

Workplace Enhancement Notes

A Tip Sheet for Organizational Leaders & Managers

Volume 7, Issue 2

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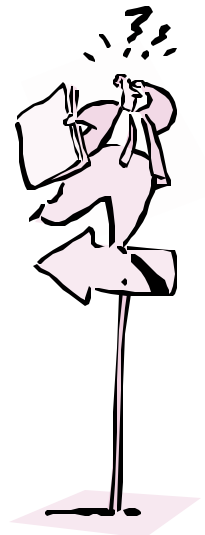
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Strategic Thinking in a Time of Chaos

How do you ensure your organization's long-term success? How do you plan and manage for the future when so much is changing so fast? These are two of the key questions that every organization must face if it is to be successful and profitable over the long-term. And these are the questions that cut deep into the heart of your own business. The answers that you find will determine your company's long-term success.

Strategic planning—the formal approach that organizational leaders use to think about the future and then to design their organizations to be successful in that future—can be a powerful tool for guiding your company's thinking and resources. Unfortunately, when done poorly, strategic planning can also lead to an irrelevant document that wastes precious resources and leads your company in the wrong direction.

How can strategic planning be relevant in a volatile and chaotic environment where few things are stable? How can you plan when markets are global, when technology defines competitive advantage, when employees work as "free agents," and when customers demonstrate less loyalty to brand and community? How can you create a plan that builds ownership in both the process and the outcomes?



Elements of a Successful Strategic Thinking & Planning Effort

There are several elements that must be in place in order for your company's strategic plan to play a compelling role in guiding your organization into the future, help your company respond effectively to its environment, and build employee ownership of their role in shaping this future. Here are those we consider to be the most important:

Make everyone responsible for strategic thinking and planning. Most strategic plans fail because they are developed by the "top" leadership of an organization. While there's nothing wrong with your leadership developing a plan—in fact leaders should, by definition, have many critical ideas and insights about the future—failing to engage the entire organization in the strategic thinking process teaches people to see that thinking about the future and their role in it

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Read this Issue to . . .

- Understand how to create strategic thinkers in your company
- Create change-minded thinking in your company
- Learn the basics of effective delegation

Creating a Change-Minded Company

You know that survival in the marketplace requires every organization to anticipate and respond to our fast-paced environment. As a leader, you understand that helping your organization keep pace with change is one of your most important responsibilities.

While introducing and sustaining change is an essential ingredient to any company's long-term success, you still struggle with getting others to embrace change. Whereas you see innovation and rethinking as an integral part of each person's job, too often your employees approach their work differently. It's not that they resist change—it's just that they don't see themselves as agents of change. They see that it's *your* role to be a change agent. Your challenge as a change leader, then, is to create an environment where thinking independently,

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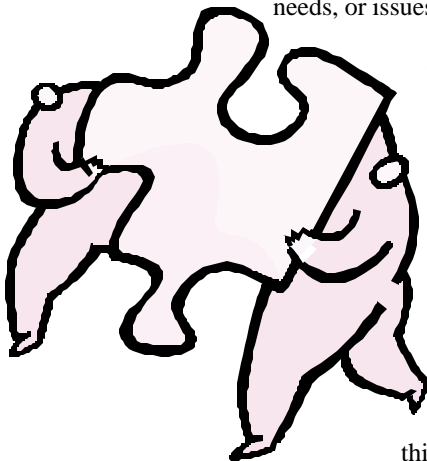
Strategic Thinking, contd.

The best strategic plan is one that changes in response to ongoing and emerging forces.

isn't their job. Engaging everyone at every level in a strategic planning process encourages them to be critical and strategic thinkers in their daily work and also gives them an opportunity to share what they know, from their own knowledge and experience, that can contribute to the larger strategic direction of the company. And the strategic insights that your "non-leaders" can bring to the process just might save your company.

Begin with a shared vision of your company's future. The whole point of strategic planning is to move your company from where it is now to where it *needs* to be in the future. Defining what this desired destination or vision must be is one of the first steps you take in the strategic planning process. But this vision must be more than *your* vision of what you want to create or the goals you want your company to achieve. It must be a vision that is widely shared by those who choose to work for you. Everyone at every level in your company must know what this vision of the future is and, in order for it to be most powerful, it should directly influence the way they view and approach their work.

