is happening, let's get to work!"[34]

The most important takeaway in prioritization– identify the first step. And then ask, "Can it be done?" If not, you have problems and may need to re-think the strategic goals or tactics chosen. If it is doable, then do it. This will create the momentum and motivation necessary to execute your strategy.[35]

The most important takeaway in prioritization...
Identify the first step. And then ask – Can it be done?

4 evaluating strategy execution with your morning coffee

To execute strategy, it must be openly and regularly communicated, monitored, evaluated, reported and shared. And all this should be done on a near daily basis. Most organizations today do not do this, which is a major reason why most strategic plans never reach full potential and in many cases end up on a shelf collecting dust.

The first step in monitoring strategy is to create a way to communicate and monitor progress. For some, this is called a scorecard– something that everyone can look to track execution and measure success.[36] A scorecard should be created for each strategic objective, clearly illustrate the targeted measures, and track the progress towards the measures. A common problem with scorecards is they are often tracked with quarterly meetings that require large amounts of time and effort to collect and analyze data prior to the meeting.

The second step, and partially completed with the creation and use of the scorecard, is reporting on and monitoring the progress of the strategic objectives, and specifically, the tactics being used to achieve those objectives. Ideally, this should be automated as execution will suffer if employees have to spend additional time collecting information to input into the scorecard.

The process of reporting on and evaluating strategy begs the question: When, or if, should strategy be changed, updated, added to, or abandoned? While there are exceptions, strategy objectives should be flexible as the organization grows and adopts, but should continue to reflect mission, vision and values, while the tactics and action items should change more regularly.

A great organization, following the direction of this handbook, knows who it is (mission and values), where it wants to go (vision) and follows a proven method of making wise and dynamic strategy choices. The strategy objectives are appropriately focused – and big. The organization is good at execution and so the strategic objectives are implemented quickly and successfully. Why then should the strategic objectives materially change? The answer is they don't very often. A good organization knows better than to chase every "opportunity" and must stay true to itself and trust its strategy development.

There are exceptions. Some external force or event, a law being passed for example, or a major competitor entering or leaving a market, can make achieving a strategic objective impossible or not challenging. This is a reality of business and out of an organization's control. But there may other reasons too. The assumptions the strategy is based upon could be proven untrue.[37] The bottom line, if a particular strategic goal is going to be changed or abandoned, it should be done so with the same deliberate action used when it was created.

While strategic goals should rarely change, the tactics used to accomplish those goals must change. The daily monitoring and evaluation process will dictate that some things are working and some things are not. Real time correction is essential to executing strategy well.

All About Timing

Strategic goals should rarely change… However, real time correction is essential to executing strategy well.

5 technology is everything everywhere

To execute strategy, an organization needs to employ the right tools and more specifically, the right technology. Failure to do so is a recipe for disaster.

In traveling from Chicago to Orlando, our fictitious marching band likely used a navigation mobile app. And the passengers in each of the vans no doubt continually texted each other as to their respective van's progress. Most couldn't fathom traveling across the country without such technology. Yet when it comes to strategy execution, leaders become luddites. They hand out a map and say "see you in Orlando." This is evident in the many organizations that utilize spreadsheets or word documents, that are reviewed quarterly to monitor, communicate and update the strategic plan. There is no real time update, monitoring or sharing of the plan.

Thus, the first step in incorporating technology into strategy execution is not evaluating the various products out there. Rather, the first step is prioritizing the use of technology in the strategy execution process. Leaders must decide to invest in the necessary tools and demand their use throughout the organization. Only after this "buy-in" is achieved can the various technologies be evaluated.

Software Evaluation Required

Most often, the technology considered will be in the form of enterprise software, in which the goal is to help organizations execute and achieve strategic goals. In evaluating such software, the primary consideration should be whether the concepts and methods which drive execution are inherent in the software. Consistent with the tenets of this handbook, the following checklist should be considered.

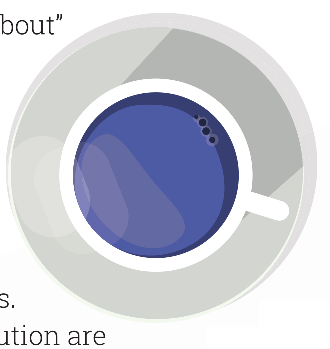
Employees, just by using the software, should be "doing" those things which will lead to execution. In other words, will strategic thinking AND strategic doing become routine parts of their daily activities?

Software Evaluation Checklist

- Encourages transparency
- Clarifies decision rights
- Allows for a prioritization of tactics and action items
- Progress toward goals is shared in real time with stakeholders?
- Allows for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the strategic goals

There are numerous software products that purport to be related to the strategic planning process. Some focus on a specific strategic planning framework, some focus only on developing a strategic plan and some focus on managing goals and objectives. There are very few products that are flexible enough to support any strategic planning framework, both plan development and execution, and of goals and objectives, and provides real time visibility and communication that leads to strong strategic execution. The tool that does this most effectively is MPOWR Envision.

MPOWR Envision incorporates all of the concepts and methods discussed in this handbook into its planning and execution system. Further, it automates much of the monitoring and performance measures against your plan. You can see the individual tasks that impact progress. The MPOWR Envision platform also allows a team to continually "talk about" progress toward the strategic goals without requiring more meetings.



Along with a morning coffee, an employee can see individual and team progress towards a particular strategic goal and engage in discussions regarding that progress. Again, the "musts" of strategy execution are inherent within the MPOWR Envision software.

Execute Strategy to Accelerate Growth

Throw away old binders stuffed with slides and spreadsheets. Your organization is growing and needs technology and proven methods to drive your strategic vision and improve performance across all levels and functions.

MPOWR Envision is strategic planning & execution software that identifies company vision, plans and goals, and enables all levels of management through developing strategy plans and goals. Leadership sees execution, and managers are recognized for their effort.

See Growth Happen

mpowr.com/envision

sources

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9 Collins and Porras, *supra* Note 2.

10 Collins and Porras, *supra* Note 2. page 92

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