

# Driving Rapid Strategic Growth



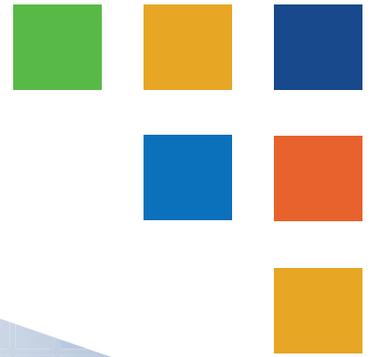
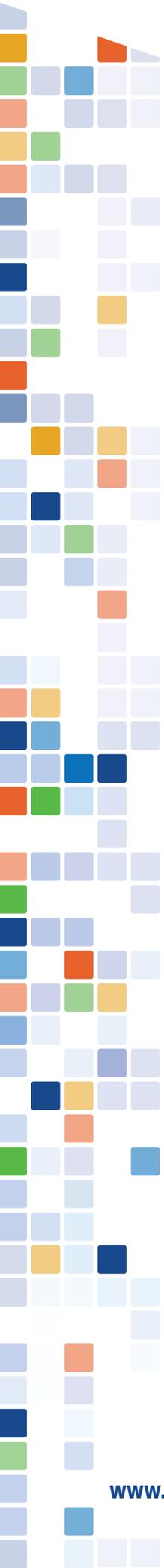
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# Chart a path on the road to **strategic growth.**

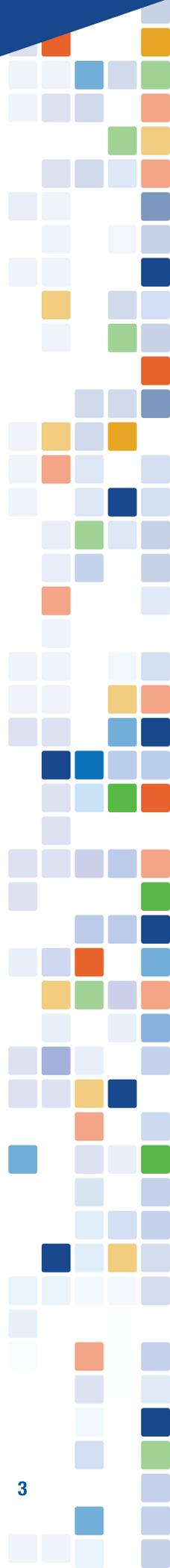
## INTRODUCTION

Most business leaders have grown accustomed to the comforting concept of “normal” market conditions. Today, when these leaders talk about the “new normal,” they are usually talking about the anticipated return to something closely resembling previous market conditions - a predictable status quo that will allow them to focus on administering and fine-tuning various elements of the go-to-market strategy. When we think about growth, we, too, may think about the days when we had a high degree of confidence that our basic assumptions would stand unchallenged. As we consider the present state of affairs, it is worth remembering that the “A” in MBA stands for “administration.”

Charting a path on the road to strategic growth in the current environment will depend, increasingly, not on skills that brought us success in the past, but on a very different set of capabilities.

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## STRATEGIC CHANGE

We now face a business reality where the need for large-scale, strategic change is unlikely to slacken. A recent article in the Harvard Business Review [i] reinforced this point when it pointed out that “strategic transformation may be the business leadership imperative of the 21st century.”

This transition to accommodate a world defined by constant change has, of course, a major impact on the world of sales. One of the key works on change and innovation, the Blue Ocean Strategy, [ii] emphasizes the importance of continuous adaptation to such a world when it observes that “...value innovation requires companies to orient the whole system toward achieving a leap in value for both buyers and themselves.”