Involve your customers and suppliers in the process. Both your customers and suppliers care about your future. They want your company to keep producing goods and services of value. Beyond their desire for success, however, are their own insights into the direction of the marketplace, emerging trends in the business, and ideas for new products and services. Invite your customers and suppliers to give you feedback on your current operations as part of the strategic planning process—but don't stop there. Ask them to share *their* vision of the future and what they see as some of the major challenges, needs, or issues that your company will need to address.



Develop measures of effectiveness. Your company's strategic plan is only as good as its ability to move your employees in a new direction and to give you feedback on the progress that you're making. A key element of an effective strategic plan is creating specific measures that will give you and your staffers a clear idea as to whether you're moving in the right direction. The measurement embedded in the strategic plan should make it clear when you're on—and off—track.

Make it dynamic and keep it dynamic. The best strategic plan is one that not only creates strategic thinkers throughout your company but one that allows the plan to change—perhaps dramatically—in response to ongoing and emerging forces. When everyone in your company is a strategic thinker, they are more likely to bring information to you and others about what they are learning from their customers and suppliers, what they read, or what they personally experience. And this information can and must help shape what your company does today and what it will do tomorrow. For this reason, your strategic plan must be responsive and resilient. While it remains true to the larger vision of what is possible for the company and what it hopes to create, *how* the company gets there and even some aspects of *what* it strives to accomplish should be under constant reevaluation. A dynamic plan that integrates learning and discovery provides the best guidance for your company's long-term success.

Skilled Facilitation of Strategic Planning is Available

While strategic planning is something that must be your own (no one else can do it for you), you can get experienced facilitation to ensure that the *process* gets you the outcomes you need. Russell Consulting specializes in facilitating strategic planning efforts that guide companies and organizations to where they want to go. Our approach is flexible and responsive to the unique circumstances of each client, yet provides a clear path for defining and moving towards a clear and compelling future. Call RCI today for a copy of our guide to strategic planning and a free consultation on our strategic planning facilitation services.

Call Russell Consulting today to receive our strategic planning guide and discuss our innovative approach to strategic thinking and planning

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Creating a Change-Minded Company, contd.

offering ideas for innovation, and challenging the status quo are what you expect. At the same time, you want employees' independent thinking, innovations, and status quo challenges to strengthen internal working relationships, build partnerships with customers, and enable higher levels of quality and performance.

Factors for Building a Change-Minded Company

In *RCI's* consulting practice, we have found the following factors to be critical for creating this "change-minded" environment:

Be clear about your company's purpose. People need to have a clear vision of your company and its future before they can either offer suggestions for change or embrace the innovations of others. Clarity about the *reason* and *destination* of one's efforts gives people guidance when exploring new ideas for improving quality or service.

Hire change-minded people. Some people are psychologically inclined to embrace change—they thrive on new ideas, innovation, and chaos—while others are change-averse. When change happens, these latter people would much prefer to be someplace else. While you can help make change more acceptable to those who are change-averse, hiring people who *thrive* on change is more likely to get you the innovative thinkers you need to keep moving in the right direction. Ask behavior-based questions in your job interviews that explore each candidate's change-oriented temperament. Find out the actions they have taken in *past* jobs that demonstrate their commitment to innovation and independent thinking.

Recognize and reward those who innovate, challenge the status quo, or think independently. If you value innovation, then find a way to recognize and reward people who demonstrate change leadership in their work. Recognize those who offer new ideas. Hold them up as models for others. Promote employees who display a willingness to learn, innovate, and ask questions.

Encourage risk-taking. Most of us agree that rewarding people who take risks is a key requirement for innovation. However, truly embracing risk-taking—including the fact that failure is always a possibility—is easier said than done. Encourage people to try out new ideas and then make it okay when those new ideas may not pan out. Take care to ensure that the risk-taking employee *learns* from what doesn't work and *why* it doesn't work.

Provide time for "off-line" innovation. If all you expect from your employees is production, production, production, you aren't leaving much room for critical reflection, innovation and improvement. Set aside time in each production or work area at least once a month for brainstorming new directions, exploring employees' perspectives on what's happening within and outside of the company, and questioning the status quo. Make critical reflection and innovation a part of what your people are expected to do—let them know that it comes with the territory.

