

THE PATH TO Extraordinary Results

2nd Edition



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**Strategic
Directions**
MAKING STRATEGY WORK

Unhappy with your business performance? Believe your organization is capable of doing better? This paper outlines a straightforward system for achieving results that are greater than you've been used to achieving – what we like to call **extraordinary results**.

Many business leaders we meet are convinced that their organization is capable of performing at a higher level. *"If only,"* they say, *"our employees could see the future that I see and we could work together to make it a reality."* Statements like this highlight the greatest impediment to performing at a higher level... employees who lack a clear picture of what the organization stands for, where it is headed, and how they can contribute to getting it there.

When individuals, teams, and departments are pursuing different agendas, an organization loses out on the synergy that's possible when everyone is working towards the same end result.

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Not only that, leaders and staff are often forced to divert time and other resources to deal with issues like:

- ◆ a confusing and convoluted decision-making process,
- ◆ silos that don't work well together,
- ◆ too much time and money invested in disconnected or "shiny" projects,
- ◆ conflicting priorities and a lack of focus,
- ◆ difficulties attracting and keeping the right talent,
- ◆ low, no, or negative growth, and
- ◆ an unacceptable level of customer, client, member, or donor churn.

We've helped many clients deal with challenges like these. This experience has taught us what it takes to perform at the highest level and achieve results that are truly **beyond the ordinary**.

We've built this experience into the **Strategic Directions Planning System**. It works for small and medium-sized business organizations of all types and levels of

sophistication – including operational units of larger entities. It's a proven approach to laser-focusing leaders and their teams on overcoming major challenges, seizing opportunities, and delivering **extraordinary results** without losing sight of their day-to-day responsibilities.

In this paper, we expand on the steps involved in achieving **extraordinary results**. We highlight what each step contributes to the end result and how they are interrelated and interdependent.

From experience we know that each step is **necessary** and as a group **sufficient** for building and implementing a robust business strategy capable of achieving **extraordinary results**.

We offer "**Conversation Starters**," questions to kickstart your understanding of what each step involves. And we highlight organizations that have emulated, consciously or otherwise, the extraordinary results process. These examples are presented as "**Extraordinary Results at Work**."

The Strategic Directions Strategy Team

“*...achieving growth and efficiency ... is not about product innovation so much anymore as about innovating business models, process, culture, and management.*”

Ginni Rometty, former Chair & CEO, IBM

What are extraordinary results and why do they matter?

Every business leader has a choice. Play it safe and accept mediocre performance. Or seize the opportunity to make the business they are leading a better version of itself and reap the rewards that thoughtful planning, engaged employees, and an unwavering commitment to hands-on execution make possible.

Give your strategy focus

For those who opt to go for it, there are decisions to be made. Among the first is selecting an appropriate **strategic focus**. This could be *innovation*, and the strategy could be built around a ground-breaking or game-changing idea. Or it could be *profitability, growth, or transformation*.

Sometimes, the choice will be a no-brainer. For example, transformation might be just what the business doctor ordered if firmly entrenched silos are getting in the way of timely decision-making. For more on strategic focus see Step 3 (page 12).

How many priorities can you handle?

Once your strategic focus is clear, decisions on strategic priorities will be that much easier. Typically major threats, opportunities, or vulnerabilities, these are big issues that promise to have an outsized influence on the organization's longer-term success.

Some strategic plans contain far too many "priorities." This often results in few (if any) getting the attention they deserve.

Our advice is to select no more than five and stage them when it comes to execution, i.e.,

mapping out an implementation plan to prioritize the priorities!

This is not as complicated as it might sound, and makes it possible to focus on a limited number of projects and tasks – no more than employees can reasonably handle.

Why planning for extraordinary results is so important

Today's business world is unlike anything most of us have ever experienced.

Disruption and uncertainty, once the exception, are now the norm.

Broken supply chains, runaway prices, technological advances, aggressive competition, changes brought on by global events, the threat of an inflationary spiral – these and other challenges are reshaping the business landscape.

