THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PLAYBOOK
QUICK GUIDE
A BREAKTHROUGH GAME PLAN FOR SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC PLANNING

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WELCOME TO THE PLAYBOOK

What is Strategic Planning, Exactly?

Strategic planning is the process by which an organization outlines key initiatives and goals, in line with their mission, vision and values, covering a specified time frame (usually 1 to 5 years) that will help them bring to fruition their mission and vision. The strategic plan then becomes a living document that is used to communicate to the organization’s stakeholders and key constituencies the organizations initiatives and goals and the actions they need to take in order to achieve those goals. Once the strategic plan is in place it becomes the guiding document for determining the organization’s allocation of time and resources.

In that a strategic plan is a living document, it should be created keeping in mind that the organization’s landscape and the marketplace can change at any moment. Thus, a strategic plan can and should be revisited on a regular schedule in order to make sure that the key initiatives and goals are still valid. Validity of the strategic plan is determined by the organization’s viability in the marketplace as well as shifts in the organization’s internal landscape.

Strategic planning is usually carried out by an executive team, but it can be useful to include a cross-section of associates from within (and possibly outside) the organization for varying points of view and innovative ideas. Strategic planning should cover organizational areas such as culture, finance, learning and development, technology, marketing, customer service, products and services, facilities, and any other area vital to the viability of the organization. Strategic plans are as valid for one-person businesses as they are businesses with thousands of employees.

A strategic plan is not a business plan. And strategic initiatives should not be guided by a business plan. A business plan is about the ‘what’ of your entire business and mainly covers business operations, staffing, funding and an overview of marketing. A strategic plan is about the ‘how’ and outlines specific initiatives and detailed goals that will help the organization grow and be successful within its core business areas.

What is Strategic Planning About?

When it gets right down to it, strategic planning is about change. Whether the plan is created in order to encourage the organization to do something better, to do more or do less of something, or to move in an alternate direction, strategic plans are created so that things will be different in the future and so goals can be achieved. And in order to do that, the current way of thinking and doing things has to change.

Change is challenging, and it is no less challenging when wrapped in a strategic plan no matter how enthusiastic the leadership team, and no matter how great the promise of a better future for the organization. Therefore, when engaging in strategic planning it important to be able to distinguish between project management (the strategic plan) and change management (the process to get people to execute) and give adequate and equal consideration to each.
Why is Strategic Planning Important?
Strategic planning is a roadmap to growth internally and externally toward the vision, mission and values of the organization. The strategic plan charts a direction for the organization. And then out of the strategic plan come the goals. If you cannot see the connection between any project, initiative or plan and the strategic plan, then more often than not, it is outside of the scope of what the organization should be undertaking at that time.

When there is no strategic plan, an organization has no way of assessing whether or not they are on the right path, and they have no way to assess whether or not what they are doing will enable them to reach their goals. An organization without a strategic plan is like a rudderless ship.

How to Use This Quick Guide
This quick guide is designed to explain at a high level what is entailed in each phase of the strategic planning process and the things you should consider in each phase. It can also guide you in carrying out your own strategic planning session and create your own strategic plan either as a multi-person or single-person business.

Everyone who is going to be involved in the strategic planning process – the strategic planning team – should have a copy of and read this guide – or at least receive an overview of the five phases of planning – in order to have a clear understanding of what is entailed in the process and what is going to be asked of them. And then as the team goes through each phase of the process they can refer to this guide for step-by-step guidance in creating the strategic plan.
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THE PROCESS

The Strategic Planning Playbook uses a people-focused, five-phase process. People-focused means that in each phase of the process, in addition to looking at the planning, considerations are also made to understand the role of the planning team and other constituencies that will be responsible for carrying out the plan. A plan cannot come to fruition without people to execute it. They are the most important part of the process.

In the diagram below the strategic planning process is mapped out over a two day period. This is a common way executive teams approach strategic planning – with a two-day offsite. The recommendation is for no less than two days because of the work to be done and the mental energy involved in this process. If you are going to go through the process of strategic planning then you want to make sure to do it right.

To be clear, the time span for the strategic planning process can be any length of time and determined by the organization. Independent schools, for example, have used an entire school year to create a strategic plan in order to allow for thoughtful discussion and contemplation over the key initiatives, to get feedback from key constituencies such as board members, parents and faculty, and to make sure the language around the key initiatives conveyed clearly the objectives and sat well with all constituencies. You should pick a time frame that works best for your organization.

Below is an illustration of the 5-Phase Process and a typical strategic planning session schedule.

