

A Jolt Consulting Group White Paper

Turn Your Vision into Reality

Four Keys to Achieving Your Strategic Vision

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Background

Achieving an organizational strategic vision is perhaps one of the most complex business challenges facing organizations today. Countless Harvard Business Reviews have been done that highlight the trials and tribulations of organizations in their quest to achieve a stated vision. Competitive, shareholder and marketplace pressures place inordinate amounts of stress on an organization and require it to make quicker informed decisions. All the rapid decisions and 'reacting' to challenges makes it difficult to catch a breath and plan. As a result, executives find themselves making far too many tactical decisions and not spending nearly enough time providing strategic direction. As evidence, numerous management surveys indicate that nearly 85% of executives spend less than one hour per month on strategic planning, far too little to ensure attainment of a strategic vision.

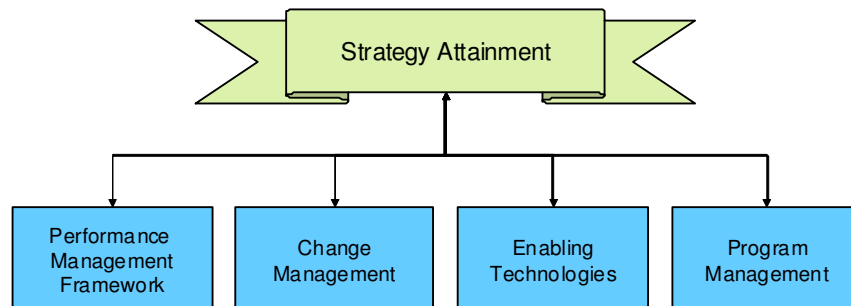
So, aside from time allocated to strategic initiatives, how to you know whether your organization is a world class achiever or one of the majority struggling to realize their vision of tomorrow? There are a few fundamental questions that will help you understand where you and your organization stand. Those questions include:

1. Do you find yourself routinely addressing customer issues and problems?
2. Do you struggle accounting for all activities, especially costs, going on within your organization?
3. When implementing IT systems, does the project seem to get done but at a greater cost and over more time than initially planned?
4. Does your workforce initially (or longer) seem to resist process or policy changes?
5. Do you struggle to achieve annual plans or goals that you view as steps toward your strategic vision?
6. Do you frequently reset expectations (lower) to customers, the board, shareholders or employees?

If you found yourself answering yes to one or more of the questions, then chances are you struggle at times to articulate and then realize your vision. The organizations that have achieved world-class status in their industries have figured out the recipe for effective strategy attainment. The question becomes, what is that recipe? This paper examines the four key characteristics of world-class achievers and highlights why those traits are critical in realizing their vision. While not a magic bullet, the framework contained within this paper will put you on the path to attaining your vision and at the same time help focus your energy on those infrastructure weaknesses needing attention.

Four Keys to Strategy Attainment

Assuming a reasonable strategic planning process has occurred (for insight on strategic planning processes, please read the Jolt Consulting Group whitepaper entitled “[An Introduction to Strategic Planning](#)”) it will have produced a strategic plan for the future. In order for an organization to realize that long term plan, Jolt Consulting Group believes an organization needs to possess four fundamental characteristics that will significantly improve the odds of realizing its vision. The following diagram provides a pictorial overview of



the characteristics, while the sections that follow provide a more detailed review of each element. The characteristics or traits are a) an effective performance management framework, b) proactive change management practices, c) effective use of enabling technologies, and d) strong program management.

Trait #1 – A Strong Performance Management Framework

As was outlined in the Jolt Consulting Group position paper entitled “[Achieve Service Excellence with the Service Performance Framework](#)”, a performance framework is a systematic set of analytics coupled with methods for understanding an organizations people and processes. A performance framework is used by best-in-class service organizations for monitoring and improving their performance. Jolt Consulting Group developed the Service Performance FrameworkSM to ensure that service business objectives, often developed as part of a strategic plan, are routinely being met and that visibility into those objectives is clear throughout the organization. In addition, the Service Performance FrameworkSM requires organizations to closely examine their business process to ensure they are the most efficient possible and are in alignment with the stated objectives. Finally, the framework requires organizations to have an intimate understanding of their people so that they have an understanding of their views, desires and frustrations. Stated differently, the Service Performance FrameworkSM is much broader than mere metrics and reports in that it requires organizations to take the time to really understand why it’s producing the results observed.





Why Does Having a Performance Framework Matter?

Attaining a strategic vision is only accomplished through systematic execution of annual objectives that have defined target goals and metrics to track progress. The creation of the annual goals, coupled with target metrics, is the first step in creating internal alignment on the strategic vision and as a result is the first step in the process. As was stated earlier, these metrics and targets are one of the core elements of a performance management program.

