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Want More? Deep Dive Into the “Build Your Plan” How-To Guide. Action Grid Action Who is Involved Tools & Techniques Estimated Duration Develop your strategic framework and define long-term strategic objectives/priorities Executive Team Planning Team Strategy Comparison Chart Strategy Map Leadership Offsite: 1 – 2 days Set short-term SMART organizational goals and measures Executive Team Planning Team Strategy Comparison Chart Strategy Map Leadership Offsite: 1 – 2 days Select which measures will be your key performance indicators Executive Team and Strategic Director Strategy Map Follow Up Offsite Meeting: 2-4 hours \*To access the worksheets under “Tools & Techniques” please refer to our Strategic Planning Kit for Dummies. Step 1: Use Your SWOT to Set Priorities If your team wants to take the next step in the SWOT analysis, apply the TOWS Strategic Alternatives Matrix to help you think about the options that you could pursue. To do this, match external opportunities and threats with your internal strengths and weaknesses, as illustrated in the matrix below: TOWS Strategic Alternatives Matrix External Opportunities (O) External Threats (T) Internal Strengths (S) SO Advantage Strategies: Strategies that use strengths to maximize opportunities. ST Protective Strategies: Strategies that use strengths to minimize threats. Internal Weaknesses (W) WO Conversion Strategies: Strategies that minimize weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities. WT Defensive Strategies: Strategies that minimize weaknesses and avoid threats. \*To access the worksheets under “Tools & Techniques” please refer to our Strategic Planning Kit for Dummies. Evaluate the options you’ve generated, and identify the ones that give the greatest benefit, and that best achieve the mission and vision of your organization. Add these to the other strategic options that you’re considering. Step 2: Define Long-Term Strategic Objectives Long-Term Strategic Objectives are long-term, broad, continuous statements that holistically address all areas of your organization. What must we focus on to achieve our vision? What are the “big rocks”? Questions to ask: What are our shareholders or stakeholders expectations for our financial performance or social outcomes? To reach our outcomes, what value must we provide to our customers? What is our value proposition? To provide value, what process must we excel at to deliver our products and services? To drive our processes, what skills, capabilities and organizational structure must we have? Outcome: Framework for your plan – no more than 6 Step 3: Setting Organization-Wide Goals and Measures Once you have formulated your strategic objectives, you should translate them into goals and measures that can be clearly communicated to your planning team (team leaders and/or team members). You want to set goals that convert the strategic objectives into specific performance targets. Effective goals clearly state what, when, how, and who, and they are specifically measurable. They should address what you need to do in the short-term (think 1-3 years) to achieve your strategic objectives. Organization-wide goals are annual statements that are specific, measurable, attainable, responsible and time bound. These are outcome statements expressing a result expected in the organization. What is most important right now to reach our long-term objectives? Outcome: Clear outcomes for the current year. Step 4: Select KPIs Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are the key measures that will have the most impact in moving your organization forward. We recommend you guide your organization with measures that matter. How will we measure our success? Outcome: 5-7 measures that help you keep the pulse on your performance. When selecting your Key Performance Indicators, begin by asking “What are the key performance measures we need to track in order to monitor if we are achieving our goals?” These KPIs include the key goals that you want to measure that will have the most impact in moving your organization forward. Step 5: Cascade Your Strategies to Operations Cascading action items and to-dos for each short-term goal is where the rubber meets the road – literally. Moving from big ideas to action happens when strategy is translated from the organizational level to the individual. Here we widen the circle of the people who are involved in the planning as functional area managers and individual contributors develop their short-term goals and actions to support the organizational direction. But before you take that action, determine if you are going to develop a set of plans that cascade directly from the strategic plan, or instead if you have existing operational, business or account plans that should be synced up with organizational goals. A pitfall is to develop multiple sets of goals and actions for directors and staff to manage. Fundamentally, at this point you have moved from planning the strategy to planning the operations; from strategic planning to annual planning. That said, the only way strategy gets executed is to align resources and actions from the bottom to the top to drive your vision. Questions to Ask How are we going to get there at a functional level? Who must do what by when to accomplish and drive the organizational goals? What strategic questions still remain and need to be solved? Outcome: Department/functional goals, actions, measures and targets for the next 12-24 months Step 6: Cascading Goals to Departments and Team Members Now in your Departments / Teams, you need to create goals to support the organization-wide goals. These goals should still be SMART and are generally (short-term) something to be done in the next 12-18 months. Finally, you should develop an action plan for each goal. Keep the acronym SMART in mind again when setting action items, and make sure they include start and end dates and have someone assigned their responsibility. Since these action items support your previously established goals, it may be helpful to consider action items your immediate plans on the way to achieving your (short-term) goals. In other words, identify all the actions that need to occur in the next 90 days and continue this same process every 90 days until the goal is achieved. Examples of Cascading Goals: 1 Increase new customer base. 1.1 Reach a 15% annual increase in new customers. (Due annually for 2 years) 1.1.1 Implement marketing campaign to draw in new markets. (Marketing, due in 12 months) 1.1.1.1 Research the opportunities in new markets that we could expand into. (Doug) (Marketing, due in 6 months) 1.1.1.1.1 