Nothing is certain except uncertainty

According to leaders responding to a [McKinsey Global Survey](#) on [new-business building](#), half of their companies' revenues five years from now will come from products, services, or businesses that do not yet exist. That means, in addition to getting better at what you're now doing, it's imperative to stay on top of how your business world is changing and what impact these changes could have on buyers, members, donors, and so forth.

A number of questions will have to be asked and answered, if not in this planning cycle then in the next. For example,

- ◆ How could the way customers interact with your business change?
- ◆ Do you see demand for some of your best selling products or services increasing, decreasing, or staying the same?
- ◆ What is happening on the competitive front that might affect your business?
- ◆ How could technology impact what you do and how you do it?

One thing is certain. With all the uncertainty, leaders cannot be content with doing what

they've always done, in the manner that they've always done it. There is every reason to believe that disruptive and rapid change will be with us well into the future, if not forever. Successfully navigating our evolving normal will require flexibility, the ability to pivot as circumstances change, and of great importance the staying power that comes from a strong financial position.

Are **extraordinary results** possible without a well-thought-out plan? Maybe, if you're lucky! However, we've found that businesses that rely on luck are more often than not disappointed. To assure longevity (as well as shorter-term success) there is no substitute for a plan that laser-focuses everyone in your organization on working together to achieve the best results possible, a.k.a., **extraordinary results**.

“ *The best way to predict the future is to create it.* ”
Peter Drucker, Consultant, Educator, Author

The 6 steps along your path to extraordinary results!

The **Strategic Directions Planning System** offers a tried and proven path to results that are greater than your organization has been used to achieving. It bears repeating that each step is **necessary** and as a group **sufficient** for building and implementing a robust business strategy capable of achieving **extraordinary results**.

- 1 ENGAGE employees and other key stakeholders** through inclusive conversation, information sharing, active participation, and recognition along the journey to – and through – execution of the organization's strategy.
- 2 CLARIFY leadership's collective understanding of the evolving business landscape** including compelling opportunities and vulnerabilities.
- 3 VISUALIZE an explicit picture of what success will look like at a future point in time** based on your strategic focus and a clear understanding and endorsement of the organization's stated purpose, i.e., "why we exist."
- 4 COLLABORATE on making informed choices** on strategic priorities (issues) and the initiatives and projects that will achieve desired outcomes.
- 5 TRANSLATE strategic choices into executable and fully resourced actions** with clearly defined and agreed-upon project accountabilities and responsibilities.
- 6 ACT, TRACK, & UPDATE action plans every 90 days** to ensure that actions remain fresh and relevant.

Read on to learn more about putting your organization on **the path to extraordinary results**.

Ready to hit the path? Let's get started.

The **Strategic Directions Planning System** recognizes the importance of fully-engaged employees and other stakeholders in your quest for extraordinary results. That's why giving thought to how and when stakeholders will be engaged is the first step and an activity that will be front and centre throughout the planning and implementation phases.

Similarly, the effort involved in monitoring results and updating your action plan (Step 6) will continue for as long as it takes to implement your plan.

The System works for any small and mid-sized organization – from relatively small professional services firms to operational units in larger organizations – regardless of the number of staff or scope of operations. So don't let your size or planning experience get in the way! Each step can be scaled to suit your capabilities, resources, and needs.

1 ENGAGE employees and other key stakeholders

Engagement is essential at every point along **the path to extraordinary results**. It starts with identifying **who** to engage, as well as **when** and **how** to engage them. It's impossible to overstate the importance of people to the ultimate success of your planning efforts.

The **"who"** includes executives, managers, and staff. It can also include customers (members, donors), external partners, and sector players.

The **"when"** needs to be explored and decided. Possibilities include, [1] at the front end for "raw" feedback on what's going well and not so well, and what they'd like to see more of, [2] part way through to gain feedback on options being considered, and [3] towards the end of the planning process when decisions and agreements have been

reached on strategic priorities and major initiatives, and stakeholders are asked to weigh in on the best ways of kickstarting and supporting implementation.