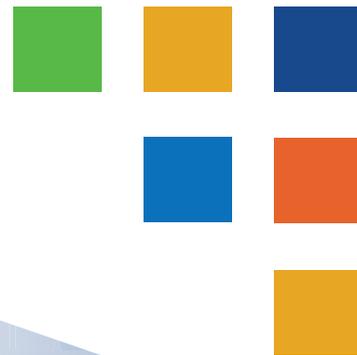
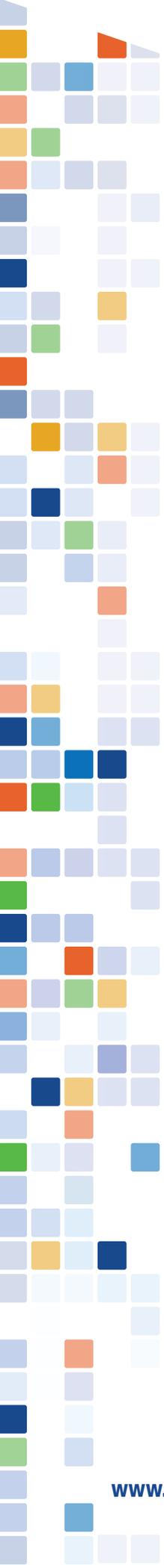
## Growth will require **strategic change**, not administration.

Such a leap is unlikely to be achieved by refining a few elements of our marketing strategy or tweaking our compensation plan. It requires both the willingness and ability to undergo regular, profound reviews of where our companies are going, and how our various teams will both align and adapt to meet the demands of the markets we serve.

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[i] <https://hbr.org/2019/09/the-top-20-business-transformations-of-the-last-decade>

[ii] Blue Ocean Strategy, 2004, Renée Mauborgne and W. Chan Kim



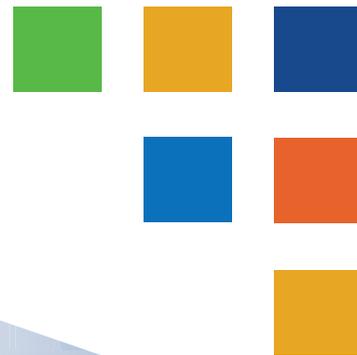
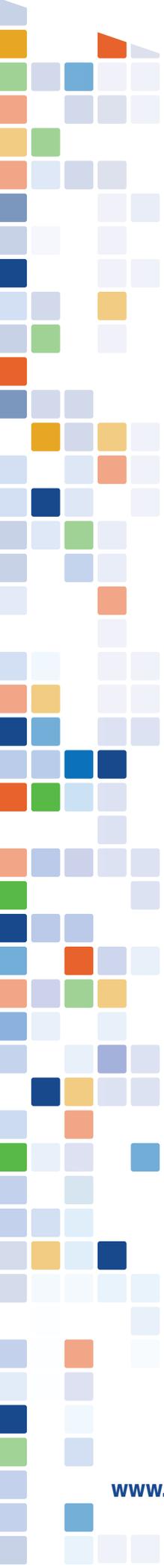
## STRATEGIC CHANGE *(continued)*

This organizational challenge demands a leadership mindset that is comfortable working in a world where change is the norm and agility is a required capability for survival.

Instead of simply marching in lockstep to the latest one-year plan, sales leaders (and indeed all leaders) must be willing to create and implement a more flexible rolling six-to-twelve month plan, and to periodically evaluate it to determine whether its goals and assumptions demand reassessment.



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## PERFECT KNOWLEDGE

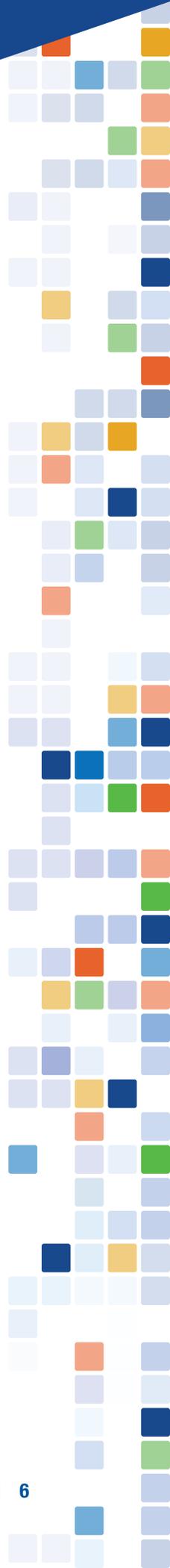
The strategic pressures now being placed on leaders demand that new approaches to leadership and decision making must be considered. Many companies still operate in a manner that suggests that senior leadership possesses 'perfect knowledge,' and that the rest of the organization exists to operationalize and execute on the mission defined by a visionary (indeed, infallible) top management. The guiding idea in such organizations seems to be that all will be well if only those operating within the various functional silos narrowly perform their specific function, in obedience to the brief, prophetic utterances that issue from the top of the organization... and those at the top ensure that there is evidence of compliance with those utterances.

