

Strategic planning step-by-step.

BIG Strategic Planning for Your Business

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# ***BIG Strategic Planning for Your Business***

**Anthony Pallante II**

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## ***Chapter 5—From Strategy to Action***

**Hierarchy of Strategic Planning**



### ***Project Review***

For many strategic planners, this is where the “planning” ends and the hand-off to operational management begins, resulting in the actions of the organization coming loosened from the strategic moorings.

This is when and where many leaders in many organizations start to get that funny, sinking feeling that their planning has been a waste of time. They hear a little voice inside their head saying, “We just came back, after spending all of this time, and continue work as usual. My input, our time, some great ideas, all lost.”

And it’s true, in far too many cases, that the same-old, same-old continues.

To be brutally honest, if you don’t have the time or desire to follow through and implement this process, you shouldn’t burn your time or people’s emotional energy on strategic planning. It will hurt your

credibility more by wasting people's time, issuing lofty documents, or placing pretty posters on the wall than doing nothing at all.

Conversely, if you take your plan and focus on this relatively difficult aspect of the process, you will increase your chances of success.

Get ready to manage the middle!

Excellence in project governance and management links the day-to-day activities of the organization to the achievement of the strategic vision. If this is done properly, leaders can communicate the strategic story to their people and explain how each employee's efforts move the organization forward to realize its vision.

Every employee wants to feel as if they are a part of something larger, that what they do matters, and that they are working in a company that will succeed. Leaders that provide the vision, talk the strategic talk, and walk the strategic walk with their people will, all other things being equal, build enthusiastic engagement that can't be purchased by compensation alone.

Projects are your business. Almost every activity in an organization is a "project". Producing your product or service is, in itself, a project. It has objectives, tasks, dates for delivery, people responsible for the delivery, costs associated for the completion, and measurements for success.

The difference between "strategic projects" and ongoing business is their extra draw on existing or needed human and capital resources.

Before we get into the "how" of strategic project management, a quick explanation of the project process may help to provide the mental linkage on the project process, which we will detail in the section on project management.

## ***Getting Organized***

The project work in an organization tends to be the weakest link in strategic execution. This is due to a number of factors, any or all of which you may recognize in your company:

- The numbers of projects increase over time as new opportunities or risks present themselves. Many of these projects are “hidden” from management’s view as they are being initiated and pursued within various departments.
- Shifting priorities create a traffic jam as the brakes are applied to one project and the accelerator is applied to another project; new projects add to the pile-up.
- High-priority projects tend to draw on the same group of subject matter experts every time. These pivotal experts also tend to be the people managing significant responsibilities within the business and they are stretched too thin to accomplish anything particularly well.
- Organizations continually add to the scope of projects. This “mission creep” extends the time, cost, and complexity of the projects to a point that puts them in jeopardy of ever being completed.
- Project governance is not formalized and no single person or department has a clear view of the resource utilization and the impacts on the organization.
- A lack of strategic alignment within or among projects means many projects are pursued that will not add value to the long-term objectives of the company. In fact, many of these projects are detrimental to the immediate and future success of the company, since these valuable resources are not available to be applied to the high-value, strategically aligned projects.

In the strategic planning process, it is important to bring these “hidden” projects into the light for the team responsible for guiding the company to see, assess, and kibosh, if necessary. This housekeeping activity is done by listing all of the projects currently in place or in line for consideration as “strategic”.



An example of projects requiring evaluation would be those that:

- involve impacts to two or more functional areas,
- require more than one person for their completion,
- require changes and will have impacts to the technology and IT resources, and
- require capital investments of a predetermined number.

Projects that would not reach this level of “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” evaluation would be activities such as building a spreadsheet model in a particular department for that department’s use, and implementing the use of forms or vendors that are limited additions to an existing process.

Every other project needs to be elevated into view. The extent of the work efforts going on in the organization will invariably surprise leaders.

### ***Aligning Actions***

At this point, the team has formulated the top levels of the strategic plan, which include the vision, the objectives, and the initiatives. The projects are now reviewed to determine if they can be associated as meeting any of the strategic initiatives. If they do, they are listed with that initiative; if they do not, they are relegated to a separate group (the ones at risk of being scrapped).

As the team conducts its analysis of the initiatives, they may see that many of the projects don’t help drive the strategy. They may realize that new and different projects are needed to bring the initiatives to fruition.

This realization is the high-value interim outcome of developing your plan! You have, if nothing else, discovered where you’ve been wasting resources that could be better utilized elsewhere.

When you have successfully linked projects with initiatives and applied realistic measures to help you determine success over time, you should have swim lanes that look something like the ones in Figure 10, which closes our example of the mortgage company’s strategic plan.

## Strategic Process Example

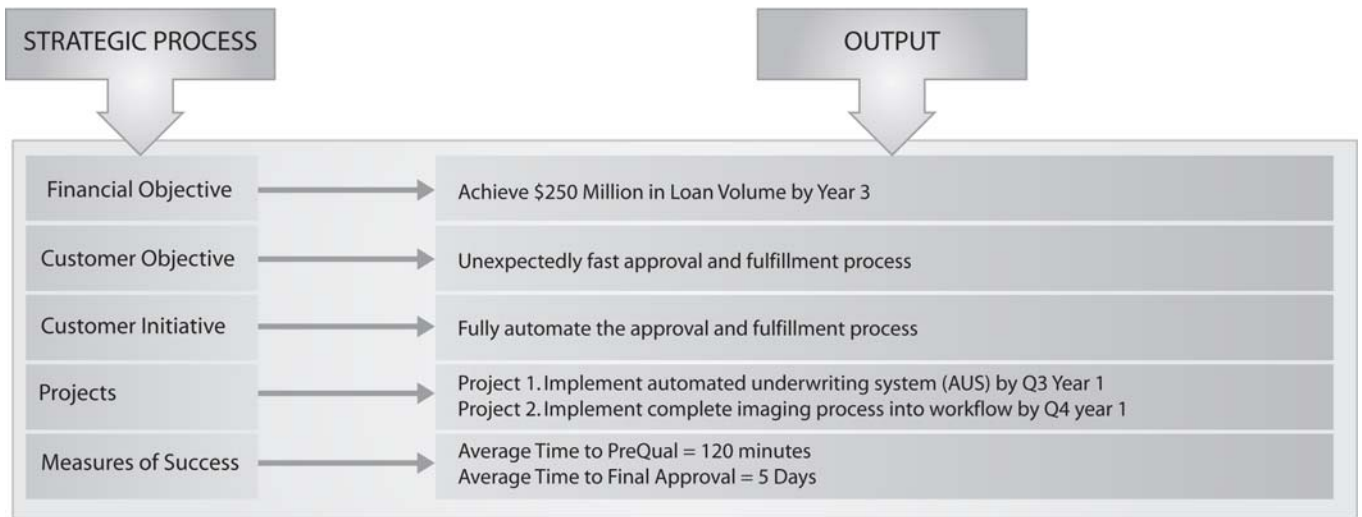


Figure 10. A complete strategic process includes linkages between processes and outputs.

These first few chapters have been an overview of the strategic language, definitions, and process that will be used in this method. It is my hope that the reader can see the way this planning process builds the plan step by step, providing direct linkage to the leadership's long-term vision. Only then can the organization align its actions to reach its goals most effectively.

This, then, is the roadmap, the touchstone that each decision in the company can be vetted against on a continuous basis, improving your chances for success. In the next chapters, we will discuss how to go about doing this so that you have a personal action plan and the tools you need to create and implement your plan.

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