Strategic Planning for

Remote Organizations

How to align your team for the year ahead — without meeting in person.

SHANE SPRAGGS
CEO, VIRTIRA

VIRTIRA

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Introduction

Take a moment to ask yourself, do you know what everyone on your team is doing right now? Is the work they're doing complementary to the work their colleagues are doing? Will they feel satisfaction and accomplishment when it's done? Is it all moving your organization forward towards the same goal?

It can be difficult for any organization to answer "yes" to all of these questions, but even harder for one that has no central office.

If you run a remote business or an organization where your team is spread out geographically or only connects virtually, it can be exceptionally difficult to ensure everyone is marching to the beat of the same drummer.

It's impossible to stand over their shoulder and be there with your team as they make the many daily decisions that affect your organization's overall direction. It takes a clear purpose to keep everyone aligned, long-term goals to set the next milepost for them to strive for, and a strategic plan for the year ahead that outlines how everyone is doing their part to reach it.

Achieve your long-term goals, improve the engagement of your team, and reduce the noise and anxiety for team members who often struggle with knowing where they fit in the big picture.

Yearly strategic planning meetings are generally accepted as one of the few that organizations need to hold in person. This book provides a process and clear, defined steps to develop and build a yearly plan that will outperform those typically prepared in person.

If followed, this approach to yearly strategic planning will help you achieve your long-term goals, improve your team's engagement, and reduce the noise and anxiety for team members who often struggle with knowing where they fit in the big picture.

We hope you enjoy this book as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you. As always, we welcome your feedback and recommendations for improvement.

Who Is This Book For?

As we developed ***Strategic Planning for Remote Organizations***, we tried to keep it as flexible and applicable to as many organizations as possible; however, we think that it most appropriately fits small to mid-sized organizations that have:

A Chief Executive Officer (or someone in charge)

A Leadership team that may also be the direct line managers for the organization

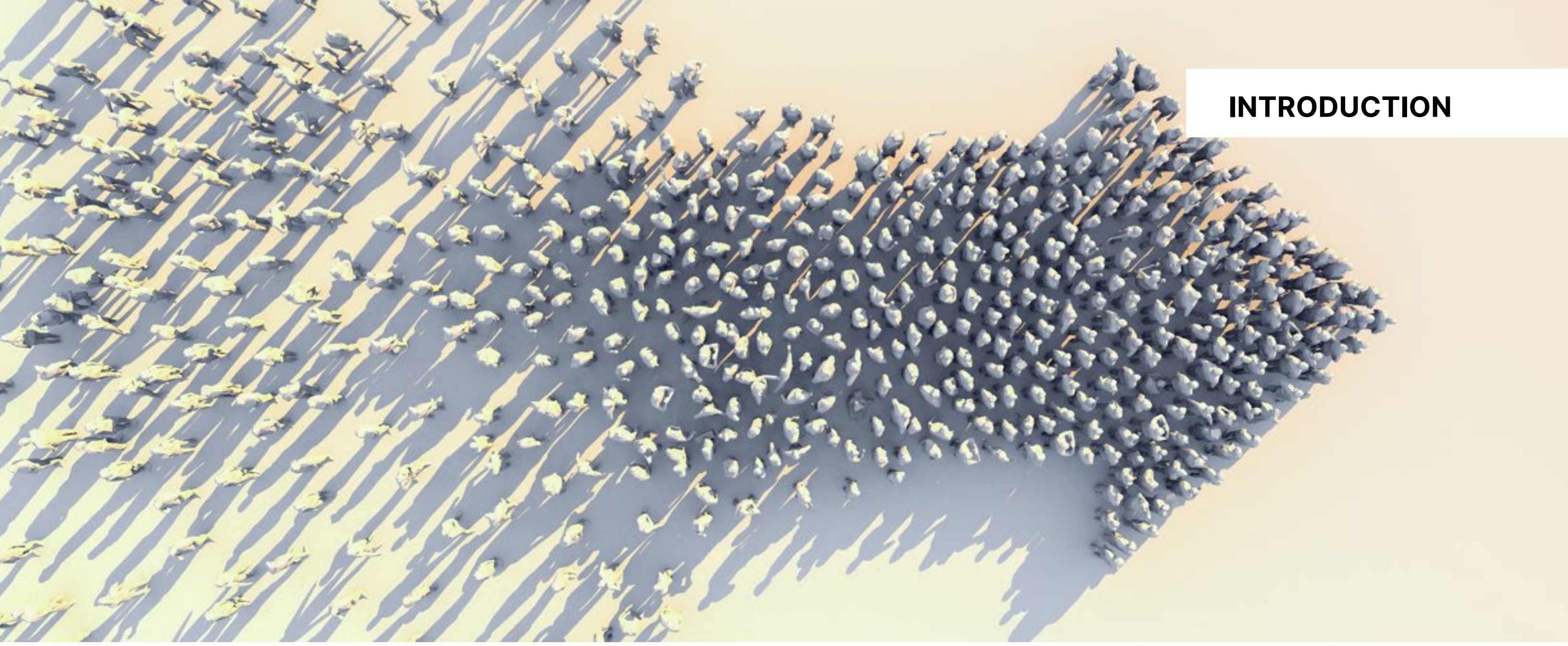
May also have a separate management layer or set of team leads below the leadership team

15 - 500

Roughly 15 to 500 employees

The process described in this book should work just as well for a brand-new start-up as it will for a well-established organization.

It will be most valuable to those with the authority to set and oversee yearly planning and drive the decision-making process, such as senior leadership team members or the CEO.



Why Strategic Planning Matters

Why do strategic planning at all? Why consume the limited bandwidth of your leadership team for up to a month when they could be working on that next deal or big project?

As Lewis Carrol famously put in Alice in Wonderland: *If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there*.

Where purpose, vision or mission statements guide the overall direction of an organization, a strategic plan gives people something to work towards that is tangible and obtainable. Once accomplished, it drives a sense of community for the people involved - increasing the commitment and engagement with your organization. It allows people to feel progress is happening and that there's something worth working for.

By failing to reflect on where you are going on a regular basis, an organization can feel rudderless.

A good strategic plan reflects on the current state of the business and the marketplace and communicates a set of priorities that aligns your team for the year ahead. It's more than a set of big, transformative projects that the organization has decided to do. It's a set of directions that guide the day-to-day decisions of everyone in the organization.

A strategic priority to increase safety at a manufacturing plant can motivate a foreman to increase the number of inspections on a weekly basis, without the need for a prescriptive command from head office.

A strategic priority to gain more business in a new region or market can spur individual business developers to look for the right opportunities in their contact lists without the oversight of a Sales Director.

By failing to reflect on where you are going on a regular basis, an organization can feel rudderless. People begin working in different, sometimes opposite directions. The wrong customers are hired and the wrong products are developed. Ultimately, this can lead to stagnation, increased turnover, and decreased profits.

Overview of Strategic Planning

If this is your first time running strategic planning, or if you are a veteran of the process, you will have one key goal: **alignment.**

A successful strategic plan puts everyone on the same page. But not just any page, the right page for your organization and team at this place and time.

Regardless of the process you follow or the name you use to call your goals, objectives, initiatives, or priorities, most yearly strategic planning processes generally follow the same pattern.

As you will see in the next chapter there are many common approaches to running strategic planning. These frameworks aim to organize people in a way that makes sense for the size and age of the organization.

A successful strategic plan puts everyone on the same page. But not just any page, the right page for your organization and team.

We advocate that you:

1. **Have a purpose, vision, and/or mission statement that is well understood by your team**

   There are many different definitions for these statements. Jim Collins of Good to Great fame prefers the term BHAG (or Big Hairy Audacious Goal) in lieu of a mission statement. You will sometimes see vision and mission, while just as often you will read the opposite: mission and vision.

   Regardless of what you call it, the important part is to understand why you are in business.

2. **Have a set of core values that will guide your decision-making process.**

   It's one thing to know why you are in business, it's quite another to know *how* you want to conduct your business.

   Your core values establish your culture and will help guide the key decisions you make.

3. **Do your best to understand your customers, staff, market, competition, and performance to date prior to starting.**

   You can't run a business from behind a desk. You need to talk to customers, pay attention to recent trends, be aware of risks, and be open to opportunities.

4. **Have informed conversations with the right people to determine what you want to achieve next.**

   For some, this will be the next 3 to 5 years. For a startup, this might be getting through the next 7 months.

   Look ahead and decide what your next milestone will be.

5. **Establish a maximum of:**

   5 strategic priorities for the year ahead for the organization;

   3 department priorities for each department;

   and 2 individual priorities for every member of your team.

6. **Establish a plan to execute.**

   Check-in on the execution monthly.

7. **Review your strategy quarterly:**

   Make course corrections as new information becomes available.

While we will provide a step-by-step guide to performing this process, there is no "one size that fits all". It must be tailored and will be unique for every organization.

It's perfectly acceptable and encouraged to modify this process to work with your organization.

Strategic Planning Remotely

For most organizations, the meat of their yearly strategic planning conversation is the conversation.

Putting everyone behind a laptop screen affects one of the key drivers for successful strategic planning: The conversation.

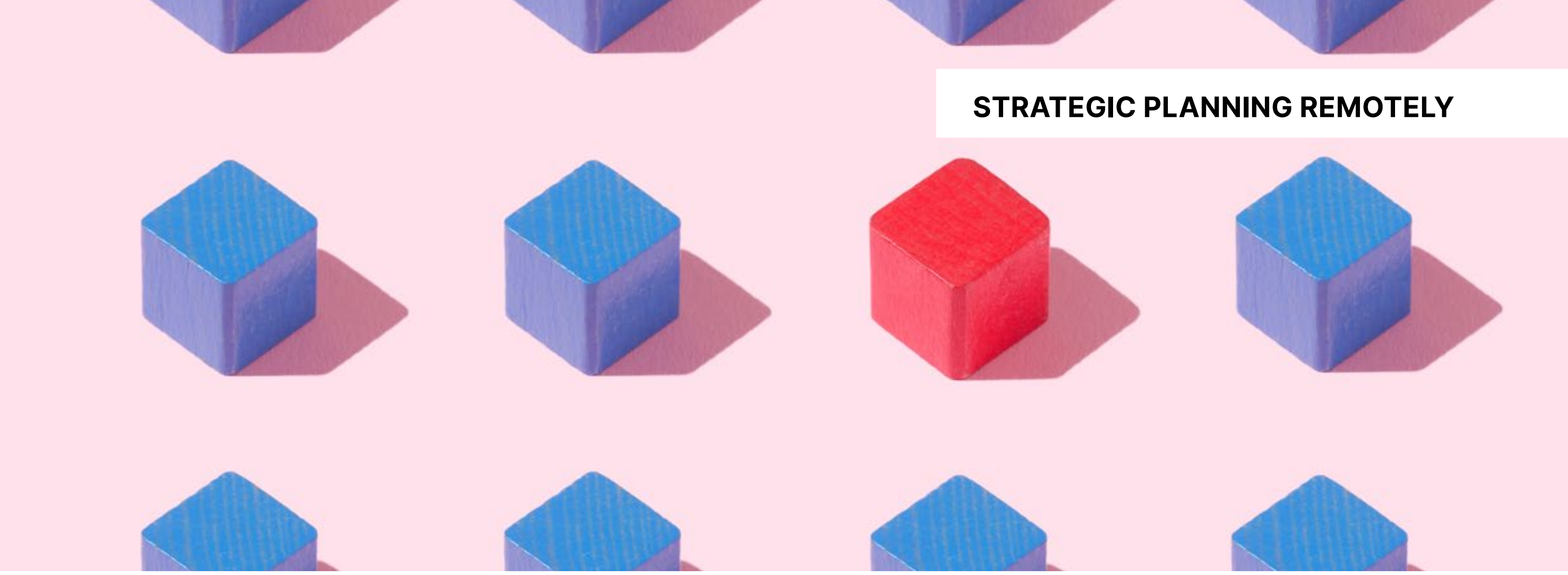
Yes, you can be prepared with reports and research and yes, you can still get everyone in a virtual room, but for all its benefits, working remotely still has a negative impact on group discussions.

The reasons for this are simple and widely documented. Only a portion of what we say and hear is verbal. Without the benefit of in-person discourse, you will not pick up the visual cues coming from your team. Remote meetings challenge the ability of teams to work out a problem on a whiteboard, or with sticky notes on a wall. It's tough to replace the drama of a passionate speech with a few clicks on a digital whiteboard.

Putting everyone behind a laptop screen affects one of the key drivers for successful strategic planning: **The conversation.**

Add the challenge of Zoom fatigue, and you have to rethink your approach for remote strategic planning.

This chapter kicks off with a high-level overview of the key differences you need to consider when running a remote strategic planning session.



Key Differences

The following key differences and challenges need to be considered and addressed for a successful remote strategic planning session.

Planning ahead is critical

Prep work needs to be complete in time for people to review and digest it

Meetings need to be scheduled ahead of time

Unlike an offsite where people are there for one purpose, people will still go about their day before, after, and during your meetings.

Spread it out over several days to avoid Zoom fatigue

It’s just not productive to spend a full day on a remote meeting

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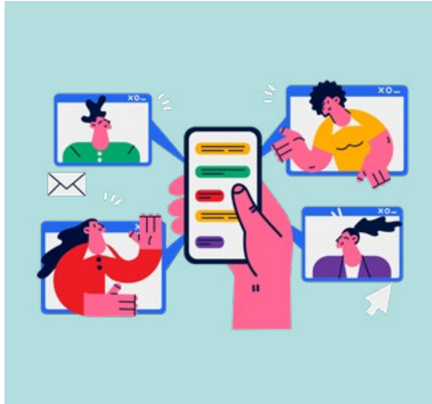
People won't read the material you give them

You need to be prescriptive and ensure the right people are consuming the information that should matter to them.



Use a collaboration tool that can do synchronous communication

We recommend Miro. Based on our research, it's a cut above other collaborative whiteboarding environments and is poised to maintain this edge for the near future.

Enlist a strong facilitator

It's easier for participants to fall silent and not be engaged. The facilitator must keep track of everyone's total talk time and keep it balanced. The facilitator must be able to interject when someone is disproportionately using the time.

Review steps along the way

Because it's over several days, you need to plan time to recap the previous day's events and decisions. Remind people where you are in the process and how what you're doing fits into the bigger picture.

Plan for breaks

Give time between the steps of the process to give people time to process and think about everything they've just discussed and learned.

Document everything thoroughly

Since you can't trust people to give you their full attention during the sessions, it's more important that you create good artifacts from your sessions so you have evidence of the process and decisions.

Common Approaches

The purpose of this section is to explore some of the common approaches organizations take to perform their yearly strategic planning.

We will look at some of the common types of strategic planning and their pros and cons. You may find best practices for your organization in one or more of them and wish to work them into your process.

There is no one-size-fits-all. Nor is there an ideal process for your organization. All of these approaches have pros and cons, cheerleaders and naysayers.

- Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics
- Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)
- Rocks (Traction)

All of these approaches require in-person meetings.

- Often organizations will host offsites to review and plan over the course of several days

The larger the organization, the further out they look:

Startups: 6 - 12 months

Small established business: 1 - 2 years

Mid-sized established business: 2 - 3 years

Public organizations: 3 - 5 years

Public enterprises: 5 - 10 years

GOST: Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics

Providing a more classical approach to strategic planning, the GOST framework attempts to provide absolute direction for a company over the long term.

To get started, establish long-term goals based on your organization's mission.

- **Goals** are big-picture ideas about where you want to go.
- A goal is a broad primary outcome.
- Goals are used to help the business grow.
- Goals are developed to turn the mission into statements that communicate desired end-results
- Goals turn broad, long-range concepts (core values/overall purpose) into usable statements that describe what you want to achieve.

Once developed, specific objectives are determined to communicate *how* to pursue the goals.

- **Objectives** are concrete steps that move you toward your goals. An objective is a measurable step you take to achieve a goal.
- Objectives should be accomplishable and measurable, which lets us determine whether we are making any progress or not.

With a sense of the goals and the objectives established, the organization defines strategies that will be used to achieve the goals.

	WHAT	HOW
High Level	GOALS	STRATEGY
Detail Level	OBJECTIVES	TACTICS

- The strategy is about *how's* and not the *what's*. It is the plan you will follow to achieve the goals.
- A **strategy** is an approach to achieving a goal.

Finally, tactics are identified to accomplish the strategy.

- **Tactics** are the actions taken to reach a particular point that helps the organization to achieve its objectives.
- Tactics are the "how" – what tools are you going to use? A tactic is a tool you use in pursuing an objective associated with a strategy.

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Pros

- Encourages long-term thinking and planning
- Communicates long term direction for the company to staff and prospective employees
- Allows for easy visibility and tracking of goals and progress

Usage

Commonly used by large, stable businesses who know their customers and industry and have predictable sales.

Cons

- The differentiation between goals, objectives, and strategies can confuse people.
  - A conversation about an objective, for example, might be derailed by the terminology as people argue it's actually strategy or a goal - not about the actual content of the proposed objective.
- Very top down.
  - Goals are often set by the Executive with little to no input from employees or even management.
  - There is a risk of missing emerging trends and market disruptors.
- Can be a lot of work to define all of the layers
  - Although not everything is redone each year-end period. i.e. a 5-year goal can remain suitable for several years
- There are lots of variations - which also adds to the confusion.
  - Also known as OGSM for Objective, Goals, Strategies, and Measurables
  - Sometimes includes a KPI step between objectives and strategies
  - Sometimes it's Goal, Strategy, Objective, and Tactic
  - Sometimes it's just Goal, Strategy, and Tactic

OKRs: Objectives and Key Results

The system was created by Andy Grove of Intel and was taught to John Doerr. Doerr became known as the "Johnny Appleseed" of OKRs due to his efforts to spread their value. His book, Measure What Matters, laid out the management frameworks that are OKRs.

An objective is what you want your team to achieve. It acts as a "North Star", a guiding light that pulls everyone in the same direction.

A key result explains how you will follow this star. It is specific, time-bound, and measurable.

An objective is significant and action-oriented.

OKRs are often shorter-term, quarterly and therefore more appealing to startups and agile environments.

Managers or department heads are consulted when creating annual OKRs. They draft alternative objectives, with their departmental priorities in mind.

Must have at least a company vision to define OKRs. The vision is the ultimate *objective* for the company.

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Implementation

At the executive level, the organization will establish a handful of, maybe 2 or 3 objectives for the next year or two and then define up to 5 key results that help identify when the objective is accomplished.

Objectives are outcomes that reflect current company, department or personal priorities.

Every objective corresponds with up to 5 corresponding key results that...

- Answer the question, “How do I know if I have achieved my outcome?”
- Are the end result of a series of tasks, but not the tasks themselves
- Are Measurable

EXAMPLE

The next level down in the business - the VP level, for example, will then take key results from the executive level as their objectives and define more specific key results to achieve them.

The process continues, with each layer defining objectives and key results based on the key results from the layer above them.

Eventually, this cascades down to the employees at the lowest level.

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Annual Process For Setting OKRS

1. Brainstorm company OKRs based on the mission of the organization. For established companies, short or long term goals may exist to plan against.
2. Collaborate with managers to draft their first set of department OKRs
3. Communicate the OKR methodology to the entire company
4. Employees draft their own OKRs
5. Finalize OKR alignment company-wide
6. Review individual OKRs and continue to monitor performance

Pros

- Promotes the setting of ambitious goals
- Employees can trace their OKRs up the chain to see how they directly contribute to the goals of the company.

Cons

- Aligning across the company, especially a large company, can be time-consuming and can lead to uneven implementation.
- The key results can get prescriptive and end up "telling" people about the work they have to do and when it should be done without proper insight on if it's possible.
- The OKR can end up being used in performance measurement.

Employees can trace their OKRs up the chain to see how they directly contribute to the goals of the company.

Rocks (Traction)

Traction is a book published in 2012 by Gino Wickman that provides a detailed and holistic process to running a company. As part of the process, he dubs the Entrepreneur Operating System, Wickman introduces the concept of Rocks for strategy planning end execution.

Rocks are set by the leadership team of a business at their quarterly meeting. They are a way of clarifying and giving weight to the most important things which must be accomplished over the next 90 days. Each Rock is assigned to a single person to own who is responsible for ensuring it gets done.

The term “Rock” comes from John D. Rockefeller, America’s first Billionaire and his habits for running a successful business.

Pros

- Traction lays out a complete process for running a business

Cons

- The term “Rock” is often difficult for people to wrap their heads around and it can get confused with projects and tactics as opposed to goals.
- The process for traction requires significant upkeep and due diligence. Many teams only implement portions of the process, which waters down its effectiveness.
- It’s not as effective with remote teams.

Summary

Strategic planning requires in person meetings and will vary from organization to organization. How far out you need to plan will be determined by both the size of the business and how long you've been in business. While there may be other ways to go about strategic planning, the three approaches mentioned above are the standards used across many businesses. Each approach has its pros and cons, however, there is a better option. One that will maximize results and ensure everyone has input and is excited about the goals.

The Remote Strategic Planning Process

From a high level, the remote planning process isn't significantly different than when it is done in person. **The main difference is the need to stick to the steps.**

For example, many organizations can survive on a single, poorly planned off-site. Whereas getting together ad hoc as a remote team isn't likely to produce reasonable results.

The strategic planning process is individual to each organization and therefore care must be taken to create a plan that works based on the size of the organization, stage of life, ownership structure, leadership structure, and previous experience with the strategic planning process.

Many organizations can survive on a single, poorly planned off-site. Whereas getting together ad hoc as a remote team isn't likely to produce reasonable results.

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The 8 key steps to strategic planning are:

1.	Prepare	Identify and acquire inputs required for successful strategic planning.
2.	Review	Share all the information collected, along with results from the previous year's strategy.
3.	Ideate	Collaboratively assess all the information and generate ideas.
4.	Prioritize	Narrow the ideas down to five strategic priorities for the year.
5.	Define	Determine the key steps required to accomplish the strategic priorities.
6.	Approve	The CEO reviews the strategic priorities and approves the high-level plan.
7.	Communicate	Share your plans with the rest of the organization.
8.	Execute	Throughout the rest of the year, the team works to deliver the strategic plan.

Depending on the size of your organization, you will include additional steps for:

- Department
- Individual goal setting

Prepare Phrase

The purpose of preparation is to generate all of the necessary inputs for successful planning.

Generally, this will include:

- Consideration of the current and future marketplace and environment
- Feedback from your customers
- Input from your employees, staff, contractors, and the people who work for you and with you.
- Results from last year's strategic plan
- Performance reports from each department such as Sales, Marketing, Operations and Finance

We will outline steps for collecting this information.

This will be heavily tailored to your company.

Review Phrase

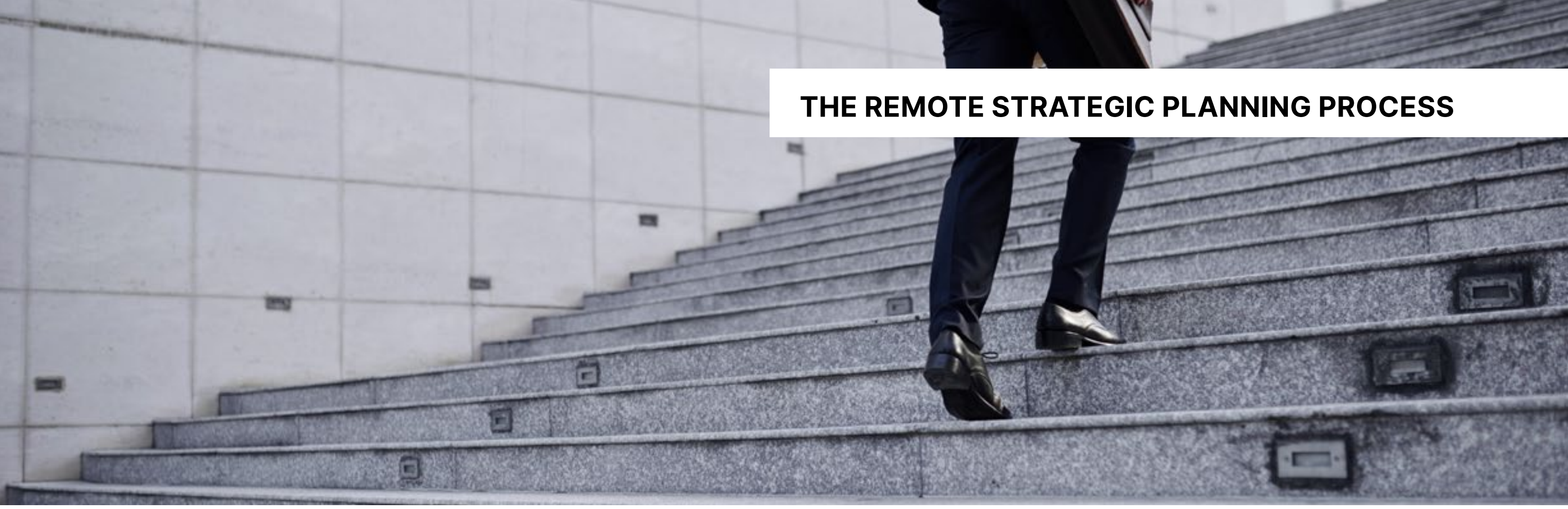
Following a successful preparation step, you will have lots of documentation to review and digest.

There will be a handful of people on your team who will consume every bit of it. However, for most, this will be overwhelming and it will remain unread.

To avoid wasting all this excellent information, you will plan a handful of presentations with your team to review the content.

Plan ahead and include it on your schedule. Give people a reasonable amount of time to present the salient points from their reports, and give people a short amount of time for questions and follow-up.

The types and volume of content you collect will dictate your agenda.



Ideate Phase

With all of the information gathered and shared in the previous step, the team must now begin making sense of it.

The ideation process will be viewed by participants as the first half of strategic planning, with the other half being the distillation of all ideas into a cohesive strategic plan.

We recommend using a tool like Miro for online collaboration as it allows participants to stay engaged in the process and contribute their ideas.

Generally, a facilitator will run participants through a collaborative brainstorming activity such as a SWOT exercise, but other retrospective style exercises can be equally successful. We will provide the steps for completing a collaborative SWOT exercise with your team.

