

Strategic Planning

Influencing the Future with Improved Performance and Stronger Leadership

Strategic Planning is both an intuitive and analytical process that:

- Anticipates the real needs of the marketplace
- Consistently expands an organization's contribution to the world
- Promotes products and services that enrich the lives of customers and all stakeholders
- Provides a financial return that allows the organization to be sustainable

Strategic planning is best regarded as *both a process and a product*.

As a process -

Strategic planning involves thoughtful review of internal and external data, as well as a soul searching examination of "what difference the organization is committed to making in the world."

As a product -

Strategic planning involves a set of clear decisions, priorities, and commitments about how an organization will use its resources to influence its future and expand its impact in the world.

Since strategic planning always involves "moving out into the unknown", it is the perfect opportunity to develop strong leadership skills in the people who are responsible for creating and implementing the plan. In fact, we believe it is more than a "good opportunity" because the failure to include the leadership development component is often the fatal flaw of an organization that died with a great plan on the shelf.

What is the Strategic Planning Process?

A formal strategic planning process has the following five phases and outcomes:

1. Pre-event Environmental Scan and Business Data Review:
This work involves capturing market trend data, recent business results indicating the relative health of the organization, as well as, the perceptions of key people regarding the threats, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses that make up "current reality". This information is best collected, organized, and presented ahead of time to allow the strategic planning team to arrive at the event with sufficient background information to begin a meaningful dialogue very quickly. Outcome: a binder of relevant information that is provided to event participants two weeks prior to the event (Some groups opt to make this the first assignment of the planning team, as opposed to providing it to them.)

2. **The Planning Event: Part 1 - Creating the Foundation:**
During this phase it is important to allow sufficient time for an in depth dialogue about current reality and a candid exploration of the relative health of the organization. It is also the time to address the intuitive feelings about the future of the marketplace and what different scenarios the organization needs to be prepared for. This event becomes the forum for confirming and/or recreating the mission, vision and organizational values. It is also the opportunity to agree upon the most important strategic initiatives for the upcoming year. Outcome: an agreed upon mission statement, vision statement, set of organizational values, and 5-7 strategic initiatives with an identified champion.
3. **Strategic Initiative Planning:**
The champions for each initiative work with the people who will play a key role in the initiative to complete the template (below) that outlines: definition of success, intended results, milestone schedule, budget impact, anticipated obstacles, strategies to overcome obstacles and necessary leadership development. Outcome: first draft templates completed for each initiative with the buy in of all people playing a key role.
4. **The Planning Event: Part 2 - Initiative Declaration and Challenge:**
This work involves all champions declaring their initiative to the other members of the strategic planning team and allowing the team to "cross examine" the first draft with an intention to support the champion's ultimate success. During these conversations it is also the time for the champion to request support and acknowledge where he/she will need to develop new leadership skills to be successful. Outcome: first draft initiatives become finalized (completing the planning product) and the strategic planning team creates a spirit of "aligned unity" in the pursuit of an expanded contribution to the world.
5. **Implementation Review:**
This is an ongoing process of each champion reporting actual progress compared to planned progress with an emphasis on asking for support and coaching to work through obstacles and developing leadership skills, as opposed to "presenting everything as going just fine". The emphasis shifts to celebration at the end of the year as the next cycle of strategic planning begins. Outcome: a results oriented culture of trust that allows for honest dialogue on a regular basis, which improves the actual performance of the organization from one year to the next.

The Role of the Facilitator: an experienced facilitator ensures that the process makes the best use of everyone's time, and most importantly, that leadership development, organizational learning and culture building occur in conjunction with the creation and implementation of initiatives that actually improve performance. Ultimately, the facilitator creates a safe environment to discuss and resolve the "real issues" impairing the organization's optimum performance.

Definition of Terms

The following are a definition of terms used in the strategic planning process:

Mission

The organization's reason for being, its purpose. Says what, in the end, your contribution to enriching the world is in one brief sentence.

Vision

A picture of the organization's future when it is fulfilling its mission as best as we can imagine (Often done in one sentence, yet can be extremely valuable to clarify details in a one page description of the future in present tense).

Values Statement

The agreed upon ethics or principles that guide people's actions in the pursuit of success. The values represent what a company stands for or how it defines excellence when it comes to working with customers, all stakeholders and one another (a quantifiable list of value declarations).

Business Results

The organization's bottom line. The numbers that indicate we are changing lives consistent with our mission.

Strategic Initiatives

A set of 5 to 7 priority organizational enhancements that set the organization's fundamental, long-range direction with the intention of improving our business results.

Champion

The individual who owns the initiative and has the responsibility to use authority and influence to work through all anticipated and unforeseen obstacles until it is completed to the satisfaction of the leadership team.

Leadership Team

The senior managers who are the core of the strategic planning team and responsible for the successful implementation of the plan.

Strategic Planning Team

All people who play a key role in the planning process and attend the events in phase 2 and 4.

Environmental Scan

A process for discovering and documenting facts and trends in the operating environment that are likely to affect the organization in its future work. Environmental scan findings are used to orient strategic planning participants.

Internal Data

Summarized information regarding the history, present status, and performance of the organization. This includes whatever current mission statement, vision, values and strategic initiatives that have been in effect.

Strategic Initiative Template

Definition of Success (the description of what will be in existence once this initiative is completed; can be written as a set of goals or as a paragraph describing the intended outcome of this initiative; the choice of initiatives and the way they are approached represent the key strategic choices we are making in pursuit of our mission and vision):

Intended Results (the business results that will have occurred when this initiative improves our ability to contribute our products and services in the way we intend; can be written as measurable objectives or in business metrics language):

Milestone Schedule (the monthly or quarterly tactical accomplishments that will occur during the year that indicate the initiative is on track; includes who is specifically accountable for each tactical accomplishment):

Budget Impact (the investment in new or unusual resources needed to implement the initiative with a payback analysis if relevant; often involves a budget approval process that ensures sufficient financial resources will be dedicated to the initiative):

Anticipated Obstacles & Strategies to Overcome the Obstacles (the foreseeable reasons this initiative could fail or not be completed on schedule, and what we plan to do to prevent each obstacle from impeding our success):

Necessary Leadership Development (the skills we will need to develop or strengthen in ourselves and others to be successful):

Champion and Initiative Team Members (the key people holding the accountability to successfully implement this initiative):

Strategic Initiative:

Definition of Success:

Intended Results:

Milestone Schedule:

Budget Impact:
