

Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan

Building Strong Foundations for Successful
Strategic Planning

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ENGINEERING SUCCESS UP-FRONT

"Every moment spent planning saves three or four in execution."

- Crawford Greenwalt, President, DuPont (1948 to 1962).

A couple of good friends of mine successfully climbed Mt Kilimanjaro. It is the tallest mountain on the African continent and the highest free-standing mountain in the world. Approximately 25,000 people attempt to summit Mt. Kilimanjaro annually. But only about two-thirds are successful. Altitude-related problems are the most common reason for climbers to turn back.



Planning is the secret to you and your team feeling prepared and confident of a successful journey. In the case of Mt Kilimanjaro, you need to consider a number of factors across a couple of phases; **before the climb** - ensure that you are well equipped, completed a fitness training program, and be mentally prepared by trying to anticipate various different scenarios and the most suitable course of action; **on the climb** - go slowly, drink at least 3 – 4 litres of liquid a day, on your acclimatisation day “walk high – sleep low”, and climb as lightly as possible as excess weight will make breathing more difficult. Then of course, you have to **get back down safely!** (P.S. Despite all of this good planning one of my friends left his climbing boots behind at base

camp and had to borrow a pair from one of the guides in his group in order to make it to the summit!).

Strategic planning is a journey as well. In our experience, the organizations that are successful are those that are willing to chunk their strategic management processes into four phases; (1) Educate and (2) Assess themselves, (3) Organize resources to meet the

learning needs they identify, and then (4) Tailor their own process of creating clear plan, that helps them make the tough choices (i.e. EAOT). Once the leadership group has transitioned through each of these four phases, they can then get on with the process of executing the plan and managing change.

Many of the plans that we see fail are often just as good as those that succeed; the secret to successful execution lies in the tenacious persistence of key leaders and their commitment to successful execution and dedication of the necessary *corporate calories* to keep the ball rolling over the long term.

Once you're clear on how to use a systems approach for planning, execution and annual renewal of your organization's core strategies, you're ready to begin reshaping your organization to become customer-oriented through the successful execution of your plan.

THE SMART START DAY

The Haines Centre for Strategic Management's research (see summary table below updated in 2014) has identified the most 13 common reasons why strategic planning fails. We have found that all of these can be addressed or eliminated by the 4 phases of the "Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan" step.

Depending on the complexities of your particular issues these briefing sessions can be structured for a half or a full day and focus on four learning topics (EAOT):

- **Educate**—get common **agreement on** strategic management goals, models, and terminology
- **Assess**—**determine our critical issues** in strategic planning, management of change and what is happening in our Future Environment
- **Organize**—**gear ourselves to take action** with the capacity to do so
- **Tailor**—identify how to **adjust & customize the process** to our needs.

You may feel you need more or less time. Whatever period of time you require, just be sure you Plan-to-Plan. This is probably the first and most critical step of the entire planning process.

13 Reasons Why Strategic Plans Fail*

Revised List of 13 Mistakes / Failures	Plan-To-Plan Agenda Topic (EAOT)	Plan-To-Plan: Best Practices Required for Success
1. Starting with an inadequate or impractical strategic plan	Educate	Avoid 13 common mistakes in strategic planning. Use The Systems Thinking Approach® to Strategic Planning
2. Lack of monitoring, control and leadership emphasis	Organise	Designate a change leadership team that meets every month. Establish tracking system; include in annual performance review; define performance indicator/target; assign accountable collector; distribute and post regular reporting updates.
3. Lack of organizational capacity for change	Organise	Develop capacity, preferably beforehand.
4. Making things too complicated.	Educate	Keep things clear and simple
5. Roles not clearly defined and	Organise	Identify clearly players of change and use a program management office.

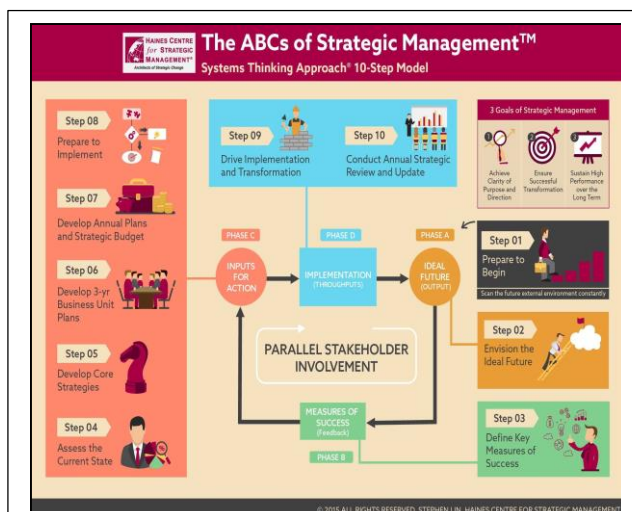
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integrates		Metronome meeting process (Monday-agenda; Tuesday-meeting; Wednesday - minutes; Thursday- executive team; Friday-summarize);
6. Inadequate (infra)structures for change	Organise	Our menu of change structures and sub-structures – structures influence behaviour
7. Neglecting the emotional response to change	Educate	Shared understanding of the rollercoaster of change
8. Lack of involvement and ownership by key stakeholders	Organise	Parallel involvement process – Use the plan-to-plan step to develop a stakeholder engagement plan that engages them at relevant steps during the annual planning process. The goal to keep engaged; before planning survey how to keep involved throughout cycle; governance team (empowered); common plan/socialization to all stakeholders; continuous cycle; absence is not impediment; open to all levels.
9. Failure to develop a culture that supports the strategies	Educate	Cultural change and development as one of the strategies. Include culture of performance and personal accountability
10. Tendency to focus on EITHER hard aspects (rational) or soft aspects (people), of change, depending on biases of the leaders.	Educate	Focus on both hard and soft aspects; use systems thinking for a holistic approach.
11. Failure to cascade the Plan	Tailor	Cascade the plan down from organization, to department, to individual for Executing Your Strategic Plan. Build awareness; ability to transfer quantitative to qualitative; have clear framework to communicate; build in passion (WIIFM); all levels; cascade the plan top down; goals and measurements; infrastructure for communication; briefing all levels; multi-media; etc.
12. Lack of distinction between a SWOT and a Future Environmental Scan	Assess	Incorporate a future environmental scan before the SWOT in order to eliminate MOS (More Of the Same)
13. Lack of understanding about a Strategic Management System	Educate	Use a Strategic Management System and Cycle.

*Developed as part of a *How to Avoid Common Mistakes in Strategy Execution* workshop of more than 20 strategic planning experts at the Association for Strategic Planning Convention in Long Beach California 2014

First and foremost, you need to have the right people in the room. Who should be involved in the strategic planning process? How do you involve them? How deeply? Ideally, attendees include the CEO, executive team and key planning team members, guided by a skilled and objective consultant.

This off-site day prepares your organization for Goal #1—developing the strategic plan and document. The day kicks off with an Executive Briefing to collectively explore and learn more fully about Strategic Management and its potential pitfalls, costs, and benefits.



During this session, Reinventing Strategic Planning into Strategic Management is explained, discussed, and accepted as a practical, common-sense approach to success. This process of chunking-up strategic planning when combined with the A,B,C,D,E phases in the Systems Thinking Approach® will give you a customer-focused high performance organization. The whole process actually consists of the five phases, within which there are ten clear, practical steps (see adjacent summary pictogram).

The Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan Day gets your collective leadership team personally ready and committed to guide your strategic planning and change management process. It accomplishes skills training, capacity-building, and team-building/visionary leadership, right from the very start.

Educate and Assess —Executive Briefing: AM Agenda

- **Desired Outcomes** – why outside-inside-outside processes are systems for strategic outcome-oriented thinking or “Beginning with the end in mind.”
- **Critical Issues identified** – what is critical to us now, and in the future?
- **3 Goals & 3 Promises in Strategic Management** – why planning is an inseparable part of management and leadership and must be linked to an annual strategic management cycle
- **ABCs Template and 5 Phases** – understanding organisations as systems, the power of the ABC model and the five key systems questions for strategic management
- **Ten clear, practical steps** – why with the systems approach, you can begin strategic planning and change at any of its five A, B, C, D, E phases, but it is important to do all ten steps and to progress through them in sequence
- **Future Environmental Scan** – how much and what kind of data do we need to feed and stimulate the process
- **Yearly Strategic Management System and Yearly Cycle** – putting in place an annual system with accountability

Organize and Tailor — Plan-To-Plan: PM Agenda

- **Parallel Involvement Process understood** – noting the second premise – *people support what they help create* - identifying key participants, options for how and when to involve them
- **Key Stakeholders identified** – stakeholder engagement planning to identify who gets in the game, when and why
- **Clarifying roles** – how to link external and internal consultants, responsibilities of senior and middle management, board and employees
- **Planning Team identified** – responsibilities, criteria, opportunity for grooming future leaders
- **Staff Support Team identified** – roles, responsibilities
- **Team building**—how to develop a high performance implementation team at the beginning
- **Evaluating readiness**—checklist of conditions to proceed and barriers to overcome
- **Cascading the planning**—how we will cascade downward with strategic consistency and operational flexibility
- **Identify linkages**—link to annual planning / budgeting sequence and to team / individual performance management
- **Tailoring to your needs—next steps**
 - The Systems Thinking Approach® is not one of those processes where you have

- to drop everything you've done and are doing and start from scratch - the major benefit is its flexibility
- The real key is not its A, B, C, D, E phases or even its ten progressive steps. It is the circular nature of systems thinking that is practical and flexible

Throughout this agenda, we collectively identify and list your organization's critical issues up front, using them as a guide to keep planning practical. The day concludes with a commitment to move forward, with all attendees feel committed because they collectively participated in customizing the approach and feeling accountable to next steps - who does what, by when.