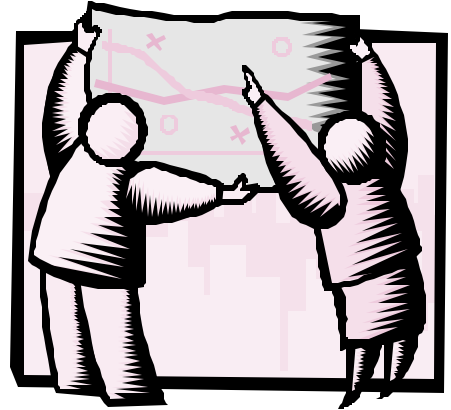
Go slow enough to bring people along—but not so slow that you lose the race. Introducing change in any organization disrupts people's work lives. For some, any new direction or idea can be traumatic. Take the time to carefully manage the change ideas that you and others introduce. Give people the space and time that they need to adjust to the change—but not so much space and time that change doesn't happen.

Model the way. Demonstrate, through your own actions, that you value innovation and change. As a leader in your company, people are watching you. They see how you respond to ideas that might clash with your own. They're observant of the innovations you offer. Your actions, inactions, and reactions in the face of change or innovation help define the culture of your company.

Let Us Help You Build a Change-Minded Company

Creating a change-minded culture in your company won't happen by accident. It requires implementing thoughtful and specific actions—like those above—in a careful way to help shape the thinking of those who work for you. As consultants specializing in leadership and change, *RCI* has practical and effective approaches for encouraging change-minded thinking that you can use today.

Call us. Contact Russell Consulting for more information about our change and leadership consulting and training services.



Creating a change-minded company requires that you provide employees time for "off-line" innovation

Want to learn more about becoming an effective change leader?

*Call Russell Consulting
(608) 274-4482*

The Art of Delegation

It was easy to talk about what the employees needed to do differently. Most of my efforts in the early years were consumed with changing 'them.' I only came to realize later that 'they' behaved the way 'they' did because I behaved the way I did. If I wanted 'them' to change behavior, I had to change mine first."

—**Ralph C. Stayer**
CEO of Johnsonville Foods

Effective delegation—the granting of authority and responsibility for a task to another person normally not charged with this task—is one of the building blocks of a strong organization. It is a key mechanism for building the competence and self-confidence of your employees. And, when it works, it frees you to work on big picture issues. Ralph Stayer, CEO of Johnsonville Foods and co-author of the book *Flight of the Buffalo*, tells the story of waking up in the middle of the night soon after taking over the leadership of his company. He was so concerned about the quality of the sausage that the plant was producing that night that he got out of bed and raced down to the plant to taste the sausage—to make sure it was okay to ship.

Stayer soon discovered, of course, that he couldn't do everything in the plant and that, if he was to be successful—and if his company was to be successful—he would have to start trusting his employees to know what quality sausage was when they were making it. He learned the power of delegation and empowerment. By standing back, he enabled his people to grow, his company to be successful, and himself to get a full-night's rest.

As Stayer eventually learned, however, delegation requires more than the desire to get work done through others. It requires several steps for ensuring that the final results benefits the company, the leader, and the person accepting the task. Here are our suggested actions for successful delegation:

- **Create shared vision.** Ensure that both you and the person accepting the delegation have a shared understanding of the destination. Ask her to describe what the *profoundly* positive outcome of this delegation will be—and then keep discussing the vision until both of you can describe the same end result.
- **Define boundaries.** Once you both agree upon the desired outcome, don't tell her *how* to achieve it. Let her know what's not okay, what things to avoid or be wary of, or any specific boundaries or expectations you have—such as cost, quality, timeliness—and then let her go.
- **Establish measures for evaluating success.** Before she begins, ensure that she knows how to evaluate her success. With a clear way to measure progress and evaluate results, she'll be able to self-correct her performance as necessary and you'll worry less about the outcome.
- **Provide resources.** Give her freedom to find her own way and access to the tools, equipment, information, training, manuals, customers, and other resources that she will need to be successful. You want her to be successful, give her the support she needs to achieve that success.
- **Identify and provide positive consequences.** When she has successfully achieved the goal, make sure that you provide the opportunities, recognition, or other rewards for her success. What do you do if she has failed to reach the goal? Find a way to reward her for taking a chance, for trying, and for *learning* from her failure.

Call RCI. Contact Russell Consulting to discuss our training program on effective delegation. We custom-design all of our training seminars around the unique needs and circumstances of our clients. Call *RCI* today to explore the ways in which the *Art of Delegation* could help you and your leadership team.

Call Russell Consulting for more information on our training program on the Art of Delegation and other leadership development skills



Enhancing Organizational Performance
Through Quality Workplace Consulting
and Training Services



Linda & Jeff Russell, co-directors of RCI

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