The **"how"** requires some thought as there are several useful ways to ensure people feel they are part of the process and the solution.

Here are four that we regularly employ:

RESEARCH Surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and town halls encourage employees to share their opinions while

providing decision-makers with valuable insights. They reinforce the importance that leaders place on understanding what employees and other stakeholders know and think of the organization, the way it does business, and the culture that's been created. Sharing a top-line summary is a great way of acknowledging contributions and letting employees and others know that you've heard and care about their concerns and suggestions.

COMMUNICATIONS Newsletters, hotlines, suggestion boxes, websites, and social media keep employees and other key stakeholders *in the loop* and reinforce their importance to the ultimate success of your **Extraordinary Results Strategy**.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL WORKING GROUPS These foster collaboration and help break down silos. They are useful for assessing current operations to identify areas for improvement, dealing with potentially disruptive challenges, seizing opportunities, and designing and recommending approaches to implementation.

RECOGNITION AND REWARDS Thoughtfully designed and consistently executed, recognizing and rewarding employees who make an effort and contribute will encourage active participation and help gain support for your **Extraordinary Results Strategy**. In many organizations, the effort needed to lead or participate in the execution of a strategic

initiative is built into job descriptions – either through temporary secondment or permanent placement – and a portion of the employees' compensation is related to this effort.

Because different people value and respond to different things, what works for one organization won't necessarily work for another. The key is to design an engagement program that reinforces the important roles your stakeholders have in developing and executing your **Extraordinary Results Strategy**.



Conversation Starters

1. What stakeholder groups should we involve in our planning efforts? How?
2. Given the nature of our organization and our staff, how should we recognize and reward extra effort and personal contribution?



If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room."

Anita Roddick, Founder, The Body Shop (UK)

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

Just when you thought things were going so well, customer satisfaction takes a hit.

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Reverse a downward trend in customer satisfaction.

THE ISSUE

Investigation established that some people, under pressure, were unable to prioritize their passengers' comfort and safety over their own & should not be flight attendants.

ACTION & RESULT

By recruiting only individuals with the ability to provide exemplary service under pressure, the airline was able to achieve a dramatic increase in customer satisfaction.

HERE'S A SITUATION THAT will resonate with many. Your business has been doing well. However, a gradual deterioration in your Net Promoter Score is indicating a downward trend in customer satisfaction. The problem is confirmed by an annual customer survey. You know there is an issue, and you want to do everything possible to reverse the trend.

A situation like this happened at a mid-sized, US airline. Concerned about a growing volume of passenger complaints, an investigation found that 80% of these complaints involved about 20% of their flight attendants.

The airline turned to a firm of industrial psychologists to determine the reason. They discovered that most of the complaints concerned attendants they classified as "internals" – people whose first concern, under pressure, was for their own comfort and safety as opposed to the comfort and safety of others (the "externals").

This led to an initiative designed to ensure that the right people were in the right jobs. From that point forward, only "externals" were recruited for flight attendant positions. This led to a dramatic reduction in attendant-related complaints and a commensurate increase in customer satisfaction.

2 CLARIFY leadership's collective understanding of the evolving business landscape

There are many models and frameworks to help you build a picture of your business landscape. These include SWOT and PESTLE analyses, and Porter's 5 Forces. The objective is to build a shared understanding across your leadership team of compelling opportunities, threats, vulnerabilities, and emerging trends.

What do you risk by maintaining the status quo? What's pushing you to pursue a different path? How can you capitalize on the strengths you enjoy in your sector? What will it take to achieve **extraordinary results**?

What's compelling you to act?

Identification of compelling opportunities, vulnerabilities, and threats starts by leveraging information gathered from online surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and town halls. These will often uncover insights that are not apparent to those who are involved in the organization on a daily basis. Frontline employees are a particularly good source as they are that much closer to your customers, members, donors, etc.

The results, when summarized and distributed to decision makers, enable informed assessments and choices. What's more, the very process of gathering information works to reassure employees

and other stakeholders that their opinions have been heard and are valued.