Complete a competitive analysis study of our current and prospective markets. (Doug) (Marketing, due in 60 days) 1.1.1.2 Develop campaign material for new markets. (Mary) (Marketing, due in 10 months) 1.1.1.2.1 Research marketing methods best for reaching the new markets. (Mary) (Marketing, due in 8 months) \*To access the worksheets under “Tools & Techniques” please refer to our Strategic Planning Kit for Dummies. Strategic planning is a process in which an organization's leaders define their vision for the future and identify their organization's goals and objectives. The process includes establishing the sequence in which those goals should be realized so that the organization can reach its stated vision. Strategic planning typically represents mid- to long-term goals with a life span of three to five years, though it can go longer. This is different than business planning, which typically focuses on short-term, tactical goals, such as how a budget is divided up. The time covered by a business plan can range from several months to several years. The product of strategic planning is a strategic plan. It is often reflected in a plan document or other media. These plans can be easily shared, understood and followed by various people including employees, customers, business partners and investors. Organizations conduct strategic planning periodically to consider the effect of changing business, industry, legal and regulatory conditions. A strategic plan may be updated and revised at that time to reflect any strategic changes. Chief information officers use strategic planning to determine how IT can be best used to further an organization's business goals. Businesses need direction and organizational goals to work toward. Strategic planning offers that type of guidance. Essentially, a strategic plan is a roadmap to get to business goals. Without such guidance, there is no way to tell whether a business is on track to reach its goals. The following four aspects of strategy development are worth attention: The mission. Strategic planning starts with a mission that offers a company a sense of purpose and direction. The organization's mission statement describes who it is, what it does and where it wants to go. Missions are typically broad but actionable. For example, a business in the education industry might seek to be a leader in online virtual educational tools and services. The goals. Strategic planning involves selecting goals. Most planning uses SMART goals -- specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound -- or other objectively measurable goals. Measurable goals are important because they enable business leaders to determine how well the business is performing against goals and the overall mission. Goal setting for the fictitious educational business might include releasing the first version of a virtual classroom platform within two years or increasing sales of an existing tool by 30% in the next year. Alignment with short-term goals. Strategic planning relates directly to short-term, tactical business planning and can help business leaders with everyday decision-making that better aligns with business strategy. For the fictitious educational business, leaders might choose to make strategic investments in communication and collaboration technologies, such as virtual classroom software and services but decline opportunities to establish physical classroom facilities. Evaluation and revision. Strategic planning helps business leaders periodically evaluate progress against the plan and make changes or adjustments in response to changing conditions. For example, a business may seek a global presence, but legal and regulatory restrictions could emerge that affect its ability to operate in certain geographic regions. As result, business leaders might have to revise the strategic plan to redefine objectives or change progress metrics. There are myriad different ways to approach strategic planning depending on the type of business and the granularity required. Most strategic planning cycles can be summarized in these five steps: Identify. A strategic planning cycle starts with the determination of a business's current strategic position. This is where stakeholders use the existing strategic plan -- including the mission statement and long-term strategic goals -- to perform assessments of the business and its environment. These assessments can include a needs assessment or a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to understand the state of the business and the path ahead. Prioritize. Next, strategic planners set objectives and initiatives that line up with the company mission and goals and will move the business toward achieving its goals. There may be many potential goals, so planning prioritizes the most important, relevant and urgent ones. Goals may include a consideration of resource requirements -- such as budgets and equipment -- and they often involve a timeline and business metrics or KPIs for measuring progress. Develop. This is the main thrust of strategic planning in which stakeholders collaborate to formulate the steps or tactics necessary to attain a stated strategic objective. This may involve creating numerous short-term tactical business plans that fit into the overarching strategy. Stakeholders involved in plan development use various tools such as a strategy map to help visualize and tweak the plan. Developing the plan may involve cost and opportunity tradeoffs that reflect business priorities. Developers may reject some initiatives if they don't support the long-term strategy. Implement. Once the strategic plan is developed, it's time to put it in motion. This requires clear communication across the organization to set responsibilities, make investments, adjust policies and processes, and establish measurement and reporting. Implementation typically includes strategic management with regular strategic reviews to ensure that plans stay on track. Update. A strategic plan is periodically reviewed and revised to adjust priorities and reevaluate goals as business conditions change and new opportunities emerge. Quick reviews of metrics can happen quarterly, and adjustments to the strategic plan can occur annually. Stakeholders may use balanced scorecards and other tools to assess performance against goals. A balanced scorecard focuses on four key parts of a business's strategic plan: financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and growth. A committee typically leads the strategic planning process. Planning experts recommend the committee include representatives from all areas within the enterprise and work in an open and transparent way