The output of this phase is a bunch of ideas, some good, some bad, and some outlandish that will provide input for the next phase.

Prioritize Phase

Following a successful ideation phase, you will have a large number of ideas that need to be grouped and distilled down into strategic priorities.

You will take all the ideas generated in the ideation phase, reflect on the ones that help you achieve your long-term goals, and then group them into yearly objectives.

Next, you will rank the yearly objectives as desirable, important, and critical. For this step it’s critical you have representation and participation from all areas of the company to avoid individual or departmental agendas.

Finally, with the yearly objectives ranked, the team will work to select the top five strategic priorities.

Strategic Priority

We use the term “Strategic Priority” to reduce confusion commonly experienced with the terminology used in other methods. Is it a goal? An objective? A strategy? A plan? An initiative? Or worse yet, a rock?

We will get into the specifics of what a strategic priority is in later chapters, however it’s fairly clear to most people that a “priority” is simply something that must be done first. Therefore the “strategic priorities” represent the most important yearly objectives the organization will focus on.

Owners must now collaborate with others in the organization to identify the requirements to successfully deliver results.

Define Phase

During the prioritization phase, owners for each strategic priority are identified. Owners must now collaborate with others in the organization to identify the requirements to successfully deliver results.

Each strategic priority needs a high-level understanding of:

- The high-level steps required to accomplish the priority in the next year
  - Steps will provide direction to the departments when they set their quarterly objectives
  - Steps can also outline new targets for the departments (for sales, for example), projects for the priority owner, changes in direction (which affect how people work day-to-day), and decisions to hire new staff.
- If it requires an investment to be successful, a rough approximation of how much it will cost
- The metrics that will be used to measure progress; and
- How we will know we've successfully accomplished the work

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Plan priorities for the year and departments for the quarter.

Put another way, rough in the work you need to do over the course of the year in the priority and lock in the work you need to do in the department.

When you recalibrate each quarter, add more work to the departments. This keeps the work manageable and reduces making commitments a year out that aren't realistic.

Throughout the definition phase, strategic priority owners must work with other owners, functional managers, and company leadership to ensure there is no overlap with other initiatives and they have the budget and resources to accomplish the work.

To wrap up the definition phase, the owners present their strategic priorities back to the leadership team for review and feedback.

This phase can be dynamic. If, for example, it's discovered there's no budget for a strategic priority, follow-up conversations may be required to revise expectations.

When changes are needed, time should be added to the schedule to discuss revisions.

Approve Phase

Up to 5 strategic priorities have been defined, reviewed, and polished. Individually, they each make sense and there are likely individuals on the team excited to get started.

One last step is required to look at the plan as a whole by someone senior on the team - likely the VP of Operations or Finance.

The strategic priorities are put into a yearly schedule and a sanity check is done on the schedule and concessions are made to make everything fit.

Finally, the whole plan is approved by someone with authority, typically the CEO.

Care must be taken to communicate the "why", and not just the "what".

Communicate Phase

What good is a plan if no one knows about it? As a final step, the strategic priorities must be communicated broadly to the rest of your organization.

This will be tailored to your organization and could include a presentation to staff, a post to the company dashboard, or a cascading communication through your management structure.

Care must be taken to communicate the "why", and not just the "what". This is a good opportunity to connect the decisions you made to the revelations you discovered in the preparation phase. It can be especially powerful if you can tie a strategic priority back to the feedback you received from a staff member.

In your communication, you will identify the owners of each strategic priority, how they will be held accountable, and what success looks like.

Execute Phase

For the bulk of the year, the organization should be focused on executing the strategic plan. The Execute phase starts immediately after the plan is approved and communicated.

Monthly, the management team communicates progress towards completing the work they committed.

Quarterly, the team meets to recalibrate their strategic plan to ensure everyone stays on track. This might involve revising a strategic priority that was too ambitious, replacing one that was achieved or reacting to new information or external event.

Throughout the year, someone needs to remain accountable for the strategic plan by scheduling follow-up meetings and reporting progress.

Overview of Department Planning

Department planning overlaps and happens in tandem with the Define Phase.

Priority owners work with Managers to get buy in for the work that needs to be done in the next quarter to move their priority towards the objective. Managers work with their teams to get buy in for priority supporting work and to identify additional, department specific projects.

Following the draft of the organization's yearly strategic priorities, the department managers will share the priorities with their teams and identify how they can best support each priority as well as establish a handful of projects or initiatives to improve the department.

Department planning is directly affected by how your business is organized. In a traditional organization with departments of 4 - 9 people, the manager may lead their team in brainstorming to identify ideas to support each strategic priority.

In organizations with departments of one, the department manager may collaborate directly with the strategic priority owner to identify the steps.

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To keep the company nimble, it's recommended department managers select department projects that can be completed within the current quarter using the strategic priorities as a guide.

For departments with multi-month projects, outline what will be accomplished in the next quarter.

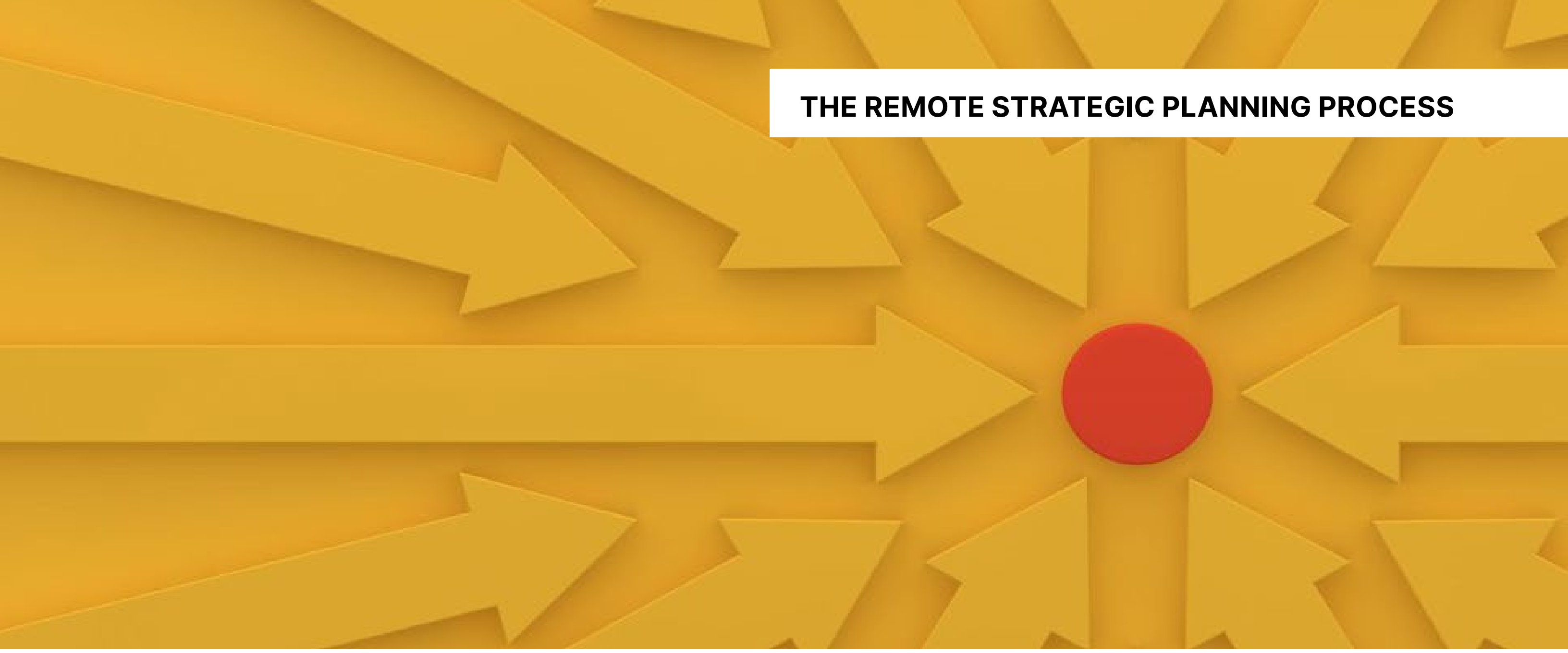
For organizations with multiple levels or a matrix hierarchy, more collaboration will be required.

Throughout the define stage, strategic priority owners coordinate with department managers to identify the steps their department can take to support the strategic plan.

For departments with yearly plans, such as sales or marketing teams, plans should be drafted ahead of time and locked in following strategic planning. A decision to launch a new product might impact sales tactics, for example.

Planning ahead reduces the overall effort required to get through the final phases of strategic planning and allow departments to react to any unexpected strategic priorities.

Regardless of the structure, the goal should be the same: To give employees an opportunity to speak into how they can support each strategic priority and allow good ideas to bubble up from the bottom.



Overview of Individual Goal Setting

As a final step to the yearly planning process, staff with set two or three individual goals.

Individual goal setting takes place after strategic and departmental priorities are set. From a scheduling standpoint, individuals will set goals in the first part of the new fiscal year after the strategic goals are communicated.

Individual goals should be guided by strategic and departmental priorities and have a focus on personal development.

An individual might identify that they will contribute to a strategic or department priority. However, they must also identify how doing so will support their personal development.

Department managers will help their team members craft meaningful individual goals that support their career direction and possible advancement within the organization.

Department managers will help their team members craft meaningful individual goals that support their career direction and possible advancement within the organization.

Summary

The remote strategic planning process runs similar to the in-person process and has 8 key steps that should be followed to ensure it will be successful. Where it differs is in the how team members will participate. Facilitators and team leaders will need to be familiar with online meeting tools such as digital whiteboards, to ensure all information throughout each of the phases is captured and communicated.

The size and structure of your organization will affect who is involved at each stage of planning and what type of collaboration is needed. Buy-in from all team members is important for your strategic plan to be executed properly. Department planning works to ensure that team members are involved in the plan that affects them directly.

Individual goal setting is optional but should be considered when a company reaches a suitable maturity. It should support not only the organization and/or departmental goals, but give the individual an opportunity to improve their skills or showcase their abilities.

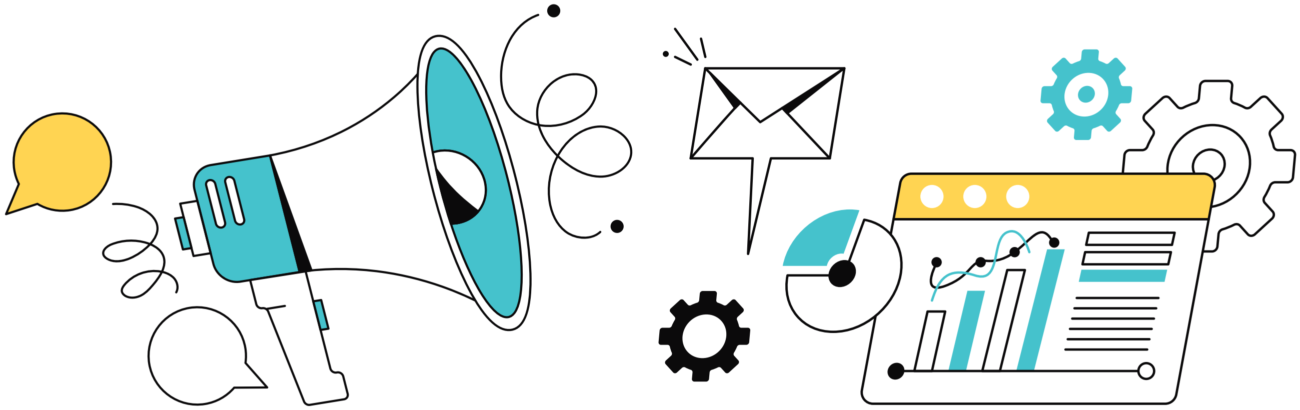
Plan for Success

Every organization, company, institution, and business is different and has its own unique qualities and idiosyncrasies. There is no one size fits all approach to strategic planning.

To ensure your success, you must:

1. Have a Purpose Statement
2. Decide who will be involved
3. Determine the right amount of strategy for your organization
4. Create a plan tailored to your organization
5. Communicate expectations to those involved
6. Proactively schedule meetings to ensure the time is booked

It's recommended you start this process at least 2 months before strategic planning begins. For some organizations, this can be as early as 3 to 4 months before your fiscal year-end. Businesses rarely stagnate. You must include this critical step every year to take into consideration changes in staff, marketplace, company structure, and environmental factors.



Have a Purpose Statement

Why are you in business? Are you more than a collection of individuals trying to increase revenue?

There are different approaches to capturing an organization's purpose. Most result in the authoring of a vision statement, mission statement, and/or purpose statement. Strategic priorities are meant to move you closer to you achieving your purpose.

> Strategic priorities are meant to move you closer to you achieving your purpose.

If you don't have a purpose, you will only confuse things by getting a bunch of people in a meeting to decide the next chapter for your business.

The process to identify a company's purpose is very different than the process to identify strategic priorities. It includes fewer people, often just the owner of the business with a few trusted confidantes. It's usually more of a creative process and seeped in aspirations and dreams, rather than tangibles and reality.

Establishing a clear, polished purpose can be time-consuming and, if you're just starting out, there may be a desire to get on with things while one is being created. At a minimum, the leaders of the company need to be able to express in their own words why you are in business (and it should all sound similar).

If you're in a rush, it's likely you can start strategic planning once the general understanding is established and before a polished statement is curated. However, there's always a risk that there will be misunderstanding and the resulting conversation will derail strategic planning.

You will see in the later chapters, it will be reviewed during the first meeting you have with your team. At that time, you will give the other leaders time to clarify and question the purpose. This is often a healthy process for new team members who were not around when the purpose was originally communicated. However, it will not be a time to revisit or change it. If changes are needed, planning should be rescheduled until your purpose is clear.

> Creating a polished purpose statement is not covered in this book.

Decide Who Will be Involved

Before sending an invite or making any requests, decide who will be involved in the process.

This is a critical step and you may need to have some difficult conversations if certain individuals feel they should be involved, but won't be.

You need to identify the following:

- Owner of the overall process
- Facilitator for the strategic planning sessions
- Participants of yearly strategic planning
    - And a possible subset of people who have access to sensitive information
- The person who will be accountable for approving the plan.

Who will own the process?

Decide who will be responsible for overseeing yearly strategic planning. Select an individual with appropriate seniority to make important decisions and has influence within the organization. Typically, this is someone on the operations side of the business, but might be the CEO or Chief Financial Officer. The strategic planning process won't work if this individual can be undermined.

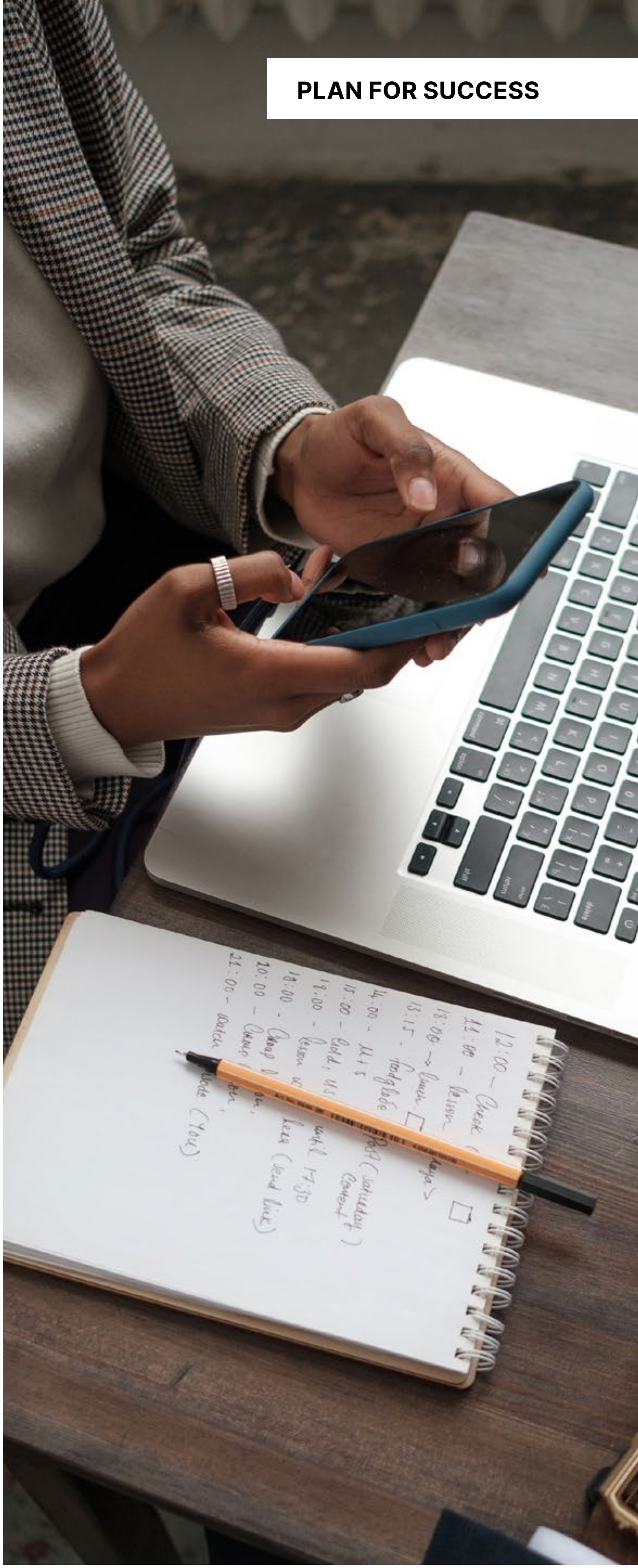
The strategic planning process won't work if this individual can be undermined.

This individual will be responsible for setting the schedule, selecting participants, and following up on progress. They will also be responsible for maintaining and updating the high-level schedule on a monthly and quarterly basis to ensure appropriate progress is being made throughout the year.

Ultimately, they will be responsible for the success of yearly planning and its outcomes.

This book assumes that you are this person.

Any references to "you" are referring to the owner of the yearly strategic process.



Who will facilitate the sessions?

The second most important role is the person who facilitates the key sessions during strategic planning week.

This individual must remain impartial and unbiased. They need to be able to appropriately involve introverts, keep extroverts from overtaking the process, and generally ensure everyone's voice is heard.

If someone does not fit this profile inside your organization, you may need to hire outside help.

It is possible for this individual to also own the process, but it may limit their participation in the process as it can be difficult to remain impartial.

Who will participate?

Review the deliverables for the prep work. Decide who will produce which report.

Look ahead to the various meetings you will have. Who do you need feedback from? What information is sensitive within your organization?

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For the purpose of this documentation, we will refer to the people involved in yearly strategic planning as the Leadership Team.

If you can't be transparent with all of the people involved, it will impact the quality of the collaboration and the resulting plan.

This can be a tricky, yet important step. Involve too many people, and the process might be bogged down and drag on. Too few and it might not be widely adopted within the organization. Try to keep the people involved to between 4 and 10 people.

Ideally, you want representation from all areas of your organization.

Who can see sensitive information?

Another common challenge for small businesses is the sharing of sensitive information, especially if it's privately owned.

If you can't share your financial reports with everyone, you may need to hold certain individuals back from the long-term goal setting, budgeting, and parts of the yearly strategic process.

Oftentimes, this group is referred to as the Executive team and is made up of C-level people.

Be honest with yourself and your team. Let them know why they are or are not part of certain steps.

People need factual data to create an achievable plan. If you can't be transparent with all of the people involved, it will impact the quality of the collaboration and the resulting plan.

Who will make the final decisions?

Decide up front who will be accountable for approving the final plan. This individual will have the final say over the yearly strategic plan, the strategic priorities, and the budget for the organization.

For most organizations, this will be the CEO.

Determine the Right Amount of Strategy

A good strategic plan aligns the organization around a common purpose, motivates staff, increases trust in the leadership team, and optimizes the use of everyone's time.

The key to successful strategic planning is to set "minimal, yet meaningful" strategic priorities.

Choosing the right amount of strategy is critical for success. Too few priorities and the organization may not move fast enough. Too many and the organization will lose focus and fail to achieve its goals.

Do you have departments of one? Or are your departments especially small?

If you run a flat organization, or you have departments of one or two, consider skipping department planning.

When there are only one or two people per department, managers are usually doing the work themselves to move the company forward and this work will usually fall beneath at least one strategic priority.

Do you have several layers of departments or a matrixed organization?

For larger organizations with more complex hierarchies, some thought must be put towards how to define and execute department projects. Will everyone plan against the organization's strategic priorities? Or, similar to OKRs, will the layer below plan against the priorities of the layer above? If the latter, you will need to factor in more time to allow each layer to perform its planning so it can cascade down to the next layer.

We outline some strategies in the Department Planning

Ultimately, you want to take advantage of the creativity and expertise of all of the employees and establish a plan that gives every individual a voice in strategic planning.

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A typical established mid-sized business will want one or two long-term goals, a maximum of five strategic priorities, two to three priorities for each department, and one or two individual goals for every staff member.

The ceremony around individual goal setting is meant to help develop staff and prepare them for advancement.

Are you established enough to support individual goal setting?

The ceremony around individual goal setting is meant to help develop staff and prepare them for advancement.

However, for startups and smaller companies, individual goal setting can create a lot of unwelcome expectations and overhead.

It sets expectations for:

- Regular wage increases that an early-stage start-up may not be in the position to commit to.
- Learning and development. Company budgets may be too tight to support training costs
- Advancement into more senior roles which may not be available or vacant

While it isn't realistic to run a company for the long term without addressing some form of employee development, smaller companies and startups need the flexibility to run ad-hoc and survive as long as they can by placing bigger bets on sales and growth.

Do you have a long-term strategic plan?

Do you have a picture of what your organization will look like in 10 years? Or maybe just the next 3? It's not uncommon for businesses that are just starting out to wing it for the first few years.

Take a moment to consider if your purpose statement will be sufficient to drive year-end planning.

A long term strategic plan will:

- Establish an optimistic future version of the organization to inspire and motivate the team
- Set financial targets for the organization: revenue, costs, profit, EBITA, etc.
- Set the tone for the amount of growth the company expects and how aggressive it will pursue its goals
- Identify the risk the organization is willing to take to achieve its vision

Without a focus on the future, the strategic priorities established in the next step may not all point in the same direction, or worse, may not move the organization forward at all.

We've provided a brief overview of how to create a long-term strategic plan later in this book. Consider reviewing it before you jump into yearly strategic planning.

Create a Plan Tailored to Your Organization

Review the strategic planning process

If this is not your first time through the process, review the feedback you received following the previous sessions. If this is your first time, follow the roadmap provided in this book as a starting point and ask yourself the following questions.

Use the headings of this chapter to create an outline for your strategic planning plan.

What information needs to be collected?

To make good decisions, you need good information. To make the right decisions, you need the right information.

An overview of the most common types of reports and activities for gathering information will be available in later chapters. Review and identify which supports your organization.

- Do you have direct customers? How will you solicit feedback from them?
- Do you manufacture a product? What data do you need to know how well it is performing?
- Did you complete any major projects recently?
- Did you collect any lessons learned that might be valuable?
- Do you have a large number of employees? How will you bring their ideas to the table? How will you measure their engagement?
- Do you know what your competition is up to? How will you learn where you stand in the race?

Create a list of every report, document, or process you will use to gather information and who will be responsible for it.

A good place to start is to enlist each department head to supply one report that encapsulates their area of business.

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Write down your definitions

Oftentimes, companies have established norms they've followed for years that you may be up against.

One of the more challenging ones is answering the question "what is a goal?". We promote the use of "strategic priority" for yearly planning because of the explicitness of the word. You may be stuck with the terminology of goal, objective, initiative, or even something ambiguous like "rock".

Choose one, write down the definition, stick with it, and reinforce it at every opportunity.

Regardless of what you call it, you need a word that can identify something specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound.

Yes, this is the very definition of a "SMART" goal. However, since organizations use the term goal to describe their long-term, multi-year, big bets, using goals to describe your focus for the year ahead just ads to the confusion.

Uncertainty over definitions commonly derails even the most organized meetings.

What other words does your organization use that frequently trip people up? **Create a company glossary that you can build up over time.** To get you started, we've started a **glossary** of the terms used in this book.

Disagreements on the process can quickly derail your efforts. Communicate your process to your team early and **get buy-in.**

How long are you planning for?

Are you performing strategic planning for the year ahead or just the next quarter?

If you're just starting out, things might be more dynamic. What you do this month might drastically impact what you do next month. It might make sense to keep the priorities focused on the near term and refresh them every quarter.

Once your organization is established, it's most common to plan for a year ahead. This gives your team a North Star to work towards throughout the year.

This is more critical than you might think.

3 month strategic priorities are typically projects, whereas a 1 year strategic priority is comprised of a number of initiatives to reach an objective.

If you don't set this expectation up front you will run into issues during the Ideate phases as it is very difficult to compare the priority of a project to the priority of an objective.

Is there clarity in your process?

Create a schedule that identifies and summarizes each step of strategic planning. You will use this schedule in the next step to communicate and get buy-in for the process.

If this is your first time through the yearly planning process, use the high-level schedule supplied in this book and tailor it to suit your needs.

Your schedule should include the major milestones of the process and dates that identify roughly when they will be completed.

Include in your schedule when:

- deliverables are due,
- major meetings will be scheduled, and
- results are communicated

As you build your schedule, consider what you get out of each step and how it adds value to the next. Ideally, each step should add to the clarity of the plan. You can't (or shouldn't) plan department priorities without strategic priorities, for example.

Depending on your organization, you may be missing a step, or you have too many.

Disagreements on the process can quickly derail your efforts. Communicate your process to your team early and get buy-in.

How often will you review throughout the year?

We recommend that you meet once a month to review the status of department projects, and then quarterly to review progress on your strategic priorities. This holds all stakeholders accountable to their commitments and should provide sufficient communication to those not directly involved in a strategic priority that work is indeed getting done and we are moving forward.

However, depending on when you hold your financial year-end, it may not be possible to run 4 consecutive quarterly reviews, and it may make more sense to drop one.