Here are a few ways to use some of the more popular information gathering tools:

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS, also known as key informant or elite interviews, are particularly useful early in the planning process to identify and explore issues of concern to employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Far from being an imposition, many interviewees will feel honoured to have been asked for their opinions.

ONLINE SURVEYS of employees, customers, and other stakeholders make sense at different points throughout the process to uncover and prioritize issues, capture



When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute."

Simon Sinek, Speaker, Author of *Start With Why*

insightful comments, rate potential solutions, or provide input on execution.

FOCUS GROUPS allow you to tap into participants' attitudes, feelings, experiences, and reactions. They are often used to explore alternative solutions and solicit insights that might otherwise remain buried.

TOWN HALLS provide a forum for presenting information to, and obtaining feedback from, larger audiences. They can be particularly useful for keeping stakeholders informed as the planning process unfolds.

WORKSHOPS – either in person or online – are useful for bringing members of the leadership team together to explore significant aspects of the business landscape and the insights generated by surveys, focus groups, and town halls.

In some situations, it is beneficial to include a concise presentation by an external “expert” on a topic like sector performance and trends, emerging technologies, or consumer behaviour. This can be followed by a facilitated conversation on anticipated changes and what these might mean for the organization.



Conversation Starters

1. What aspects of our business landscape – for example, technology, emerging competition, or shifts in buyer behaviour – deserve particular attention?
2. What would be good sources of information and the best ways of tapping into them?



Connect the dots between individual roles and the goals of the organization. When people see that connection, they get a lot of energy out of work. They feel the importance, dignity, and meaning in their job.”

Ken Blanchard, Consultant, Author of *The One Minute Manager*

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

An association increases its relevance by staying on top of member needs.

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Increase the value & relevance of membership in a professional association.

THE ISSUE

As one of the most significant member benefits was continuing education, the question was what could be done to make it more relevant.

ACTION & RESULT

A task force identified 8 subsegments with different educational needs. Being proactive and tailoring the offering to each increased the perceived value of membership.

IN AN ONGOING EFFORT to better support members with an interest in taxation, an association representing the accounting profession created a task force comprised of tax practitioners. Its mandate was to determine what continuing education members in both public practice and industry required following their initial qualifying training.

One of the first things the task force did was to segment the audience for tax-related training, and identify eight distinct segments. This highlighted the differences between practitioners who specialized in very specific areas of taxation, those whose practice was broader and still 100% tax-related, those whose practice included more general tax concerns, and those who needed to be aware of tax issues so they could turn to an “expert” as required. It further highlighted that these four groupings could be in public practice or industry generating the eight distinct segments.

By identifying the educational needs of each segment and determining where these needs overlapped and where differences should be recognized, the association was able to design a specific offering for each. This proactivity was well received by members and served to increase the association’s relevance and the perceived value of membership.

3 VISUALIZE an explicit picture of what “success” will look like

Most organizations have a **mission** statement. However, very few have created a separate **purpose** statement. According to one estimate, less than a quarter of Fortune 500 companies have one. The percentage of small and mid-sized organizations that have done this is likely to be considerably smaller.

MISSION speaks to what you’re “in business” to do, and for whom. Your **PURPOSE** is different. It gives voice to the ways in which your organization impacts the lives of donors, volunteers, members, clients, and/or customers. It addresses the questions, “*Why do we exist?*” and “*How are people better off because we do?*” To be meaningful, it must be about much more than dollars and cents or market share.

Purpose is one of the main reasons that people do business with your organization and decide to join and stay.

Research by the likes of McKinsey, PwC, Deloitte, and many leading business schools shows that purpose-driven organizations grow faster and enjoy higher levels of customer satisfaction and employee engagement. A purpose-driven **Extraordinary Results Strategy** will commit your organization to a reason for being that

resonates with management and staff as well as existing and prospective customers, donors, and members.

Framing a future you want to own

To paraphrase the Cheshire Cat, “*If you don’t know where you’re going, any path will take you there.*” Establishing an overarching **strategic focus** as well as a clear **vision** and measurable **goals** will keep your destination in sight and your plans on point.

