

IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC PLANNING

Getting The Thing To Work

Strategic Planning has developed a bad name. Many organizations do *strategic planning*, but few are satisfied with the results. It seems that somewhere between the conceptualization and the execution, a serious *melt down* occurs.

Strategic Planning is an activity undertaken by an organization to identify priorities, and to develop and implement *action plans* to achieve those objectives. For the process of *Strategic Planning* in an organization to be successful, it must have the commitment of, and be driven by, the executive group. The executive group not only must commit sufficient time and energy to the process, but also must make available the necessary resources required to implement the plan.

Developing A Strategic Plan

Strategic Planning begins by assessing the competitive landscape and identifying forces that will impact on the organization. Considerations might include changing technology, government regulations, ethics, customers' requirements, suppliers' capabilities, cost and quality pressures, substitute products, competitors' behaviour, and human resources. Emerging from this analysis, the organization will identify the factors deemed to be priorities and will formulate how it will perform in that future environment. This is the organization's *vision* or *desired state*. Thus, the *strategic plan* is intended to *transform* the organization – to move it holistically to something different than what it is today.

A *gap analysis* then is conducted, in order to identify existing conditions that either will *enable* or *constrain* the achievement of the strategic priorities. At this point a detailed *action plan* can be developed. The *action plan* addresses:

- ◆ what has to be done
- ◆ who is responsible
- ◆ when it is due
- ◆ the resources required
- ◆ how it will be measured

This *action plan* becomes the **operating contract** for the organization and its members. Unfortunately, at this point management often seems to think that all the hard work has been done, as the *strategic plan* is passed down to the departments for implementation. Although management probably engaged the services of a consultant to facilitate the development of the *strategic plan*, rarely is such a provision considered for the implementation phase.



The Barriers To Implementation

Experience demonstrates that strategic planning initiatives often break down at the implementation stage. There are numerous reasons for this phenomenon:

- ◆ the organization's vision is too generalized
- ◆ organizational objectives are vague and unmeasurable
- ◆ organizational objectives fail to become translated into deliverable departmental objectives and activities
- ◆ strategic priorities are stacked onto, instead of integrated into existing operations
- ◆ there is no relief of workload
- ◆ staff are unable to internalize the strategic priorities
- ◆ there is a lack of consequence related to performance
- ◆ inter-departmental barriers are not resolved
- ◆ there is insufficient staying-power

Because of these factors, at the departmental level, the *strategic plan* becomes perceived as extra work. In order to meet the organization's requirements, departments spend time and energy inventing ways to demonstrate that they are contributing to achieving the goals of the plan. Thus, at the departmental level what often occur is counting. **The *strategic plan* becomes *transactional*, rather than *transformational*.**

The Departmental Approach

An integrated approach to implementation will ameliorate the barriers identified above and provide an organization with a platform for success. The recommended approach engages a single department in the process of implementing the strategic priorities in its area, with the assistance of a consultant to facilitate the process.

By working with a single department first, the activity can be singularly focused; peripheral issues can be identified, but actioned later; an early and visible success can be attained; and a model for implementing the strategic priorities in other departments can be developed.



The department to be involved should reflect the following:

- ◆ leading edge orientation in relation to the strategic priorities
- ◆ willingness of staff
- ◆ capability for change
- ◆ visibility and credibility within the organization

The Process

A facilitated *team* approach needs to be used. *Team training* probably will be a preliminary requirement, in order to ensure that the department achieves high performance.

The first step in the implementation process will be to define and detail the *desired state* for the department. This is the process of translating the organization's strategic priorities into departmental objectives and actions. Sufficient time and thought need to be dedicated to this activity in order to ensure that the strategic priorities are reflected and aligned properly and effectively. Performance indicators then can be developed.

A *gap analysis* then is conducted, as well as a *business process improvement*. The *business process improvement* exercise examines existing and required business functions, always asking the following questions:

- ◆ *What* do we do?
- ◆ *Why* do we do it?
- ◆ *How* do we do it?
- ◆ *When* should we do it?
- ◆ *Who* should do it?

A basic premise must be: **“We can’t add more to an already full plate, without getting rid of something.”** The expected outcome of the *business process improvement* exercise, therefore, will be the elimination of unnecessary business functions and/or activities, and the streamlining of others.

Once the *gap analysis* and *business process improvement* exercise are completed, a detailed implementation plan can be developed. The implementation plan will serve as a roadmap for the department, in that it introduces the required changes in the department's business focus and activities. The plan will include *measurable deliverables*, *timelines* and *accountabilities*.

Follow-Up

Regular follow-up sessions are required to ensure that the department follows the implementation plan, identifies new problems and opportunities, makes appropriate adjustments, and delivers on the strategic priorities of the organization.



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