At Virtira, our year-end is October 31st. Three months from October 31st is January 31st. We've learned having a quarterly review right after the holiday season in December (when many people are away for 2 weeks), is simply poor timing. To resolve this, we pushed the January review until February, moved the April review to June, and dropped the July review altogether.

Not only does this make sense for us, but it also saves our team a number of hours of preparation and discussion. Furthermore, when we start ramping up year-end planning activities in August for next year, people aren't just recently coming off a review in July.

Look ahead on your calendar. What makes sense to you and your organization?

Communicate expectations to those involved

With your plan created, your next step is to seek buy-in from everyone involved.

For some, yearly planning is a necessary evil, and the sooner they can get back to their day-to-day work the better. For others, yearly planning is a significant yearly event for everyone to collaborate and share their thoughts and ideas with the team. Meanwhile, for others, it is a fun social event that provides a break from the day-to-day doldrums. You can disappoint all three of these types of people if you don't proactively involve them in the process.

Sometimes communicating the plan needs a plan.

Think through how you will communicate the time investment and schedule to those involved Sometimes communicating the plan needs a plan.

Few people like to be told what to do. At a bare minimum, they like to be asked. Most like to think it's their idea.

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This may require skills not covered in this book, but generally and depending on your organization, your status, and your relationship with others, **you may need to meet with each person individually to sell them on the merits of their involvement.**

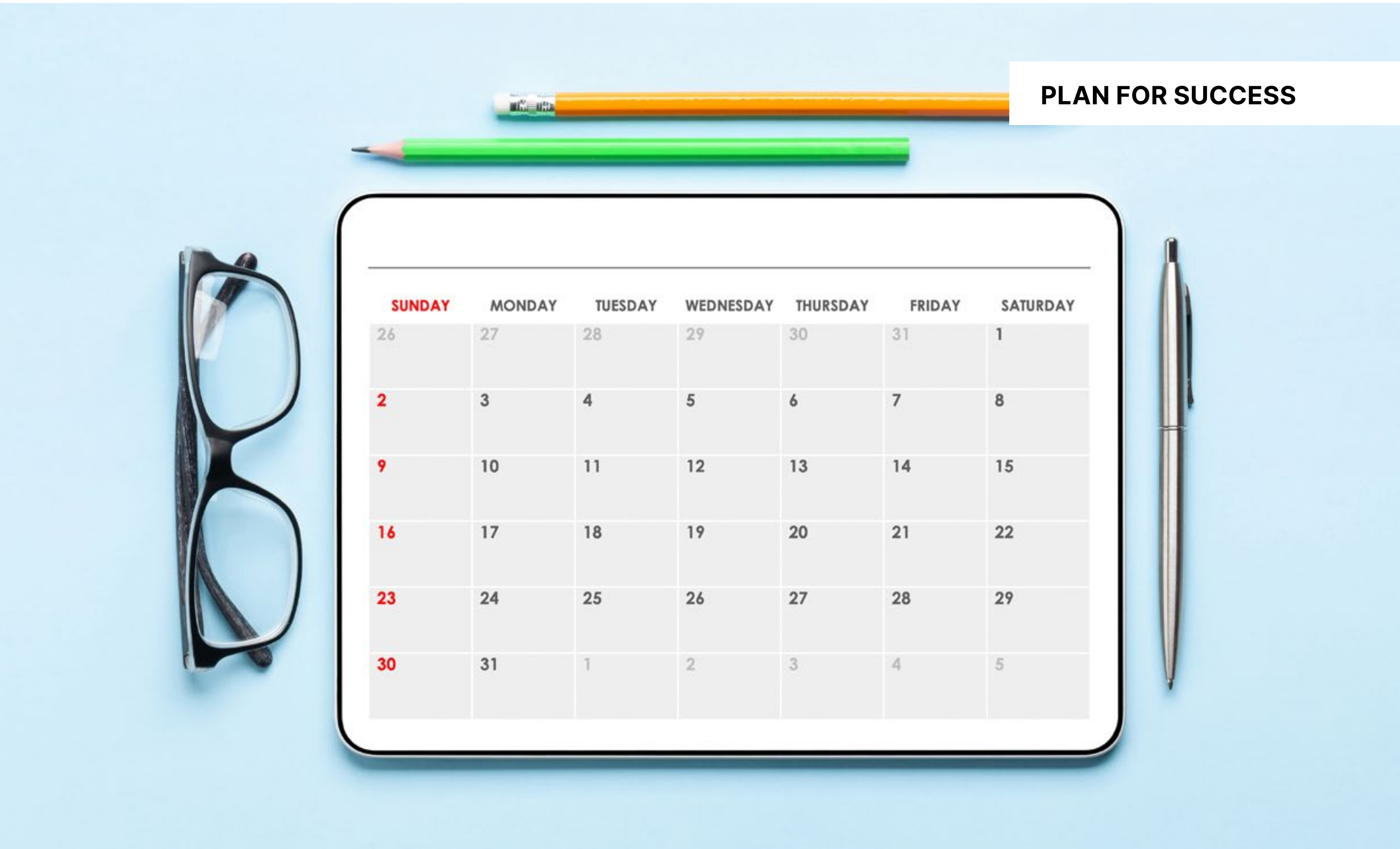
Your CEO needs to be 100% on board and have your back for the process to be successful.

Here's a communication strategy to start with that should be sufficient for most small to mid-sized companies:

1. **Get buy-in from the CEO or whoever is in charge of your organization.** Your CEO needs to be 100% on board and have your back for the process to be successful.
    - Discuss with the CEO the high-level plan
    - Be open to feedback
    - Get approval for the time investment
2. **Let the broader team know you are working to summarize the steps for strategic planning and you will soon present a draft for their feedback.**
    - This involves them early and lets them know it's being worked on. Without this step, the sudden appearance of a fairly robust plan will be a shock to some and they may push back.
3. **Review a draft plan with the CEO.**
    - Make changes to the plan based on their feedback
4. **Meet with everyone you've earmarked for the Leadership team and get buy-in.** Knowing you have the approval of the CEO will help you if there's any resistance. Take the opportunity to show them the draft of your plan.
5. **If there's someone or a group of people who will feel left out of strategic planning, meet with them individually to set their expectations.**
6. **Present your draft plan to the management team for approval. By now you should have a commitment from the major players.**
    - Depending on how it's received and the nature of any feedback you might receive, you may need to make changes and schedule a follow-up meeting.
7. **Share the finalized plan more broadly with the staff.**
    - Communicate and commit to major milestones such as when they will hear about updated strategic priorities.
    - This level of transparency also makes the Leadership Team accountable to the plan.

Tailor the above plan for your organization and reporting structure. Perhaps you have an additional layer of VPs to convince before you can move on to the directors. It could be you are the CEO of a team of 10 and you can collaboratively include everyone from the very start.

Whatever your situation, do not miss this crucial step.



Schedule Meetings

With the plan approved by your team, proactively schedule meetings in everyone's calendar for all of the major milestones.

You should start this step no later than 2 months out. This will give everyone time to move around recurring meetings and accommodate the schedule. It should also give everyone sufficient warning to avoid conflicts due to ad hoc vacations.

Block off time in calendars for yearly strategic planning

For the main event, the week of strategic planning, block off 5 to 6 hours of their day. You may not need all of that time, but it will prevent people from scheduling unrelated meetings in between planning sessions. You want people to be able to focus on planning. It won't be possible if they are context switching between multiple topics.

Avoid blocking off the whole day. Full day events are largely overlooked in people's calendars.

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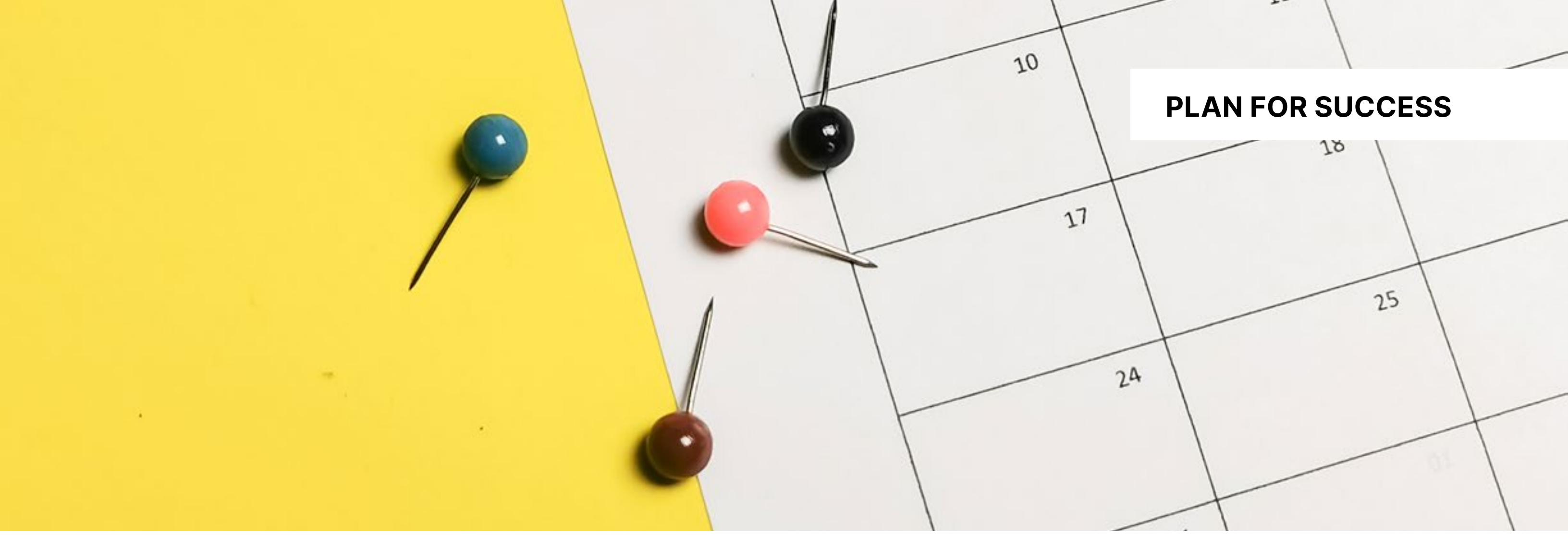


For your year-end strategic planning to wrap up by Oct 31st consider the following schedule and block these events in your calendar:

- **Sept 26 - 30:** Review week
  - 2 hours to review all of the reports
  - 2 hours to review the results of the previous year's plan
- **Oct 3 - 7:** Strategic planning week
  - Oct 3: 1 hour to set the stage: Review the schedule and process strategic planning followed by your organization's vision, mission or purpose.
  - Oct 4: Block 6 hours for the Ideate step
  - Oct 6: Block 6 hours for the Prioritize step
  - Oct 7: Block 2 hours for any overflow from the Prioritize step
- **Oct 10 - 21:** Strategic Priorities are defined and departments perform their planning
- **Oct 25**
  - 2 hours to review draft strategic priorities and offer feedback
- **Oct 27**
  - 2 hours for approval of the strategic plan
- **Nov 1**
  - Communicate the plan to the whole organization

You will not use the full 6 hour block. There are natural breaks in the process, but they aren't always predictable.

You will not use the full 6 hour block. There are natural breaks in the process, but they aren't always predictable.

The facilitator needs the flexibility to allow an exercise to run over, or schedule breaks as required.

People tend to fill their calendar. If you book 2 hours and then leave time for a break, your participants might find themselves committed to another conversation exactly at the end of your meeting. This can have serious impact on a creative process, especially if you're in a heated debate, or making significant progress.

Reinforce Reporting Expectations

Schedule conversations with each of the people responsible for writing year-end reports and for collecting supporting information. These types of reports are the exact type of thing that falls off people's radar - especially when remote work is involved.

In your first conversation provide an overview of the information you're looking for and explain the value it will provide. If there's a sample from previous years, review it together and discuss what you liked about it and where you think it can be improved. If this is the first year, consider creating and sharing a template for them to follow.

We provide a starting point for all of the documentation needs in the Prepare phase.

Schedule a follow-up call at least three weeks before strategic planning to review the progress each person is making.

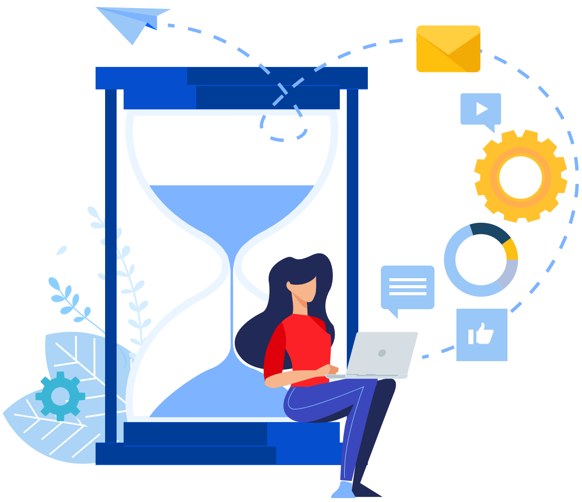
Schedule a calls one week out for everyone to present and review the reports.

Schedule Reminders for Yourself

Unless managing the strategic plan is your full-time job, you're also busy doing "real" work. It's easy for these dates to creep up on you leaving you unprepared for the big event.

Consider some of the following reminders for your calendar:

- One month out: Remind the team about yearly planning
- Every two weeks: Follow up with report writers
- The week before the review of the reports
    - Plan the agendas for your review sessions in the review step.
    - Set up your collaboration space
- On the day before the Ideate session set up your collaborative SWOT activity
- Week of planning: Remind team where we are on the schedule
- One week after planning: Remind strategic priority owners their plan is due
- One month after planning: Thank everyone involved for all their hard work.



If you are the facilitator for the strategic planning sessions, ensure you can perform the basics.

Setup your Collaboration Tools

For your strategic planning to be successful, you will need the use of a video conferencing platform and a collaborative whiteboarding tool.

There are a number of video conferencing platforms for you to choose from and the one your organization uses is likely ideal. If you are the facilitator for the strategic planning sessions, ensure you can perform the basics: share an application, mute participants, send messages to people, and record a session.

We recommend Miro for your collaborative whiteboarding tool. As of the writing of this book, it is leaps and bounds ahead of the competition and is poised to remain in the lead for the near future.

Make sure each of your participants has an account and access to Miro.

If any of your participants are new to Miro, it's recommended you take the time before strategic planning to teach them the basics.

While most will pick up the basics in 5 to 10 minutes, you will immediately lose momentum and strain the patience of your participants if they have to wait for a novice to figure out how to use the tool.

If you decide to use a different tool, ensure it:

- allows participants to collaboratively create, edit, remove and move notes
- supports a variety of shapes
- supports voting
- provides a timer
- exports images and texts
- lock items so they can't be edited by the participants
- provides a historical record of all changes

At the end of the chapter on the Prepare phase, we outline how to set up your collaboration space.

Avoid sending out links to your Miro board before the first session. It's nearly impossible to prevent people from adding stuff to the board ahead of time.

Summary

To successfully create a strategic plan, the process should start at least 2 months prior to the planning and may need to be up to 4 months prior. Starting with a purpose statement allows you to check in and ensure your goals are aligned with that statement and that there are no misunderstandings that derail strategic planning. Next, you'll need to identify who is involved at every step to ensure all relevant voices are heard and that those who have authority to make decisions are in key conversations. Having people left out can result in a lack of buy-in, while non-relevant people may slow down planning. When it comes to the amount of strategy, company size plays a crucial role. Smaller organizations can skip certain levels of planning so that they're not feeling overwhelmed, and potentially overworked. At the end of the day, strategic planning needs to be customized for each business and their needs.

Regardless of size or years in business, clarity on process is key: what the deliverables are, when they are due, when will deliverables be reviewed, who is responsible, etc.

PHASE 1: PREPARE

One of the traps yearly planning can get into, especially in person, is when people treat the strategy discussions as the entirety of the process.

When you set a meeting to discuss yearly priorities and fail to prepare for it, you end up making decisions based on incomplete, irrelevant, and sometimes incorrect information.

This chapter covers a variety of tools you can use to set your strategic yearly planning process up for success.

Plan ahead, distribute the responsibility and have the following prepared well enough ahead of time to be digested by all participants.

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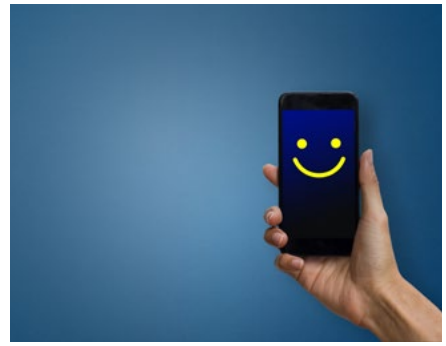
Market analysis

Includes size and share of the marketplace, trends and external forces to keep an eye on, competitors to watch out for, and the positioning of similar products and services.

Sales performance

A report on your sales for the past year, sales cycles to watch out for next year, top-performing products and services, top-performing regions and segments, and cost of sale versus revenue.

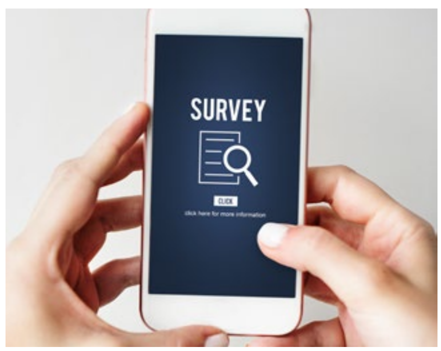


Customer experience

A summary of customer satisfaction with your product or service. May include pain points, production team performance, feature requests, response times, or any other metric to measure the experience of your customers.

Financial report

More than simple profit and loss, the financial performance report should educate the leadership team where the highest margins on products and services come from, where money is potentially being wasted, and how much runway you have.



Engagement report

Summarizes information from anonymous surveys, exit and stay interviews, and HR metrics to provide a clear picture of the overall health of your organization.

Department retrospectives

Facilitated sessions with each department to find out what's working, what's not working, and ideas for improvement. Feedback in the department retros supports department planning and gives the leadership team insights into their teams.

Successful yearly strategic planning requires preparation. It's vitally important the people involved in creating the plan for the year ahead have as much (accurate) information as possible. Without it, the resulting plan may not prepare the company for changes in the marketplace, react to customer feedback, or address employee needs.

At the end of this chapter, we provide step-by-step instructions for setting up your collaboration space.

Market Analysis

Time to take a peek outside your door and look around at the rest of the world. We get so wrapped up in our day-to-day that we can often overlook the interesting developments happening with our marketplace, our customers, and otherworldly events.

The purpose of a market analysis is to inform your leadership team of external risks and opportunities that might impact or benefit your organization.

A market analysis is typically performed by a Business Analyst or someone in the Marketing Department. A market analysis is curated from market research. The author is responsible for interpreting the data in the research as it pertains to the impact on your organization.

Use the section headers below as a template for your Market Analysis.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provide a summary of the most impactful information based on your analysis. If you are presenting this information or providing it to executives for them to read, what are the most critical points that need to be conveyed?

INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Identify the current industry your organization does business in.

- What's the current state? Is it growing? Shrinking? What is the projected growth or decline?
- What is the size of the industry?
  - Note – your target market is a subset of your industry
- What are the current trends? What new products or services are being sold?

TARGET MARKET

Describe the people or businesses your organization does business with.

- Who is your customer?
- What is the demand for your product or service? What are their needs?
- What are their demographics? Where is it geographically vibrant?
- What is the size of your target market?

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Describe the other businesses you compete with.

- Who are your main competitors and direct threats?
  - How big are they?
  - What are their competitive advantages/ weaknesses?
  - What is their value proposition?
  - Who are their customers?
  - How much do they sell their products/ services for?
- Who are the emerging players to watch out for?
  - How are they innovating in your space?
- Who are you indirectly losing business to?
  - What other products or services are your customers opting to pay for or put up with instead of engaging with you?

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EXTERNAL FORCES

Describe forces that impact you, your customer, your competitors, or your industry. Consider political, environmental, economic, regulatory, and social factors

- What are some notable newsworthy events that might impact your organization?
    - Were there major announcements from the government?
    - Was there a recent change in interest rates that will affect your customers?
    - Was there a recent disaster or catastrophe that you need to be considerate of?
    - Will there be an election in your country?
- What opportunities or threats might affect your organization?

If your organization has budget, work with an external consultant to prepare your market research. Not only will this save you time, it will provide an unbiased view of the world and might end up being the best investment you make all year.

There are many larger firms who preform yearly market research for most common market segments. The information you need may already be readily available.

Sales Performance Report

The year-end sales report summarizes the performance of the sales team and provides leadership with insights into the top-selling products and services, their most attractive characteristics, and areas where you perform better than others.

It needs to be more than just top-line totals. It should provide insights and trends based on a thorough review of the sales data.

The Sales Performance Report is typically performed by the VP of Sales or your most senior sales team member.

Use the section headers below as a template for your Sales Performance Report.

Where possible, make use of charts and graphs to illustrate trends.

For each of the reports below, decide how you will present the data based on what communicates the information in the clearest possible way for your organization.

- Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly
- Day of the week
- Targets vs actuals
- Repeat vs new
- By customer and/or customer segment
- By sales team or individual
- By region
- By channel
- By product/service
- Percentage change over the previous reporting period

Be sure to call out any anomalies such as an increase in sales for a single month or a sharp decline at a certain part of the year. Provide explanations and observations for these events.

Be editorial. Only include information that provides value or tells a story. The report should interpret the data. Not drown people in a myriad of colourful charts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provide a summary of the most impactful insights included in this report. If you are presenting this information or providing it to executives for them to read, what are the most critical points that need to be conveyed?

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

If your organization uses KPIs as a way to measure performance, lead with a summary of KPI performance over the past year.

Some KPIs you might consider:

- Average time to close
- Revenue per sale
- Customer lifetime value
- Churn

YEAR TO DATE ACTUALS

Include in this section charts or tables of the top-line metrics from sales for the year.

Generally, people will want to know:

- How many sales did we close?
- How does that compare to our forecast?
- Why are the actuals different from the forecast?
- What products/services sold the most/least?
- What was our gross profit/profit margin?
- Which product/service brings in the most revenue?

SALES PIPELINE

It's one thing to know how many sales were closed, it's more important to convey how healthy the sales pipeline looks going into the new year.

- Prospects
- Leads
- Proposals
- Contracts in negotiation

Expand on the sales pipeline metrics and answer the following questions:

- Where are our best leads coming from?
- What is our sales cycle?
- What are our projected sales in the coming quarter?
- When during the year should we expect lulls and spikes

Be editorial. Only include information that provides value or tells a story. The report should interpret the data. Not drown people in a myriad of colourful charts.

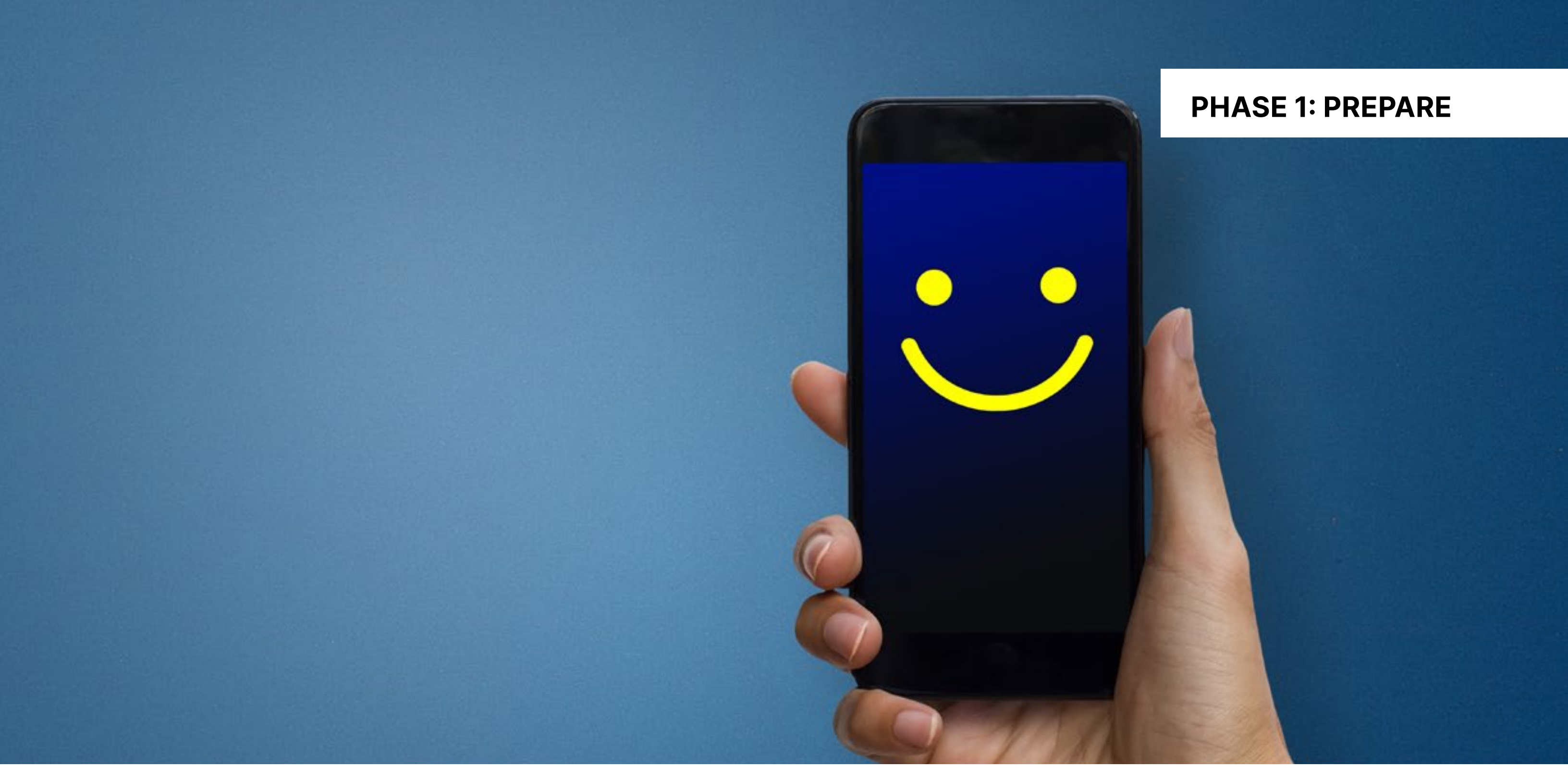
SALES PERFORMANCE

Along with the sales results, share evidence to communicate the efficiency of the sales team.