STRATEGIC FOCUS helps guide your strategic thinking, serving as a filter for decisions on goals and major initiatives.

It could be *innovation*, with your strategy built around a ground-breaking or game-changing idea. It could be *profitability*, necessitating a close look at your product and service offering, as well as costs and selling prices. It might be *growth* leading your team to consider a merger or



The one requirement for success in our business lives is effort. Either you make the commitment to get results or you don’t.

Mark Cuban, billionaire owner of Dallas Mavericks

acquisition, a new market, different ways of gaining market share, product extensions, or other alternatives. It might be *transformation* which could focus attention on data integration or updating incompatible and ineffective systems and processes.

Your **VISION** speaks to what you want your organization to accomplish, or be, at some point in the future. An aspirational vision describes a future that is always slightly out of reach – a good balance of the pragmatic and aspirational.

GOALS are, broadly speaking, your destination – measures of what your organization will look like when your *Extraordinary Results Strategy* has been successfully executed. These can be “hard” (percentages and numbers) or “soft” (for example, anecdotal evidence of greater agility). Many people believe that the most useful goals are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Be sure to share your **purpose, strategic focus, vision, and goals** with your employees. Increasingly, people want to work for an organization with an inspiring purpose, a vision they buy into, and goals they understand and support.



Conversation Starters

1. Has our vision or mission changed or evolved over the past few years? How?
2. If we could wave a magic wand and change anything about our business, what would we change?



When you're surrounded by people who share a passionate commitment around a common purpose, anything is possible."

Howard Schultz, former Chair & CEO, Starbucks

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

Putting customer experience front and centre.

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Improving a retail bank's customer experience.

THE ISSUE

Customers were becoming increasingly upset by bank employees who seemed to care more about their paperwork than serving customers and reducing lineups.

ACTION & RESULT

By relocating admin staff to a "back room" and bringing them out to assist customers when lineups got too long, wait times were dramatically reduced and customer satisfaction measurably increased.

IN CONSIDERING HOW TO attract, delight, and retain customers, a newly-minted retail bank district manager determined that his branches would have to be reconfigured to make them more "customer friendly." So, when he was charged with consolidating administrative functions across the district, he began by specifying what "success would look like" when the job was done.

He recognized that the real, strategic opportunity lay in improving customer service. Through conversations with branch employees and his own observations, he was convinced that customers wanted all visible branch employees to be "working for them."

The solution was to relocate to a "back room" administrative staff who processed Visa payments and did other administrative tasks. Working with branch managers, he created the position of customer service coordinator. When the lines grew too long, coordinators were empowered to put backroom staff to work serving customers.

Customer service is an essential aspect of every retail banking operation. By thinking strategically and making it a priority, this district manager was able to dramatically reduce wait times and measurably improve the customer experience across his 11-branch district.

4 COLLABORATE on making informed choices

It's very likely that you already have a pretty good idea of the issues with which you'd like your **Extraordinary Results Strategy** to deal. Nonetheless, confirming these through research and dialogue pays off – big time!

You hear it all the time, “When things get back to normal...”

The fact is, the “normal” we once knew and what “normal” will look like tomorrow or in the years to come are likely quite different. As we have seen, global events have the ability to change a great many things about the world in which we live and work. Quite rightly, the questions many leaders are asking are, “*What's next?*”, “*How could our business be affected?*”, and “*How can we prepare?*”

There is much to be gained from bringing decision makers together *specifically* to brainstorm issues, identify alternative courses of action, and reach consensus on the best path forward. The keyword here is “specifically.” The weekly meeting is *not* the place to do this kind of work.

Facilitated workshops create an environment in which participants can share ideas, agree on a strategic focus and priorities, identify and scope out initiatives and major projects, and establish what success will look like when an initiative has been fully completed.

Accountability & responsibility

Each strategic initiative must have a Champion who will be accountable for the initiative's successful completion. Often (and not always) a member of the leadership team, this individual will estimate and secure resources, provide guidance to those working on various projects, and represent the initiative at the executive level.