### Top-down, strict-silo thinking are hallmarks of the Administration mindset.

If such an approach ever served the larger interest (and it is hard to see how it could have), it is uniquely suited to deliver failure in the current market environment. Fortunately, there is a powerful collaborative counter-model to this mode of leadership. It is not the product of some disruptive tech guru. It has been around for well over half a century and was tested and proven under extreme pressure in October of 1962.



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## Collaborative decision making under pressure is a **survival skill**.



### **A NEW MODEL**

During the military and diplomatic stand-off between the USA and Soviet Russia over secret nuclear missile installations in Cuba, the decision-making model deployed at the highest levels of the Kennedy administration was shockingly at odds with the familiar top-down/strict-silo approach. This new model found a positive outcome to what may well have been the most serious global political and military crisis in modern history. It remains the best blueprint for effective collaborative decision making under pressure.

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## A NEW MODEL *(continued)*

The key features of this model, and the circumstances that gave rise to it, are worthy of close consideration by sales leaders, and indeed all leaders, who are seeking to set a course through 2020 and beyond. To begin with, we should note that President Kennedy and his team faced three major challenges in 1962 - challenges that will look quite familiar to today's leadership teams.

### IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE

As an unprecedented and potentially lethal crisis with the realistic potential for millions of civilian casualties unfolded, the US leadership team had only partial awareness of the facts emerging on the ground and at sea. Major decisions had to be made based on probabilities and incomplete data. Very often, the lack of information led to an awareness of the necessity of pursuing the “least bad” option -- which was, typically, the option that would leave the most other options open.

The administration's decision to establish a blockade, or “embargo,” around Cuba using US naval forces, rather than launch an air assault (which was the strong recommendation of military officials), was an example of such a choice.

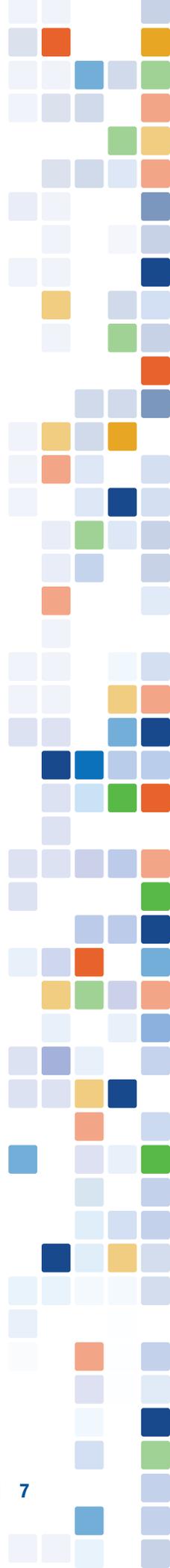
### RAPID CHANGE

The situation Kennedy faced often moved suddenly in unexpected directions. The assumptions he was working with at the beginning of a given day often had to be revisited and updated -- or even discarded -- by the end of the same day. Most famously, a conciliatory message from the Russians that had seemed to herald a breakthrough was superseded, without explanation, by a more combative and antagonistic one, leaving the US team with no clear path forward.

### COMPLEXITY

Multiple agendas were in play throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis. The span of control of the leaders on both sides was far from absolute, and both the American and the Soviet leadership faced intricate behind-the-scenes challenges and conflicts that made implementing any policy excruciatingly difficult. Not only that: the chance of front-line leadership making catastrophic errors was ever-present. At one point, for instance, a US pilot died when the surveillance plane he was flying over Cuba was shot down by a Soviet officer acting on his own authority. This was just one of dozens of situations that could easily have been allowed to escalate into a nuclear exchange.