For most organizations that do not have a strong performance management program in place, their attempts to create annual metrics with target values can be a frustrating process, especially for executive leadership. It can often highlight how little information the organization actually has available. For example, an organization that desires to improve its' customer loyalty (repeat business), but doesn't have a good handle on why its' customers buy, what frustrates their customers, or which internal processes impact customer satisfaction, will have a difficult time developing effective plans for improving its' customer loyalty. In turn, this can lead to frustration within executive leadership ranks who will continually introduce "ideas" for the organization to try, only to cause them to thrash about, wasting valuable time and scarce resources.

Achieving a strategic vision requires the discipline and persistence that can only be provided by having in place a strong performance management framework. The *Service Performance FrameworkSM* provides the rigor and framework executives can leverage to ensure they have a more intimate understanding of their people, processes and why those people and processes produce the results observed. This intimate knowledge provides the crystal ball necessary to understand what to change and when within an organization.

Trait #2 - Proactive Change Management

Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of effective strategy execution is proactively establishing a change management plan. No matter the organization or strategy objectives, changing the organization in some manner will no doubt be an integral part. In fact, for organizations looking to dramatically improve their performance, the change will need to be significant and often flies in the face of the current culture and approach. The key to successfully "turning the ship" begins and ends at the top of the organization and it requires a compelling reason to change. Change for the sake of change does not and will never work. The change must be rooted in the survival of the company or attainment of a meaningful objective for **all employees of the company**. A CEO desiring a higher share price for shareholders, for example, will never be a strong foundation for change if the employees are not significant beneficiaries of that change. If the organization does not have a market driven imperative or a compelling objective that is shared by all ranks of the company, change will be slow and often will be stifled by the current culture of the company.

It is also important to note that change management does not and should not begin with "soft" items (e.g. creating employee incentive programs, evaluation processes). As was stated above, it should always begin

with a compelling reason for the change – the “what”. The reason for change must be clear, meaningful to all and most important, easily quantifiable.

Why Does Change Matter?

Invariably well constructed strategic plans require an organization to do something differently than it does today. It could be improving profitability, increasing customer loyalty, penetrating new markets or capturing market share from a competitor. The point being is that it requires a set of results other than those currently being produced. Therefore in order for an organization to realize its strategic plan, it must change since the strategic plans themselves do nothing to achieve the desired results. The strategic plan therefore, is realized only through the sustained, collective actions of its employees who ultimately are responsible for designing, executing and working in the changed environment.¹ This is the heart of change management; leading others to understand a vision, obtaining their buy-in to its importance and ultimately empowering them to identify the modifications to behaviors, processes, etc. necessary to realize the vision. Without change management, an organization will never realize its' vision.

Ok, So How Do I Go About Changing the Organization?

The most obvious answer to this question is that change begins at the top of an organization and cannot be delegated downward into the organization. However, truly affecting organizational change that will enable strategy attainment is a much more in depth topic. At the most basic level, change management requires executive leadership to define a “material” problem, the size of that problem, the vision for addressing it and the benefit to all involved for solving it. This establishes the organizational direction, but alone is not enough. True change management requires that same leadership to cascade the vision and payback downward into the organization. They must do this while eliminating obstacles until such time that the base of the organization is mobilized and takes ownership for tackling the challenge. Unless and until this final step occurs, change will not occur.

Harvard Business School professor John Kotter, a leading thinker and author on organizational change management and publisher of two books on change management entitled 'Leading Change' (1996) and 'The Heart of Change' (2002), describes a helpful 8-step model for understanding and managing change. Each stage acknowledges how people observe, react, internalize and implement change. The 8-steps are summarized as follows²:

1. **Increase urgency** - inspire people to move, make objectives real and relevant.
2. **Identify the true leaders** - get the right people in place with the right emotional commitment, and the right mix of skills and levels.

¹ Booz, Allen, Hamilton, *Ten Guiding Principles of Change Management*, 2004.

² John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*, (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 1996) pp 3-18.

3. **Simplify the vision** - get the team to establish a simple vision and strategy; focus on emotional and creative aspects necessary to drive service and efficiency.
4. **Communicate, communicate, communicate** - Involve as many people as possible, communicate the essentials, simply, and acknowledge and respond to people's needs. De-clutter communications - make technology work for you rather than against.
5. **Empower actions** - Remove obstacles, enable constructive feedback and lots of support from leaders - reward and recognize progress and achievements.
6. **Create short-term wins** - Set aims that are easy to achieve - in bite-size chunks. Create a manageable numbers of initiatives. Finish current stages before starting new ones.
7. **Don't let up** - Foster and encourage determination and persistence. Encourage ongoing progress reporting - highlight achieved and future milestones.
8. **Create a culture of change** - Reinforce the value of successful change via recruitment, promotion and new change leaders. Weave change into culture.

Achieving a strategic vision requires organizations to change and grow in order to improve. It is the responsibility of the executives leading the organization to drive this change, while at the same time ensuring it is meaningful to all employees. These leaders must **create** the “fire” and then provide continual support to ensure the fire is addressed to truly achieve change. While one of the hardest elements in achieving a strategic vision, it can also be one of the most rewarding aspects for those leaders strong enough to tackle the challenge.