where information is documented from start to finish. The committee researches and gathers the information needed to understand the organization's current status and factors that will affect it in the future. The committee should solicit input and feedback to validate or challenge its assessment of the information. The committee can opt to use one of many methodologies or strategic frameworks that have been developed to guide leaders through this process. These methodologies take the committee through a series of steps that include an analysis or assessment, strategy formulation, and the articulation and communication of the actions needed to move the organization toward its strategic vision. The committee creates benchmarks that will enable the organization to determine how well it is performing against its goals as it implements the strategic plan. The planning process should also identify which executives are accountable for ensuring that benchmarking activities take place at planned times and that specific objectives are met. There are no uniform requirements to dictate the frequency of a strategic planning cycle. However, there are common approaches. Quarterly reviews. Once a quarter is usually a convenient time frame to revisit assumptions made in the planning process and gauge progress by checking metrics against the plan. Annual reviews. A yearly review lets business leaders assess metrics for the previous four quarters and make informed adjustments to the plan. Timetables are always subject to change. Timing should be flexible and tailored to the needs of a company. For example, a startup in a dynamic industry might revisit its strategic plan monthly. A mature business in a well-established industry might opt to revisit the plan less frequently. Strategic planning activities typically focus on three areas: business, corporate or functional. They break out as follows: Business. A business-centric strategic plan focuses on the competitive aspects of the organization -- creating competitive advantages and opportunities for growth. These plans adopt a mission evaluating the external business environment, setting goals, and allocating financial, human and technological resources to meet those goals. This is the typical strategic plan and the main focus of this article. Corporate. A corporate-centric plan defines how the company works. It focuses on organizing and aligning the structure of the business, its policies and processes and its senior leadership to meet desired goals. For example, the management of a research and development skunkworks might be structured to function dynamically and on an ad hoc basis. It would look different from the management team in finance or HR. Functional. Function-centric strategic plans fit within corporate-level strategies and provide a granular examination of specific departments or segments such as marketing, HR, finance and development. Functional plans focus on policy and process -- such as security and compliance -- while setting budgets and resource allocations. In most cases, a strategic plan will involve elements of all three focus areas. But the plan may lean toward one focus area depending on the needs and type of business Organizations that are best at aligning their actions with their strategic plans engage in strategic management. A strategic management process establishes ongoing practices to ensure that an organization's processes and resources support the strategic plan's mission and vision statement. In simple terms, strategic management is the implementation of the strategy. As such, strategic management is sometimes referred to as strategy execution. Strategy execution involves identifying benchmarks, allocating financial and human resources and providing leadership to realize established goals. Strategic management may involve a prescriptive or descriptive approach. A prescriptive approach focuses on how strategies should be created. It often uses an analytical approach -- such as SWOT or balanced scorecards -- to account for risks and opportunities. A descriptive approach focuses on how strategies should be implemented and typically relies on general guidelines or principles. Given the similarities between strategic planning and strategic management, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. A strategy map is a planning tool or template used to help stakeholders visualize the complete strategy of a business as one interrelated graphic. These visualizations offer a powerful way for understanding and reviewing the cause-and-effect relationships among the elements of a business strategy. While a map can be drawn in a number of ways, all strategy maps focus on four major business areas or categories: financial, customer, internal business processes (IBPs), and learning and growth. Goals sort into those four areas, and relationships or dependencies among those goals can be established. For example, a strategy map might include a financial goal of reducing costs and an IBP goal to improve operational efficiency. These two goals are related and can help stakeholders understand that tasks such as improving operational workflows can reduce company costs and meet two elements of the strategic plan. A strategy map can help translate overarching goals into an action plan and goals that can be aligned and implemented. Strategy mapping can also help to identify strategic challenges that might not be obvious. For example, one learning and growth goal may be to increase employee expertise but that may expose unexpected challenges in employee retention and compensation, which affects cost reduction goals. The balanced scorecard part of the strategy map helps managers keep track of what tasks must be accomplished to achieve strategic planning objectives. Effective strategic planning has many benefits. It forces organizations to be aware of the future state of opportunities and challenges. It also forces them to anticipate risks and understand what resources will be needed to seize opportunities and overcome strategic issues. Strategic planning also gives individuals a sense of direction and marshals them around a common mission. It creates standards and accountability. Strategic planning can enhance operational plans and efficiency. It also helps organizations limit time spent on crisis management, where they're reacting to unexpected changes that they failed to anticipate and prepare for. Information technology is a key part of developing an effective strategic plan. Look at these six free IT strategic planning templates that can help make IT a driving force in a business.





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