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Supporting Inspiration and Innovation in the Development of a Strategic Plan within your Organisation²:

Fail To Prepare, Prepare to Fail
(Or did he mean Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail!)³

The aim of this article is to offer both a practical and theoretical perspective of how inspiration and innovation must play their part in the development of strategic planning if it's to lead your organisation to having a successful future. Innovation, by definition, can re-arrange established order. The argument has been made, strategic planning, by its very nature, can preserve it. This is one reason why planning is often accused of not easily handling truly inspiring and innovative ideas.

Yet surely to make the most of the opportunity and get real value from developing a strategic plan, then it is really important to get inspired, so as to allow innovation flourish and be the key element, along with practicality in devising your strategic plan. For many people then there is a need to let go of the notion that planning for a successful future doesn't easily handle inspiration leading to innovation, when in fact it really is the only way forward.

Strategic Planning:

Although sometimes used interchangeably with strategic management, strategic planning is the actual process of creating strategy. It is the set of organisational processes for identifying the desired future of the organisation and developing decision guidelines. Thus, strategy may also be viewed as a set of guidelines or a plan that will help assure consistency in decision making and serve as a map to the future. Strategic plans indicate what types of decisions are appropriate

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² For the purpose of this article an organisation as used also means any type of business, institution or organisation including both private and public.

³ Roy Keane former Ireland and Manchester United Captain at the world cup training camp Saipan 2002.

or inappropriate for an organisation. Strategy links managements' understanding of the organisation today with where it wants, can and should be at some point in the future⁴.

Strategy usually describes a thought-out plan of action, a consciously formulated and a broadly defined policy for achieving an objective. Strategy can be generally defined as the match an organisation makes between its own resources and the threats or risks and opportunities created by the external environment in which it operates. So strategy can be seen as a key link between what the organisation wants to achieve, its objectives and the policies adopted to guide its activities⁵.

Strategic planning is also the process of clarifying what an organisation is about, deciding what is and is not, a priority for the use of resources and setting out a clear direction and concrete goals for the future. Strategic planning means looking at the organisation as a complete entity and is concerned with its long-term development.

Why Inspiration and Innovation?

If you're doing what you have always done then you're not innovating. You're not doing your part to make things better. You're not creating superior value. And that means rather than evolving to ever-increasing levels of excellence, you are slipping deeper into old patterns of stagnation. Choose innovation over stagnation and your organisation will be fine in this uncertain business world we're now in. Choose calculated risk taking versus operating the same old way, and you're organisation will do great.⁶

To make the most of the opportunity and get real value from developing a strategic plan it is really important that those leading the process get inspired so as to allow innovation flourish and be the key element along with practicality in devising the strategic plan for their organisation. If you or those charged with the development of the strategic plan are not inspirationally or innovatively inclined, then those that are or have the potential to be need to be involved in the process of developing your strategic plan. No one person will either develop your plan or see it

⁴ Duncan J. W., Swayne E. Linda, Ginter M. Peter (2002) *Strategic Management of Health Care Organisations*, 4th edition, USA, Blackwell Publishing, pgs. 14-15

⁵ Bowman Cliff and Asch David (1988), *Strategic Management*. London: MacMillan Education Ltd, pgs. 4 – 36.

⁶ Sharma Robin (2010), *The Leader Who Had No Title*, London, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, p. 64

implemented, so when initiating the development of a strategic plan, it is vital all involved work as a team. To have a group of focused people, who will work together as a team, systematically, creatively, and yet in a disciplined way⁷.

So what plan is your organisation working off? Is it right at this point to stop, take stock and draw a new one? Is it time to stop settling for what's good enough and start creating ways to allow your organisation to have great success? Be a success, a real success. If so then there may be a need to identify original thinkers, provocateurs, and people who care to get involved when devising your strategic plan.

These inspired and innovative people are essential building blocks of tomorrow's high-value organisation. They don't bring capital or expensive machinery, nor do they blindly follow instructions and merely contribute labour. They are indispensable, the driving force of the future and need to be involved when you're planning where it is you want your organisation to be in the future. Those that are inspired and creative want to get involved for the simple reason that by being involved in the development of a strategic plan they are given the chance to make things better.

If part of your strategic plan is to have management attract, motivate, and retain great talent, then it will have much more leverage than the competition. Would your organisation be more successful if your employees were more obedient? Or, consider for a second: would it be more successful if your employees were more connected, aware, passionate, genuine, inspired and innovative – you can't have both. As cited by Dave Stewart & Mark Simmons in their book "The Business Playground – Where Creativity and Commerce Collide"⁸ Time after time, in survey after survey, executives say that it is creativity that will drive their businesses in the future. An IBM study⁹ of CEOs and senior managers highlighted the importance of innovative thinking as the world of business continues to change. Eight out of ten CEOs predicated significant change ahead; change that comes from just about anywhere.

