



Strategic planning a journey

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In today's business atmosphere, any organization that wishes to surpass customer expectations and stay competitive needs an up-to-date strategic plan. The plan must be forward-looking, visionary and achievable, while at the same time striving toward continuous improvement of the organization's crucial processes. Strategic planning should not end with the development of the plan; instead it must be the beginning, planned so it does not lose sight of the day-to-day measures required to run an organization successfully. Thriving organizations focus their efforts on continuously improving important processes each day.

Once the organization has gone through successful strategic planning, has defined the critical areas of improvement and has assigned champions to achieve goals, practices must be built in to hold everyone accountable for the integral and necessary objectives and action items.

Once the action items and the strategic plan are drafted, there still can be problems for an organization. Strategic planning is difficult. It requires that people think differently, research time, reallocating resources and changes to the organization. The process can be draining to an organization, especially with financial constraints and a shortage of staff, but it must be prioritized for an organization to stay on-task, moving forward and gaining ground.

You can think of it as a car: You can start with the right equipment, but the car needs gasoline and oil added often, regular maintenance and loving care. The older the car gets the more

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David Miessler-Kubaneck
illustration / The Gazette

maintenance is required. Many cars last years but need attention because people count on them to get to work, to school and to kids' activities.

Sometimes strategic plans can have overly optimistic projections that are impossible to implement, and when management fails to support the planning, implementation is hopeless.

Internal resistance to strategic planning also can restrain efforts and make goals unattainable. There are numerous reasons why strategic planning can disintegrate and push an organization off course.

Strategic planning is not realized unless the process is totally integrated with current

operations. Also true is that the process must not merely be an exercise in generating reports. It must include a measurement of strategic thinking. Everyone in your business, from the CEO to the front line, must be involved actively in discussions about the key factors that will enable the successful execution of your strategy. Interaction with co-workers is essential in getting and keeping buy-in. Integration, encouragement and support are needed to inspire action and keep momentum.

When organizational participants are empowered to act as effective leaders based on core values and a unifying purpose, the potential for unprecedented advances and exceptional outcomes are enhanced.

Performance targets, progress reports, benchmarks and other specific measurement tools to track success on work plans, strategic goals and objectives are critical to keep the process moving in the right direction; otherwise, it is easy for goals to slip behind.

Continuous use of a strategic planning process enables organizations to steer more effectively toward long-term goals while balancing them with short-term needs. Continuous strategy evolution, not a rigidly fixed road map, enables an organization to act and react quickly to critical challenges and opportunities.

Periodic examinations (change the oil) will track the measurable outcomes, allowing course corrections (include a new filter) due to changes in the environment. Strategic planning doesn't end with the publication of a plan; its success depends on it purposefully becoming a never-ending process. The value of strategic planning lies in the journey of improvement.

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