Each project will have a Project Lead. This should be an employee who has the time and ability to manage the project and see it through to a successful conclusion.

Strategic priorities

In most cases, we advise clients to build their **Extraordinary Results Strategy** around five or fewer strategic priorities. More than this can be overwhelming and bring execution to a grinding halt.

The strategic focus you have selected will serve as a touchstone, ensuring that each strategic priority has a specific role to play. For example, if the strategic focus is “growth,” strategic priorities could include

“ *The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do.*
Michael Porter, Economist, Author of *Competitive Advantage*

market share, product development, and/or sales execution.

Sometimes, strategic priorities are obvious to an organization's leadership team. In other cases, the process of identifying compelling opportunities, threats, and vulnerabilities (through surveys, one-on-one interviews, brainstorming, and so forth) will uncover issues that were not readily apparent.

For example, in one professional services firm, project delivery was identified as a strategic priority after research established that outdated technology (amongst other things) was undermining the firm's ability to deliver complex projects in a timely fashion.

Strategic initiatives & projects

A **strategic initiative** is a collection of projects that fall outside the organization's day-to-day operational activities. They are designed to close performance gaps and achieve the organization's longer-term goals.

In the professional services firm just mentioned, decision makers came together in a facilitated workshop to scope out initiatives and projects. The initiative associated with the strategic priority project delivery was, *"Refine our process for delivering projects on time, on budget and to a client's complete satisfaction."*

It's not unusual to see 3, 5, or more projects associated with a strategic initiative. For project delivery, they involved leadership, communication, and technology.

Getting input on choices & execution

As part of your decision-making process, and in the spirit of true collaboration, you might solicit input from various stakeholders on the options you are considering. This could involve presenting your thinking to smaller groups of stakeholders. And you might want to use a framework like **Six Thinking Hats®** to generate opinions on the best option to run with, as well as ideas on how best to execute the option.



Conversation Starters

1. How much information is enough information and what's the most effective way of getting it?
2. Given our culture, what can we do to encourage a truly collaborative decision-making process?



Vision without action is just a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. And vision with action can change the world.

Nelson Mandela, former President, South Africa

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

Examining every aspect of the customer's (rider's) experience pays off – big time!

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Design an alternative to conventional taxi services.

THE ISSUE

Finding a taxi is often an unpleasant chore, particularly in bad weather. As well, riders must have cash or a credit card to pay for the trip.

ACTION & RESULTS

As these alternative services have demonstrated, focusing on identifying and improving every aspect of the customer experience can have a very positive impact on results.

IMAGINE YOU'VE BEEN tasked with recommending a way to improve on a conventional taxi service. Where would you begin?

Well, you could start by breaking down a typical taxi ride into its component parts – those ordinary events or behaviours that people take for granted. For example, walk to a street, flag a cab, make the trip, and pay for it once the final cost is displayed on the meter.

Having broken the taxi ride into its component parts, you would then be in a position to consider alternatives. What could you do to make the experience easier and more enjoyable for customers?

This is the kind of strategic thinking that services like Lyft and Uber must have gone through when they were designing their taxi alternative. And it is the kind of thinking that can benefit any business organization. It might not lead to radical changes. However, even a modest improvement in the way your customers, members, or donors experience your organization could make a big difference in the results you achieve.

5 TRANSLATE strategic choices into executable and fully resourced actions

You've identified as many as five strategic priorities, and scoped out the initiatives and projects that you believe will have an outsized influence on your success. Nicely done! Now, the challenge is to translate these into fully-resourced action plans.

Implementation Timeline

Once your strategy has been finalized and approved, it's useful to develop a visual implementation timeline that lays out what will be done and when over the life of your **Extraordinary Results Strategy**. This provides a graphic depiction of the entire strategy and captures your initial thoughts on sequencing – when the various initiatives and major projects will start and finish.

This timeline will be a work in progress, so expect to update it on an ongoing basis in light of the progress you're making, changes in your business environment, and unforeseen challenges or opportunities.