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## 4 KEY ELEMENTS

A review [iii] of the processes put in place by the US administration during this period shows the four key elements that made the Kennedy administration's decision-making work effectively during the crisis. Given the imperfect states of knowledge, the rapidly changing market developments, and the deep complexity facing today's business leadership, these four elements, adapted from Kennedy's personal directives during the Cuban crisis, merit close study today.

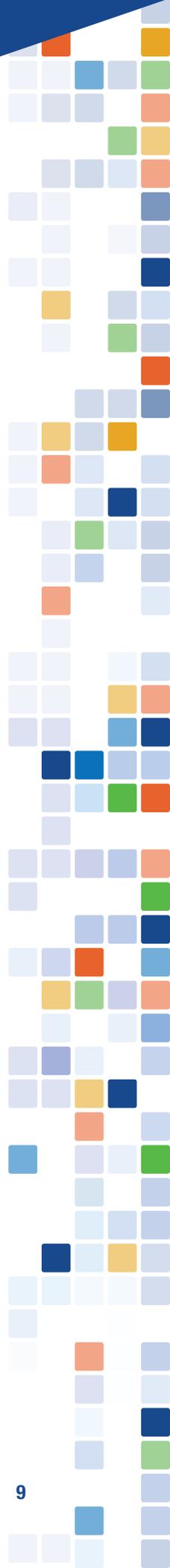
1. **“Everyone’s problem.”** Everyone on the decision-making team should accept their role as a generalist. The focus should be on solving the big problem, not just on offering advice from one narrow, silo-driven “expert” perspective. In doing this, we must summon the courage necessary to act as a “skeptical generalist” by taking on problems well outside of our experience base, evaluating options with an eye toward avoiding worst-case outcomes that will affect everyone.
2. **“Goals, not agendas.”** Formal meetings should be avoided. Meetings should be considered opportunities for informal collaborative discussion and should not follow one person's or one department's political or personal priorities. (Many of the most important senior-level US meetings held during the Cuban Missile Crisis were described as having no leaders at all.) Keep the agenda simple and focused on a single major problem or challenge.
3. **“Create options.”** Smaller teams should be tasked with the specific expectation that they will use vigorous open discussion to create viable options and alternatives that can be reviewed by the larger team. These smaller teams must generate these options and alternatives sooner rather than later.
4. **“The team, not the leader.”** The senior team should sometimes meet without the senior-most leader. In pressing this, Kennedy wanted to minimize the risk of “boss echoing” and the related phenomenon that would later come to be known as “groupthink.”

While a quick read of these four points may suggest that they are intuitive and obvious approaches to effective decision making, the reality is that very few organizations operate in this way.

To thrive in the current environment, senior leaders must make a conscious effort to adopt and constantly reinforce the four principles for effective collaborative decision making under pressure.

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[iii] How John F. Kennedy Changed Decision Making for Us All by Morten T. Hansen HBR, November 22, 2013



## FAILURE TO ENGAGE

Success requires that a good strategy be translated from theory into reality. Research shows that more than 70% of major corporate initiatives fail to achieve their objectives [iv]. Of the major reasons for project failure, the majority connect to failures to engage key people and provide the tools they need for the tasks they have been assigned. [v]



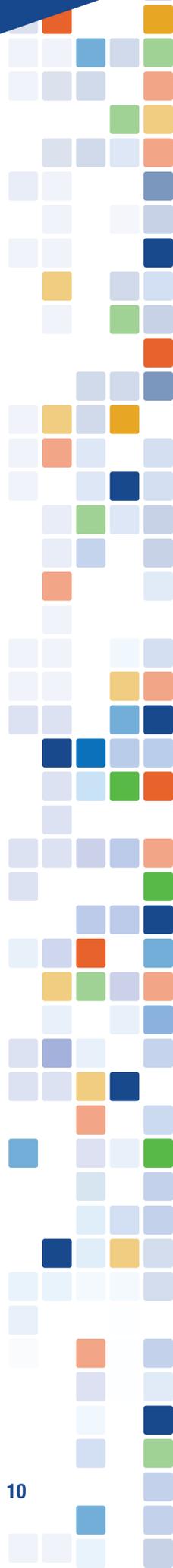
It is not enough to understand what needs to be done; we must have a methodology and a set of tools that can turn our idea into real, practical change that affects the way people and organizations behave... and the results they deliver with that behavior.

