Editorial

Open Access CrossMark

Strategic planning for research projects

Strategic planning for research projects

Volume 5 Issue 1 - 2016

Abdel Rahman Ahmed
Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering Research Institute, Egypt

Correspondence: Abdel Rahman Ahmed, Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering Research Institute , 11, 10 St., From Hasan Atia St., Bhteem, Shobra El-Khima City, Post of no 13211, Kaluobia Government, Egypt, Tel 002-02-48254412, Email a_abdo_a2000@hotmail.com

Received: November 07, 2016 | **Published:** November 10, 2016

Successful strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (which will ultimately provide data that will be used in future planning and implementation efforts). Strategic planning, an essential first step in the development of a results-based accountability system, is defined as the process of addressing the following questions:

i. Where are we?
ii. What do we have to work with?
iii. Where do we want to be?
iv. How do we get there?

A systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them.

In contrast to long-term planning you have to answer:

i. At every stage of long-range planning the planner asks, “What must be done here to reach the next (higher) stage?”
ii. At every stage of strategic-planning the planner asks, “What must be done at the previous (lower) stage to reach here?”
iii. It’s hard to accomplish anything without a plan, developing a strategic plan might seem hard process, but it’s easy to tackle.

Here’s our five-step approach

Determine where you are

This is harder than is looks. Some people see themselves how they WANT to see themselves, not how they actually appear to others.

Identify what’s important

Focus on where you want to take your organization over time. This sets the direction of the enterprise over the long term and clearly defines the mission and vision (conceptualization of what your organization’s future should or could be).

Define what you must achieve

Define the expected objectives that clearly state what your organization must achieve to address the priority issues.

Determine who is accountable

This is how you’re going to get to where you want to go. The strategies, action plans, and budgets are all steps in the process that effectively communicates how you will allocate time, human capital, and money to address the priority issues and achieve the defined objectives.

Review and Review

It’s not over. It’s never over. To ensure the plan performs as designed, you must hold regularly scheduled formal reviews of the process and refine as necessary.

These five elements form an essential foundation for the strategic planning process. If even one of these bedrock elements is missing, your chances for success become marginal at best. Once these elements are in place, the next step involves action planning and breakthrough modeling to determine what it will take to get to where you want to go. Here is where you get down to the nitty-gritty to figure out what organizational capabilities (systems, tools, processes, people and technologies) are needed to reach your destination points. Effective strategic planning also requires that you set goals and define team and individual accountabilities, as these link the big picture to individual goals and competencies.

Important of strategic management

Leaders expect strategic planning to be the blueprint for future growth and success. However, visioning the future and setting goals will not guarantee results. Studies have shown:

i. *Only 9% of organizations feel they have the capability to fully execute their strategies (while)*

ii. *45% of organizations feel their execution of strategy is effective (and)*

iii. *90% of well-designed strategies fail due to poor execution.*

Key words of strategic planning (Vision, mission and values)

The key purpose of a board of directors is to direct an organization’s affairs to meet the legitimate interests of its stakeholders. In order to be able to do this effectively, it needs to establish the organization’s culture and goals. This is done through a vision, mission and values exercise.

Vision

A vision is a picture of the future created in the imagination, and communicated in a way that motivates others to act. A vision helps unite people towards a purpose.

Mission

Mission is the overall purpose of an organization: what you do, who you do it for, and how and why you do it. It sets boundaries on the organization's current activities.

i. How are you unique from everyone else out there? What is your unique selling proposition?
ii. What problem(s) do you solve? What need(s) do you fulfil?
iii. What do you sell? How do you make your money?
iv. Who will you sell to? What is your target market?
v. What are your economic/financial goals?
vi. What are your social/community goals?

Values

Values are the beliefs of an organisation, the expression of what it stands for and how it will conduct itself. Values are the core of an organisation's being, they help to distinguish this organisation from others. They underpin policies, objectives, procedures and strategies because they provide an anchor and a reference point for all things that happen.