- Conversion rates
- Time/Cost to close
- Sales calls versus leads

By looking at the sales performance, the leadership team will want to know

- Who is our ideal customer?
- Which product/service is easiest to sell?
- What motivates customers to buy?
- Why do leads and/or prospects choose not to purchase?
- Where are the bottlenecks?



Customer Experience Analysis

Crucial to any review is an analysis of your customers. They are why you are in business. However, far too many businesses fail to keep a pulse on their customers.

Depending on the nature of your business, you may already be gathering customer feedback from support channels or periodically from your Account Managers.

The Customer Experience report aims to summarize the quality of your customer's relationship with you.

The Customer Experience report is typically performed by the head of Operations, Production, or the lead supervisor of customer support.

Use the section headers below as a template for your Customer Experience Analysis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provide a summary of the most impactful information based on your analysis. If you are presenting this information or providing it to executives for them to read, what are the most critical points that need to be conveyed? Include in this section what data you collected and how you went about it.

OVERVIEW

Provide a summary of who your customers are and the products/services they consume.

- Total customers. It's surprising how many executives just want to know how many customers you have.
- Top customers based on how you measure customer size. This could be revenue, hours sold, interactions, or a KPI specific to your organization
- Net promoter score
- Average customer support rating

SUMMARY OF CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Look for ways to gather feedback directly from your customers. Common approaches are:

Surveys
Send an email to all your customers with a link to an online survey. While these allow for the ease of gathering feedback, response rates are often lower than with other methods. You may wish to consider an incentive, such as a gift card to those who reply.

Interviews
Schedule a call with some or all of your customers to ask them questions in person. This approach requires more time investment, but it gives you the opportunity to expand on the answers your customers give. Be wary that interviews can sometimes skew more positively because people tend to avoid providing negative feedback in persona. You can compensate by having someone other than the people they work with perform the interview.

Customer service requests
If your organization provides a method for customers to initiate a support request online, include follow-up questions with each support request. The support requests themselves will provide you with a gold mine of insights. Look for common issues, trends, requests.

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Use the following questions to get the best from your efforts:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): Standard question “Based on your experience, how likely is it that you would recommend our (product, brand or service) to your friends, family or colleagues?”
  - Why did you provide that score?
- What problems are you solving by using our products/services?
- Does our product/service meet your expectations?
  - Why?
- How could we improve our product/service?
- What else would you like us to know?

Avoid questions that provide ambiguous “feel good” metrics or generate broad answers that you won’t be able to follow up on.

Design questions that produce answers that are actionable. Avoid questions that provide ambiguous “feel good” metrics or generate broad answers that you won’t be able to follow up on. It’s okay to put specific questions on your survey to target specific topics you are currently working on or concerned about, but be careful not to automatically carry them forward into future surveys.

SUMMARY OF CUSTOMER ANALYTICS

If your business is product-based or keeps detailed records of customer calls and interactions, prepare reports that summarize their activities.

- Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly interactions/usage
- Top features/requests
- Churn, cancellation, abandonment rate
- Support requests, reply time, time to resolve/close, average per customer, customer satisfaction

Keep your report focused on the experience your customer or client has with your organization. Save financial metrics such as cost of goods sold and customer lifetime value for the financial report.

Financial Report

The Financial Report has been around since the dawn of business and there are many different versions and reasons the Finance department might generate one. For this reason, the preparation of a Financial Report is beyond the scope of this training.

Work with the lead in your Finance department to ensure the report they generate fits the needs of year-end planning. Depending on your organization, you may need to ask for multiple reports for different audiences. It’s not uncommon for a private business to hide all of the ins and outs of its revenue and expenses from some or all of the people responsible for running the company.

The purpose of the Financial Report in year-end planning is to support decisions made in Sales, Marketing, Operations, and other departments.

It should help answer questions such as:

- Which products/services generate the most/least revenue? This is especially powerful if you can connect this to sales and marketing efforts
- Which clients/customers generate the most/least revenue?
- What is the lifetime value of our clients/customers?
- What is our cost of sale?
- What is our cost to hire?
- What time of the year/month/week do we make the most revenue?
- What are the cost of internal projects?
- How long is our runway?
- What are our financial risks?
- What areas of business are cost-effective/ineffective?

Your organization likely also has some KPIs that are financially driven.

Employee Engagement Report

The Engagement Report summarizes information from four critical sources to give you a picture of the health of your team.

On a quarterly basis, your organization should run a simple survey to ask for feedback from your team members

Your HR department should run exit interviews with everyone who leaves the company

Your HR department should be involved in periodic stay interviews

Summary of HR metrics such as employee turnover

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By diving into the long-form answers, you get further insights into pain points.

Employee Satisfaction Survey

Similar to the net promoter score question you ask your clients/customers, you should send a similar anonymous survey to your staff to ask:

How likely are you to recommend [your organization] as a place to work? (1 lowest - 10 highest)

With a simple follow up question: *Why?*

The net promoter score is a simple calculation that helps you identify if you have more promoters than detractors. It's also a metric you can track over time and report on.

By diving into the long-form answers, you get further insights into pain points.

Go a step further and categorize the answers and track the number of people who bring up certain issues such as communication, or compensation, or trust. Then work to identify the root causes.

If you've completed an employee satisfaction survey each quarter, you will have trends you can share in your Engagement Report along with the top concerns from the staff that the leadership team should focus on.

Summary of Exit Interviews

Regardless of how someone leaves, it's vital to capture their experience with the company in an exit interview. The leaver is often more than willing to offer direct feedback about their experience with your organizations and areas that let them to the decision to look for employment elsewhere.

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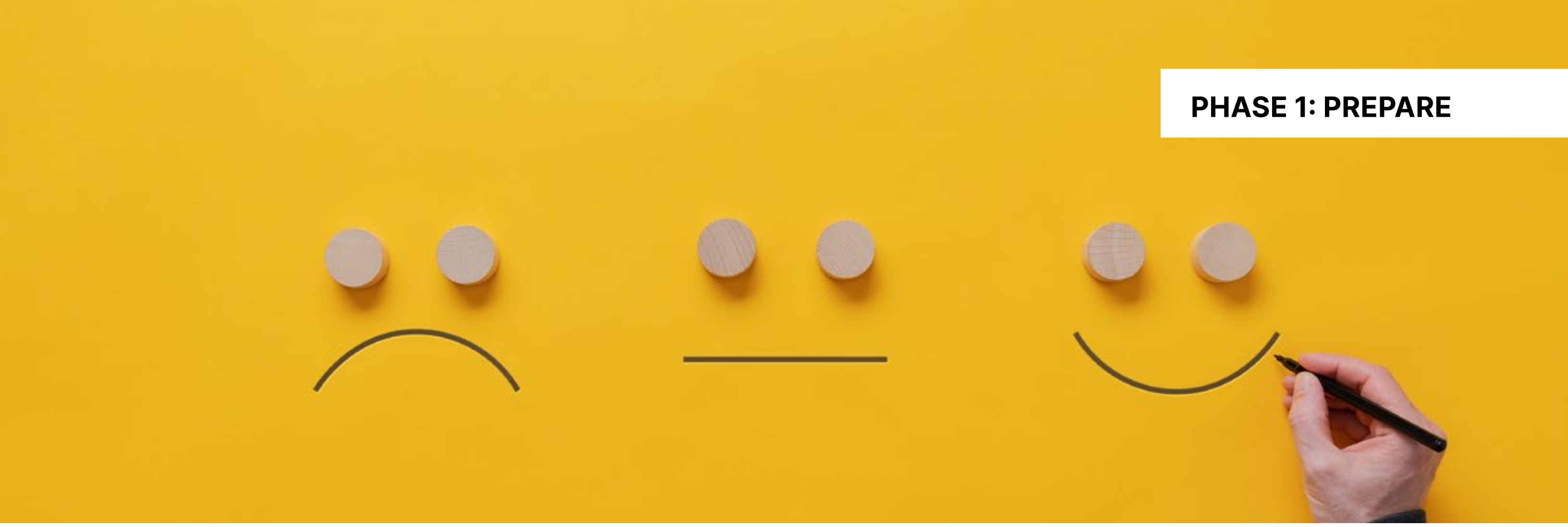

As in other reports, be careful to only include information that adds value to the conversation.

As you capture each exit interview, use the same categorization as your employee satisfaction survey and summarize the underlying topics for your Engagement Report.

Be sure to provide samples of supporting feedback but be sure to honour the privacy of your leavers.

Summary of Stay Interviews

The more proactive version of an exit interview, the stay interview is given to employees who (hopefully) have no intention of leaving. Your HR team should schedule stay interviews throughout the year with a variety of team members from a variety of areas of your business and ask similar questions to the exit interview.

In your Engagement Report, summarize the top topics from your stay interviews and provide samples of supporting feedback. Similar to your exit interviews, be sure to honour the privacy of your sources.

HR Metrics

Depending on the maturity of your organization and the tools used, you will be able to pull together a number of HR Metrics that can be used to encourage questions such as: *Why is our turnover so high?*

Employee turnover is key as it illustrates either a problem with keeping people or hiring the right people. Most organizations, small or large, can at minimal pull together a calculation of:

Number of leavers / (number of people at the start of the year + number of people hired)

You may have insights from recruitment or employee performance reports that support the health of the team.

If you use an HR Management System, look through the reports it offers for other information that helps paint a complete picture.

As in other reports, be careful to only include information that adds value to the conversation.

Department Retrospectives

Prior to yearly planning, each department will perform a retrospective to gather feedback from its team members.

A retrospective is a facilitated, collaborative meeting with a group of people using an interactive whiteboarding tool such as Miro.

Retrospectives encourage open and collaborative discussions and give a stronger voice to everyone on the team.

The Department Retrospective activity serves two purposes.

1. It provides more detailed feedback from the leadership team on ideas and areas for improvement

2. It provides department heads with feedback and inputs for department goals.

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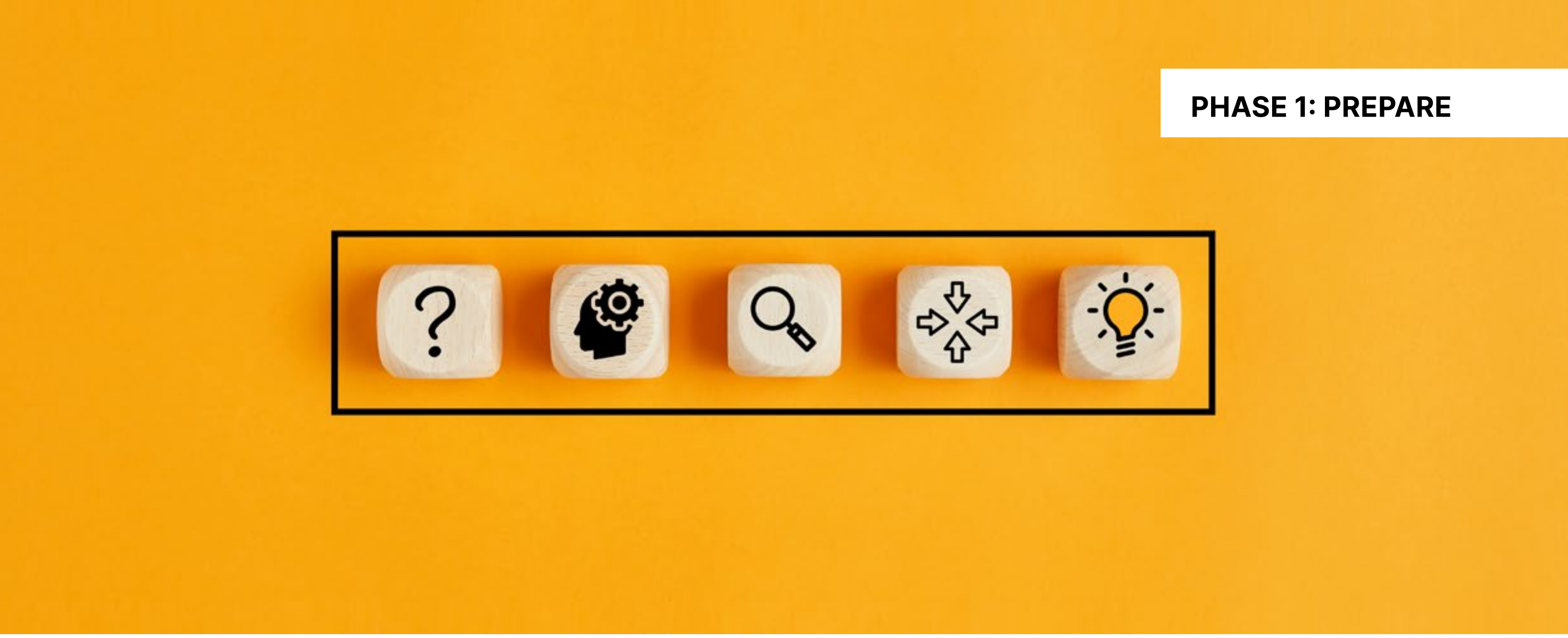

Retrospectives encourage open and collaborative discussions and give a stronger voice to everyone on the team.

Brief Overview of a Retrospective

- Schedule a 1 1/2 hour meeting for your department
- People are asked to spend the first 5-10 minutes of the meeting writing down topics for discussion
- After the 5-10 minutes, participants organize their topics into categories. **Some categories you can use:**
    - What are we doing well? What are we doing poorly? What should we start doing?
    - What should we start doing? What should we stop doing? and What should we continue doing?
    - What are some processes we should Keep, Add, do Less of, or do More of? (KALM)
- A facilitator works through each of the topics and discusses them with the team.

When you Perform a Virtual Retrospective

- Set everyone up with your collaboration tool ahead of time and make sure they can log in and know the basics before the meeting
- Give your participants a bit more time to post their thoughts. People can generate topics much faster in a more traditional, in-person setting.
    - Consider asking participants to prepare topics ahead of time and allowing them to copy and paste them into the tool.
- Give yourself more time. You will likely need an hour and a half to get through all the topics
- For best results, have someone from outside of the department run the retrospective. A skillful facilitator will be able to drill down into topics, ensure everyone's voice is heard, and maintain a decent pace for the meeting.
- Record your meeting to allow the facilitator to focus on the conversation and free them from taking detailed notes.

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After the Retrospective

Following the retrospectives, thoroughly document and share the results for each department. Summarize key findings with the leadership team so they don't have to sift through pages of notes to find important notes. Results of the retrospective can also be exported as text, quickly creating documentation from the meeting.

Select one person from the leadership team to facilitate all of the department retrospectives, and empower that individual to share the summarized results.

Running a Retrospective with a Large Team

Depending on the makeup of your organization, you may have a large department such as a support team or a large sales team.

Use the following hints to increase your success with large teams:

Break the team down into smaller groups. The obvious solution is to break your team into smaller groups of 6 to 12 people and perform a retrospective for each. This will increase the number of facilitated sessions prior to year-end planning, so consider using multiple facilitators for the job.

Limit the number of topics. While the traditional retrospective allows individuals to have as much input as they like, consider limiting the number of topics to 3 to 5 per person. Doing so can keep the number of overall topics to review down to a reasonable amount and encourage people to share only their most important feedback.

Ask for topics ahead of time, sort through them, and create a plan. You will find as you add more people to the conversation, there will be a lot of duplication. This also allows you to deal with more sensitive topics or unrelated topics before the meeting. However, be careful not to censor people's input into the yearly planning process.

Enlist the aid of a second facilitator who will review and organize the topics in real-time. This removes some of the busy work in the meeting and allows the primary facilitator to focus on the discussion.

Impose a time limit. Set a maximum amount of time for dealing with any single subject. There is typically a mix of easy, less than 10 seconds, topics, and tough topics that get people into heated debates. Commit at the start of the meeting to host a follow-up conversation on anything that takes more than 2 minutes.

Set Up Your Collaboration Space

Throughout the strategic planning process, you will make use of a collaborative whiteboard tool to engage your team and involve them in the planning process. We use Miro for our collaborative whiteboard tool.

Create Your Board and Add the Virtira Strategic Planning Miro Template

Use a descriptive name. You will continue to refer back to this board throughout the year, especially at the end of each quarter. Add the Virtira Strategic Planning for Remote Organizations Miro template found here to your board.

Remove All Access

Before going too much further, make sure you, and you alone have access to the board. You will give access to the board to the participants when it's time. Every organization seems to have that one individual who won't read instructions and will jump in ahead of time and prepopulate the board with their feedback and insights.

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Summary

The Prepare Phase is all about planning ahead. As there are several things that need to be organized it’s important that tasks are distributed to team members appropriately and even possibly hiring outside consulting firms. Your preparation should include input from your current market environment, sales, finances, HR, and operations. From each of these key areas ensure you are highlighting the information that will have the most impact. Think about what information key executives need to know to help make business decisions that will positively affect the business (both internally and in terms of sales).

When planning and organizing your meetings, ensure you have collaborative tools that allow every member of the team to have a voice. The organizer should be well-versed in how to use the tools. A number of activities should be employed to ensure the planning session is engaging and useful.

PHASE 2: REVIEW

In the previous step, your team generated a lot of information. Everything from your market analysis to the team retros and the financial report holds information vital to developing a successful strategic plan.

Unfortunately, few people will read it.

One of the sad realities of remote work is people are busy and they tend not to read everything that's thrown at them - even when it's as critical as the preparation for the year-end strategy.

To counteract this, you will

1. Plan two presentations the week before strategic planning
   - In Review Session #1 you will review all of the material created during the Prepare step to support yearend strategic planning.
   - In Review Session #2 you will review the results from the previous year's plan
2. Ask all participants to do some homework in preparation for the Ideate step
3. Host a kick-off for your week of strategic planning and review your organization's purpose and core values and give your CEO an opportunity to share a personal message.

Following your strategic planning kick-off, set up the Collaborative SWOT activity based on the homework you assigned the week prior.

Review Session #1: Year-End Reports

Each owner of a year-end report will present the salient points from their report.

This does two things:

1. It forces people to think about the data they've collected. Instead of simply compiling every possible analytical report or chart, they now need to identify the information that matters to the organization. It will encourage people to look for trends and anomalies in the data and answer the question "so what?".

2. It gives a more tangible deadline than simply delivering a document. It's very easy to be a couple of days late delivering a report. It's far more difficult to be unprepared to discuss your report in front of your peers.

Your agenda should give 10 to 15 minutes for each person to present and then 5 to 10 minutes for questions. This works out to an average of 20 minutes per presentation. If you start on time you should be able to fit 6 presentations into a 2-hour meeting.

Do not schedule more than 2 hours for a remote meeting. If you have more than 6 presentations, break it up into additional meetings.

A facilitator is recommended for this meeting since it'll be easy to deep dive into many of the subjects.

Questions should only be used to clarify - not debate or discuss.

The goal is to bring attention to all of the information that was collected. Participants should be encouraged to follow up after the meeting. If an important topic needs to be resolved before strategic planning, get permission from the participants to schedule a follow meeting with everyone, or schedule a follow up with the interested parties.

If appropriate, take the time to celebrate the end of a successful year.

Review Session #2: Previous Year's Plan

If you performed strategic planning last year, you should put your previous plans to rest before creating new ones.

The outcomes from the strategic priorities from the previous year are presented by their owners.

This should be similar to the quarterly review process. Each presentation should answer the following questions:

- What did we say we'd do?
- What did we do?
- Were we successful? If not, why?
- What did we learn?

This holds owners accountable for their strategic priority and can help craft more realistic and achievable priorities next year.

Similar to the first review session, plan for about 20 minutes per strategic priority: 10 to 15 minutes to deliver the presentation and 5 to 10 minutes for clarifying questions.

If appropriate, take the time to celebrate the end of a successful year.

Following the second review session, be sure to assign homework for all of the participants.

Homework for the Participants

Following the presentations and the week before strategic planning week, you will ask participants to prepare for the SWOT activity.

Based on their understanding of the material presented, each participant will prepare a list of:

Strengths
What internal qualities give the organization an advantage over the competition?

Weaknesses
What internal barriers prevent the organization from achieving peak performance?

Opportunities
What external possibilities could give your organization a competitive advantage?

Threats
What external risks jeopardize the future of the company?

Ask that everyone keep their ideas to themselves and not share their feedback with anyone but the facilitator.

It's recommended participants provide ONLY three of each. This will force participants to select what they believe to be the most important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, instead of simply trying to see who can create the longest list.

The participants will be asked to provide their SWOT feedback no less than a day before the start of strategic planning to give the facilitator time to set up the activity.

Find time before kicking off strategic planning to [set up your collaboration space.](#)

Strategic Planning Kick-Off

As the name suggests the function of the Strategic Planning Kick-Off is to set the ball rolling for your week of strategic planning.

You will likely schedule this session on a Monday for an hour and a half. The next session, the Ideate session, happens the following day. It's not recommended that you host them both on the same day, as you need people to arrive fresh and ready to start for the Ideate sessions.

The agenda of the Strategic Planning Kick-Off is as follows.

Time	Activity
9:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
9:15 AM	Confirm the Schedule
9:35 AM	Ground Rules Activities
9:55 AM	Set the Stage
10:25 AM	Next Steps

Welcome and Icebreaker

It's vitally important to set everyone's mind at ease and focus them on this conversation. This will be one of many meetings your participants have throughout the day and their minds may be all over the place.

Give everyone a chance to connect and ensure everyone has their technology working properly.

Briefly review the agenda for the session and get things kicked off with an icebreaker.

Get buy-in from everyone before moving forward. Disagreements with the process are a sure-fire way to derail your week.

Confirm the Schedule

Review the schedule you provided prior to strategic planning and briefly discuss the expectations from each session. Explain what their inputs, outputs, and activities are. Review out how long each is and that there will be opportunities for breaks.

Give people an opportunity to ask questions. Get buy-in from everyone before moving forward. Disagreements with the process are a sure-fire way to derail your week.

If you've done your pre-work, this won't be the first time they've seen this schedule and have already had an opportunity to work through any disagreements.

Set the Ground Rules

Run the team through a ground rules activity to set the rules governing the sessions in the weeks to come.

The Ground Rules activity serves three purposes:

1. It collaboratively builds a list of ground rules for the team to follow for the week ahead
2. It provides everyone with an introduction to the tool you will use to collaboratively whiteboard.
3. It gives the facilitator the opportunity to see who will need more help or more encouragement than others.

Set the Stage

Now that you've reviewed the schedule and confirmed the ground rules, it's time to get everyone on the same page and motivated.

As an annual ritual to kick off strategic planning, have the CEO or another company leader remind everyone why they are in business by reviewing the mission, vision, and/or purpose statements.

Next, the CEO should review the company's core values and reaffirm what each means to them and your organization. While the ground rules will guide participation in the sessions, the core values will guide the decisions that are made.

If available, the Long-Term Strategic Plan should be reviewed to ensure everyone knows the long-term goals and targets are for the organization. These will help guide decisions during the Prioritize phase.

Finally, the CEO will typically take the opportunity to share a personal message based on the current state of affairs. This might include a call to action, a challenge to overcome, a significant opportunity to take advantage of, or a reminder of the importance of yearly planning.

Next Steps

Thank everyone for their attention and participation in strategic planning and let them know when the next session starts.

If you are missing anyone's homework, now is your last chance to ask people to supply their top three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the organization.

Prior to the start of the next session, be sure to set up your collaborative SWOT activity.

Take a moment to confirm everyone is alignment with the purpose. If there is disagreement at this level, do not move ahead with strategic planning.

Regroup, and reassess your organizations purpose before setting a strategic plan that doesn't have the full buy-in of the team.

Summary

Deadlines and presentations are a key step to the Review phase. They help hold everyone accountable but also allow other team members to ask clarifying questions about the tasks that were completed. Two types of presentations should be completed: Year End Reports and the Previous Year's Plan. After the presentations participants have homework that will help them prepare for the upcoming strategic planning session.

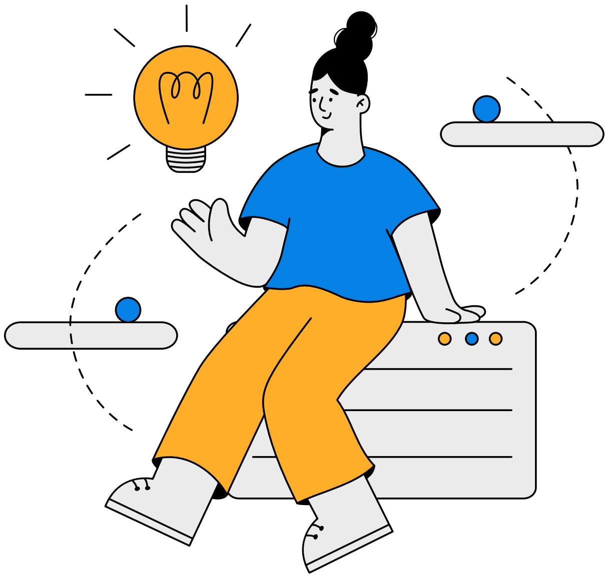
Your Kick-Off meeting will help set the tone for your week of strategic planning. As part of this meeting ensure everyone is clear on the long-term goals and targets of the company.

PHASE 3: IDEATE

The purpose of this step is to generate ideas and lay the groundwork for successful strategic planning.

Schedule a 6-hour block for participants to complete this step. You will not use all of this time, but it will give the facilitator the flexibility to move the schedule around as the day progresses.

Before you start your day, set up the Collaborative SWOT activity.



Schedule

Expect the schedule to be fairly fluid based on the number of participants and their engagement level.

If everything were to go by clockwork, the day should look like this:

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
10:10 AM	Review the schedule for the week
10:15 AM	Review the ground rules
10:20 AM	Review the Epiphany Box
10:25 AM	Explain the collaborative SWOT exercise
10:30 AM	Collaborative SWOT - Part 1: Discuss and Prioritize
12:00 PM	Take a Break
1:00 PM	Collaborative SWOT - Part 2: Generate ideas for Opportunities
2:00 PM	Take a Break
2:30 PM	Collaborative SWOT - Part 2: Generate ideas for Threats
3:30 PM	Wrap Up

Notes for the Facilitator

The ideas generated in this phase will be prioritized in the next phase. It's critical the facilitator keep the conversation between the participants positive and productive.

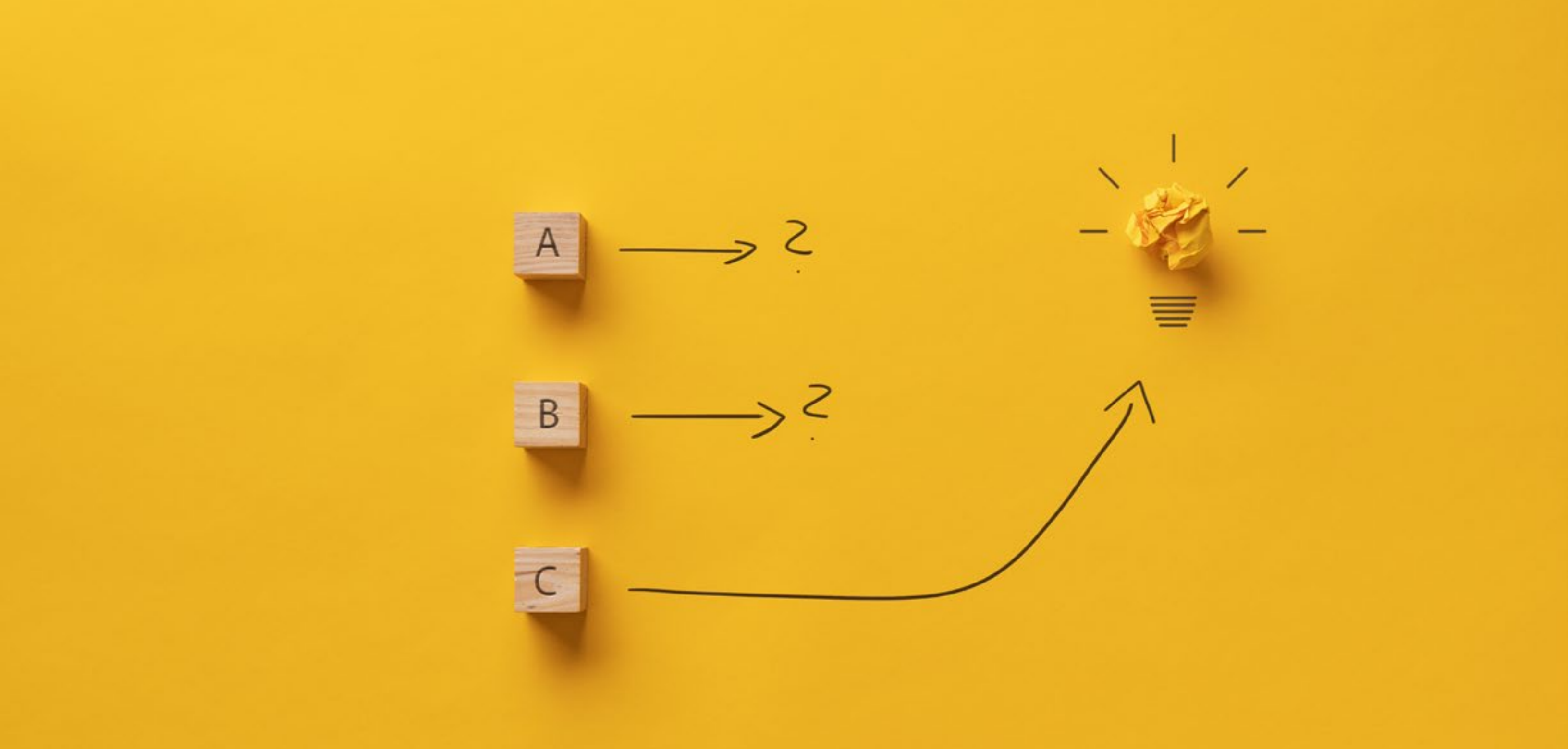
There is no place in this phase for discussion or disagreement. The facilitator must reinforce that there will be a time to debate and discuss all ideas in the coming phases.

Being creative and interacting with others can be taxing work.

The facilitator must keep an eye out for burnout among participants.

When people stop contributing, start resisting or showing signs of frustration, it might be time for a break.

If the "well runs dry" before the end of the exercise, you may have to push the remainder of the session to the next day.



PHASE 4: PRIORITIZE

The Collaborative SWOT activity in the previous phase generated a pile of ideas based on your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. **Now we take these ideas and filter them down to the key strategic priorities for the year ahead.**

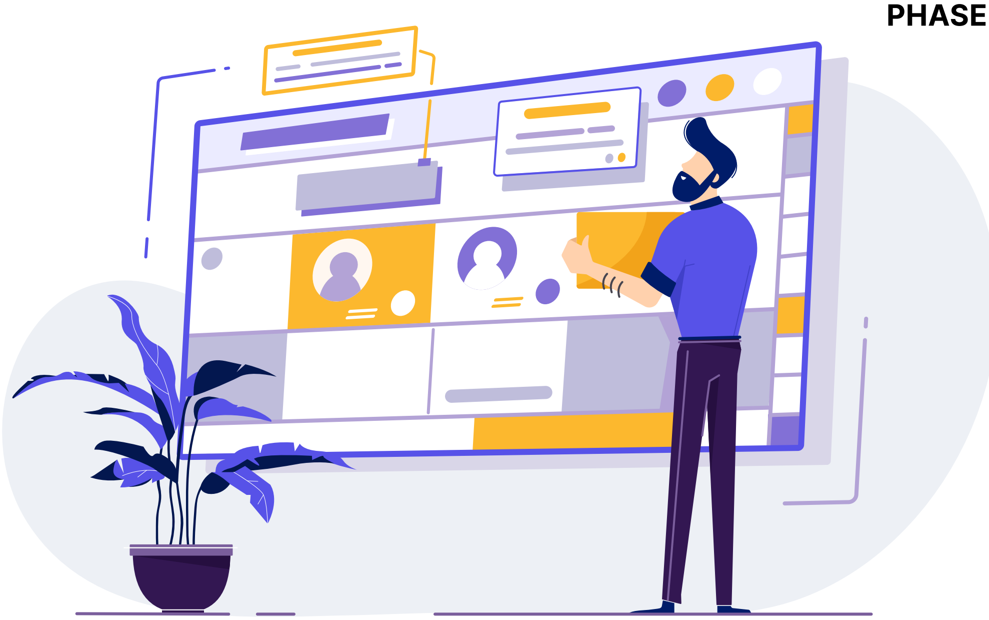
The Sort part of the Sort and Combine activity separates all the ideas into departmental and cross-departmental ideas. This tends to immediately reduce the number of ideas that need to be discussed or considered by half.

Then, the Combine part of the activity organizes strategies into strategic themes, leaving the participants with about 20 to 30 strategic themes.

The Rank activity is then used to reduce the strategic themes even further by challenging participants to identify which of the strategic themes are truly critical to hit the organization's long-term goals. This tends to further reduce the field to 6 to 10 strategic themes.

Finally, through the Prioritize activity, the participants pick the top 5 strategic priorities for the organization for the next year*.

* The traditional timeline for strategic planning is **one year**, but depending on your company maturity, you may opt to plan for the **next quarter**, or **6 months.**



Schedule

The schedule will be fairly fluid based on the number of strategies you have to work through and the engagement of the participants.

If everything were to go by clockwork, the day should look like this:

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
10:10 AM	Review the ground rules
10:15 AM	Review where you are in the schedule
10:20 AM	Sort and Combine activity
12:00 PM	Take a Break
1:00 PM	Rank activity
2:00 PM	Take a Break
2:30 PM	Prioritize activity
3:00 PM	Wrap Up

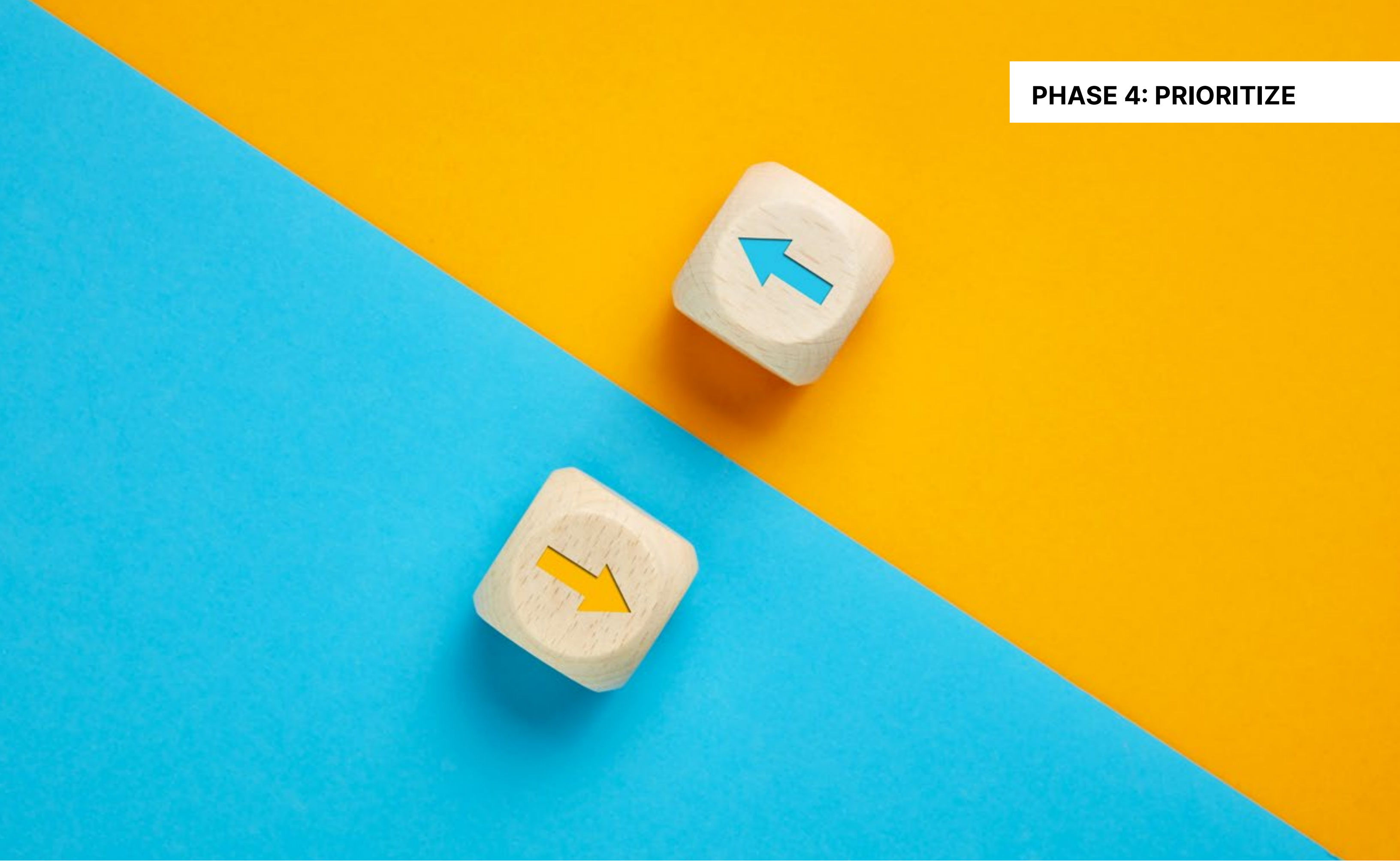
Keep an eye out for burnout, or diminished engagement from some or all participants.

Notes for the Facilitator

It's during the Rank and Prioritize activities that you should experience the highest engagement from the participants. The decisions made in these activities will set the strategic priorities for the year ahead.

Keep an eye out for burnout, or diminished engagement from some or all participants. Confirm along the way if everyone has enough energy and excitement to proceed. If not, move the remaining steps to the next day. If you've set your schedule up properly, you will have a free block scheduled with everyone at the end of the week.

Use the polling feature of your meeting platform to get an honest assessment from everyone.



Summary

The Ideate Phase is intended to be positive and productive. However, it is done over the course of a day so it's important that facilitators both manage the time properly and look for ways to engage team members throughout the session.

The Prioritize Phase also requires proper facilitation as it can take up 6 hours of a day during your strategic planning week. This phase is all about taking the ideas from the Ideate Phase and sorting, ranking, and prioritizing them. Watch carefully for meeting burn-out and push tasks to the next day if needed.

PHASE 5: DEFINE

Most organization stop their yearly planning after they select their priorities for the year. This is a mistake. By not taking time to further define the expectations of each strategic priority you run the risk of the goalposts moving as people's memory fade over time.

Classically, once an organization selects its priorities for the year, it becomes the responsibility of the departments to do their planning, using the organization's strategic priorities as a guide.

As part of the prioritize activity, each strategic priority is assigned an owner. It's the responsibility of the owner to ensure cross-functional projects and department priorities align to form a cohesive plan.

The work done in this phase promotes cross-functional collaboration and gives the organization an opportunity to evaluate if the selected priorities are in fact achievable and realistic – especially when taken in the context of the whole plan. If, for example, two or more priorities depend on the same resource, one is bound to fail.

To wrap up the define phase, the leadership team meets again to review the proposed plans – giving a final opportunity to catch an oversight.

You will be grateful when issues and concerns are revealed early in the process, and not after you've communicated your plans broadly to everyone in your organization.

High-Level Steps for the Define Phase

The define phase is less prescriptive and will depend heavily on the strategic priorities you selected and the team of people you are working with.

Strategic priority owners can expect a small investment of time to:

- Meet with colleagues to discuss the priority
- Create a strategic priority one-sheet
- Follow up and communicate with strategic priority stakeholders

The goal is to end the two weeks with a clear picture of what's expected in the next quarter along with a rough road map of the work you will do for the rest of the year for each of your strategic priorities.

On rare occasions, the process of reviewing and documenting the strategic priority will uncover challenges that need to be resolved before strategic planning can complete successfully. This is, however, a good thing. You will be grateful when issues and concerns are revealed early in the process, and not after you've communicated your plans broadly to everyone in your organization.

Define Phase – Week 1

During the first week of the define phase, owners of strategic priorities will select people to work with, host a discussion to clarify expectations, and prepare draft strategic priority one-sheets.

As the owner of the overall planning efforts, you will follow up with strategic priority owners throughout the week and ensure they:

- Select their teams within the first couple of days.
- Schedule meetings to clarify expectations of their priority.
- Complete a draft strategic priority one-sheets by the end of the week.

Owners Select Teams

Owners should not define their strategic priorities in a silo. Their first step is to gather input and feedback from across the team. It's recommended they identify 2 to 3 people to work with who can help define and expand on the expectations of the strategic priority.

The people they select need not be on the leadership team or even involved with strategic planning. They can be selected from anywhere across the organization. This gives the owners the opportunity to work with key individual contributors who may hold the knowledge required to properly assess needs and establish a high-level expectation of effort.

Clarify Expectations

Within the first week following strategic planning, owners will meet with their teams and discuss the strategic priority.

Share the following information with them.

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So, you've been assigned a strategic priority? Or maybe you volunteered in the heat of the moment, and now you're wondering, what the heck did I just sign up for?

Strategic priority owners can expect a small investment of time to:

- [x] Meet with colleagues to discuss the priority
- [x] Create a strategic priority one-sheet
- [x] Follow up and communicate with strategic priority stakeholders

The goal is to create a clear picture of the time and money investment expected in the next quarter along with a rough road map for the rest of the year for each strategic priority. You want to lock in the next quarter, and rough in the year.

On rare occasions, the process of reviewing and documenting the strategic priority will uncover challenges that need to be resolved before strategic planning can complete successfully. This is, however, a good thing. You will be grateful when issues and concerns are revealed early in the process, and not after you've communicated your plans broadly to everyone in your organization.

Take some time to read through these practical next steps to get you started:

1. Establish a team of key stakeholders to work with

Keep the team to 3 – 4 (including yourself). Smaller teams tend to be better at making decisions!

- These will be the people who will be directly impacted and may be the ones doing the work.
- If there is a stalemate on a decision or how to move ahead, you are the one who will make the final call

2. Create a draft by the end of the first week

- This will give you time to circulate it more broadly and get feedback from other key people (such as the CEO and VP of Finance)

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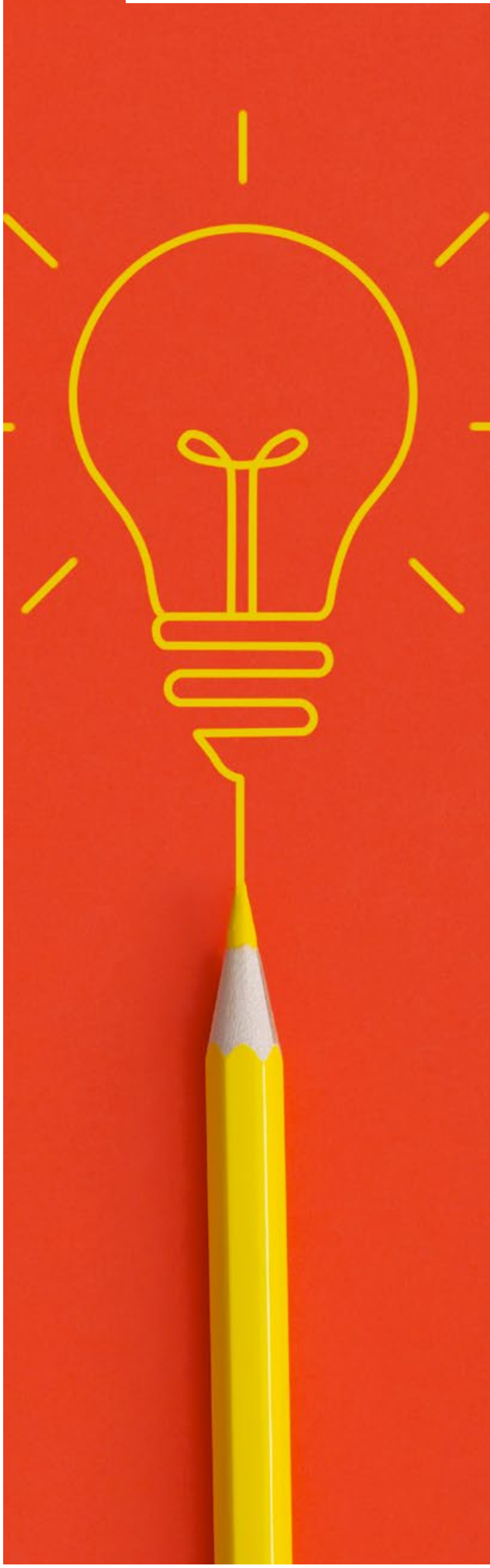

3. Meet as a team, and clarify expectations

- Confirm a shared understanding of what the strategic priority is and what it's meant to deliver by reviewing and building on the details gathered during strategic planning.
    - This is easier said than done. Often, in the throes of strategic planning, ideas are put forward and agreed to that aren't as fully baked as they should be.
    - Review the brainstorming notes for your strategic priority identified during planning.
- Understand why it was selected as a strategic priority. The team should discuss how it will impact the organization, the benefits it will bring, and why it was prioritized ahead of other options.
    - The strategic priority owner should watch out for signs of people guessing and making assumptions.
    - **If you can't get past this part, do not move on and seek clarification.**

1. **Revise the strategic priority name based on the transformation or the impact it will have**
    - Most strategic priorities come out of planning with a project-based name.
        - i.e. the don't use the name *"Do this"*
    - You should look for a name that captures what the outcome or benefit will be.
        - "**We want to** *do this*, **so that we can** achieve *this*"
2. **Establish what success will look like for the strategic priority and how it will be measured.**
    - Some success criteria were established during strategic planning.
    - Work with the team to solidify and refine.
        - Look for quantifiable results that can be measured before, during, and after. Sometimes the measurement of success needs to be included as a deliverable.
        - Avoid listing "completing the goal" as a success criteria. It is the least everyone should expect. If you don't think it will be delivered at this stage, now is the time to do something about it!

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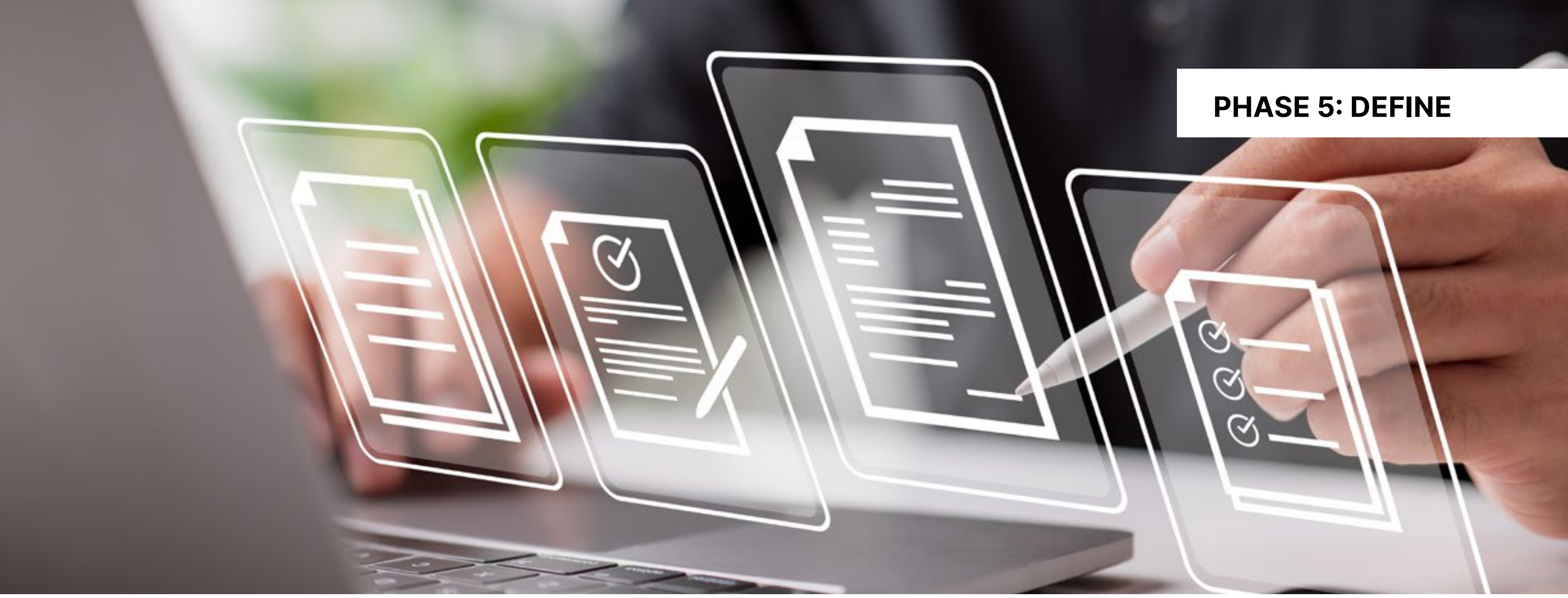

3. **Identify the steps required to be successful. This is the first step of an iterative process.**
    - The team will establish several high-level steps. These will be presented to the departments during their planning, and then finalized or revised.
    - It's recommended the team work backwards from the success criteria, iteratively asking "What do we need to accomplish, and by when".
    - The team should identify what work they will ask the departments to contribute to the strategic priority.
        - Ideally, the department manager responsible for work will be invited to the conversation and be able to speak on their team's behalf.
    - The team will also identify any cross-functional projects that may be required to accomplish the success criteria, who will likely lead them, and how they will be paid for.
        - Similar to the department asks, in an ideal world, the sponsors for any cross-functional projects will be one of the members of the team discussing the steps.
        - If done well, this will be the starting point for large cross-functional projects, giving everyone visibility into their origin.
    - Care should be taken not to be too prescriptive. You want to identify the rough, high-level steps required and leave the implementation details for the department responsible for the work.

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The strategic priority owner should *ask* the for the support of department managers. They should not *tell*. It's the responsibility of the department managers to advocate for their teams and provide realistic schedules, costs, and resourcing for the requests.

It's during the department priority planning that these plans will be locked down.

Care should be taken not to be too prescriptive. You want to identify the rough, high-level steps required and leave the implementation details for the department responsible for the work.

4. Proactively communicate budgetary and headcount requests

- If you believe your priority will require a budget for procurement or the need to hire someone reach out to the VP of Finance as soon as possible to let her know.
- Throughout the strategic planning phase, the VP of Finance is juggling department and corporate budget requests and will need your information to complete the budget

Strategic planning is completed by the approval of the budget by the CEO.

5. Communicate to the team

- Once your priority one sheet is completed and you're satisfied you've gathered all of the pertinent information, you will present your strategic priority to the Leadership team.

If all goes to plan, the details of your strategic priority must be ready to share with the rest of the team.

Define Phase - Week 2

The second week of the define phase gives departments an opportunity to meet with their teams and discuss their priorities along with those of the organization.

During this week, strategic priority owners will circulate the One Sheet to key stakeholders and ensure everyone is aware of the expectations. In most cases, managers will be directly involved in strategic priority discussions and will be able to contribute to the development of strategic priority one sheets.

Throughout this week, as the owner of the overall planning efforts, you will ensure department managers meet with their teams, and will keep tabs on the progress of each strategic priority owner.

Perform Department Planning

For organizations performing department planning, managers should wait until after the strategic priority one-sheets are drafted before working with their teams to define their priorities.

Department planning gives team members the opportunity to understand what's expected from them and provide feedback on the viability of each strategic priority. It's at this step departments identify they have the bandwidth to cover all of the asks and set realistic schedules for delivery.

While department managers are solidifying department plans, strategic priority owners should remain in close communication with department managers to catch any curveballs that might come out of department planning.

The onus is on the strategic priority owner to ensure they have a complete picture of the deliverables for their priority.

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Very little of what's in the strategic priority should be a surprise at this point.

Socialize and Get Feedback

Very little of what's in the strategic priority should be a surprise at this point. In many cases, strategic priorities are discussed well ahead of strategic planning and most people involved in the definition stage are well aware of the expectations.

The strategic priority owners will work to finalize the one-sheet through conversations and follow-up with the various stakeholders to determine the high-level investment and timing of the steps. This may include the hiring of a new resource, the purchase of software licenses or equipment, or investment in 3rd party services.

A specific budget is not necessary at this stage. Keep cost investments to rough high-level estimates.

The combined investments from all strategic priorities will be taken into consideration during the approval phase to allow the organization to do a gut check on the overall investment.

Make use of instant messages tool like Slack, Webex, or MS Teams and set up a "channel" for discussing your priority with key stakeholders. It will allow those directly involved to contribute feedback and provide transparency for those who want to remain informed.

Present Strategic Priorities

At the end of the Define phase the leadership team will meet and the owners will present the results of their work.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a final sanity check for all of the participants in the process but it also provides an accountability step for the owners.

Plan for 20 minutes per strategic priority. This will give approximately 10 minutes to present, and 10 minutes for questions.

Dedicate someone to take notes during the meeting and capture the feedback for each strategic priority owner.

Time	Activity
1:00 PM	Welcome and review schedule
1:10 PM	Present Strategic Priority 1
1:30 PM	Present Strategic Priority 2
1:50 PM	Present Strategic Priority 3
2:10 PM	Present Strategic Priority 4
2:30 PM	Present Strategic Priority 5
2:50 PM	Wrap up and next steps

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a final sanity check for all of the participants in the process but it also provides an accountability step for the owners.

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Take the last few moments of this conversation to gauge the enthusiasm for the plan.

Wrap up and Next Steps

There has been a lot of discussion to date, not just in planned conversations, but between individual participants. Disagreement at this stage is rare, but it is possible that you will encounter a senior staff member who has misgivings about one or all of the decisions made.

Based on feedback from the participants, you may need to schedule follow-up conversations to clarify and further define the expectations for each strategic priority.

Take the last few moments of this conversation to gauge the enthusiasm for the plan.

As the owner over the overall process, do not allow strategic planning to limp across the finish line. Your objective is to wrap the process up with five clear and realistic strategic priorities with buy-in across the organization.

Do not move on to the next step until there is satisfactory agreement within the leadership team of your organization.

Department Planning

On a smaller scale, departments should meet to establish initiatives and projects to improve their operational efficiency and contribute to organizational strategic priorities.

If you've followed the process, as part of the Prepare phase, each of your departments completed a Department Retrospective. The retrospective provides your team members with an opportunity to speak into the opportunities of the organization, and it also gives them a chance to share feedback on the department.

Each manager or team leader should have a healthy amount of feedback from the retrospective that relates to their department. The amount of department versus organizational feedback tends to be about 70 / 30, with some departments focusing wholly on themselves.

Department managers should plan ahead and schedule conversations with their team for the second week of the Define phase.

Generally, department planning should be done with a shorter timeframe in mind. Whereas a strategic priority might provide direction to the organization for a year, department planning should identify the actual work getting done in the next 3 to 6 months.

The reason for this is simple: Change. People leave, new people are hired, new opportunities and threats emerge, and lessons are learned through trial and error.

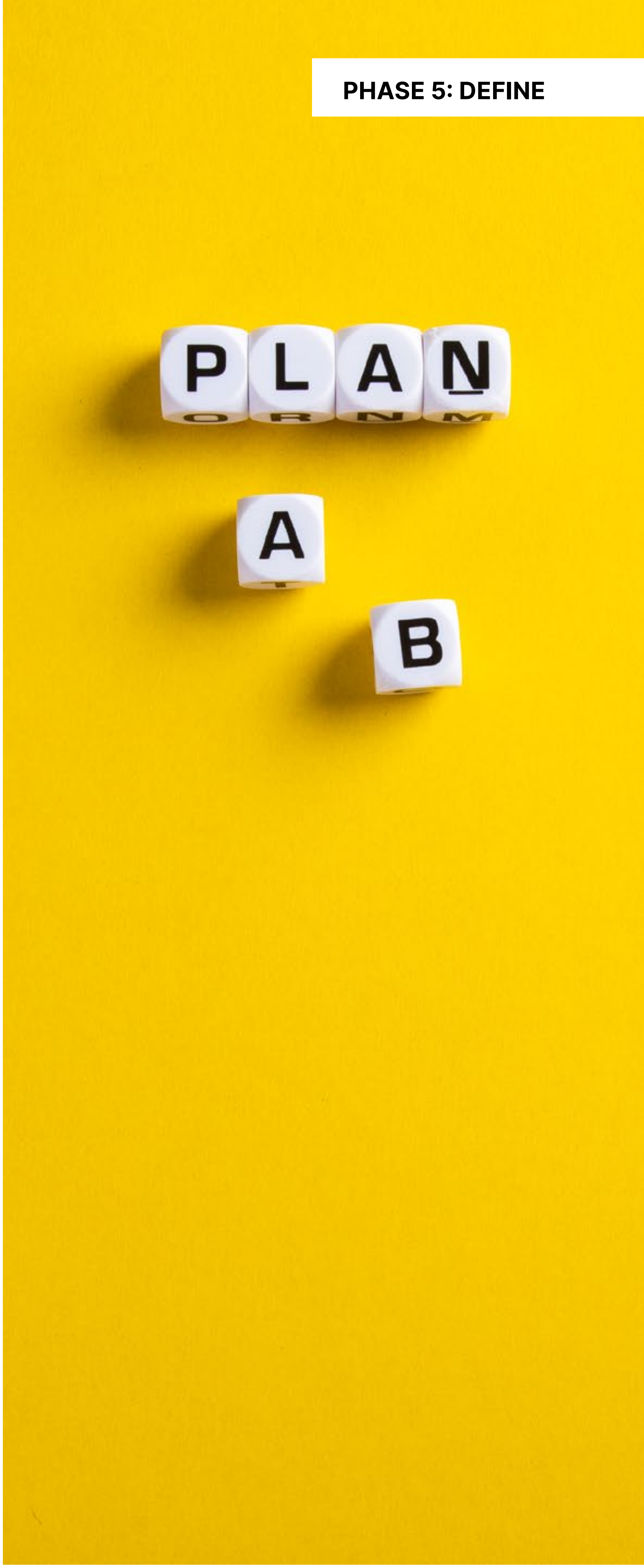
All companies, large or small, new and established, go through sufficient change over the course of a year that the initiatives selected at the beginning of the year are rarely the right decisions at the end of the year.

It's for this reason follow-up is required on a quarterly basis to reassess how the department will continue to contribute toward the strategic priorities of the organization.

For example, if a strategic priority to "Provide better service to our customers" identified a step to launch a new CRM, the department might establish the following priority for Q1:

- *Identify three CRMs that fit our needs.*

This leaves the actual implementation of the CRM to Q2.



As a rule of thumb, a department project should either contribute towards an agreed upon strategic priority, or affect the operations within that department.

Keep an Organizational Eye on Department Priorities

Organizations can run into problems when overzealous department managers make plans that impact the organization.

The organization is limited to just 5 *strategic priorities* to ensure there is sufficient bandwidth to manage the change. This can translate directly into 5 major changes to the organization in a quarter. Consider what the impact would be if you allowed department priorities to also affect change in the organization. It could add 2 or 3 major changes to the organization per department!

This is too much change for any organization and would result in competition between departments and the organization for priority and resources.

Therefore, an amount of organizational oversight is required in department planning to ensure the overall plan remains viable.

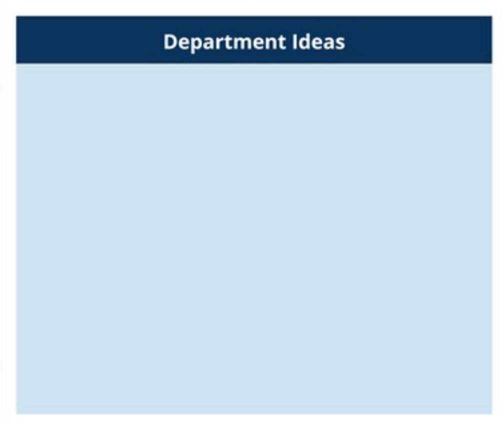
As a rule of thumb, a department project should either contribute towards an agreed upon strategic priority, or affect the operations within that department.

Department Prioritization

Department managers will lead their team in an activity to select a handful of department-level projects or initiatives.

PREPARATION

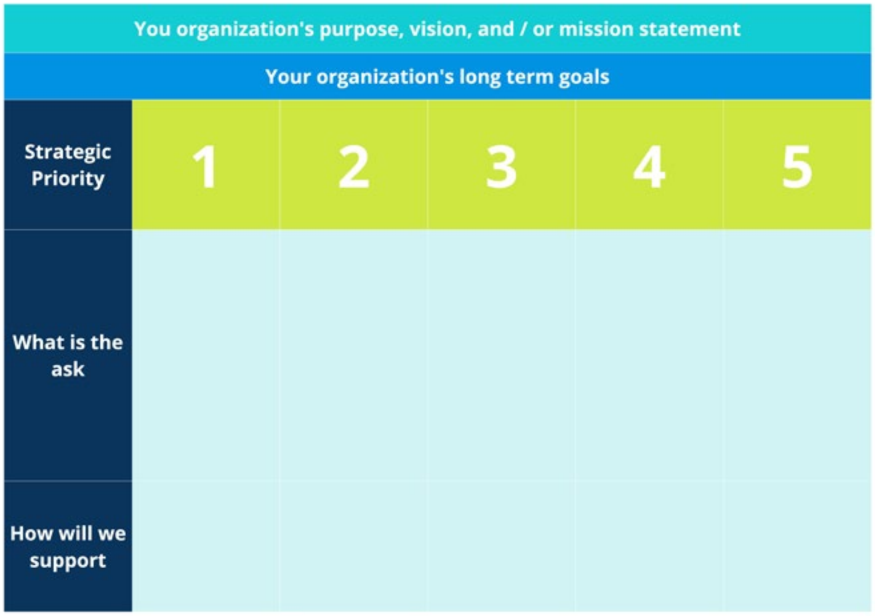
The manager will review ideas generated during the Sort and Combine activity and decide which are fit to be shared with the team and add them to a new section on their retrospective board (see right).



The manager will then add the following section to their retrospective board.

- Replace "Your organization's vision statement" with your organization's vision or purpose statement
- Replace "Your organization's mission statement" with your organization's mission statement
- Replace "Your organization's long term goals" with your organization's long term goals
- Add a sticky note for each of the strategic priorities. Cover the number "1" with the sticky note for the first priority.
- Repeat the process for priorities 2, 3, 4, and 5.

DEPARTMENT PLANNING



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The manager will schedule a 2-hour session with their team with the following agenda

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
10:10 AM	Review
10:20 AM	Ideate
11:00 AM	Prioritize
11:50 AM	Wrap up and next steps

A few days before their meeting the manager should share the selected department ideas with the team members along with the retrospective feedback generated during the Prepare phase.

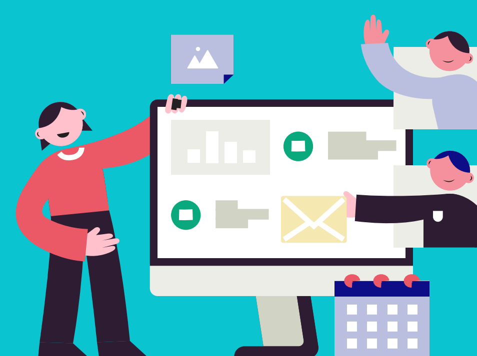
REVIEW

The manager begins the review with an overview of the selected organizational strategic priorities, being careful to explain that these are not yet approved, but still demonstrate the direction the organization is heading.

If there is an ask from an owner for the department to support a strategic priority, the manager will take this opportunity to add a note in the "What is the ask?" section with the corresponding strategic priority.

The manager will then review the departmental ideas generated for their team during the Sort and Combine Activity.

The manager will then review the feedback generated at the team's retrospective. Depending on the retrospective activity performed, this will remind participants of what they said was working or not working.



Allow a minimum amount of feedback at this time on this step. Participants should have received this information from their manager prior to the meeting. Do not let someone who failed to prepare to hijack the meeting with a lot of questions or new input.

Ideate, Sort and Combine, and Rank

The manager now gives the team time to come up with ideas to support for each strategic priority.

IDEATE

The manager will give individuals 10-15 minutes to generate ideas on sticky notes to support the strategic priority asks in the next quarter.

In our above example, the manager might share that a strategic priority owner is asking the department to contribute to the “Provide better service to our customers” priority by building a launching a new CRM.

This leaves the team to determine how they will support the launch in the next quarter.

SORT AND COMBINE

Once the time is up, the manager will lead the team in reviewing the ideas. As each sticky note is reviewed, it should be moved to the section labelled “How will we support?” in the department priorities table.

If participants came up with similar ideas, agree on which one best represents the idea and discard the duplicate sticky note.

If participants identified tasks of a larger project, combine ideas together to create a single, larger initiative.

RANK

The manager now leads the team in a prioritization discussion and will talk through the ideas to select which best supports the ask.

To expedite things and for larger teams, the manager should consider performing a dot vote to select the top ideas.

If 2 or more ideas are tied for the top spot, run the vote again, removing the ones that received the least number of votes. If there is still a tie, the manager can select the ones they feel best fit the needs of the department.

Prioritize

Once all ideas are generated and ranked, the manager should work with the team to reduce the total number of projects in the upcoming quarter. The number of projects a department can take on will vary depending on project size and team size. It's the manager's responsibility to ensure the team commits to a reasonable amount of effort.

The manager will now work with the participants to select owners, identify high-level success criteria, and establish target quarters for each of the projects.

It's in the manager's best interest to encourage team members to take ownership of department projects. This allows the manager to focus on their role of providing oversight over the team, and it allows team members to stretch and grow in their careers.

Next Steps

Managers should proactively share the selected projects with their peers, senior leadership, and strategic priority owners before communicating approval to their team. If done well, there should be no concern of overlap or collision with another department's priorities, but this helps remove the risk.

In rare cases, the results from the team discussion may trigger a review of selected strategic priorities if, for example, there's the department is lacking sufficient resources to support multiple priorities.

Approval

Following the approval of strategic priorities, managers take on the role of the CEO for their department and approve the projects for the department.

Similar to the strategic priorities, this should be largely a symbolic step and sets the manager as the one accountable for their department.

In the rare event that there is an unexpected change in the strategic priorities, managers may be required to work with their team to revise their plans or review the remaining ideas and select new department priorities.

Leadership should be careful not to override the direction of the department as this would undermine the manager's role in the department.

In this book we assume there is already healthy communication in the organization and managers will share their progress with their superiors and fellow managers through natural conversation.

If healthy communication doesn't exist in the organization, additional steps may be required to ensure department priorities are appropriately communicated up and across.

Communication

Once approved, managers should be encouraged to share their department projects with other managers in the organization. It may be critical for some departments to be in lock-step - Sales & Marketing for example.

Department priorities will be formally communicated at the first monthly check-in, one month into the fiscal year.

If your organization includes an intranet or dashboard for each department, managers should be encouraged to put the following up on their home page.

Strategic Priority	Department Priority	Q1
Strategic Priority #1	Department Priority #1	• Milestone • Deliverable
	Department Priority #2	• Milestone • Deliverable
Strategic Priority #2	Department Priority #3	• Milestone • Deliverable

This chart should show a list of the department priorities, the corresponding strategic priority they support, and the deliverables and milestones expected per quarter.

It will also be used to communicate progress throughout the year by adding additional columns for each new quarter and by checking of deliverables and milestones when they're met.

Present Strategic Priorities

At the end of the Define phase, the leadership team will meet and the owners will present the results of their work.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a final sanity check for all of the participants in the process but it also provides an accountability step for the owners. Plan for 20 minutes per strategic priority. This will give approximately 10 minutes to present, and 10 minutes for questions. Dedicate someone to take notes during the meeting and capture the feedback for each strategic priority owner.

Time	Activity
1:00 PM	Welcome and review schedule
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2:30 PM	Present Strategic Priority 5
2:50 PM	Wrap up and next steps

Wrap up and Next Steps

There has been a lot of discussion to date, not just in planned conversations, but between individual participants. Disagreement at this stage is rare, but it is possible that you will encounter a senior staff member who has misgivings about one or all of the decisions made.

Based on feedback from the participants, you may need to schedule follow-up conversations to clarify and further define the expectations for each strategic priority.

Take the last few moments of this conversation to gauge the enthusiasm for the plan.

As the owner of the overall process, do not allow strategic planning to limp across the finish line. Your objective is to wrap the process up with five clear and realistic strategic priorities with buy-in across the organization.

Do not move on to the next step until there is satisfactory agreement within the leadership team of your organization.

Strategic Priority One Sheet

The Strategic Priority One Sheet provides a brief overview of a strategic priority. It's meant to be informative enough to communicate the expectations and the purpose of the strategic priority all the while being short enough to quickly prepare and digest.

As mentioned during the Prepare phase, the sad reality about virtual work (and real work in most cases) is much of what is written down will not be read. There is, however, value in the process of writing a one-sheet since it challenges the author to answer important questions about the strategic priority they are responsible for.

It will also serve as the content for a presentation to the rest of the team, and it will be used to hold the owner accountable later on in the year as the work is done, or not done.

Use the headings below as a template for your Strategic Priority One Sheets. Establish guidelines for storing One Sheet in an easily accessible tool or file location.

Consider using a tool such as Confluence or SharePoint to allow team members to collaboratively edit and share a document.

WHAT IS IT?

Briefly explain in the simplest of terms the expected deliverable or outcome of this strategic priority. Avoid jargon of business-specific abbreviations. It must be able to clearly describe your strategic priority to anyone in the organization.

This will give context to the rest of the sections.

If done well, you should be able to keep this to 2 - 3 lines of text.

WHY ARE WE DOING IT NOW?

Briefly explain the business reason is for prioritizing this strategy.

- Why is it the most important thing to focus on right now?
- How will it benefit the organization?
- What is the impact of not doing it?

WHO IS INVOLVED?

List the stakeholders of this strategic priority.

- Who is the owner and will be held accountable for this strategic priority?
- Who will do the work?
- Who's opinion and input will be required?
- Who needs to be kept up to date on the progress?

By understanding all of the stakeholders you will ensure you are working on the right deliverables as well as be able to manage expectations and communication.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

List the high-level steps you will take in each quarter.

- What gets done first?
- What do you need to learn or research before you move forward?
- When will various deliverables be completed?

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Avoid being too prescriptive in this list. These should be high-level deliverables or milestones, not specific tasks or projects.

Include deliverables that are meaningful to stakeholders and those that have the highest impact. This does not necessarily mean the deliverables that will require the most effort.

You should have a maximum of 5 steps per quarter.

You will report quarterly on your progress towards completing these steps.

Oftentimes, you will need more time than a week to decide if the strategic priority is viable.

If this is the case, limit the work to just the steps to complete the research and add a final step to review the overall priorities of your organization. This allows your leadership team to rethink the direction once better information is available.

For example, you may be launching a new product or service. Rather than assuming it will hit a sales target, establish an initial step to perform market research or run a pilot project to establish a baseline and describe the next steps at a later date.

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED?

Outlining what won't be done can further help define the scope of your strategic priority. If you previously had a brainstorming session that generated a lot of ideas, this can be a good place to list those that were outside this scope.

WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

Roughly estimate any additional costs required to achieve this strategic priority.

- What assets need to be purchased?
- What events need to be attended?
- Who needs to be hired?

This section should provide insights into how much everything in the "What's Included" section will cost.

WHEN WILL WE KNOW WE'RE SUCCESSFUL?

Identify how you will know you were successful when the work wraps up. This is much more than confirming the work was completed.

- Was the purpose of the strategic priority achieved?
- How will you measure your progress over the lifespan of this initiative?
- How will you report on your progress at quarterly business reviews?
- What key performance indicators will you track?
- What target are you hoping to hit?

This section balances the "Why are we doing it now?" section by providing proof it was the right strategy to prioritize.

Summary

The Define Phase requires a lot of time, so it's important to block it out in your schedule to ensure it is properly executed. During the first week, priority owners build teams and develop the details of each priority. Oversights or challenges are caught and addressed. It's also where expectations are defined and managed so that halfway through the year teams aren't panicking about how to complete each goal.

Whether it's the company's overall strategic planning or the individual department's, priorities must be achievable, realistic, and able to be measured. This allows you to track progress throughout the quarters and the year and have clearly defined achievements.

PHASE 6: APPROVE

Summarize the Strategy

Once everyone is satisfied with the descriptions provided for the individual strategic priorities, assign someone to put it all together and look at it as a whole.

A high-level schedule must be developed based on the strategic priority one sheets, a sanity check performed to ensure you have enough people to perform the work and the cost for any purchases fits with the budget.

High-Level Schedule

Following approval, produce the following high-level schedule and complete a sanity check.

Strategic Priority	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Name of priority 1	• Steps in Q1	• Steps in Q2	• Steps in Q3	• Steps in Q4
Name of priority 1	• Steps in Q1	• Steps in Q2	• Steps in Q3	• Steps in Q4
Name of priority 1	• Steps in Q1	• Steps in Q2	• Steps in Q3	• Steps in Q4
Name of priority 1	• Steps in Q1	• Steps in Q2	• Steps in Q3	• Steps in Q4
Name of priority 1	• Steps in Q1	• Steps in Q2	• Steps in Q3	• Steps in Q4
Cost	Total $	Total $	Total $	Total $

Does it fit?

With the overview of the schedule completed and investment summarized, it's now time for the biggest decision: Does everything fit?

A reminder that most of the work that is invested into a strategic priority is performed in addition to the day-to-day work of the organization. In some rare cases, a priority might necessitate the shut down of a division or product line, but generally, the effort put into the strategic priority needs to coexist with the day-to-day operations of the organization.

This step will be different for every organization, but generally should be performed by someone senior in the organization such as the VP of Operations or Finance. They should consider the following questions:

- Does it seem feasible for the people involved in the strategic priorities to also deliver on their daily responsibilities?
- Are the strategic priorities so critical it should change who does what in your organization?
- Do you need to hire additional headcount to support the priority?
- If you are hiring, is the time to recruit and onboard factored into the steps of the strategic priorities
- Can you afford all of the costs proposed in your strategic priorities?

Depending on the outcome of the sanity check you may have to drop the lowest strategy, or work with a strategic priority owner to reign in an ambitious plan.

Use the priority of the strategies to make concessions. The top priority should always take precedence over the strategies below it. This will help simplify and expedite decisions.

Work to maximize the efforts of your organization and create a plan that is realistic yet stretches and challenges your team.

Get Approval

As a final step, the strategic priorities must be put in front of the CEO to approve. It's ultimately their decision to pursue and invest in the proposed direction.

For most organizations, this milestone will be mostly ceremonial. The CEO should have been heavily involved in the process and will be well informed of the proposed strategic priorities.

Summary

At the approval stage it's important to ask the questions: can these priorities co-exist with the company's day-to-day operations? Do these priorities require changes in people's roles? Do we need to hire new people to achieve these goals?

Because of these questions Operations and/or Finance will need to review and approve, before putting them in front of the CEO for final sign-off. If strategies don't fit within the budget they may need to be dropped or readjusted.

PHASE 7: COMMUNICATE

With the yearly strategic plan approved by the CEO, the focus should now turn to ensure your extended team knows about all the work that was done and the decisions that were made.

A good strategic plan will inspire optimism in the organization and motivate others to shift their thinking to contribute to it in their own ways through their day-to-day work.

Establish a plan for communicating the new strategic priorities. Depending on the nature of your organization, this might involve a presentation at an All Hands or delivered through your management structure. Your communication plan must be thorough enough to ensure every member of your organization is made aware of and understands your priorities.

Explain to your team the reasoning behind your decisions.

- Be humble and share the results from the SWOT exercise. People like to know you’re aware of your threats and weaknesses.
- Connect your team members to the plan by letting them know which ideas emerged from department retrospectives. People appreciate knowing they contributed and it will motivate them to contribute next time
- Call out cultural challenges from your engagement reports that you are addressing. This provides ongoing evidence that you are listing to your team.
- Share the lessons you learned from your past year. People will appreciate that the leadership team is mature enough to learn from its mistakes.

Inspire your team with a vision of the organization when you successfully achieve your strategic priorities.

Share Broadly and Frequently

There's an old adage that says: Once you're tired of saying it, they're starting to hear it

With this in mind, plan to communicate your strategic priorities in more than one way. Find creative ways to share the news and share it more than once.