Before Meeting

Day 1

Day 2

On-Going

PHASE I - Preparing to Plan

PHASE II - Landscape Assessment

PHASE III - Key Initiatives

PHASE IV - Implementation Plan

PHASE V - Execution & Evaluation
PHASE I - PREPARING TO PLAN

There are some things you will need to do in order to prepare for your strategic planning meeting. You will need to consider whether you are having your session on-site or off-site, and whether you will carry out the strategic planning process over the course of two days, or more. If you choose to have your session off site you will need to scout a location and make sure to reserve a room that meets your needs. You will then need to come up with an agenda (what we expect to cover) and objectives (what we expect to accomplish) for the session and make sure everyone receives copies of both in advance of the meeting so they have an opportunity to give feedback or make suggestions.

Here are some other things to consider as you prepare to plan:

**Why Are You Planning?**
The team must have a clear understanding of why they are coming together to create a strategic plan. Is it just “what we always do” or is there something specific the team needs to get out of the strategic planning process. Here are some common reasons for planning:

- Something in the organization is not working well (*i.e. leadership, production, culture, etc.*)
- Growth and change (*internal or external*)
- Old plan has been executed or is out of date
- New members, product or service offerings, or departments within the organization

Understanding why you are coming together to plan helps everyone on the team get on the same page.

**What is Our Strategic Planning Timeline?**
Once you understand why you are planning and what your general objectives are, it is important to discuss and determine your planning timeline. That means asking two important questions – one informs the other.

1. What type of plan are we creating? Is it a one-year, three-year of five-year plan, or something in between?
2. How long are we going to be engaged in the strategic planning process? Is it going to be two days, six months, one year, etc.?

Determining the type of plan you will create – a one-, two-, or five-year plan – has to do with the complexity of the overall strategy and how many preliminary initiatives are being proposed for execution. Team members must estimate how long they believe it will take in order to execute those initiatives.

Determining how long you will engage in the strategic planning process has to do with how long you believe it will take to refine the initiatives and consult with the key constituencies. Creating a draft, yet realistic, timeline of all the strategic planning activities up front will help you determine how long you should allow for your strategic planning efforts. The more realistic the timeline, the higher the chance of success at the execution phase.
Who Will Be at the Table?
Who is on your strategic planning team? Who needs to be a part of the strategic planning process? And what criterion determines who needs to be at the table (rank/title, innovative thinking, diverse perspective, etc.)? What is the reputation across the organization of the people who are on the team? The team’s reputation will weigh in the organization’s initial willingness or unwillingness to commit to the plan. Is there a need or an opportunity for internal SMEs or outside experts to be invited in order to lend different perspectives to the planning process? It is important to give some thought to who will be on the team because your strategic plan will only be as good as the team who creates it.

In addition to deciding who will be around the table, a team lead will need to be appointed. This person, either solely or in partnership with the facilitator, is responsible for, among other things:

- securing a location for the meeting
- creating an agenda
- keeping the meeting on time
- making sure conversations are appropriately moderated
- navigating any conflict
- facilitating any activities

To Hire a Facilitator or Not...
It may seem unnecessary to hire a professional facilitator to facilitate your strategic planning process or meeting because, after all, how hard could it be? Or, possibly you have been accustom to doing it yourself. Yet, the case for a facilitator is strong. Strategic planning can be a challenging process as conflicting ideas and beliefs as to the current landscape, key issues and the direction of the organization can arise, and emotions can run high. Additionally, conversations can tend to wander into places unproductive for strategic planning, participants can get bogged down in the minutiae of details versus staying with the big picture, and new ideas can get squashed before proper consideration. Facilitators are adept at handling situations that team members may struggle to overcome.

Here are some of the advantages of hiring a professional facilitator:

- Facilitators are skilled at keeping your group on task and on time
- Facilitators help create a safe environment for truthful conversation to occur
- Facilitators are adept at addressing the “elephant in the room”
- Facilitators know how to prevent team members from hijacking a conversation or the session
- Facilitators are well-trained at managing high emotions and navigating personal conflicts
- Facilitators help keep the group open to innovative thinking and new ideas, and keep participants away from past-focused conversations by using a proper balance of advocacy and inquiry
- Facilitators are adept at making sure everyone in the process has an opportunity to contribute

Professional facilitators are solely focused on the success of your strategic planning efforts. They do not have emotional ties to the organization and thus they are not likely to get bogged down by the same things the team members might fall prey to. This can be seen as a positive or a negative.
Surveys
Part of getting a successful scan of your internal landscape is by doing a survey. Surveys should be done on a fairly regular basis in order to track important issues inside of the organization such as culture, perception of leadership, engagement, workflow, communication, processes, culture, values, and overall employee satisfaction. It is one thing to assume you know how the employees view the company. But it can turn out to be a completely different story when you hear it directly from their mouths, without fear of retribution.