Makes a HUGE difference

In general, there are five different options for beginning this curricular systems thinking process and Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan is just one of them. However, choosing to begin with this step can make all the difference in how smoothly your planning and change process will go.

The Smart Start process includes setting up your core planning team, along with a Parallel Involvement Process that involves key stakeholders. It also clarifies top management's role in leading, developing, and owning their strategic plan. It forces you to focus on your core strategic issues, then find ways to fit them into an overall systems framework.

Preparing for the Plan-to-Plan Off-site day

Some useful preparatory tasks that will multiply the value of the day for all participants.

Pre-Briefing

The Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan step is really pretty straightforward once you know how and where to get started. It's a good idea to distribute a brief questionnaire, such as the sample one in the text box below, with key points to think about. Make sure your executives and key stakeholders understand that their opinions will be sought in these areas, and that they will be an ongoing part of the strategic planning and implementation process.

Find Out Who Cares: Learn About Who is Affected

Because organizations are complex, it's virtually impossible for senior executives to monitor what's happening throughout the organization. In order to implement the organization's strategic plan at every level, therefore, you'll need to involve stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization, who bring different vantage points to the table.

Sample Pre-Briefing Questionnaire

1. What is your vision for the organization in the year 2020?
2. What are the values/beliefs and principles that you believe are key to achieving this vision of future success?
3. In year 2020, what business should we be in? Why do we exist? Who is our customer?
 - a. How do Baby-Boomers impact our plans?
 - b. What do today's teenagers think of our services, products, and values?
4. What is our current driving force? How should it change for the year 2020?
 - a. Why would anybody ever choose us?
 - b. Can you state our USP from memory (15 words or less)?
 - c. Will there even be a need for our products or services next year? In 3 years?
 - d. Which overseas providers will we be competing with by this time next year?
5. How would you define the units (elements or programs) that make up our business?
6. Currently, how many top priorities do we have as an organization? List them.
 - a. How does the price of energy touch us or our products/services?
 - b. What has our competition done recently?
 - c. Where has our target market moved to?
7. What does this above list of top priorities say about our ability to focus and make tough choices?
8. What are the major, future-oriented core strategies we should adopt to reach our vision in the year 2020? Be specific.
 - a. How are current attitudes about war, commerce, capitalism, and freedom impacting our business?
9. How will we measure success for our organization in the year 2020?
10. How should we manage a multiyear, organization-wide change process to ensure the success of our vision?

Members of middle management absolutely need to be involved as the first key group of stakeholders in a Parallel Involvement Process each time. However, it is crucial to involve the employee's point of view also, as well as customers, union representatives, and even suppliers.

In some instances, it may be important to include members of special interest groups (SIGs), as well. Once you've selected your list of stakeholders, then decide who are the top five to seven stakeholders in terms of importance to the success of your plan, and discuss how to fully involve them in the planning and change processes.

Again, outside-inside-outside processes are systems for strategic outcome-oriented thinking, **so it's important to consider both its internal and external environments.** If you have only individuals from your organization's internal, immediate environment involved in the planning and implementation process, you drastically limit the quality of your thinking and the possibility

of successfully completing the plan. You also cut yourself off from gaining a greater understanding of how your organizational system interacts within other systems and the environment that surrounds it.

Find Out Who Cares: Learn About Who is Affected

Again it is important to keep in mind the second premise *that people support what they help create*. So the first, most obvious group of people that have to support implementation is the top management team. They will form the core of the planning team.

Carefully consider the size of the planning team. A typical top management team in a medium-sized organization may consist of executives. Six to eight members is best; our experience has shown that you can double that size to around 14 or 15, and still have a reasonably effective team. So, if you have eight people from the top management team, you could conceivably seed the rest of the team membership with an additional six or seven from your key stakeholder list. You may want to select high potential middle manager and use this

as an executive development experience. You could also select a key worker and informal leader or someone more on the fringe (e.g. Gen Y) who can act as a stimulating resource and bring a different perspective into the mix. You could also choose a union leader, a retired business person, an external content expert/consultant, a supplier or vendor, or even a customer. Be sure you have enough externally focused sales, marketing, and customer-focused team members to ensure that it is a strategic (outside-inside), not operational, plan. Again, you are strongly cautioned against going beyond 12 to 15 members. **If the group gets too large, it will soon degenerate into nothing more than a crowd control activity for the facilitator.**

Selecting an external consultant

Whilst acknowledging our first premise *that planning and change is the **PRIMARY** job of leaders*, it is never a good idea to try to do the job all by yourself. You will usually need an external professional strategic planning facilitator to conduct your strategic planning process. The fact is, no matter how skilled or experienced your internal facilitator may be, his or her ultimate loyalties lie within the confines of the organization. After all, his or her paycheck comes from you. His or her's ability to be neutral, or need to find the courage to challenge and to play devil's advocate with the CEO and senior management, including his or her own boss, will place them in a vulnerable position. It is more than likely that an internal person taking on this role will find it to be both frustrating and career limiting.