Trait #3 - Leverage Enabling Technology

In today's rapidly changing business environment, information technology can and should play a critical role in organizations strategic execution plans. This however, does not mean that technology should be selected or implemented just because it is a hot trend or because a department thinks it a good idea. In today's IT market, there are thousands of vendors offering products and services that aim to address nearly every challenge organizations face. The questions organizations must consider when contemplating a technology investment are:

- a) Which investments are most closely aligned with the strategic objectives?
- b) Does the anticipated time to benefit associated with the technology align with the 'sense of urgency' that should exist within the strategic execution plan?
- c) What alternative exists that would eliminate the need for the technology and are those alternatives acceptable?

- d) What changes to my people and processes must I consider as a result of the technology and will these changes enable strategy attainment quicker?

As businesses continue to evolve and introduce more technology, the demands on IT departments for implementation, training and ongoing support continue to increase. Since organizations do not have infinite IT budgets, careful prioritization of investments must be made and must be done against the backdrop of the strategic plan. Pet projects, cool technologies, or projects not directly aligned with the strategic plan should be avoided. Rather, focused investments that are directly tied to the strategic plan and deliver the greatest projected return should be prioritized for deployment. While this may seem like common sense, far too many organizations rely on departmental initiatives and fail to draw the necessary linkage between investments of capital, resources and time to the benefits of the strategic plan. This gap results in projects that consume valuable IT resources, but don't advance the ball closer toward strategy achievement.

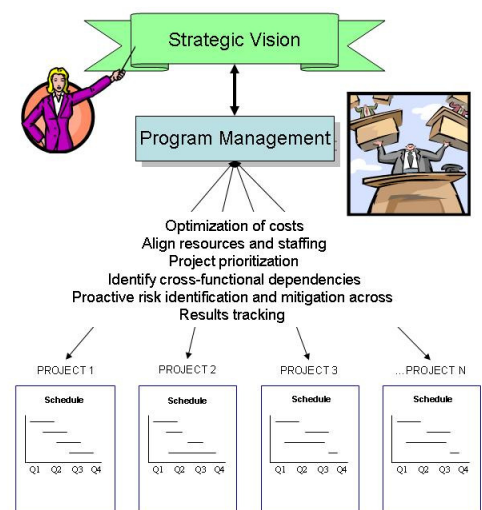
Trait #4 - Strong Program Management

Effectively implementing an enterprise strategy requires multiple initiatives to be deployed and managed to a successful conclusion. These initiatives are often referred to as an organization's portfolio of projects. Program management is responsible for the oversight of these initiatives as it strives to manage, in a coordinated way, the projects to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually. In a well-functioning organization, these projects and higher level initiatives are all tied to the strategic plan of the company. They are viewed as the necessary investments to ensure the strategic vision as outlined by executive leadership.

Why Does Program Management Matter?

Program management is the centralized coordinated management of the initiatives that drive the organization towards its strategic objectives and resulting benefits. As a result, program management facilitates optimization of costs, resources and staffing, project prioritization, identifying cross-functional dependencies, proactive risk identification and mitigation across projects (versus within an individual project – that's the job of a project manager!), and results tracking. Program management is the link between a portfolio of strategic initiatives and the underlying projects.³ By coordinating activities under a program management charter, it strengthens the

Program Management Overview



³ Chatterjee, Ruchira. "Why Program Management is an Essential Part of Strategy Execution." Projecttimes. June 2011.

alignment to the organizational strategy and ensures better control and focus on benefits realization.

Organizations serious about achieving its strategic vision would be well served by investing in program management. The program management function can be provided by a central program management office or via an individual tasked by leadership, but in all cases should be separated from the any functional silos in the business. Embedding program management within a functional silo will ultimately impede the progress of the organization because it will prevent a) true organizational change management or b) limit any objective analysis of the relative investment priorities across projects. Whether a dedicated organization or a very senior individual, it is imperative that the resource(s) chosen to lead programs have several characteristics, including:

1. An ability to lead and influence without possessing an autocratic style
2. Sufficient knowledge of individual projects to identify risks and elicit countermeasures from project teams
3. Active listening skills
4. An ability to synthesize volumes of information and develop communication plans to ensure transparency
5. The willingness to halt or recommend halting ineffective initiatives

Strong program management requires careful coordination of numerous tasks while maintaining open lines of communication upward and downward in the enterprise.

Closing Thoughts

The incredible pressure placed upon executives in today's economic environment makes it exceedingly difficult to carve out meaningful time for strategic activities, especially those related to strategic execution.

Organizations that have been able to bring together strong performance frameworks, proactive change management, enabling technology and program management routinely find themselves leading their respective industries and are the four key traits of strong strategic performers. By contrast, organizations that struggle in the marketplace often require an objective assessment of their ability to strategically execute and more specifically at these four characteristics to find the root cause. Jolt Consulting Group has the experience to assist those organizations looking to improve any or all of the key criteria and in turn their position in the marketplace. To learn how Jolt Consulting Group can help you more effectively achieve your vision, contact us today.

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