During the strategic planning process it can be tempting to try and speak for your employees, putting less emphasis on their feedback, opting instead to focus on purely profit initiatives. But if your strategic initiatives will have to be carried out by your employees, you would be well-advised to seek out their truthful input and give it proper consideration. External surveys, or customer surveys, should also be conducted on a regularly decided upon schedule. If you provide a product or service it is important to know the truth regarding how your customers view your organization, its products and services.

In anticipation of the strategic planning session, you will need to decide if you want or need to use, or will gain any benefit from using, survey information as part of your strategic planning process. Surveys should be created by professional outside sources who are adept at understanding how to extract the necessary information from the survey process.

Pre-Work
What, if any, pre-work should be assigned to the strategic planning team before assembling? Sample pre-work such as:
- questionnaires
- future thinking
- reading
- research

Appropriate pre-work can be assigned to prepare the team for the meeting and get the team thinking about the strategic planning process.

Materials
It may seem like a no-brainer, but making sure you have the proper *(sufficient amount of and working)* materials to support the process is vital. There materials include things such as:
- notepads & pens
- flip charts & markers
- sticky notes
- index cards
- any necessary reports
- relevant marketplace articles or research
- computer/laptop & projector
- speakers
Ice-Breakers and Activities
How will you get the room warmed up? And how do you keep the group engaged in the strategic planning process. Ice-breakers can be used to loosen up the team and relax the mood; they can be used as a means of helping the group get to know each other better if there are new team members, or they can be used to create a teaching point *(such as how do the team members currently view the organization, or what is their vision for the organization)*. Ice breakers are a great way to create space for, and jump start, group contribution which is important to the strategic planning process.

Activities, on the other hand, are necessary to provide the opportunity for team members to interact, to energize the group and to help reset group focus. Activities can be used as a different way to reach strategic planning objectives by sparking enthusiasm and creativity.

NOTES:
PHASE II – LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Phase II is where the teamwork begins. You have prepared for this strategic planning session and now it is time to gather and start the process.

GETTING STARTED

As you come together to begin your strategic planning process there are a few things that need to be acknowledged and addressed in order for your strategic planning process to be a successful one.

Ground Rules

It is always important to set ground rules for any meeting group. It creates an agreed-upon expectation around meeting behavior that you do not want to take for granted. Adults may have an aversion to ground rules and balk that they are unnecessary because “we know how to behave”. That is, until they aren’t unnecessary. It is better to create them up front and refer to them as needed.

Sample ground rules:

- Respect differences of opinion and different ideas
- One conversation at a time
- Listen before responding
- Disagree respectfully
- Be on time in the morning and after breaks

The group should come up with the ground rules, or at least most of them, so that they have ownership in seeing them carried out.

Attitude for Success

The strategic planning process can push buttons and challenge comfort zones. If it is done well it will challenge old mindsets and ways of conducting business and allow space to ponder what is possible. In order to get the most out of the strategic planning process there is a specific attitude, or mindset, that the strategic planning team must take on in order to succeed at their charge.

Characteristics of an attitude for success include:

- Willingness to listen
- Willingness to suspend judgment
- Having an open mind
- Having the courage to tell the truth
- Patience
- Focus on what is right vs. who is right – interests over positions
Attitude has a direct effect on team communication and collaboration which, in turn, directly impacts the quality of the strategic plan and potentially the future success of the business. Each participant is responsible for making sure they have the right attitude to participate.

**The Elephant in the Room**
There must be space and a process to discuss the undiscussable. Unaddressed issues are one of the main ways a strategic planning process is silently derailed even before it gets started.

Situations and emotions that might arise include:

- Mismatched expectations
- Competitiveness
- Territorialism
- Focus on a personal position over what is in the best interest of the business
- Fear of change (*old thinking*)
- Pessimism ("We tried it before, but it didn’t work.")
- Pride
- Unaddressed interpersonal conflicts
- Personal judgments about others
- Defensiveness around feedback

There needs to be room to unearth team member’s expectations around the strategic planning process to make sure everyone is moving forward on the same page. This can be done when coming up with ground rules. You can ask for one objective – something they would like to walk away having addressed or accomplished – from each team member.

**Step 1: WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

**What Do the People Say?**
If you have done internal or external surveys the team lead, or the facilitator along with the team lead, should disseminate the results to the strategic planning team. It is not only important for the team lead to disseminate the information dispassionately, but it is also important for the team to absorb the feedback with an open mind. Team members should take notes on the items that stick out to them.