Very few internal facilitators can successfully navigate serious business and conflict issues to a consensus and reach closure among strong-willed senior executives. They also usually lack the breadth and depth of a professional strategic planning facilitator. While many can do an excellent job with the vision/mission/values step, most get lost beyond that point. So why would you do it to them? Unless of course, you are just going through the motions.

Things will get particularly difficult for your executive team during the strategic planning phase, when you will be dealing with sensitive issues and looking at some very tough choices. The professional strategic planning facilitator has no personal stake in any of these issues, and is trained to keep the process moving, resolve conflict, and methodically help you work through each tough choice. An external facilitator is better able to challenge you and confront key issues lest you back away from your desired outcomes.

Establish your internal support cadre

Every strategic plan requires support, persistence, and coordination by your people over a long period of time. Think this facet through and select and assign those individuals who will be accountable for this process. Select these people at the very beginning so they can get up to speed themselves. This includes assigning someone with a laptop at team meetings so they can take down all of the notes on the flip charts in real time.

SUMMARY

8 Tips for a successful planning & management retreat

Regardless of the size of your organization, bringing senior managers together for a well-planned retreat is a smart business decision.

They can be a great opportunity for strategic planning that will enhance performance and foster overall growth.

Follow these eight tips to assist you in planning a successful senior management retreat:

1. **Decide on the focus.** Every organization has its unique dynamics, goals and challenges. Your agenda may vary depending upon the focus of your retreat.
2. **Find a suitable venue.** Pick a location with comfortable accommodations, a variety of meeting facilities and easily accessible local attractions. Aim to make your decision based upon the overall quality of the experience offered, not just the price.
3. **Select appropriate participants.** If you fail to select the right players, your retreat will be unproductive. Identify key people. Consider the benefits of including executives, managers and top-performing employees. Invite only those that can actively participate in achieving your focus. No more, no less.
4. **Set an agenda.** Customize your retreat based upon your key objectives. Be sure to fill each day with a well-balanced mixture of business and fun. Distribute the agenda before the retreat so your managers can begin to think about the topics and prepare themselves to participate in any activities.
5. **Bring information.** Before the retreat, ask your senior managers to compile a list of relevant information, data and research about your organization and its business environment. Use the list as a starting point for discussions and to promote the sharing of ideas.
6. **Begin with a group activity.** Plan an informal event to kick off the retreat. Use this as a way to introduce new faces, minimize tension and encourage group interaction.
7. **Retreat now. Repeat.** You will be amazed at what you will accomplish with a well-planned retreat. Repeat the events as often as possible to ensure that leaders don't go 'back to business as usual'. The investment will be worth every penny.
8. **Engage a facilitator.** Find someone from outside the company to facilitate the retreat. Maintain your goals and vision, but allow a seasoned professional to manage the process of achieving them.

Contact us to plan the retreat that may help your organization to achieve superior results. Find a Haines Centre Global Partner in your region [here](#).

- Before you begin the Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan step, make sure you are clear on what it is. Schedule an executive briefing and an opportunity to organize your approach to the strategic planning process (i.e., assess, educate, tailor, and organize)
- Be specific and clear on the exact entity for which you're planning – organization, geographic community sector, business unit, etc.
- Make sure the top members of your collective leadership team are personally ready and committed to leading your strategic planning and change management process. In other words, conduct capacity building through team-building/visionary leadership priorities and skills training, right away
- Use Plan-to-Plan as an opportunity to problem solve potential barriers to strategic planning that your organization may encounter—before you begin
- Be sure to scan your organization's future environment, both internal and external, to make certain you are not trying to create your plan in a vacuum
- There are multiple points of entry to this curricular process and systems thinking - Smart Start: Plan-to-Plan is just one of them
- Be sure your strategic plan drives your budget (i.e., "strategic" budgeting) not vice versa. **Planning precipitates payments**
- Your key stakeholders should include anyone who affects or is affected by the organization's strategic plan. Broaden your horizons and really think about this
- Have an experienced external strategic planning facilitator who can play devil's advocate and facilitate strong egos, especially during the planning process



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