Behavior must not be considered an independent phenomenon. It is always intimately connected to two key factors:

- The techniques and processes that people can learn and apply.
- The organizational culture and personal attitudes that either support or hinder the application of these techniques.

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[iv] Are large-scale transformation initiatives doomed by default? PwC 2017  
[v] Seven Causes of Project Failure. Project Management Institute.2007



## THE SUCCESS TRIANGLE

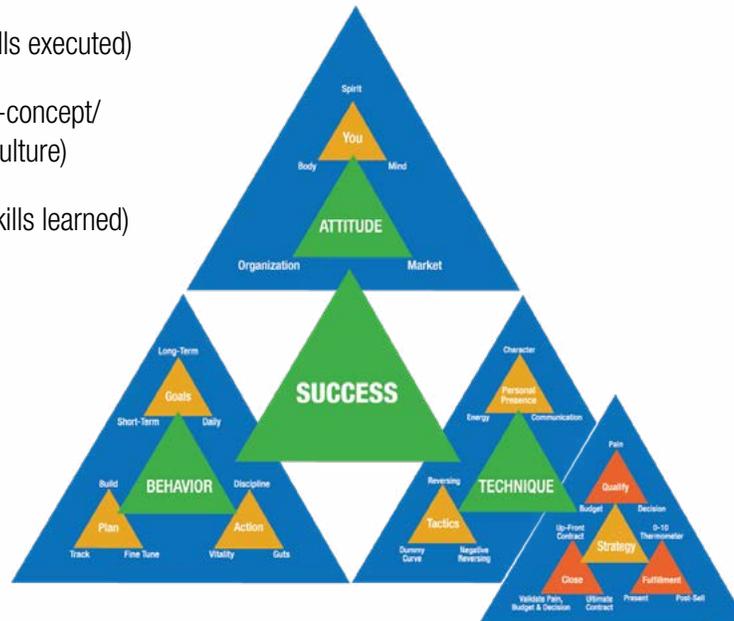
Behavior, techniques, and attitude -- the three corners of David Sandler's famous Success Triangle -- are, it turns out, interdependent. Progress will only be made at the speed of the least developed of these three elements; stagnation in any one of the three areas is a recipe for personal and organizational disengagement.



**BEHAVIOR** (skills executed)

**ATTITUDE** (self-concept/  
organizational culture)

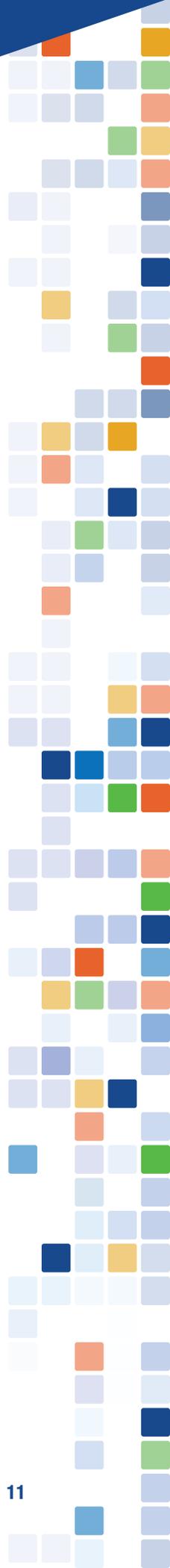
**TECHNIQUE** (skills learned)



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## THE SUCCESS TRIANGLE *(continued)*

How, then, can we develop people and processes that drive our organizations with as much focus on attitude as on supervising the effective use of techniques?

