

From Strategic Planning to Strategic Agility

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At its core, strategic planning is a defined process that allows an organization to define a set of goals, break these goals into manageable steps, and determine how to implement each step while identifying the expected outcomes and measures of success for each step. It's a logical, straightforward, step-by-step process designed to take an organization from where it is today to where it wants to go tomorrow. Strategic planning is based in large part on the assumption that the world is reasonably stable and somewhat predictable based in large part on past history.

Strategic Agility is the ability to continuously adjust and adapt your strategic direction based upon changing circumstances. The focus is on new products and services AND business models and methods that create value based on changing conditions. Strategic agility utilizes a dynamic process of decision-making versus the typically static model utilized in traditional strategic planning.

There are several key factors to consider when considering improvements to your organization's strategic agility. **First**, it is critical to communicate a clear **vision** that clarifies what success means to your team. **Second**, complexity and turbulence means that **you may not have all of the data** needed to make good decisions. Ask questions that facilitate a different look at available data and drive your organization to look for solutions that may not be "obvious". Ensure that your organization is expanding data gathering beyond traditional sources. Find out what is happening beyond the walls of your business and your industry? **Third**, continually **balance the big picture strategies and the detailed tactics**. Strategic agility requires that you focus on the big picture AND that you stay open and flexible to making the needed changes required to convert your vision to reality. Strategic agility is a balancing act between sticking to your vision while at the same time adjusting to change and turbulence.

New skills and ways of thinking are also required to be strategically agile. These skills can be grouped under a process called strategic thinking. This decision making process defines the manner in which people think about, assess, view, and create the future for themselves and others. Strategic thinkers have the ability to use the left (logical) and right (creative) sides of their brain. Strategic thinkers balance big picture thinking without ignoring the details required to be successful. They do not allow the past to dominate their view of the future. These skills are not automatic for most people but they can be learned.

Organizations that perform strategic planning in a traditional step-by-step, linear fashion are doomed to be unprepared for big changes. The successful way ahead is the creation of an agile organization that can think strategically and be prepared to react to big changes and turbulent environments. Is your organization flexible and agile? If you cannot honestly answer yes, then it may be time to make changes to your planning processes.

Questions?

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