**What Does the Team Say?**
After going over the survey(s) the team should weigh in on the survey results. Questions that should be asked include:

- Does the team agree or disagree with the results? Why or why not?
- Are there extenuating circumstances for any of the results?
- Are the responses reasonable within the context of the organization?
What results are in alignment with what was expected?
Are there any surprises? Any unexpected results?
Is there any follow-up necessary – for clarification - with key constituents?

When hearing the survey results, especially if they are referencing a particular department or area, team members should be careful not to get defensive, and not to seek out an opportunity to “pile on”. It is easy to take survey results as a personal affront and to begin the process of defending the results, or use it as an opportunity to assign blame. The more challenging, but productive path is to use the feedback as an opportunity for growth and improvement by focusing on areas for improvement.

**Key Issues**
What themes are emerging from the internal and external surveys? What information is it giving the strategic planning team in order to guide them in uncovering the key issues? What are the employees saying? What are the customers saying? The team should be taking notes and compiling a list of key issues.

**SWOT**
The last piece of understanding where the organization is, is to do a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis gives the team a chance to evaluate the internal and external landscape of the organization by categorizing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The SWOT categories are defined as follows:
- **Strengths** – Where does the organization have an advantage?
- **Weaknesses** – Where is the organization at a disadvantage?
- **Opportunities** – What current areas can the organization use to gain an advantage?
- **Threats** – What could potentially be a threat to the organization?

A SWOT analysis should be conducted as a group exercise. It is useful to create flip charts so that the information gathered can be visible, referred to and utilized throughout the planning process.

**Mission-Vision-Values... Check?**
Before moving on to Phase III, it is time to do a gap analysis. Does the organization have a mission statement, a vision statement, and core values? The mission, vision and values of the organization are at the foundation of the organization’s success. They are not something created as a way for the team to simply check the mission-vision-values box before going off and doing the real work of making money.
The mission, vision, and values are the guiding tenant of the organization, and should be understood and viewed as the construct within which the organization makes its money. Every technological initiative, every project, and every plan should be guided by the mission, vision and values of the organization. And that includes the strategic plan. Every key initiative should be in alignment with the mission, vision and values of the organization. If the organization does not have a mission, vision and values they need to be created before moving on to Phase III.

NOTES:
PHASE III – KEY INITIATIVES

Now it is time to employ some forward-thinking and uncover the key strategic initiatives that are going to move the organization toward its future vision. The two steps in this phase pick right up from Phase II.

Step 2: WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

Mission, Vision, Values... Check!
Before getting into determining the key initiatives it is important to check in on the organization’s mission, vision and values. An organization can take their mission, vision and values for granted allowing the fact that they have them to be enough. But given the fact that the mission, vision and values are the guiding tenant of the organization, and because the external landscape changes so rapidly, means they should be seriously reevaluated at each strategic planning session.

Here is a breakdown of what they are:
- Mission – Why does the organization exist?
- Vision – What is the future the organization is trying to create?
- Values – How will the organization behave (internally and externally)?

Some questions that should be asked about the organization’s mission, vision and values include:
- Do we like our mission and vision?
- Do our mission and vision still represent us?
- Do the people (internally and externally) know our mission and our vision?
- Do we do a good job of promoting our mission and vision?
- Do we do a good job of promoting our core values?
- Do the people from the top to the bottom live the values of the organization?
- Are our goals and strategic initiatives tied to our mission, vision and values?

If the team cannot answer these questions with certainty then it is a good sign the people of the organization may need to be surveyed to get to the truth. It is vital to have a clear understanding as to whether the mission, vision and values play a real or artificial role in the organization.

A Look into the Future
There is a tendency for organizations to get bogged down in present circumstances. Strategic planning is not about solving today’s problems. Strategic planning is about moving the organization toward its long-term vision (with a consistent eye on the marketplace).

The question that should be asked as you plan for the future is: Is how the organization spends its time and resources each day, how it operates and what it produces, in alignment with its mission, vision and values? It may seem like too simple of a question, but it is deceptively complex.
Once you ask the question, you will then begin to look closely at all of the business operations. Every program, department, service offering, product or initiative is up for consideration, including your name, logo and branding, when engaging in strategic planning as you work to make sure that everything you spend time and resources on is:

A. in alignment with your mission, vision and values (is a good representation of the organization),
B. the best use of your time and resources (something you have the capacity to do very well), and
C. providing the ROI that you want it to (financially, to the customer or otherwise).

It is important that team members not get attached to anything and be able to participate in the discussion that will emerge from asking the question objectively.