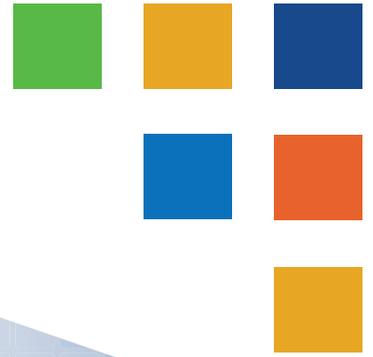
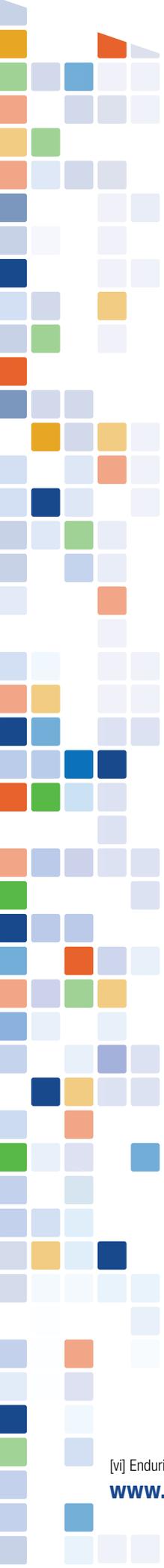
One of the key changes we see in effective leadership on this score is the move towards emphasizing front-line leadership's accountability for the development (not just the hiring) of the people on their teams. Historically, sales leaders have often fallen into the trap of hiring, onboarding and then simply supervising the performance of their people ... and doing little to enhance the skills base of their teams or support their personal and career development over time. Reversing this trend not only makes the attainment of short-term goals more likely, but also supports the cultivation of the next generation of leaders.



Emphasize front-line leadership's accountability for the development (not just the hiring) of the people on their teams.

A shift toward supporting sustainable improvements in self-concept, identifying critical skill gaps, and driving new behaviors -- rather than "managing by results" -- will be essential for sales leaders seeking to engage (and retain) the best front-line salespeople in the present market environment.

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## SET THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION-- AND PURSUE IT COLLABORATIVELY.

Success in the current market environment requires that we prepare both the market objectives of the strategic plan . . . and our objectives for meeting the ongoing internal need for constant collaboration and coordination.

One of the most widely accepted models for doing this is the 7-S Framework created by McKinsey [vi]. Below, it appears in checklist form, populated with a series of statements inspired by the Sandler Selling System. One of the best and simplest ways to begin tackling the challenge of setting your organization's strategic direction, and collaboratively pursuing it, is to score yourself on the statements below. Be ruthlessly honest. Doing this will provide a clear sense of where your organization is right now and where there is room for improvement.

ON THE NEXT PAGE

**Conduct a 7-S analysis  
and be ruthlessly honest.**



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[vi] Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework. McKinsey Quarterly 2008

## 7-S ANALYSIS

Use a score of 4 to reflect “strongly agree,” 3 for “agree,” 2 for “disagree,” and 1 for “strongly disagree.” Then, when you have finished the assessment, review its results and identify no more than three areas where you and your organization will make investments of time, attention, and material resources to bring about improvements.

### SCORE 1-4

<b>STRATEGY - We understand our total addressable market.</b>	
We have a clear segmentation strategy which is executed globally.	
Key clients and market players are defined based on those we want to Keep, Attain, Recapture, and Expand.	
We spend time defining the key buyer personas that make the critical decisions that drive our growth.	
We know what problems we solve for the businesses we serve.	
<b>SKILLS - We invest above the market average in developing the key skills of our people.</b>	
We frequently spend time and effort defining the “as is” and “to be” skill levels of our key commercial roles.	
Our key sales, business development, and customer success teams follow consistent processes and are measured against them.	
We have tools and processes for assessing the skills of our people.	
<b>STRUCTURE - Our organizational structure promotes coordination and collaboration.</b>	
Our flow of data from the front line to executive leadership is efficient in delivering critical information to the company.	
All elements of our customer-facing teams use agreed processes to plan, execute and debrief key steps in their processes.	
Our sales, marketing, service, product management, and customer success teams have KPIs and processes that are fully aligned with each other.	

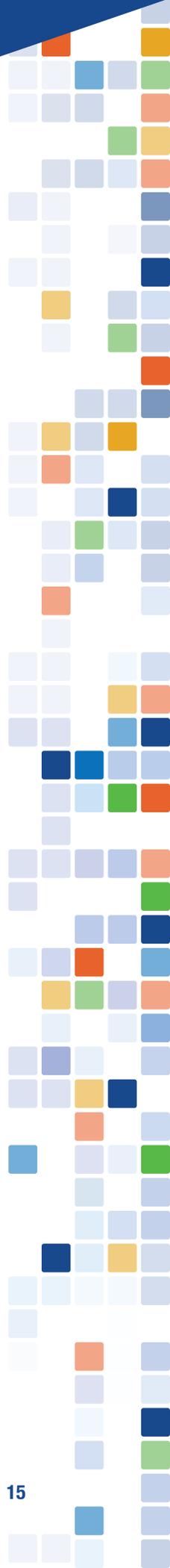
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## 7-S ANALYSIS *(continued)*

**SCORE 1-4**

<p><b>SYSTEMS - We streamline processes and give people the tools they need to do the job.</b></p>	
<p>We have an established set of playbooks that define consistent high performance across all critical areas of the business, specifically including, but not limited to, sales.</p>	
<p>We use effective information systems to support our people and processes.</p>	
<p>We support our customer-facing teams not only through a culture of “sales enablement,” but also by giving them the tools and resources necessary to deliver good outcomes.</p>	
<p><b>STAFF - We are committed to attracting and retaining the best people, and to their personal and professional development.</b></p>	
<p>We have consistent role-descriptions across the organization that we use to measure performance.</p>	
<p>We actively recruit talented people, even when there is no immediate opening to fill.</p>	
<p>All staff have clear and unique personal development plans that are regularly reviewed during one-on-one meetings.</p>	
<p>Leaders are measured on their ability to manage the future talent acquisition requirements of their teams.</p>	
<p><b>STYLE - Our organizational culture is positive and is reflected in our daily leadership style.</b></p>	
<p>Our senior leadership actively promotes a culture and a set of behaviors that the rest of the organization can follow.</p>	
<p>Our front-line leaders are coaches to their people, meeting privately with them to pose important questions about personal goals, about personal and professional development, and about alignment with the organizational culture.</p>	
<p>We consistently measure success and take action on failure to deliver on commitments.</p>	
<p><b>SHARED VALUES - We act on values that are clearly identified and that support our mission.</b></p>	
<p>We make long-term decisions that are based on our shared values.</p>	
<p>People who act in ways that run counter to our values are held accountable.</p>	
<p>We openly and regularly discuss our values and invest in finding new ways to keep our people engaged in that discussion.</p>	

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## FIVE WAYS COLLABORATIVE LEADERS CAN HELP THE TEAM SUCCEED

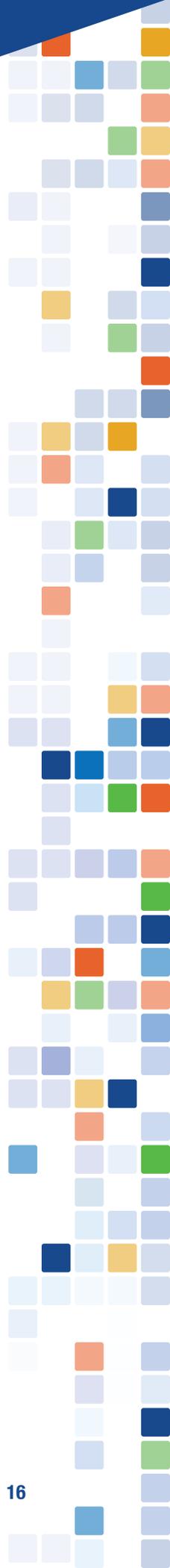
Here are five steps we see collaborative leaders taking right now to adapt to, and thrive in, the extraordinary circumstances we all now face -- a rapidly changing marketplace where there is no "normal."

- 1. Support the sales leaders.** Of course, we need to prioritize revenue generation. That means we want to double down on sales management. Our research indicates that 43%<sup>1</sup> of sales managers do not receive effective training prior to taking up the role. As if that weren't enough, some 32%<sup>2</sup> of sales managers report that the ongoing training they do receive is less than effective. That is unacceptable in normal times, but it is strategically dangerous right now. As organizational leaders, we need to make absolutely sure we are giving our sales managers the support they deserve, by providing them with all the training, all the tools, all of the coaching and all the personally-customized support they need.
- 2. Be open to innovation.** This is really a matter of organizational mindset and corporate culture. Phrases like, "We have never done that," "It won't work," and "It didn't work last time we tried it," all need to be thrown out the window. We need to start connecting seemingly unrelated dots and creating new perspectives. We need to look for alliances that we might never have considered in the past. For instance, business agreements with people you once regarded as "enemies" or "competitors" may make perfect sense now, because you each do things that are slightly different but, collectively, you have a better service offering. In addition, we should be enhancing the communication between sales and product management, creating a constant 'closed loop' of feedback between those who create new offerings and those who first hear the voices of the market.