Vision, mission and values statement: is a collection of words, created collaboratively, that summarise what an organisation is intended to look like.

It should include references to the various stakeholders in the business and, sometimes, broader societal interests. It helps to determine strategy and policy, and how the organisation operates. A successful vision, mission and values statement accomplishes six goals:

i. gives a sense of the future
ii. guides decision making and strategy
iii. creates a shared purpose
iv. provides guidelines that determine behaviour
v. inspires emotion
vi. connects to values

Strategic planning models

There is no one-size-fits-all strategic planning model. Each organization will develop its own approach, often by selecting a model and modifying it in response to local realities and program feedback. The six models of strategic planning described in further detail below are:

i. **Model 1: The Basics**
ii. **Model 2: Issue- or Goal-Based**
iii. **Model 3: Alignment**
iv. **Model 4: Scenarios**
v. **Model 5: Organic (or Self-Organizing)**
vi. **Model 6: Appreciative Inquiry**

These models provide a range of alternatives from which communities and organizations might begin to develop their own strategic planning process. Note that an organization can use more than one model, e.g., starting with scenarios (model 4) to identify issues and goals, and then moving to an issues-based approach (model 2) to address the issues and achieve its goals.

Strategic planning advantages and disadvantages

A few resources containing more or different benefits and limitations are revealed at the end.

Advantages

Facilitates communication between managers: One of the goals of strategic managers is to facilitate the collaboration of functional managers to achieve synergy between different parts of organization. Managers in finances, marketing, operations and human resources are essential for an organization but they often compete rather than collaborate. Even worse situation is with separate SBUs.

Identifies strategic goals and strategic intent: CEOs are usually the people who create goals and envision the future of the company.

Reduces resistance to change: It is strategic planner's job to inform the whole organization of strategic changes, company's plans, current situation implications and what changes are expected to be done.

Improves resource allocation: New products, services, strategies, goals or objectives require resource allocation (moving people from one team to another or moving the facilities into another country), which is done more efficiently when aligned with strategic objectives.

Leads to sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is often achieved without strategic planning but if the company wants to achieve sustainable competitive advantage it has to plan strategically.

Disadvantages

Costly to perform for small and medium businesses: Strategic planning, the same as marketing or proper human resource management, adds a lot of expenses to an organization. Managers or strategic planners have to be hired, additional efforts are required towards analysis of external and internal environments and some tools have to be designed to properly implement strategic planning process.

The process is very complex. Strategic planning process consists of many steps that are connected to each other and must be constantly adjusted. Some unexpected factors also appear that may change the whole strategy and as a result, strategic planning process.

Low rate of successful implementation. Due to its complexity and heavy commitment to strategic goals, strategic planning is rarely implemented successfully. Often, the poor implementation is the reason for failure, although it is more often the case of misaligned operational and strategic goals.

10 reasons why strategic plans fail

Below you'll find ten common reasons strategic plans fail. It's likely that the last strategic initiative to fall short in your organization could be attributed to one (or some combination) of these ten causes.

History – You have to be mindful of your history when it comes to launching strategic initiatives.

People/Culture – Knowing what to do in the abstract is usually the easy part. Knowing what YOU can do based on the unique skills and mindset of your team is an entirely different matter. Understanding your people, the culture and sub-cultures within your organization, and shared vision/values are essential to developing a plan that stands a chance of success. Failure to do so is a recipe for disaster.

Leadership – How committed is your leadership team to the success of the strategic plan? Not just in terms of what they say when the plan is announced, but how they communicate (words & actions) during the life of the plan.

Discipline – Let's say you've got committed leaders and employees. That's great, but commitment to achieving strategic goals is still not enough. The question is: Do they have the discipline necessary to make real behavioral change?

Communication – Most strategic-related communications, even if thoroughly planned and executed, are designed only to create clarity around what management wants the employees to do. (Which by itself can be a tall order). As a result, the communication efforts fall woefully short of the mark. Good strategic communication should have one goal: To make sure everyone in the company sees the strategic plan NOT as just the leadership's plan, but as THEIR plan.