Here are some sample questions:

- Do we like this ________________?
- Do our employees like ________________?
- Do our customers like ________________?
- Is ________________ in alignment with our mission, vision and values?
- Is ________________ giving us the ROI that is beneficial to the business (bottom line) or is ________________ a sentimental favorite?
- Are we doing ________________ to the best of our ability? If not, how do we do ________________ to the best of our ability?
- Do we want to keep doing it?
- Should we keep doing it?
- If we were to keep doing it how can we bring it into alignment with our mission, vision and values?
- If we were to keep doing it how can we improve on it?
- If our business were to get wiped out today, would we create the same business the same way? If not, what would we create and do differently?
- What is our ideal future vision of our organization?
- How do we create our ideal future vision?

It is also important to use the information compiled in the SWOT analysis to guide this conversation. Strengths can be built upon, weaknesses need to be assessed and taken into consideration when formulating key initiatives.

This is also the time to assess all of your hidden clutter; outdated mindsets, old product and service offerings, or anything that is blocking new opportunities, sucking up resources, and inhibiting growth.

**Step 3: HOW DO WE GET THERE?**

If you have done the work recommended up to this point the strategic initiatives should practically be creating themselves, and should clearly illustrate how the organization will achieve its future vision. There
are three parts to creating the strategic initiatives: the strategic initiative, the goal and the metric. Each of these parts serves a different purpose.

- **Strategic initiative** – What we need to do *(at a high level).*
- **Goal** – How we are going to do what we need to do.
- **Metric** – Our projected number. How we will measure whether or not we have been successful.

Here is an illustration of how the three parts work together:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Initiative</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bring in more revenue to the business.</td>
<td>Sell more strategic planning workbooks</td>
<td>Sell 100 workbooks per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create a signature offering</td>
<td>Signature offering brings in at least $5000/month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some people believe setting certain profit level goals is a strategic initiative. It is not. Numbers are a metric used to assess whether or not the strategic initiative is successful. It is important when you are discussing strategic initiatives that you are actually discussing strategic initiatives and not goals, metrics or action plans, which we will discuss in Phase IV.

**Strategic Initiatives**

It is important to keep the strategic initiatives high level. They are big picture in order to lend some flexibility to the goals that will support them. Strategic initiatives if they are truly in alignment with the mission, vision and values, will rarely change as you return to evaluate how you are progressing toward successful strategic implementation, but the goals – the how the organization will get there – might change.

The number of initiatives should not be limited in the beginning. Each suggested initiative by team members should be up for consideration. As you begin to ask whether or not each suggested initiative is A) in alignment with your mission, vision and values *(is a good representation of the organization)*, B) the best use of your time and resources *(something you have the capacity to do very well)*, and C) providing the ROI that you want it to *(financially, to the customer or otherwise)* the most important strategic initiatives will reveal themselves. Prioritization during this part is vital.

A 5-year strategic plan allows the team to adopt more complex and long-term strategic initiatives than a 1-year strategic plan. If you have several initiatives and are looking to cut down the team can discuss whether some initiatives can be put off until the next session, or if some of the initiatives are so similar that they can be combined.
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The Breaking Point
At this point it is important to mention that this is the place where some strategic planning sessions end. For many teams when they come up with the initiatives they believe they are done, and they fail to reconvene and move forward collectively with goals, metrics and a comprehensive change management and execution plan. For other teams this is the place where another team – one that will be more involved with execution – is called upon to handle the more detailed work of the goals, metrics and execution. This may also be the point where the initiatives go to the key constituencies for feedback before the team reconvenes to complete the planning process.

Whatever the case, it is important to understand that as accomplished as your team may feel at this point this is not the end of the strategic planning process. And believing that it is the end is the reason many strategic plans fail to ever come to fruition. After the initiatives are created, goals and metrics come next.

Goals & Metrics
Each strategic initiative now needs to have goals assigned to it. How is the team recommending the strategic initiatives be fulfilled? When considering actions, the team should not operate solely within the context of “what they can see now” or “how we have always done it”. Taking a limited, comfortable, or risk-free view of goal setting keeps you in the construct of the present which is in direct conflict with the assignment of creating strategic initiatives for the future. On the other hand, looking at how you can leverage the current advantages and opportunities, pointed out in the SWOT analysis, is highly recommended. Setting goals requires brainstorming.

Brainstorming is not execution. And brainstorming is not about pointing out everything that “can’t be done” or judging potential ideas against personal preferences. Brainstorming is about looking at creative ways to meet the mandate of the strategic initiative. Brainstorming is about keeping an open mind, allowing the creative juices to flow and getting as many ideas on the table as possible.