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<sup>1</sup> Sandler Research Center article, December 2019: The Hidden ROI of Training Top Sales Talent  
<sup>2</sup> Sandler Research Center article, December 2019: The Hidden ROI of Training Top Sales Talent

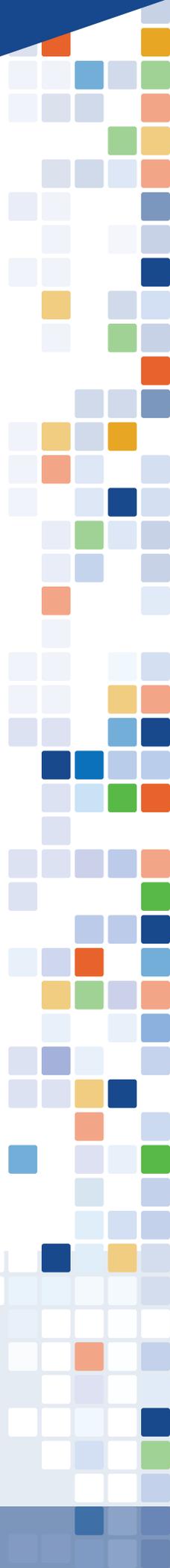


## FIVE WAYS COLLABORATIVE LEADERS CAN HELP THE TEAM SUCCEED *(continued)*

- 3. Set clear expectations and create a culture of accountability.** In order to hold people accountable, your expectations must be crystal clear – and the best way to do that is to hold brief daily meetings with direct reports. What did we accomplish yesterday, what are we trying to accomplish today, and what are the tools and support we need to accomplish that? Those three simple questions will help propel all the tasks and behaviors that need to be done on a daily basis. Success has its rewards; the failure to deliver has consequences.
- 4. Avoid over-platforming.** If we all run out to get the most “up-to-date” platforms and technology possible for each one of our teams, we may find that we are making it harder, not easier, to communicate and collaborate across and within the organization. That is overkill. And that is a recipe for disaster when rapid change is required. What we don’t want is to silo ourselves into micro-groups within our organization, each using a separate communication or project management platform.
- 5. Wherever possible, clarify the process.** Express the following idea to your team members: “We need to follow the ball. Whenever our goal is to do X, we need to identify step one, step two, and step three for making sure X happens successfully, and we need to write that down in a playbook and then circulate that playbook to all the appropriate people.” No, we can’t do this with certain creative processes that do not “scale” -- but yes, it is absolutely imperative that we do this for all the major critical functional areas of our business. When there is no playbook in one of those functional areas, we are basically asking Fate for a breakdown. If Employee A gets sick or cannot do what he or she normally does for any other unforeseen reason, you want Employee B to be able to step in without missing a beat.



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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Leaders need to accept that the success of their teams and their companies will rely heavily on striking a collaborative, coordinated balance between creative strategic thinking and effective implementation.

This balance will be all the harder to strike given the constantly changing market environments we all live in and the need to implement new initiatives frequently.

The previous model of leadership through top-down, silo-driven 'command and control' thinking will no longer suffice.

Sustained growth will be driven by an organization's ability to align itself with the critical priorities of their customers and support repeatable patterns of behavior, rooted in strong skill sets and a productive organizational culture that supports the leveraging of strengths.

Building the right skill sets, the right attitudes, and the right patterns of behavior in the organization and the people will drive not only marketplace success, but also the development of the next generation of leaders.

There will be winners and losers.

If you want to know more about how Sandler works with some of the world's best companies, please contact us at [corporate.training@sandler.com](mailto:corporate.training@sandler.com).

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