Rolling 90-day Action Agenda

Now you're ready to formulate the first in a series of **90-day Action Agendas**.

Decide which projects you would like to get a jump on and break out the tasks that will launch these projects.

Be sure to select tasks that can be completed in 90 days. Assign responsibility to only those people with the interest, time, and ability to take them on.

Working groups, milestones, metrics

It's often in the first 90 days following a plan's approval that a leadership team establishes cross-functional working groups – one for each strategic priority – to design and coordinate implementation.

This is a particularly powerful way of engaging and recognizing talented staff members throughout the organization. With clear terms of reference and capable and willing members, these groups can have a



However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results."

Winston Churchill, Statesman, Soldier, Author

very positive impact on the speed and success of implementation.

This is also the point at which the leadership team confirms milestones and metrics for initiatives and projects. Decisions are required on how each will be tracked and communicated up and down the corporate ladder.

Size can be everything!

When viewed in its entirety, the work involved in implementing a strategic plan can be daunting. This can lead to implementation being slow-rolled, back-burnered, or postponed indefinitely.

Many organizations have seen the execution of their strategic plan falter or come to a grinding halt. One way of preventing this is to break projects into smaller – doable – tasks, and identify a person who is willing and able to take charge of getting the work done.

In our experience, this goes a long way towards avoiding the angst experienced by time-challenged employees who feel overwhelmed by the prospect of more work than they feel able to handle.

Also, consider incorporating the extra effort required to execute a strategic plan into job descriptions. This helps ensure that workloads are fairly balanced and execution is accorded the importance it should have.

Communicating with stakeholders

You have a real opportunity to build support for your **Extraordinary Results Strategy** by communicating with stakeholders, both internal and external.

Give some thought to how you would like to announce your strategy (what media and process to use) and keep people informed of your progress. The effort this takes will be repaid many times over when staff feel like part of the solution and not the problem.



Conversation Starters

1. What have we learned from past strategic planning efforts that will be useful this time around?
2. How will we ensure that execution doesn't slow or stop in favour of day-to-day activities?



Extraordinary results happen only when you give the best you have to become the best you can be at your most important work."

Gary Keller, Author, founder of Keller Williams

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

A working group sets its sights on achieving results that are more than ordinary.

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Supporting the strategic & operational needs of a division with a robust data & analysis function.

THE ISSUE

Although a great deal of data was being generated by the division, it was not being effectively used to support high-quality decision making.

ACTION & RESULTS

A cross-functional working group defined success, identified data sources, specified clear outcomes, and developed a time and cost-effective implementation plan. This effort put the division squarely on the path to achieve extraordinary results .

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR A division of a provincial government ministry resulted in six strategic priorities. One was to advance their use of data and analytics to support decision-making, program design, and quality improvements.

A working group of staff members representing all functions across the division was formed to develop a granular implementation plan. The group started out by defining “what success will look like when the data and analytics function is fully operational?” This “definition of success” included key sources of relevant data as well as the outcomes they were trying to achieve, and the evidence-based outputs needed to support decision-making and program design.

As the planning process identified, this emphasis on data and analytics, while an everyday aspect of the division’s operation, had the potential to yield “extraordinary results.” In developing the implementation plan, the working group’s efforts were guided by the questions, *“Where do we need to concentrate our energies to make the greatest difference and therefore generate the best results?”*

Consciously separating these areas from those needed to operate at a reasonable or acceptable level has enabled the working group to put the division squarely on the path to achieving “extraordinary results.”

6 ACT, TRACK, & UPDATE action plans every 90 days

Bring your implementation team together every 90 days to review progress on the tasks included in the your 90-day Action Agenda. Tasks that were not completed can be rolled into the next 90-day Action Agenda, modified to take account of changing circumstances, or abandoned if they are no longer useful.

Updating the Action Agenda every 90 days provides an opportunity to confirm the importance of tasks that must be completed, build on those that were completed, and factor in unanticipated opportunities, threats, and changes in both the external business environment and what's going on in your own organization. Most importantly, it focuses everyone's attention on finding a solution when something goes off the rails.