After the brainstorming, when vetting the goals, alignment should be considered. The goals should be charged with same standard of measurement as your strategic initiatives; are your goals in alignment with your mission, vision and values. It should be clear how the goal fulfills the strategic initiative. If there is any question as to how a goal fulfills an initiative then further open-minded discussion by the team is required.

Metrics are extremely useful and should always be a part of strategic planning. Metrics around revenue, outgoing calls, new customers, and product sales, for example, help organizations attach number thresholds to goals in order to pinpoint success. Metrics need to be substantiated. And in order to obtain metrics, the team may need to do some market research that is either comparable to where the organization is now or comparable to where the organization wants to be.

There are times when metrics will expose weaknesses in systems or processes when targets are unable to be reached, and times when systems, processes, resources or capacity need to be shored up in order to have a chance at reaching metrics.
PHASE IV – IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

If you have successfully executed in Phases I – III, you ready to work on the implementation plan. Implementation is how you get from goal to metric. Depending on the number and complexity of the strategic initiatives, the amount of time it takes to put together an implementation plan will vary from organization to organization. The basic implementation process asks the question: Who is going to do what, by when, how and why?

THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

There are five core questions as it pertains to implementation, but there are several other essential questions to consider as you begin creating your implementation plan. It is important to give thoughtful and honest consideration to these initial questions and avoid the temptation to gloss over the truth due to pride, fear or wishful thinking.

What Are the Priorities?
It is idealistic to think that all of the strategic initiatives hold equal urgency, and that you can execute them all at once but that is rarely the case. Some initiatives may be “on fire”, meaning they need to be worked on immediately, while others may need to wait until later date. Some initiatives may need to happen before others can even get started. And there may be some initiatives the organization does not have the resources or capacity to undertake right away. Prioritization is important in order to be realistic about the scope and scale of the initiatives that can be launched.

Do We Have What it Takes?
The organization will need both resources and capacity in order to achieve the goals. All the optimism and hopefulness in the world is not enough to get the people of the organization to implement even the most promising and exciting of strategic initiatives if they are low on resources and capacity. The team must assess honestly if the organization has the resources and capacity to take on the proposed initiatives.

Resources include the following:
- money
- time
- people
- expertise (knowledge and skill)

Capacity includes the following:
- time (operational bandwidth)
- physical and mental energy
- organizational structure
- willingness
- motivation
Discussing in depth each strategic initiative and its goals, and thinking out what will it take to achieve them is vital to successful planning. Here are some questions to consider:

- What are the personnel and financial implications of undertaking each initiative? *(Do we need to hire? Do we need money? And, if so, how much?)*
- What are the time implications? *(Do we have the operational bandwidth to take this on?)*
- What are the knowledge and skill implications? *(Do we have the necessary expertise to carry this out? Do we need to train people to do this?)*
- Is the organization in a positive position to take on new initiatives? *If yes, then you’re on your way. If no, then...*
- What will it take to get the organization to a place where it can take on the initiatives?

**How Do We Get the People On Board?**

In order to prepare for implementation, the team must give thought to how to get the organization – the key constituencies – engaged in the implementation. The key constituencies encompass more than just the people responsible for implementation. It is everyone in the organization who will be affected and impacted by implementation, even a little bit. The team must give thought to how to create a collaborative environment, where the people of the organization are engaged in the process of implementing the strategic initiatives, versus an environment where people feel like change is being forced on them.

Implementing strategic initiatives is about change, although most people view a strategic plan as a project. The team must not take for granted that just because it has come up with the necessary initiatives that the people will immediately see the value in them and jump on board enthusiastically to execute them. People initially view any change through the lens of ‘How is this going to affect me?’ There needs to be an answer to that question. A change management plan implemented alongside a strategic plan guarantees not only that people understand the importance of the strategic initiatives, but also how the changes will affect them in their roles, and what they should expect as well as what will be expected of them.

Questions the change management plan will address include:

- How will the strategic initiatives be communicated to the organization?
- What people should expect throughout the change process?
- How will a sense of urgency be created?
- How will the knowledge and skills of the people responsible for implementation be assessed?
- How will we support the new behaviors and skills necessary to sustain the change?
- How do we deal with the people who resist?
- What is the timeline for implementation?

**What is in the Way?**

Within the process of formulating a change management plan, the team must be willing to anticipate what could get in the way of strategic implementation. They need to assess from where the resistance will come. Resistance is a natural phenomenon of change. The objective here is to anticipate where obvious resistance will come from and proactively create a plan to address and minimize it as much as possible.
Common reasons resistance will arise:
- Lack of understanding regarding why the change is happening
- Lack of understanding regarding what the changes is
- Not enough direction around how to execute
- Lack of skill at successfully leading change
- Change fatigue *(too much change forced on the organization at once)*
- Too many previous failed attempts at change
- A disengaged workforce *(i.e., culture and misalignment between espoused values and actions)*
- Fear
- Overwhelm

Newton’s Third Law says that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and it is no different when it comes to change within an organization. Therefore, assessing potential resistance is necessary.

### What Do We Need to Do to Prepare for Success?
Once the team has taken into consideration the priorities, resources and capacity, what it will take to get people engaged, and where during implementation there is likely to be resistance, it is time to go back and look at the feasibility of successfully implementing your strategic initiatives based on any new information. The team should not be considering whether or not to go forward with implementing the initiatives, as they have already been identified as critical, they should be looking at what gaps need to be filled in, in order to move forward with the best chance to succeed.

Some possible steps that need to be taken
- Present the strategic plan to key constituencies *(again)* and get feedback
- Push back the date for implementation until after another initiative is completed
- Do a survey
- Do some consensus building
- Do more research
- Add another strategic initiative, or take one away
- Hire an outside consultant for help with the implementation plan

The team must plan for success and be of one mind when it comes to the importance of success planning. The team will not be able to anticipate every roadblock or challenge that the organization will face, but the more they consider all critical implications and plan for them the better the chances of lasting success.

### Step 4: WHO, WHAT, HOW, WHEN & WHY?
Now it is time to answer the five core questions which will make up your implementation plan. This section is about implementing the goals and not the specific strategic initiatives.
Who is Responsible?
The ‘Who’ is broken down into two constituencies:
1) The team member responsible for overseeing that the goal gets distributed to the responsible party, or parties, and completed
2) The person, team or department responsible for executing the goal

What Needs to Be Done?
The team must recognize that most goals are projects. Goals often have multiple steps and more often than not no one goal can be completed by just one person. When determining what needs to be done the team must look at each goal, determine whether or not it is a project and, if so, further break down the steps within that goal into tasks so that the person, or people, responsible for execution of those tasks know exactly what is entailed.

Challenges arise when projects, goals, or tasks are passed on to the responsible party without any explanation and the responsible party is left to figure things out on their own, without the benefit of the context or information the strategic planning team possesses regarding what really needs to be done.

How Should It Be Done?
If there are any specifications around how a task should be executed, especially if it is different from how things were previously done, or if the new ways of executing are unfamiliar to the person or persons responsible, then time should be taken to explain how the tasks should be executed. It is easy to assume that people should just know how to execute, but it is better to make certain than to make assumptions.

It is also important when discussing how a task should be executed that the responsible team member make sure the party responsible for executing has everything (resources and capacity) they need to carry out the task as required. And if they don’t, arrangements should be made to get them what they need.

When is it Due?
The ‘When’ is determined by taking into consideration two factors:
1) The team’s initially decided-upon completion date of the overall strategic initiative, as well as each of the goals
2) The resources and capacity of the responsible party that will allow them to execute by deadline

These two factors have to be in alignment in order to come up with a realistic due date. It can be tempting to dictate a due date without giving consideration to the resources and capacity of the party or parties responsible for executing, but this is done at the peril of the strategic plan execution.
If there does happen to be any issues that affect the completion due date of the tasks then the responsible team member should report their findings back to the strategic planning team, or the plan owner, for review. A change in the completion date for one or a set of tasks may affect the ability for other goals and tasks to be completed so it is important to report back.
Why is This Important? And also...
People want to know why what they are being asked to do is important. And they also want to know how does what they are being asked to do tie into the mission, vision and values of the organization. Being able to answer the why question provides context for people as they decide whether or not they are going to buy in. The “why” is often left out of the conversation of assigning goals and tasks, but it something that should be attached to every conversation about implementation.

The ability to have this conversation is one of the main reasons it is important to have a mission, vision and values that are promoted and reflected throughout the organization. When they are promoted and reflected, people can make the connection from the work they are being asked to do to the mission, vision and values of the organization. They can see consistency between “who we say we are” and “what we do”. When the mission, vision and values are not promoted and reflected, people feel a disconnect between what they are being asked to do and why they being asked to do it. And this disconnect is one of the root causes of organizationally driven conflict.

NOTES:
PHASE V – EXECUTION & EVALUATION

Congratulations! You are ready to execute! Getting here the right way is no small feat. Many people get here only to find their best laid plans fall apart because they have not taken the proper steps to set themselves up for success. Phase V is on-going and is all about tracking the progress of the strategic execution, evaluating success, and tweaking when necessary.