Monitoring, Measurement, Feedback – Even the best conceived strategic plans require adjustments along the way. It's critical to monitor the plan's progress, measure outputs as well as outcomes, and obtain feedback from all your stakeholders. It's also essential to consider unintended effects.

Lack of Flexibility – While it's helpful to have all the right systems in place to track your progress, it's all for naught if you lack the will, the flexibility, and the triggers necessary to make adjustments along the way. Over time, and presented with solid evidence, you can't be afraid to depart from the original plan. Keep the goal, change the plan – not the other way around!

Milestones/Rewards – Most strategic initiatives of any consequence take time. Even for the most disciplined among us, we need to be motivated and inspired to achieve a longer-term goal. Consider what it takes to keep your people on track. How do you stay focused on the goal and celebrate your progress? What are the best milestones and rewards for your plan? Your organization?

Bad Planning – Make a list of the people in your organization who were involved in developing your last strategic plan. Who were they? How deep did you go in the organization? How wide? What was the extent of their involvement? OR, did the senior leadership team develop the plan on its own and then announce it to the organization? How did that work for you? Off-site huddles by the senior management team to develop a strategic plan often result in developing a plan that has no chance of success.

10. Bad Plan – Sometimes plans fail because they are simply bad plans, and I would argue that they are often bad plans because we don't tend to get everyone involved that we should. We either fail to tap into the collective talents and dedication of our people or we misjudge the external environment and the response of our stakeholders. It can make employees feel isolated and the leadership look out of touch.

Barriers to strategic planning

Fear

Fear can be a barrier to effective planning. When management focuses on the fear of change or lack of success rather than the potential for growth, it makes it difficult to plan for the future of an organization. Fear of financial insolvency or a lack of knowledge about market conditions can cause executive management to avoid planning for the future and focus solely on day-to-day operations.

Short sightedness

Shortsighted behavior can cause executive managers to stop in their tracks. By focusing on current projects rather than broader, long-term goals and on day-to-day management rather than future growth and profitability, shortsightedness is a barrier to effective planning.

Negativity

Negativity, or a lack of positive ideas and suggestions for the future, can create an insurmountable barricade when it comes to strategic planning. A good leader must be positive and bring knowledge and expertise to the table. Negative thought, or a belief in failure, can lead to inertia, which can cause an organization to stagnate.

Communication barriers

Difficulty in communicating goals and plans can stall a planning session. Whether communication barriers stem from language or cultural differences, or whether a manager simply is an ineffective communicator, poor communication can make it hard to express goals and organizational mission.

Poor leadership

Leaders who are insecure or fearful in their own position within an organization are ineffective when it comes to planning. A leader must inspire those around him to work to their full capability. A leader who cannot lead, or who is unapproachable, cannot collect suggestions and ideas from employees that are essential to effective planning.

Lack of creativity

An ability to think originally and grow in new directions are what often keep a company alive and vibrant. While one business model may work for many years, organizations have to think creatively and take chances by expanding and growing into new areas. A lack of creativity, tied with poor leadership, can cause employees to grow bored and disheartened, and employees who feel like that can't do their best work.

Thus, communication and involvement are the cornerstones to making strategy everyone's everyday job. Management and all employees must to enable to openly review, comment, feedback, keep updated on progress and obtain clarity on questions as they arise on every aspect of strategy delineation and execution.

SWOT analysis

SWOT Analysis is a tool designed to put strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a business into perspective.

A SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is the combination of the Internal Analysis and External Analysis which identifies Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (ie S.W.O.T) for any particular organization or business. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats need to analyze in relation to competitors. SWOT Analysis needs to be undertaken in the context of the competitive environment; it tells us nothing useful if we don't factor in competitors.

We really need to identify

i. Relative Strengths and
ii. Relative Weaknesses;
iii. Opportunities we can use better than competitors and
iv. Threats we can avoid better than competitors.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.