⁷ Venzin Markus, Rasner Carsten and Mahnke Volker (2005), *The Strategic Process - A Practical Handbook for Implementation in Business*, Germany: Campus Verlag GmbH, p. 37.

⁸ Stewart Dave & Simmons Mark (2010), *The Business Playground – Where Creativity and Commerce Collide*, UK, Prentice Hall, p. xiv.

⁹ The enterprise of the future: Global CEO Study, conducted by IBM and The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008.

Hugh MacLeod has this to say in his book “Ignore Everybody – And 39 Other Keys to Creativity”:¹⁰ Companies that squelch creativity can no longer compete with companies that champion creativity. If you’re creative, if you can think independently, if you can articulate passion, if you can override the fear of being wrong, then your company needs you now more than it ever did. And now your company can no longer afford to pretend that isn’t the case.

If once again your organisation doesn’t have such creative people or even if it does it is so worthwhile to bring in outside assistance. As they can offer a fresh perspective on the creative challenges the organisation is trying to address. Assistance from people unencumbered by too much experience or too many rules, who don’t know what’s been tried and what hasn’t¹¹.

Inspiration

Inspiration is cultivating a space within us and an environment around us that encourages ideas to come to us. If we are to allow inspiration to have a place within our organisations then we need to create a space that holds and supports the germination of ideas – a space of emptiness: if we are full, how can more be added? Too often we are afraid of emptiness, of not having lots of distractions, of not being busy and having our time structured. But empty hands are receptive hands, they can receive and hold. In the Buddhist tradition, the Zen mind, or beginner’s mind, is to know we don’t know and not to be afraid. We are not limited by preconceived ideas, and are open to all possibilities. As Einstein said; ‘Imagination is more important than knowledge’. Nothing exists that wasn’t once an idea, which the English poet, William Blake echoed, when he wrote: ‘Everything starts in the imagination’. Everything in the natural and human world starts as a seed, and ideas and visions are seeds of potentially great things.

We can’t force ourselves to be inspired; we can’t control inspiration, which is why many people have trouble with it. We can make ourselves receptive to it. We do this by surrounding ourselves with inspiration but also by the choice to keep turning up to inspiration and creativity, however

¹⁰ MacLeod Hugh (2009), *Ignore Everybody – And 39 Other Keys to Creativity*, England, Penguin Books, pgs. 35 - 36.

¹¹ Stewart Dave & Simmons Mark (2010), *The Business Playground ...*, op. cit., p. 156.

resistant we may feel¹². And if you (or your colleagues) don't see themselves as particularly creative, that's not reality, that's a self-imposed limitation. Only you can decide whether you want to carry that around with you forever¹³.

To be inspired is to be in conscious contact with another realm of ourselves. It does not derive from the everyday 'I' that we use to pay the bills and drive to work, but from greater power. The artist Pablo Picasso described this in a letter to his friend: 'At the beginning of each picture there is someone who works for me. Toward the end I have the impression of having worked without a collaborator.' We are in an invisible but very real partnership with a force of inspiration that at first can feel separate from us. As we follow and trust our inspiration, it becomes more integrated and we simply experience it as a part of ourselves. Zen teachings tell us that the practice of enlightenment is concerned with emptying out our minds, not cramming them full.

So getting inspired maybe one thing but inspiration without innovation is like knowledge without action. What is the point of having all the knowledge yet not turning it into action? At the end of the day it really will be about action and not knowledge alone. Likewise what is the point of getting inspired if it doesn't bring us forward – to see us start to innovate? It is not enough to just get inspired if there is no tangible out come in terms of this leading to innovation for the organisation.

Innovation

Innovation is an instinct to produce and this is what we are doing when producing a strategic plan as where it is we want to be in the future and the best way to get there. One way to become creative is to discipline ourselves to generate bad ideas and be prepared to make mistakes. 'Innovation is a numbers game. You have to go through 5,000 to 6,000 raw ideas to find one successful business. Six Sigma, on the other hand, tries to avoid errors – and it's making errors that make innovation possible. Marva Collins, a US educator who worked tirelessly to help

¹² Williams Nick (2005) *How To Be Inspired*, London: Tethered Camel Publishing, p. 25.

¹³ MacLeod Hugh (2009), *Ignore Everybody ...*, op. cit., p. 37.

impoverished students in and around Chicago to get a decent education, said, ‘if you can’t make a mistake, you can’t make anything.’¹⁴

So it really is about coming up with ideas and the worse the ideas, the better. Do it a lot and magically you will discover that some good ones slip through. Nine times out of ten, the answer is no. Finding good ideas is surprisingly easy once you deal with the problem of finding bad ideas. All the innovative books in the world are not going to help you if you’re unwilling to have lousy, lame, and even dangerously bad ideas. So it really is true, one sure way to become innovative is to discipline ourselves to generate bad ideas.