Step 5: HOW ARE WE DOING?
Are We Making Progress?
Each team member should know what and who they are responsible for and have measures put in place to consistently chart the progress of execution. The team lead should then report back to the strategic planning team, the strategic plan team lead, or whoever is appointed owner of the overall plan, on how things are moving along. It is at this point where adjustments can be made to timelines or to the processes.

Do We Need to Do Anything Differently?
It does not do any good to continue with a course of action that is not working. And it is much easier to tweak execution or shift direction mid-stream than it is to change direction once you are at the end of the journey. It takes courage to admit that the current course of action may not be the best option but it is vital to the organization’s overall strategic plan success that each team member empowers the parties responsible for execution with the ability to provide the necessary honest feedback. And it is vital that each team member be able to muster the courage to take that feedback back to the strategic planning team, the strategic plan team lead, or the plan owner so action can be taken.

Let’s Celebrate!
In addition to celebrating the overall completion of an initiative, it is important to seek out and celebrate the small successes along the way. There are always positive things to acknowledge during the implementation process but sometimes the focus is only on celebrating the completion of an initiative. If that mindset is not altered and appreciation of effort is not offered along the way, it can wear down the people charged with execution which can cause delays in completion.

In addition to the celebrating along the way, expressions of gratitude, support, and encouragement should be freely offered throughout the process. People need to be recognized and validated for the work they are putting in. The idea that people should work solely for the pleasure of receiving a paycheck, or because it is their job to do what they are told to do, leads to a demoralized and resistant workforce which will undermine the success of the strategic execution, among other things.
AND FINALLY...

Strategic planning is something a strategic planning team should take very seriously. The team should not look at the strategic planning process as a rote exercise simply to be performed each year so that they can say the plan is done. There is a lot to consider. Strategic planning is an on-going process and your strategic plan is a living document.

Each time a strategic planning team gets together to create a new strategic plan, the initiatives of the old plan should be reviewed and evaluated. Some key questions that should be asked include:

- What worked well in the implementation process?
- What did not work well in the implementation?
- What got completed?
- How is it working now?
- What did not get completed?
- Why did it not get completed?
- Do we need to revisit it for completion?
- What did we learn that needs to be taken into consideration this time?

Each strategic planning team should record their name for the record, and the year the strategic plan was created, so if and when a new team is appointed, the new team can call upon former strategic planning committee members, if available, for input or any needed clarifications.

When done well, the strategic plan is the key to charting the path to the organization’s on-going growth and success. When done well, the people of the organization understand the importance of, and willingly collaborate in implementing, the goals of the strategic initiatives. There is no substitute for taking the time to do the strategic planning process the right way.
READY TO PLAN?

Strategic Planning Development Workshop
The strategic planning development workshop will take you *(and your team)* through The Strategic Planning Playbook and help you to plan for your own strategic planning session. Ask any questions you want to ask and learn inside tips on what derailed the strategic planning process, barriers to successful implementation, as well as an overview of a change management plan. Develop your strategic planning game plan from beginning to end as you prepare to host your own strategic planning session. *Each attendee will receive a copy of The Strategic Planning Playbook Quick Guide.*

Strategic Planning Facilitation
If you are struggling to get out of your strategic planning rut of setting yearly goals, assessing the SWOT and then walking away with a few strategic initiatives and crossed fingers (“This year it’s going to be different!”), then maybe it’s time to upgrade your process and hire a professional facilitator. With Strategic Planning Facilitation you and your team will be able to address the often unaddressed issues and engage in breakthrough thinking as you work through the strategic planning process and set yourself up for successful implementation. Take your strategic planning process to the next level and learn how to walk away with a plan you can make work. *Can be combined with the Strategic Planning Development Workshop.*

If you’d like to book a facilitated strategic planning and development workshop or hire a facilitator for your strategic planning session, please contact us for your complimentary consultation.

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Kathy is a former collegiate and professional basketball player and coach who, for over ten years, has worked with clients ranging from government agencies to higher-learning institutions such as The Securities and Exchange Commission, the FDA-FSIS and Vanderbilt University, to Fortune 100 and 500 companies such as Morgan Stanley, Aerotek (The Allegis Group), and the McGraw-Hill Companies sharing her unique combination of on-court experience and off-court knowledge, speaking, consulting and delivering training and development solutions that have transformed the way people lead and function in workplace environments and in life.

Kathy received her B.A. Communications from the University of North Carolina @ Chapel Hill, and her Graduate Certificate in Leadership Coaching and M.A. in Organizational Management from The George Washington University.