

Information Technology is Integral to Holistic Strategic Planning

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ABSTRACT:

Doing an effective strategic plan for your organization requires taking a holistic view that includes information technology as a key element. Excluding IT from your strategic planning process places you at risk of failing to achieve your organizational mission. Growth opportunities will be missed, and your competitive advantage will erode as you use scarce resources to put out operational fires that flare up. Broadening your planning approach to include the IT perspective will ensure better alignment and realization of your business objectives.

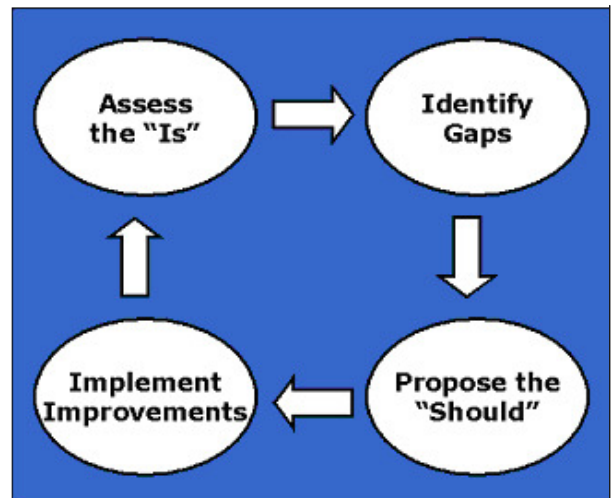
This article presents the case for a holistic view of strategic development and outlines how to develop a roadmap to incorporate information technology considerations. Integrating IT into your strategic planning process will help you achieve your organization's objectives at twice the speed and half the cost.

Excluding information technology from your overall strategic planning bears a huge cost on your companies' bottom line for three reasons. Firstly, you and your employees will waste time, energy and resources as you contend with unanticipated operational and technology issues. You'll find yourself in a constant disruptive, reactive state that is draining and symptomatic of the lack of IT vision and planning. Secondly, you will be missing opportunities that generate a competitive advantage, such as leveraging automation to fuel membership growth. Thirdly, your organization will continue to hobble along with costly operational inefficiencies that could have been eliminated were IT planning done on a strategic not tactical level.

Think of yourself as leading an expedition in the vast frontier. The issues you face will either move or halt your crew across the wilderness in pursuit of your final destination. To plan properly, you must anticipate potential pitfalls, including the rugged mountains in the way, the deep and wide rivers you'll have to cross, and the unwelcome predators that are waiting to pounce.

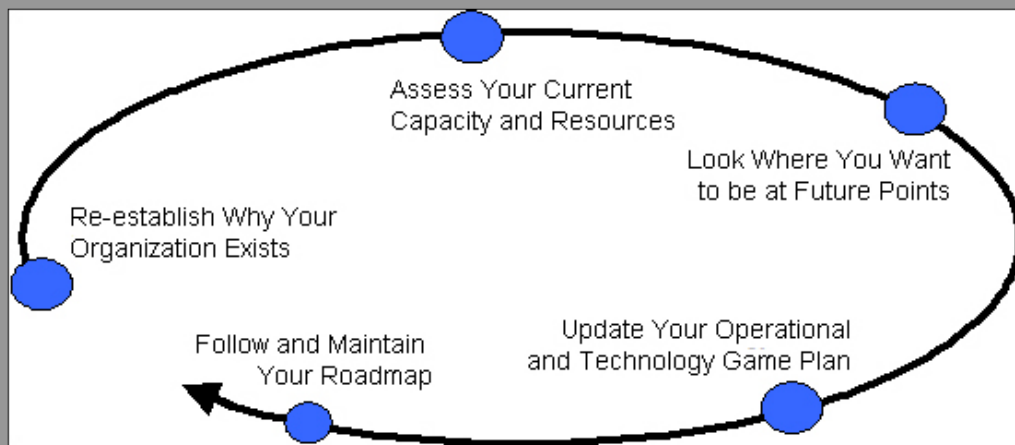
During your planning phase, you'll need to identify your crew's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and allies and enemies. You have only a certain amount of tools, equipment, supplies, and food. Using them efficiently means rationing them while still sustaining your mission. Waste adds up quickly over time, but time is not a luxury when facing the challenge of a vast frontier.

To create a well-rounded, strategic roadmap for your organization, you must cover the essential areas in depth as part of your overall planning process.



Holistic Strategic Planning Template

1. **Reestablish the reason why your company exists.** Ask what is the value of your product that differentiates your company from others and gives your customers value they can't get from any other company?
2. **Define the goals and objectives.** What are the business objectives that support your product in the short and long-run?
3. **Define a high-level but complete list of all operational processes in your company.** This will give a picture of the organization's current state, or "Is."
4. **Diagram the information flows needed internally and externally to support your goals.** This will give a picture of the company's future state, or "Should."
5. **Assess your current technology capacity, capabilities and platforms.**



6. **Define the key use cases for all areas of your organization.** "Use cases" are short descriptions of scenarios that outline your main information needs. List the use cases on the left side, while identifying the current technology projects to the right side. You'll quickly see the gaps you have between your current and envisioned states.
7. Create an **operation and technology game plan that will bridge the gaps** between the "Is" and "Should." Your plan should provide specifics regarding your budget, timeframe, required skill sets and any improvements needed to fulfill your mission.
8. **Establish a schedule to repeat the above steps on an on-going basis.** Otherwise, you face reinventing the wheel, misalignment and wasted effort.

As an executive leading your company, you should adopt a broad view that includes IT in mapping your organizational vision and strategy. The rewards you'll receive include sustained value for your customers and optimal use of scarce resources. Following these guidelines will ensure that you and your crew will thrive and complete a successful journey.



About the Author:

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