Send them to everyone via email

Remind people at the start of every meeting

Include them in your company newsletter

Post them to your company dashboard or intranet

Send a video of your CEO to everyone via your organization's messaging service

Communicate the Whole Strategic Plan

Creating an overview of company direction is a great way to connect all of the dots for your team members. Prepare a document combining your purpose, vision, mission, core values, long-term goals, and strategic priorities using the following template:

Our Purpose	*Insert your vision, mission, and/or Purpose Statement*
Our Core Values	Core value
	Core value
	Core value
	Core value
Our Long-Term Goals	Long-term goal 1
	Long-term goal 2
Our Strategic Priorities	Priority 1
	Priority 2
	Priority 3
	Priority 4
	Priority 5

If you have it available, take the above template one step further and include Twitter-sized descriptions for:

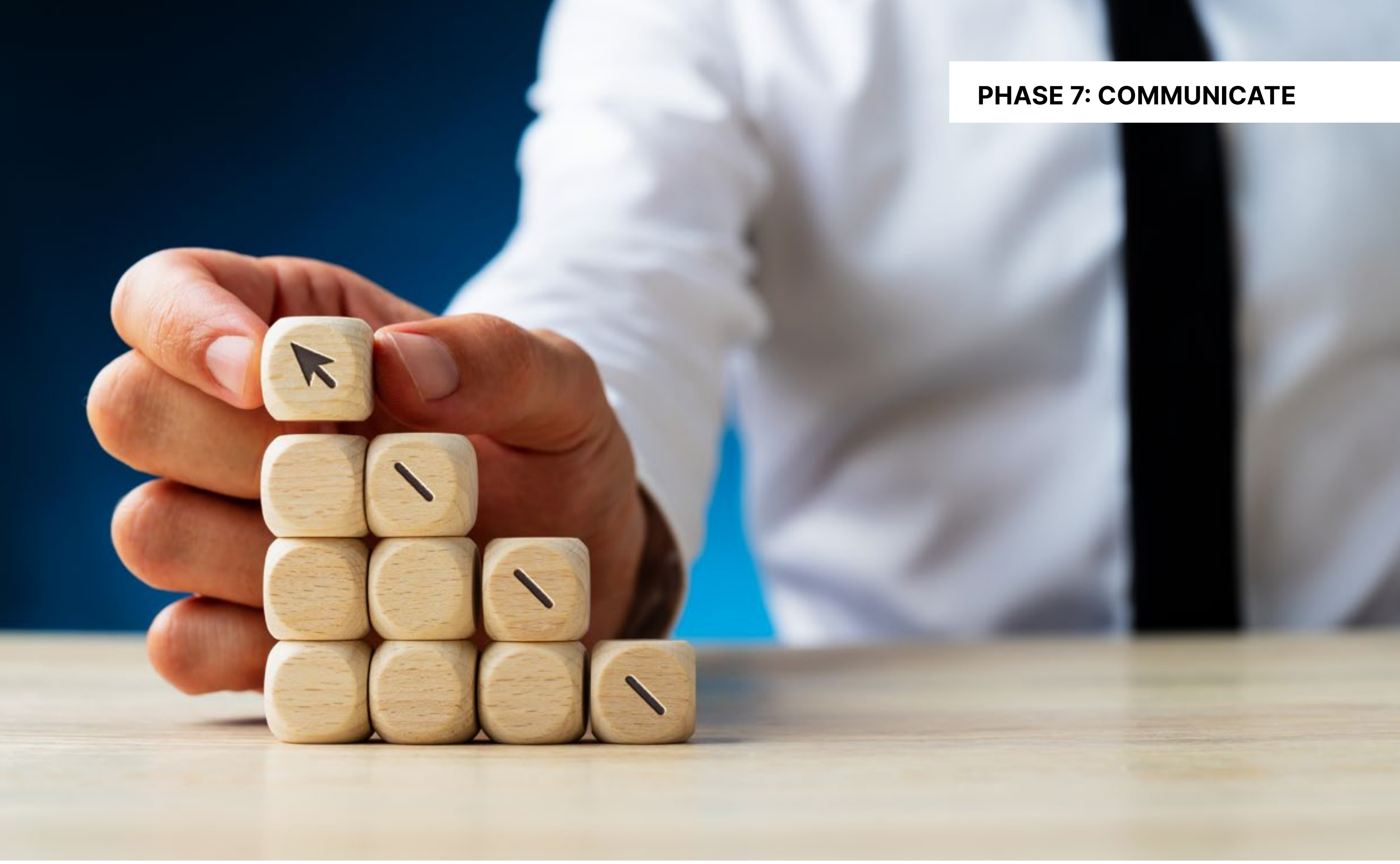
- Our brand promise
- Our elevator pitch
- What we sell
- Where we sell
- Who we sell to
- Our core competencies

This becomes a great tool for communicating to existing and new team members who you are and where you're going.

Celebrate

With the strategic plan communicated you can take a moment to pat yourself on your back and congratulate yourself for completing all of the work that went into getting yourself this far.

Now the work begins.



Summary

All employees had some involvement throughout the process, whether it was from the team/department retrospectives or the different defining stages. However, communicating your priorities is a major step in completing them. Ensure that everyone is informed on the whole strategic plan (not just their individual department's) via an All-Hands or through departmental meetings. Along with ensuring that everyone is clear on the direction of the business, it gives you an opportunity to generate enthusiasm and optimism for these goals and where the company is headed.

PHASE 8: EXECUTE

Throughout the remainder of the year, the team works to execute the plan. Depending on the strategic priorities that were selected this will result in the delivery of a product, completion of a project, affecting change within the organization, or the drive towards hitting a target.

To ensure the strategic plan you put so much effort into is successful you will:

- Check-in monthly
- Recalibrate quarterly

For best results, make someone responsible for the execution phase. They will schedule the required follow-up meetings and advocate for the process throughout the year.

Monthly Check-In

Keep the pressure on strategic priority owners and departments by checking in on progress once a month. Every month, each manager will fill out a report for their department.

Present the Reports

It's critical that department managers present their reports to a larger audience. This encourages accountability and provides a deadline for delivering the report that is much less flexible than simply requesting a written report.

It's up to you how much time you want to put into the monthly check-in. You can either integrate a quick touch-base into a regular team meeting, or you can create a separate, long-form version to dive into additional details and ask questions. The format of both is the same. The only difference is how much talking you let participants do.

Track Progress

Someone on your leadership team should be responsible for keeping track of progress on a monthly basis. Priority owners should be reminded to keep track during monthly reporting to look for signs the expectations for their strategic priority are falling behind.

Ensure someone is responsible for updating the high-level schedule that was created during the Approve phase should be updated. Indicate on that sheet, which items have been delivered and what milestones have been reached.

This will provide you with an excellent overview of the progress being made across the organization and give you an indication of which strategic priority owners need more support.

Do not skip this step.

It's far too easy for three months to go by and for people to overlook the work they were so eager to own during yearly strategic planning. Before you know it, you'll be working through Quarterly Recalibration and you will be making the same promises to yourself, with only 9 months left in the year.

Establish a monthly cadence that works for your firm, but do not overlook the reporting on quarterly initiatives and projects.

Monthly Report

Use the following template on a monthly basis to provide an update on departmental objectives. The information on this report is intentionally minimal and high-level. The goal of the monthly report is to communicate progress and hold people accountable for the work they committed to.

Stakeholders involved in the day-to-day and should not need to rely on this report for up-to-date information.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Month - Year</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Overall Status: Healthy</th></tr>
<tr><td>Completed milestone or deliverable 1</td><td>Completed milestone or deliverable 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Completed milestone or deliverable 3</td><td>Completed milestone or deliverable 4</td></tr>
<tr><th>Next Milestones</th><th>Risks</th></tr>
<tr><td>Milestone or deliverable next month 1</td><td rowspan="3">Risks that might prevent completion, with a mitigation strategy</td></tr>
<tr><td>Milestone or deliverable next month 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Milestone or deliverable next month 3</td></tr>
</table>

Managers can use this opportunity to report on other metrics if available and appropriate for their department. For example, the Sales Manager might provide a summary of the sales funnel, the Marketing manager might provide a summary of website traffic, the Customer Service manager might summarize the time to close support tickets for the past month.

Establish a monthly cadence that works for your firm, but do not overlook the reporting on quarterly initiatives and projects.

OVERALL STATUS

Owners should indicate if the progress towards accomplishing the work is:

Healthy or On Track:

This status communicates that everything is proceeding according to plan and there are no concerns.

- For a quick check-in, managers should be able to simply say they are healthy or on track, and then move on to the next report
- For a more detailed check-in, managers can read out their report and provide additional colour to their milestones or deliverables

Concern:

This status communicates that the owner is behind schedule but still feels they can complete everything they need to do to hit targets for the quarter.

- For a quick check-in, managers should include a brief explanation of why they are concerned, and what they will do to get back on track.
- For a more detailed check-in, managers will read out their report and highlight the steps where they are behind. The manager will also field questions about their plan to get back on track.

Off Track:

This status communicates the work will not meet expectations without outside intervention.

- For both a quick and detailed check-in, the manager should provide an explanation and their plan to get back on track.
- It’s often best to schedule a follow-up discussion with a smaller group of people to work through the issues and solutions to get the work back on track.

COMPLETED MILESTONES

Include a list of completed milestones for the month. Encourage managers to only communicate the completion of milestones that were originally included in their department plan.

Managers should strive to keep their updates bite-sized or Twitter-length.

NEXT MILESTONES

This should be the list of milestones or deliverables the owner will complete in the next month.

Similar to the above, Managers should strive to keep their next month's milestones bite-sized or Twitter-length and related to the strategic priority.

RISKS

Managers should communicate risks to the work when it's straying off track. A risk may be something that's already happened that is putting the successful delivery of the priority in jeopardy, or it could be something that might happen if the status quo remains.

Managers should be encouraged to call out risks to promote transparency. If a risk within a department will affect a strategic priorities, it should everyone's concern.

Managers should also take initiative and indicate how they are mitigating the risk. This could be anywhere from requesting additional resources or budget, to accepting that the risk is going to happen regardless of their efforts. Sometimes the resolution to the issue requires more seniority than the priority owner and resolving the risk needs to be pushed up the ladder.

Do not make the monthly check-in the place where key stakeholders first hear about a risk.

Managers should make all efforts to communicate the risk to the people impacted by the risk before the monthly check-in.

Quarterly Recalibration

On a quarterly basis, the leadership team should reconvene to ensure the strategic plan is progressing at the expected pace and the priorities continue to represent the best direction for the organization.

Taking a deeper look at the priorities every 3 months keeps the organization focused on the most important tasks and allows the plan to adapt to unanticipated changes.

The recalibration process builds on the research and reporting done for yearly planning and makes use of the results from the Rank activity - which in turn takes into consideration the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organization.

1. Preparation is minimal and only requires the facilitator of the process to schedules sessions for recalibration.
2. During the review step, strategic priority owners report on the completion of major milestones or the completing of a success criteria.
    - An additional check-in called the Gut Check is performed to ensure nothing extraordinary has come up that necessitates a more involved review process.
3. The ideate and prioritize steps are combined into the main "recalibration" session. The existing priorities are reviewed and confirmed they are still the top priorities of the organization.
    - The organization can decide to "top up" the strategic priorities if they feel there's bandwidth in the remainder of the year.
4. If there are any new strategic priorities, they are defined using the exact same process as yearly planning.
    - Owners create or update strategic priority one-sheets.
    - Everyone meets to review and provide feedback on the new or changed strategic priorities.
    - The recalibrated strategic priorities are approved and the high-level schedule is updated.
5. Finally, the progress and any changes are communicated to the larger team.

If there are no changes, a typical organization can get through recalibration in two 2-hour sessions, with a smaller group taking a bit more time for the Gut Check and approval steps.

Following Quarterly Recalibration, individual departments will take a moment to review their progress and perform Department Recalibration.

Preparation for Quarterly Recalibration

Plan to run Quarterly Recalibration in the final month of the quarter to ensure you have a fresh plan to start the next quarter with.

In the Plan for Success section, we discuss an optional tri-annual process that changes Quarterly Recalibration from every 3 months to every 4 months.

Planning for Quarterly Recalibration requires you to look ahead on the calendar and schedule the following work sessions on the following dates. For example purposes, the month of April is used to show the spacing and timing of these sessions.

April 5: Review

- 2 hours for Quarterly Review. This will be similar to the monthly review, except you will also look at the success criteria for each strategic priority. Depending on your monthly review process, you may already have this time scheduled on people's calendars.
- 1 hour for a Gut Check. A quick check-in to make sure there are no external factors that will derail the strategic plan.

April 12: Recalibration

- 2 hours for Quarterly Recalibration: During recalibration, you will review the existing strategic priorities and decide if they still best fit the direction of the organization.

April 13 - 19

- 2 hours for Strategic Plan Review, a tentative session to review any changes made to the plan.

April 21

- 1 hour for the approval of the revised strategic plan.

Similar to the yearly process, you will find it useful to schedule some reminders for yourself and proactively communicate with your team.

- One month out, inform the team recalibration is in a month.
    - Send them a summary of the strategic themes captured during yearly strategic planning
    - Let them know there will be an opportunity to suggest new strategic themes.
- One week out, inform the team that recalibration is next week.

Quarterly Review

To kick off Quarterly Recalibration, the team will perform the monthly review plus include a summary of progress towards success.

Plan for approximately 10 minutes per strategic priority and 5 minutes per department.

Most organizations will be able to get through all of the strategic priorities and the department priorities in 2 hours. If you have lots of departments, consider moving them to a separate session.

SAMPLE AGENDA

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
10:10 AM	Department Reviews
11:00 AM	Review Strategic Priority #1
11:10 AM	Review Strategic Priority #2
11:20 AM	Review Strategic Priority #3
11:30 AM	Review Strategic Priority #4
11:40 AM	Review Strategic Priority #5
11:50 AM	Wrap up and Next Steps

Keep the session focused on the presenters and encourage people to be concise. This is not an opportunity for people to debate, discuss, or disagree with the information being presented.

As outlined in the Monthly Report section, key stakeholders should already be aware of the status and risks of the strategic priority. Questions and concerns about the information presented should be noted for follow-up.

REPORTING

The quarterly report for a strategic priority is similar to a monthly report for department with the addition of a “success measurement” section. To complete the report, the priority owner will be required to check in with department managers to confirm progress is being made.

Month - Year	
OVERALL STATUS: HEALTHY	
Completed milestone or deliverable 1	Completed milestone or deliverable 2
Completed milestone or deliverable 3	Completed milestone or deliverable 4
NEXT MILESTONES	RISKS
Milestone or deliverable next month 1	Risks that might prevent completion, with a mitigation strategy
Milestone or deliverable next month 2	
Milestone or deliverable next month 3	

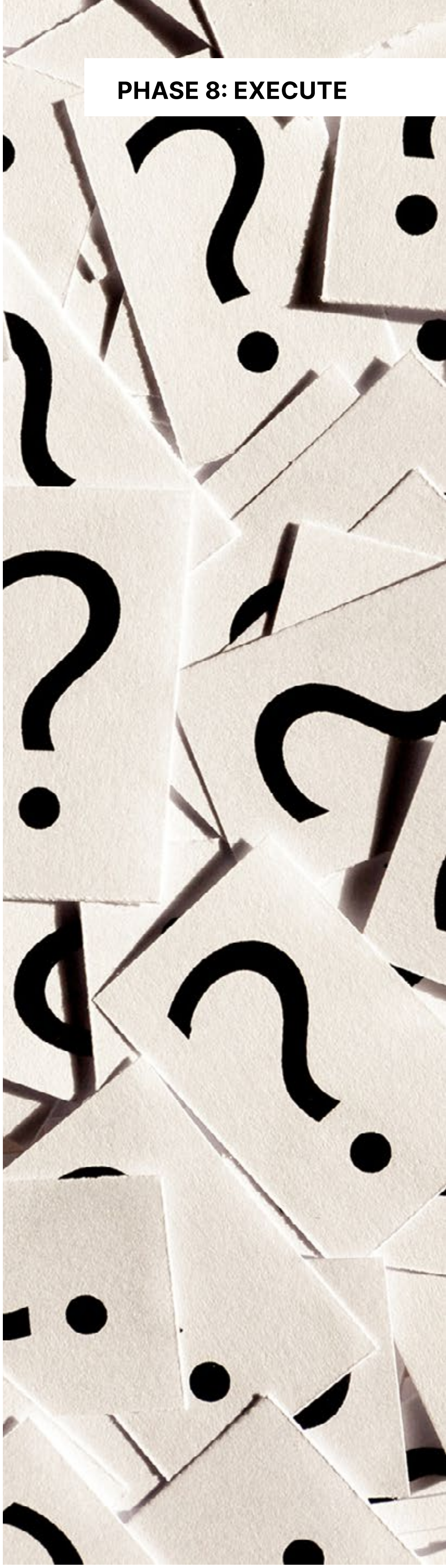
SUCCESS CRITERIA	
Success measure #1	Results
Success measure #2	Results
Success measure #3	Results

The success criteria section should clearly state if you were successful in achieving the result, include evidence, if available.

If, for example, your success measure is a 10% increase in new sales, you should identify what the actual % of new sales was for the period.

If it was achieved, add a or the word **Achieved!**, or **Success!** in green.

If it wasn’t achieved, communicate how much you missed it and be prepared to speak to it during the presentation.



The Gut Check

Following the Quarterly Review, you will meet to do a brief assessment of any external factors that might impact the direction agreed to during yearly strategic planning.

The participants of this meeting are often a subset of the leadership team. They need to decide if Quarterly Recalibration should go ahead as normal or, has something unexpected happened that will reset the strategic priorities.

The following events may necessitate a more thorough review of priorities:

- The loss of a key client or account
- A significant opportunity that's brought more business than you can handle
- The anticipated merger or sale of the organization
- An unexpected change in the marketplace such as a new, cheaper technology
- The failure and subsequent shuttering of a key competitor
- Distribution challenges caused by global unrest or severe weather
- A global pandemic
- A new government program or change in legislation
- The loss of a key employee
- Financial challenges that can no longer be overlooked
- A lawsuit against the organization
- The introduction of a union

If any of the above proves to be true, or another serious event has occurred, the participants of the Gut Check must decide if recalibration can proceed as planned, or if it needs to be scrapped in lieu of an emergency planning session.

If scrapped, the conversation should quickly turn to a replacement process for strategic planning and communicating to those involved.

Quarterly Recalibration - Ideate and Prioritize

The meat of Quarterly Recalibration is a conversation with the leadership team to determine if you still have the right priorities and, if you don't, to select new ones.

During this session, the leadership team will review the strategic priorities one at a time to:

Then, if there is room for a new priority, the leadership team will select from the strategies strategic themes previously identified during yearly strategic planning.

SCHEDULE

You should be able to get through this session in about 2 hours.

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker
10:10 AM	Review the ground rules
10:15 AM	Review the current strategic priorities
10:45 AM	If needed re-rank your strategic themes
11:15 AM	If needed, re-prioritize
11:50 AM	Wrap up and next steps

REVIEW CURRENT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Open the collaborative whiteboard you used during strategic planning and review the section where you prioritized your strategic themes. Starting with the first priority, the team will ask the following questions.

Is it complete?

If yes, make a note to communicate the completion of the strategic priority to the broader team and plan to celebrate the win.

Is It Still a Priority?

You've now put three months of work into this strategic priority. It is possible you or your team completed the highest priority aspects of it and relieved pain within the organization.

If you're looking at the #1 priority and people can't agree that it is still priority #1, move it off the priority chart and back into the "critical" section of the Rank chart.

Does It Need to Be Revised?

If progress is lagging behind, but people still think it's a priority, the leadership team should first decide if they want to change the owner and make someone else responsible for it.

With the owner confirmed, participants will discuss any changes to success criteria and target quarter.

The owner will now have a week to revise the strategic priority one-sheet and present an updated plan at the Strategic Plan review in one week. This will give the owner time to work with key stakeholders to meet expectations.

During this part of the discussion, the facilitator must steer the participants away from "solutioning" and remind them that there will be ample time to discuss the plan with the owner after Recalibration.

RE-RANK

The facilitator will take the participants through the same Rank activity as they did during yearly strategic planning.

The facilitator will first read off the definitions of each of the sections.

Starting first from strategic themes in the **"Critical"** section, the participants will be asked if each one is still critical. If something is no longer critical, the participants will agree if it's **"Important"** or **"Desirable"**.

Then the facilitator will move on to the "Important" section, followed by the "Desirable" section.

Finally, the facilitator will give participants an opportunity to share any objectives that they feel are new since yearly strategic planning.

Adding new objectives during quarterly recalibration is similar to bringing in ideas from the Epiphany box. It saves the organization from being blind to changes throughout the year and gives an avenue to creative ideas that may have been missed through the process.

Participants must agree to accept new objectives and then rank them as **"Critical", "important"**, or **"Desirable".**

RE-PRIORITIZE

With the strategic themes re-ranked, the participants will go through the same Prioritize activity to select new priorities.

This should include selecting the top priorities, their owner, an initial set of success criteria and a target delivery date.

NEXT STEPS

If any new priorities are added, or if a request was made to revise an existing one, set the expectation that owners now have a week to create or update one-sheets.

Department Recalibration

Following recalibration, managers will meet with their teams to discuss their department priorities.

This step is similar to the department planning done during the Define phase with an added step to:

- Call out any lack of progress and set new expectations
- Celebrate the completion of any department priorities
- Add priorities to keep the number of department priorities to 2 to 3.

Depending on the department, this will take 1 to 2 hours to work through per quarter with additional time spent on planning out any new department priorities.

Department recalibration should be completed prior to the end of the month and before the start of the next quarter.

Summary

When it comes to executing the priorities, accountability plays a huge role. Monthly departmental check-ins and Quarterly Recalibrations help keep everyone in check and informed. It’s important to highlight not only the risks that have come up but also the teams’ achievements.

While you hopefully are able to set long-term priorities that stick, things are constantly changing. The Quarterly Recalibration allows you to assess whether the priorities set earlier are still the best direction for your company, without wasting too much time on goals that no longer hold value.

ACTIVITIES FOR REMOTE STRATEGIC PLANNING

Throughout the strategic planning process, there are a number of activities. Many of these have real-world counterparts and are similar to activities you would perform at an off-site. **These have been optimized for remote teams.**

The Icebreaker

Ground Rules

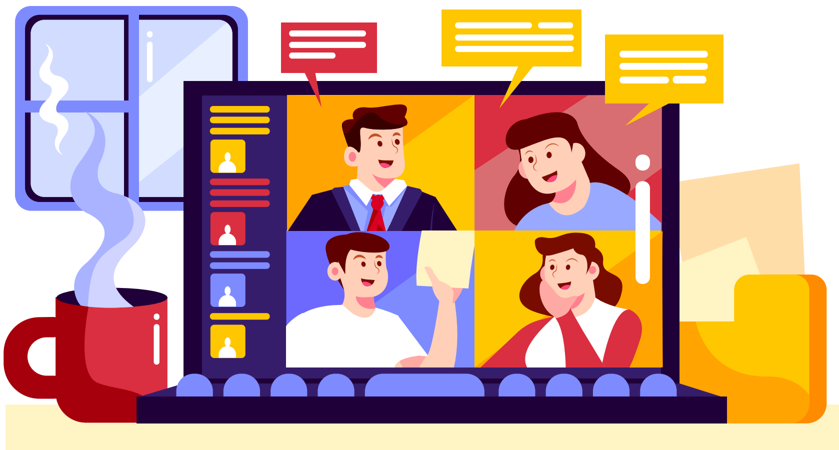
The Epiphany Box

Collaborative SWOT

Sort & Combine

Rank

Prioritize



A good icebreaker activity will break down barriers and get everyone talking.

The Icebreaker Activity

We recommend running an icebreaker before every major collaborative discussion.

An icebreaker is a 5 - 10 minute activity that provides a small amount of socializing and team building, all the while giving people a chance to clear their heads. It's not meant to produce anything permanent and will hopefully put everyone in a good mood.

A good icebreaker activity will break down barriers and get everyone talking. This can be especially important if you have a variety of levels of roles at your meeting. A manager may feel anxious and awkward about providing honest feedback in front of the CEO, for example.

Set up the Icebreaker Activity on your collaborative whiteboard ahead of your strategic planning.

We've included a bunch of our favourite Icebreakers for you to choose from below.

Running an Icebreaker

Decide ahead of time how you want to select the icebreaker for your session. If you've set up your icebreaker activity properly, you will have up to 10 notes posted to your board each with creative names to represent each icebreaker.

- You can select the icebreaker yourself, and choose one that fits the rest of the activities
- You can delegate this responsibility to one of the participants, and then choose a different person to choose the next time, or
- You can use Miro's voting function to follow a more democratic process.

Once the icebreaker is selected, read out the rules and ask if anyone needs any clarification. Do not continue until everyone understands the activity.

Run your icebreaker according to the rules.

Some activities, such as the "One word check-in" will be quick. Others may take a bit more time. However, they shouldn't take more than 5 to 10 minutes. If it gets off track, cut it short. This isn't the reason you're having your meeting today. It's just the warm-up.

Once the icebreaker completes, move the Icebreaker note to the "Used" section, so it can't be selected again at the next session.

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Virtual Icebreakers

The following icebreaker activities are tried and true favourites at Virtira. They take advantage of the uniqueness and limitations of remote meetings to create a fun and engaging way to get your conversations started.

The Name Game

Rearrange the letters of your name. Add or replace one letter.

Create the most positive word you can.

Debate: Pizza vs Toast

Break into two teams. One team argues for pizza, the other for toast.

Predictive Poetry

Start a text message with the word '***work***'. Select the next 10 words the phone suggests.

Share your poetry.

One Two...Ten

Count to 10 as a group, but only one person can count at a time.

You must start over if two or more people count at the same.

Everyone has to count at least once.

No preparation or planning.

Rock, Paper, Scissors

Pick two people to start.

Play a round of rock, paper, scissors.

Then two more people play.

The winners play each other.

Continue until you have a winner.

Five Word Snapshot

Take a few moments to think about how you are feeling about your current project or work.

Describe your feelings or attitude using five words or less.

Deskposition

Select an item on your desk, hold it up for everyone to see, and explain why it's on your desk.

Time Travelers

If you could travel through time, either forward or backward, where would you go and why?

The Breakfast Club

What did you have for breakfast, and why?

Food Moods

What's your favorite international dish?

Where is the best place to get it?

The Same Game

As a group, come up with a list of 10 things that everyone has in common.

Bit 'O' Ditty

Sing a few bars of a favorite song.

Ground Rules Activity

The Ground Rules Activity is a must-have for any significant amount of remote collaborative work. Most people expect when you run a 1-hour presentation that a majority, if not all of the participants are distracted. They're likely reading email, communicating via instant message, reading unrelated websites, or doing other work. Sometimes even the presenter is guilty as well.

If these bad habits carry forward into your collaborative activity - where you want every participant to be engaged, you will not get the highest quality results. Worse, you may arrive at decisions that lack the teeth to be implemented since participants won't remember being involved in the process.

To combat this, you will collaboratively build a list of ground rules for the meeting. It's critical these are generated by the participants themselves to ensure the highest level of buy-in.

If this is the first time someone on your team has used the collaboration software, this activity can also serve as a boot camp to learn the tool.

