



STRATEGIC PLANNING

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WHEN THE BIG DECISIONS ARE MADE, SEQUUS IS THERE ...

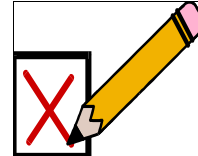
Al Holmes, a SEQUUS director, gets to the table when some very important strategic decisions are made. His experience as a strategic planning facilitator is called upon by some of our most important institutions. He was there when the decision was made to breathe new life into the Winnipeg Stock Exchange. The Manitoba government called on him to pioneer client-focussed strategic planning in the Highways department. He shepherded three financial institutions through a recent merger. And he led the meetings that initiated a turnaround in a major arts organization. Professional associations of dentists, accountants, trainers, property appraisers, public health officials, community developers and others have used his help to set new, long term directions.

Some of our biggest and most successful private corporations have used Al to help them assess themselves against critical success factors in their sector, develop new visions, identify strategic alternatives, select the best strategy, and develop implementation plans. He works with retailers, software developers, television networks, financial service providers, insurers, law firms, manufacturers, professional service providers, biotechnology companies, car dealerships, and other bottomline-oriented clients. Health care, education and social service organizations face many, serious challenges today. Al has been on the inside when boards and management get together to develop their response to a world that is changing around them. His clients include some of our major hospitals, health authorities, our universities, our social service agencies, and education boards. In the world of sports and recreation, Al has been there when the Canada Games faced major challenges, when the PanAm games conducted a progress review, and when the Royal Winter Fair built a new governance structure. He has done the same for museums, theatres, aboriginal groups, festivals, religious organisations, and even entire communities.

Within the recent past he has developed strategic plans for Wawanesa, Acsion, Infocorp, Credit Union Central, Videon, Riverview Health Centre, Hyline Credit Union, the Women's Television Network, Interlake Regional Health Authority, Manitoba Community Long Term Care Authority, YM-YWCA, KAP, the Pulse Growers, the Canola Growers, Red River Exhibition, C.A.F.E., Westman Cable, The Aboriginal People's Television Network and many others. *This document explains what we do and how we do it.*

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DATA-DRIVEN PLANNING

Sometimes you need to collect information from large numbers of key stakeholders to assist you to plan. Frontline staff can provide a unique perspective on internal strengths and vulnerabilities. They also can help uncover threatening trends and emerging opportunities. Clients, members, funders, suppliers, partners, and even competitors can provide another perspective.

When the numbers are large and time is limited, surveys and focus groups can be used to collect input and establish performance benchmarks.

We have developed many instruments for collecting data from key sources on performance dimensions that matter. We customize these standard instruments to take into account the unique needs of any given organization.

Planning that responds to hard data takes on a new, more serious dimension. It sometimes confirms the impressions that leaders already have but often opens up surprising new avenues for consideration. Follow-up surveys can measure the change that results from planning.



THE PROCESS IS KEY!

Winston Churchill has been credited with the quote, **"Plans are useless but planning is essential!"** We interpret this to mean that it is not so important what you produce as a result of a planning session but what is important is that you planned! That is to say that if a group of reasonably well-informed and well-intentioned individuals take time out from their day-to-day concerns and sit down together for a few days to try to wrestle with where they are, where they've been and where they are going, **something good is going to happen as a result even if no one writes down what is said!**

It seems that, if you talk about a new direction long enough for everyone involved to reach some consensus on that direction, it will happen!... even if that direction is not recorded, not specific, not assigned to anyone in particular, nor reported, monitored or tracked! The key seems to lie in the nature of the discussion, the depth of understanding, and the breadth consensus that this is the way we must go.

We are committed to an approach to strategic planning that is very much process-oriented and very much dependent upon key players spending a lot of time together in a setting that encourages a lot of talking. We organize the agenda, provide worksheets, guidebooks, structure questions and exercises and facilitate the interaction, but the client supplies the content. And, when the sessions are over, we do provide a written record of the proceedings.

The planning process, as we see it, has several phases with sub steps within each phase. The diagram illustrates the phases in sequence and helps to portray the process as one that gets more and more focussed as it progresses. The cycle repeats itself on a regular basis, often annually while the organization learns how to do it, then, when the process becomes routine, the cycle may lengthen or become an "as required" event.

GETTING STARTED is the first stage. Some call it "planning to plan", which is a good name for it because something as important as setting long term direction for an organization usually requires some planning itself. The usual "who, what, where, when, and how" questions need some answers.

THE EXPLORE-ANALYSE PHASE is the first phase of the process itself. This is the "blue sky" dreaming phase, during which we generate dozens of thoughts, ideas, dreams, lists, etc. But it is also an analytical phase so that we can separate external factors (opportunities and threats) from internal factors (strengths and limitations). And we combine the opportunities and strengths into **DISTINCTIVE COMPETENCIES** and the threats and weaknesses into **MAJOR VULNERABILITIES**.

This is also where we often use surveys and focus groups to collect hard data from key sources in order to identify or confirm strengths, weaknesses, threats or opportunities.