Intentionally managing execution in this way ensures that action plans continue to be fresh and relevant, reinforces engagement, and helps avoid any tendency to treat implementation as optional.

A few tips

1. About two weeks before a meeting to update the 90-day Action Agenda, ask Project Leads to provide their Champions with a project update consisting of:
 - ◆ tasks that were completed,
 - ◆ tasks that were not completed along with a recommendation to stop, get back on track, delay, or modify (with explanation), and
 - ◆ tasks to add to the Agenda (along with those responsible).
2. At each meeting, review your Strategy's initiatives and projects in light of changes in the business environment. If any seem less relevant than they once did, consider forming a working group to investigate.
3. At each meeting, schedule the next meeting to review and update your Action Agenda.
4. Communicate progress to employees and key stakeholders after each update meeting. This will help keep execution of your **Extraordinary Results Strategy** top-of-mind while recognizing the contributions of Project Leads and others.



Conversation Starters

1. How can we support colleagues involved in implementing strategic initiatives?
2. What additional or modified systems might we need to monitor progress on executing our strategy?

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS AT WORK

A renewed emphasis on employee training positions an association for extraordinary results.

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Improving employees' ability to live a rejuvenated brand

THE ISSUE

Having invested considerable effort in rejuvenating the brand, the success of the entire initiative rested on obtaining the active support of frontline and other employees.

ACTION & RESULTS

Workshops held over three years were used to inform staff about how to live the brand and inculcate the behaviours that would enable exceptional service in all staff interactions with each other and members.

HAVING GONE THROUGH a major rebranding initiative, an Ontario-based association was determined to do everything possible to ensure the effort paid off.

The marketing vice president recognized that the association's brand lived in the hearts and minds of members, employees, and other stakeholders. Further, since employees were involved directly in the vast majority of member touch points, he knew it would be essential for employees to understand, buy into, and live the rejuvenated brand.

To help with this, the association turned to an agency experienced in employee training. Over the next three years, employees attended a series of intensive workshops designed to inculcate specific brand behaviours – teamwork, customers first, can do, quality, keep it simple, and communication – into their everyday interactions with each other and members.

Using role playing, storytelling, and other tools, employees gained the understanding and confidence needed to live the brand. Did this emphasis on working with employees to live the brand pay off? Support for the behaviours was tracked and, as early as the second set of workshops, began to trend up. In the words of one member of the leadership team, *"Our objective of ensuring that each employee gets the important role that he or she can play in building the brand was fully achieved."*

Where to from here?

There are six essential and straightforward steps along **the path to extraordinary results:**

1. **ENGAGE** employees and other key stakeholders.
2. **CLARIFY** leadership's collective understanding of the evolving business landscape.
3. **VISUALIZE** an explicit picture of what success will look like.
4. **COLLABORATE** on making informed choices.
5. **TRANSLATE** strategic choices into executable and fully resourced actions.
6. **ACT, TRACK & UPDATE** action plans every 90 days.

The **Strategic Directions Planning System** has worked for dozens of small and mid-sized organizations. Follow it as we have outlined and it will work for yours, as well.

Map out your path

Before embarking upon your own journey, make sure you've mapped out the path you're going to follow.

People are everything

In particular, consider what it will take to engage your leadership team and staff, not only in building your strategy, but also in executing what you come up with. We can't overemphasize the importance of this work.

Be intentional

A breakdown in execution is the single biggest reason that strategic plans fail. Being intentional about monitoring how well you're doing, holding people accountable while providing support when and as needed, being willing to pivot, and updating your Action Agenda every 90 days are essential to keeping your efforts to successfully execute on track.

Facilitation matters

Good facilitation can mean the difference between a ho-hum planning effort and one that works for you. Your facilitator could be someone on your payroll or an outsider. While ability should be your first consideration, style, fit, and cost are also important.

Got a question? Need some support? Call or email Chris Ward, Principal:

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