Innovation is personal, original, unexpected, and useful. Unique innovation requires domain knowledge, a position of trust, and the generosity to actually contribute. Unique implies that innovation is focused and insightful. Delivering unique innovation is hardest of all, because not only do you have to have insight, but you also need to be passionate enough to risk the rejection that delivering a solution can bring.

Companies that squelch innovation can no longer compete with companies that champion innovation. Passion for what you do is not just an innovative imperative – it is a competitive necessity. Innovation means either infusing our work with our own uniqueness or bringing ideas from the realms of our mind and imagination into physical reality. Inspiration is natural to us and, as we remove the blokes we have erected to our naturalness, we will find ourselves becoming channels for innovative ideas and energy, and becoming co-creators with life.

Creative action is the way we turn inspiration into action. Innovation is the ability to act, not just react. The word authentic is derived from the Latin *authenticus*, meaning ‘original’ and ‘written in the owner’s hand’. This is what we all yearn for in our work – authenticity, something that is us through and through.

Then there is capital ‘C’ Creativity, concerned with our God-given ability to bring into existence something that does not currently exist, to see and create our future. The Latin root of the word create is *creare*, meaning to ‘bring into being’. It is in our nature to imagine, dream, create and

¹⁴ Stewart Dave & Simmons Mark (2010), *The Business Playground ...*, op. cit., p. 208.

shape our world, and when we do so in the spirit of love and compassion our creativity can literally bring heaven to earth. To surrender to it and let it flow through us requires something in us – some of our limits and self-concepts – to die.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is the core belief that we are not creative. Only a minority of people believe they are. We are not particularly educated to value and encourage creativity. Culturally creativity is often marginalized and seen as unimportant, irrelevant or even dangerous to our working lives. So we too often marginalize it and reward people for doing as they are told, not for being original and authentic; it may even seem as if there is an enmity between work and creativity. Innovative confidence is not about being certain of the answers but about being certain that we will find and discover the answers ourselves. Courage oxygenates hope, vision, faith and trust, and allows us to act despite and in the face of fear, anxiety, doubt conflict and even despair. We may encounter the fear that if we give all of our creativity away then we will have nothing left to give; our creative cupboard, as it were, will be empty. Our imagination, the mind's eye, is the starting point of all creative impulses and ideas, although it may have some hard graft and sweat before their fulfilment. Yet we need to regain our imagination so that we can choose our direction and so that the hard work has meaning.

We need to remember that the substance from which creativity flows so as to allow for innovation is unlimited. As we commit to a creative life and developing our own creative skills for our joy and the benefit of all, we are aligning ourselves with the creative intelligence behind all things. More organisations have to report to shareholders monthly or quarterly, let alone yearly; governments are always looking to the next election. All these pressures discourage and damage true creativity, thus blocking innovation. Over and over again people drop innovative ideas that don't come to immediate fruition, not realising that if they stay focused on their goal it will eventually become real. In Greek there is a word *chronos*, meaning linear time, and a word *kyros*, meaning at the right time.

Summary

Strategic planning is about looking at what the organisation wants to achieve in the future i.e. three to five maybe even ten years down the road. Once the organisation has identified where it

wants to be and sets its vision, the act of strategic planning is about putting in place a set of processes that will assist the organisation to arrive at its vision.

If you or your organisation still subscribe to the notion that planning doesn't easily handle inspiration and innovation you have to deal with and overcome this thought pattern if you are to make the most of the opportunity and get real value from developing a strategic plan. To maximise your chances of achieving success or maintaining it, if already achieved, then it is really important to get inspired, so as to allow innovation flourish and be the key element, along with practicality in devising your organisational plan for success.

We don't get inspired and innovated just by reading about it or watching it: we need to throw ourselves into it somehow – strategic planning if carried out correctly can so forcefully lend itself to this. Innovation is not limited by circumstances, even harsh circumstances. We have all seen incredibly wealthy people and organisations driven by the belief that throwing money and resources at any problem will solve it. We know that does not work: innovative solutions – new ways of thinking – are what are needed.

Your organisation might just need to study how it is others like Disney, Google and the IBMs of this world get creative so as to allow innovation flourish, but that alone will not be enough if you want to move up to the next level of success as an organisation. Having learnt what you can it's then a matter of go put what it is you have learnt into practice so as to have your organisation allow inspiration and innovation be a key element in the development of your strategic plan. A strategic plan which will set out a vision of success for the organisation.