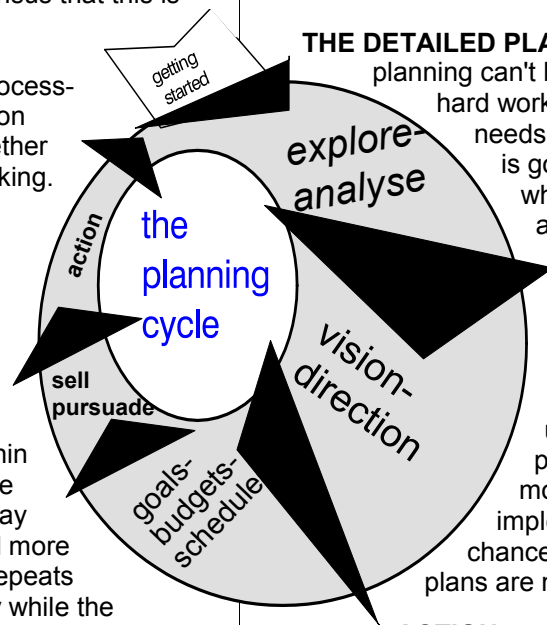
THE VISION-DIRECTION PHASE is the one during which the myriad of materials generated by the previous phase, is used to paint a new picture of the organization as it might be, should be or could be! This is where the **PURPOSE, MISSION, VISION, VALUES** and **AREAS OF STRATEGIC FOCUS** are determined. This is also where we hope the "magic" occurs, particularly when the Vision gets established. To really work their magic, visions need to be compelling, stretching, and worthy of our commitment and effort.

THE DETAILED PLANNING is next. Strategic planning can't be all fun. This phase involves hard work and details. Each area of focus needs some action plans showing who is going to do what, when, where, why, how, with what resources, and so on. Unfortunately, many approaches to strategic planning start and end with this phase.

SELLING OR PERSUADING those who were not at the table usually follows. This is a critical phase and is made easier the more people who need to implement the plans are given a chance to be at the table when those plans are made.

ACTION completes the cycle. At this phase the plan gets implemented in the real world. This usually involves a great deal of adaptation, mini-planning sessions, and lots of disappointments and celebrations.

Individuals have their favourite, high-energy phases in the process and they can tune out of those phases that are less attractive to them. We spend some time trying to ensure a planning team with a good mix of personalities.



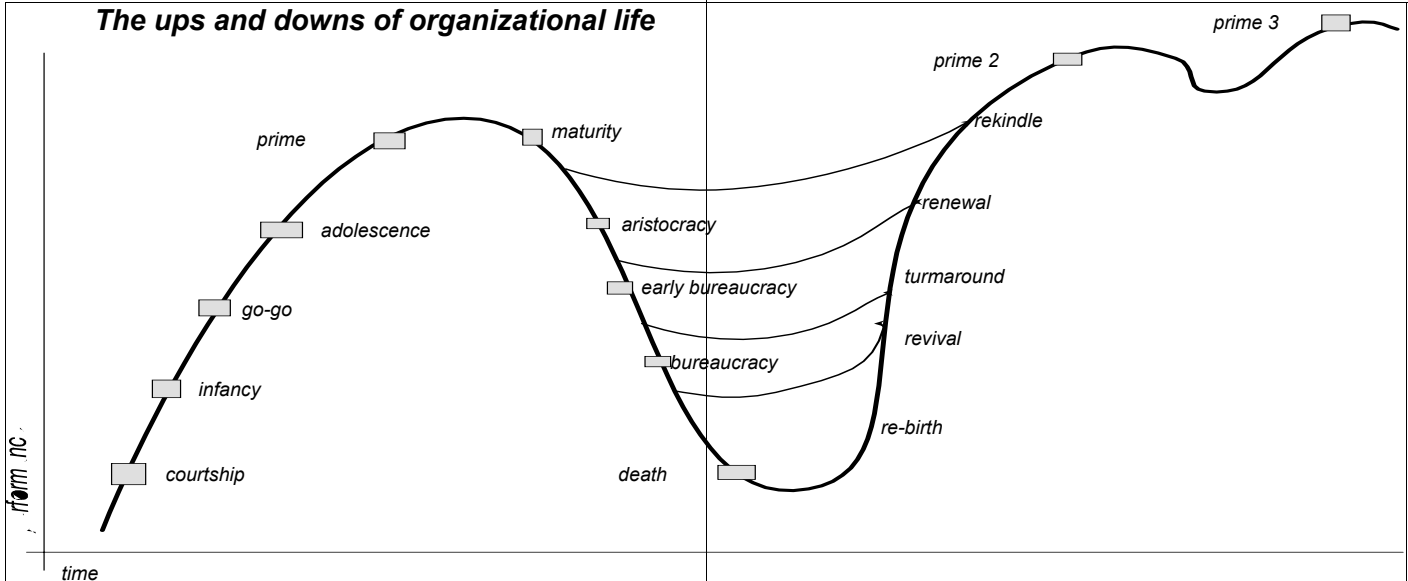


PLANNING & ORGANIZATIONAL LIFECYCLES

many business ventures included a few car dealerships, a rent-a-car franchise, car washes and others. The client used strategic planning to give focus to his business. He says every mid-size business in the country ought to be doing the same thing!

Making Babies; The Key To Staying In Prime!

The ups and downs of organizational life



Look at the chart above. It is based on a model developed by Ichak Adizes. Time flows from left to right on the X axis. Performance is measured on the Y axis. Generally, performance improves with time (assuming that an organization survives each stage.) Once an organization reaches a peak, generally its performance declines until it dies or gets re-cycled! Re-cycling can bring the organization back to new performance peaks. Strategic planning is often used as a tool to deal with the various stages, but planning for each stage has its unique features.

The infant organization: SEQUUS Directors have helped thousands of potential entrepreneurs take their businesses from conception (courtship) to 'infancy' by assisting them to do a new venture analysis and then to prepare a "business plan"- a special version of a strategic plan - that she could take to a banker for financial assistance.

Stuck at Infancy: Some clients get stuck in infancy, focussed on a single, annual event, product or service. In one client organization, the Board Chair, used strategic planning as a means to unglue the organization and expand its horizons.

From 'Go-Go' to adolescence: Often the first attempt at strategic planning comes from the desire to "get organized" or get focussed after a period of frantic, "seat-of-the-pants" random growth and expansion. This was the case with a very successful entrepreneur who's

Organizations that reach prime are in danger of becoming complacent. The key to staying at the peak is to continually seek opportunities to allow parts of the organization to experience the life cycle from the beginning in order to bring new learning into the organization. Breaking off a division and letting it survive on its own with some financial input from the parent was one client's way of staying young.

Decline!: Organizations in decline are special cases. Strategic planning is often used as a tool to help turn around a tired organization. This can work in the early stages of decline including the maturity and aristocracy, however, at later stages, it must often be accompanied by external threats that shock the leaders into action and in extreme cases, it follows major surgery!

Renewal: The renewal of organizations that have been in decline is a multi-phased process that begins with a new focus on clients followed by a major effort to get rid of bureaucratic rules and processes. Empowerment of frontline staff to make the decisions needed to serve clients often follows. In time, the new culture becomes entrenched at a new performance peak. Without the vigilance that regular strategic planning offers, the whole cycle can start over again with a new period of decline. Often, the first step we take with new clients is a life-cycle review.



PLANNING TOOLS

Our clients tell us that we take the mystery out of strategic planning. We make the process simple, straightforward and accessible to everyone. This allows the complex work of setting strategic directions proceed without getting lost in complex, expert-driven approaches. They also tell us that one of the keys to making it that way are the tools that we use such as those that follow selected from our most popular ...

- **The Strategic Planning Process:** an four-panel reading describes the planning process for those who are new to it.
- **The Strategic Planning Worksheet:** this four-panel worksheet guides a group through the first phases of planning and helps build a permanent record of outcomes.
- **Plan, Act, Learn:** this worksheet picks up where the previous one leaves off and helps with the final phases of strategic planning.
- **The New Vision Worksheet:** this six-panel worksheet helps organizations rethink the fundamental direction of the organization and establish a new vision.
- **Stakeholder Input Worksheet:** focus group input to planning is often gathered following the processes mapped out in this worksheet.
- **The Rise, Fall and Renewal of Organizations:** to help a group determine where it is in the organizational lifecycle, this four-panel reading is essential.
- **Strategic Thinking:** using some of the latest works of strategic gurus such as Gary Hamel and Michael Porter this collection will stimulate a group to think beyond the ordinary.
- **Planning at the Work Group Level:** this worksheet takes the whole process down a level into a part of the organization.
- **The Board-Management Worksheet:** This worksheet is used to decide where the work of the Board stops and Management takes over on any particular issue.

And there are others. Some clients prefer to work on their own but use our tools. Some want customized versions adapted to their special needs and terminology.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Our preference is to involve as many of the persons who will be expected to make the plan live and breathe in the planning process. However, time and logistics often make this an impractical ideal. When we need input but haven't got the means to bring everyone to the planning table, we resort to surveys and focus groups.

ORGANIZATION DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONNAIRE (ODQ): One of our more popular surveys is the ODQ. The standard version of this questionnaire contains up to 80 questions that are sorted into categories such as Service Quality, Service Delivery, Performance Culture, Leadership & Management, Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Problem-Solving & Decision Making, Change & Stress, and Ethics & Values. Typically, employees at all levels respond to this questionnaire.

CLIENT-CUSTOMER-MEMBER SERVICE: The major stakeholder in the future of most organizations is the person who consumes or benefits from the organization's products or services. This questionnaire uncovers what is important to them and reveals how you are performing.

We also survey board members, referral agencies, funders and other key stakeholders. All of our standard surveys are available on-line. Visit our website at www.sequus.org to see how they work!



For more information or to have someone visit your organization, send your contact information to..

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