Setup

Use a collaborative whiteboard for this activity. We recommend Miro.

Create a space on your board to house all of the answers and the resulting list of top ground rules.

Be sure to invite everyone to the board prior to the activity.

Step 1

Ask the participants to spend 5 minutes writing down up to 3 rules they feel everyone should follow while participating in the activities this week.

Step 2

Review all of the rules people created. Remove duplicates. Clarify as necessary.

Step 3

Set up a vote and give all participants 5 votes to pick their top rules.

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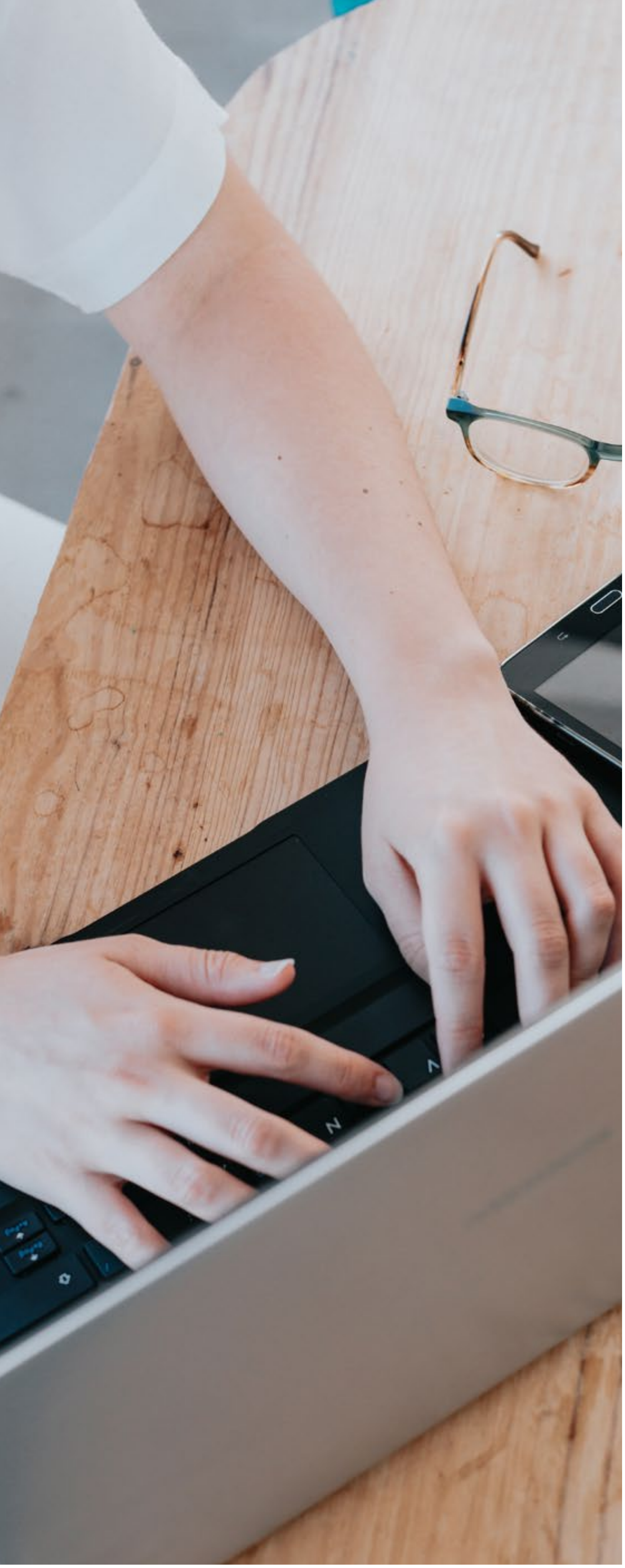


Step 4

Review the rules with the most votes. Select the top 5 to 7 rules.

Step 5

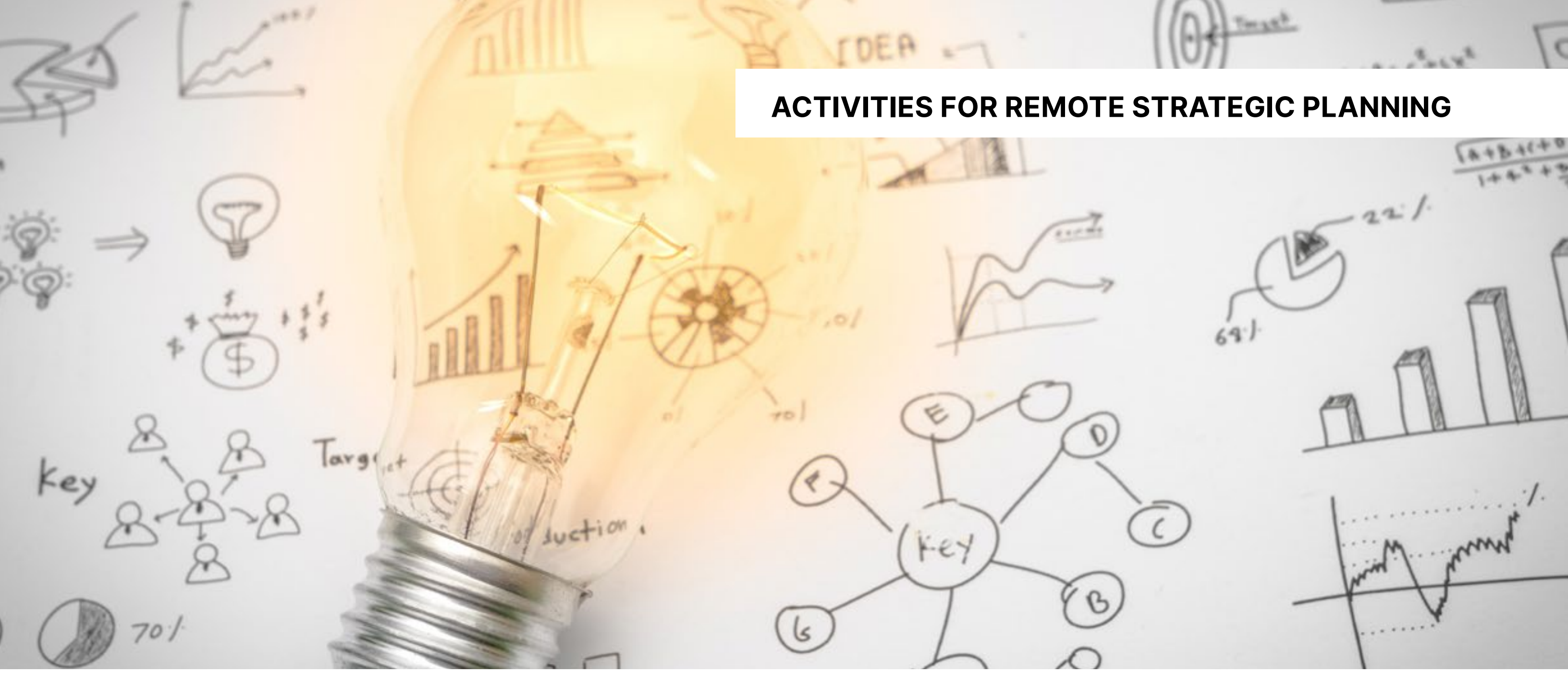
Ask all participants to agree to and commit to the rules for all of the sessions.

Give all participants permission to call each other out when someone is breaking the rules.

If your group is having a hard time coming up with ground rules, suggest some of the following.

However, be careful not to start with this list:

- Be present and avoid multitasking
- Put yourself on DND
- No back-channel communication - if you have something to say, share it with everyone
- Always assume a positive intent
- Be honest. If you don’t agree speak up
- Keep answers concise
- Don’t interrupt others
- Let others speak. Don’t monopolize the conversation
- Allow the facilitator to run the session
- Use active listening



The Epiphany Box

Strategic planning is a creative process and as such it's possible to have an idea at any time. The Epiphany Box is similar to a Parking Lot for ideas during meetings and it provides a way for people to jot down their ideas without interrupting the rest of the team.

Dedicate a part of your collaborative whiteboard to a space where participants can add sticky notes at any time.

Follow the instructions in the Collaboration Space Setup for the Epiphany Box.

Explain to the participants that they can add ideas here at any time by creating a sticky. Since the Ideate process will sometimes generate similar ideas, let them know they can also remove or move their own ideas at any time.

Ask participants to use the colour that was assigned to them when they add an idea to the Box.

Let them know that ideas captured in the Epiphany Box will be reviewed as part of the Prioritize Phase. Don't worry about excessive ideas in the Box, the goal of the Ideate phase isn't to limit anyone's ideas, but rather to provide a framework for generating as many as possible.

The Epiphany Box is also a great way to deal with people who can't follow the process. If someone shouts out a "you know what we should do" idea, don't dwell on it. Just move it to the Epiphany Box where it can be reviewed at a later date

If, however, you see someone abusing this power, simply add a step that requires them to reduce the number of ideas to their top 3 to 5 before you work through them.

Collaborative SWOT

The purpose of any SWOT activity is to discover the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

This activity takes it one step further and develops ideas to take advantage of the opportunities and minimize the threats.

It provides the participants with a framework to generate new ideas based on the real issues and possibilities affecting the company.

These new ideas will be converted into potential strategic priorities in the upcoming phases of strategic planning.

Setup

Prior to running your Collaborative SWOT exercise, set up your Miro board and include all of the supplied homework from the previous step.

It's recommended the facilitator collects initial feedback from the participants before you run the activity.

With any luck, everyone will have provided you with their top three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the organization, well in advance of the Ideate session. If you have some laggards on your team, use the strategic planning kickoff meeting to give them one final reminder and to track down their input.

Miro pro-tip: create a list in MS Excel, then copy and paste it into Miro. This will automatically create all of the sticky notes for you.

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Combine all of the strengths from everyone and add them to the Strengths space on the SWOT diagram.

Do the same for weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

To improve the facilitation of the activity, it's recommended that you assign each participant their own colour. This will make it visually easy to pick out who contributed what during the activity. This is not an anonymous activity and people need to take responsibility for their input.

Take an additional moment to create a legend next to the SWOT board with sticky notes with their name on it and their colour.

Finally, randomize the order of your notes so you don't read off all of one person's feedback, followed by the next. This can leave people out of the conversation for long periods of time and many people just want to be there to share their information.

Make use of the Totally Random add on for Miro to quickly randomize the order of sticky notes.

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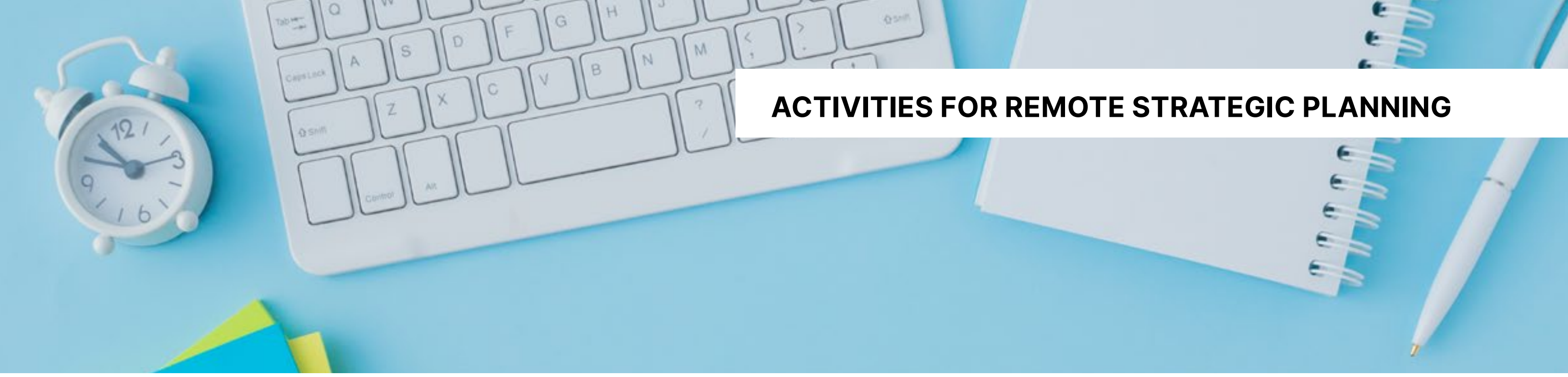

Part 1: Discuss and Prioritize

The goal for the first part of the activity is to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that pose the highest opportunity and are of greatest concern to the organization.

Step 1

Digest all of the information with the participants.

Starting with the strengths group, review each sticky note. Give the owner of the sticky note the opportunity to explain it and elaborate in their own words.

If a similar sticky note already exists, remove the sticky note from the Strengths area, but do not delete it. This will help with the voting activity, which occurs after all sticky notes have been reviewed.

Allow people to share their own perspectives on each topic.

If a new strength is developed through the discussion, add it to the board.

Step 2

Identify the 3 to 5 most important strengths of the organization by holding a vote.

The process to run a vote is not covered here as it will be specific to the whiteboard tool you are using. If this is the first time using the voting feature, be sure to set aside some time prior to running the activity to learn and practice how voting works.

Once all sticky notes in the Strengths area have been discussed, set up a vote. Give each participant five votes to select the most important strengths of the organization.

Before the vote is held, be sure to remove any duplicates. Otherwise, you run the risk of people voting for the same topic on different sticky notes.

Following the vote, move the sticky notes with the most votes to the “Top” area on the SWOT.

These 3 to 5 strengths will be used in the next part of the activity to generate ideas.

Step 3

Repeat the above steps for the Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Depending on the participants, this section of the activity should take between 90 and 120 minutes.

It is okay for one section to take longer than the others, however, do not allow the session to go longer than 2 hours without a significant break. The facilitator should keep an eye on the time, and look for a natural break in the activity between groups. Avoid putting a break between steps 1 and 2 as voting should occur while all the topics are still fresh in everyone’s memory.

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Part 2: Generate Ideas

We will now use the top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify new ideas for the organization to take advantage of opportunities and mitigate threats.

Step 1

Review the top 3 opportunities identified in part 1 of the activity. Now review the top 3 strengths.

Step 2

Set a timer for 5 minutes and ask participants to generate as many strategies as they can think of to take advantage of the top 3 opportunities using the top 3 strengths.

Ask participants to post their strategies to the section labelled **”Strategies to make use of Opportunities through our Strengths”.**

For example:

If an opportunity was *“Increased interest in the solid-state battery market”.*

And an identified strength was *“Our distribution network”.*

A new strategy might be to *“partner with a vendor to distribute solid-state batteries”*

After 5 minutes you will have a handful of ideas captured from each individual. If they’ve paid attention during the prepare and review steps, they likely came to this session with these ideas in mind and this exercise will help unlock them.

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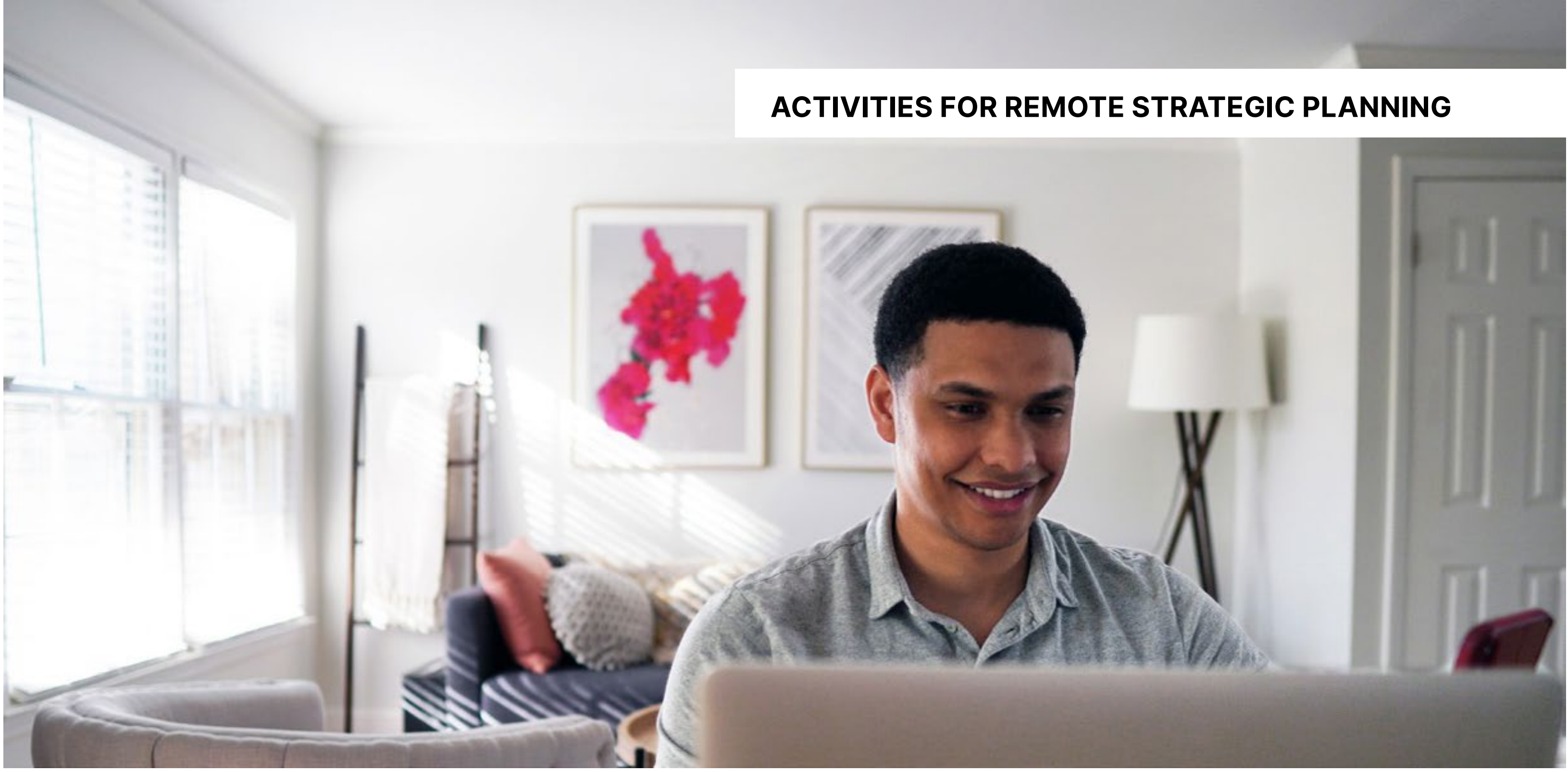

Step 3

Review the identified ideas with all participants, giving anyone a chance to clarify. Be careful not to allow anyone to turn this part of the process into an ad hoc pitch session.

This is also a safe space. There no bad ideas. The facilitator should redirect any negative energy to the development of new ideas.

A strategy must include a verb. If someone posted a strategy without a verb, use this time to clarify what the action is in the strategy.

If more than one person came up with the same strategy, decide which one does the best to explain it and delete the duplicate.

Step 4

Repeat the same exercise for the sections:

- Strategies to make use of Opportunities to minimize Weaknesses
- Strategies to prevent Threats through our Strengths
- Strategies to minimize the potential dangers lying in sectors where Weaknesses meet Threats

Conclusion

This activity brings together all of the information prepared to date and provides a framework to generate new ideas based on that information.

If done well, you will have 10s and maybe 100s of good ideas to work through in the Prioritize stage of yearly strategic planning.

Sort and Combine Activity

The purpose of the Sort and Combine activity is to quickly process all of the strategies generated by the Collaborative SWOT activity into either departmental or cross-departmental boxes.

This immediately reduces the number of items the team has to **discuss, debate, or disagree** with and keeps the **strategic planning process** focused and positive.

Setup

Prior to running your Sort and Combine activity, set up your Miro board.

Explain to all participants the difference between “department” vs “cross-department” activities

Departmental strategies will only impact the people and productivity of the department.

Cross-departmental strategies will impact the people and productivity of the organization.

If there is any disagreement, default to “cross-departmental”. It’s not critical that there’s absolute clarity at this stage. This activity is designed to weed out the obviously departmental strategies and to give additional input into department planning.

Step 1 - Sort

Select any one of the ideas from any one of the areas in the middle of the Collaborative SWOT activity and ask the question:

Is this a departmental or cross-departmental strategy?

If it’s a departmental strategy, ask which department it belongs to and drag the sticky note to that box.

If it’s a cross-departmental activity, drag it to the STRATEGY section of the cross-department box.

Step 2 - Combine

When you add sticky notes to the cross-department box, ask if it’s similar or different from a previous sticky note already in the box.

If it’s similar, place the sticky note below the previous sticky note already in the box to construct vertical columns of similar sticky notes.

As you work through all of the sticky notes from the Collaborative SWOT, you will gather piles of departmental activities in each department, and columns of similar sticky notes in the cross-departmental box.

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Explain to everyone that this is their last chance to inject new ideas into the process.

Step 3 - Review the Epiphany box

By now, you may have a number of items in the epiphany box. Work through them in the same way you did for the items identified in the Collaborative SWOT activity.

Explain to everyone that this is their last chance to inject new ideas into the process. After this step, you will be moving forward with the ideas developed to date.

Step 4 - Create Themes

Once you've worked through all of the sticky notes, you will now work with the participants to identify the theme for each of the columns you've collected in the cross-department box.

Inform the participants that they are now creating candidates for strategic priorities for the year ahead (or a quarter or 6 months for up-and-coming organizations).

3-month strategic priorities are typically projects, whereas a 1-year strategic priority is comprised of a number of initiatives to reach an objective.

If you don't set this expectation upfront you will run into issues during the Rank and Prioritize activities as it is very difficult to compare the priority of a project to the priority of an objective.

Start by asking the participants to review all of the sticky notes in one column and to pick out the one that best describes the bunch. Move that sticky note to the STRATEGIC THEME section of the box, and at the top of the column.

You want them to identify the overarching business benefit that will result from all of the ideas in each column.

If that's not possible, allow for a short amount of discussion to select a theme for the column. Reinforce that it should be in plain English and dampen attempts from any participants to "polish" the name of the theme.

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People tend to think of strategies in terms of solving a problem.

By rolling up strategies into a strategic theme, they're actually identifying the **OBJECTIVE** that needs to be achieved. It's these objectives that will eventually become the priorities for the organization.

Yes, specific work will be defined to accomplish each objective, but they should also be open ended enough to inspire change throughout the organization and allow everyone to contribute to it in their own way.

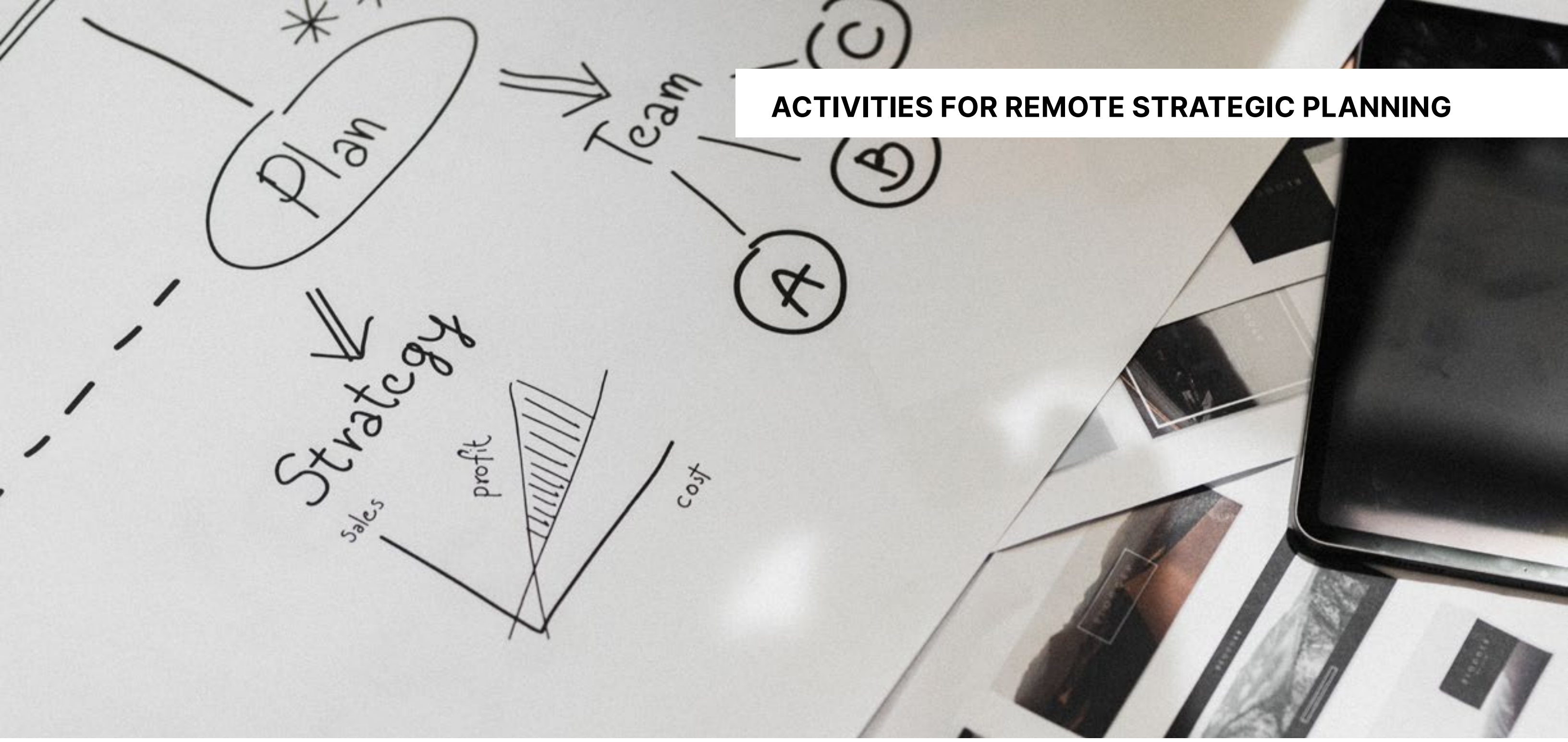
The facilitator should keep an eye on the objective selected for each column. People new to the process will often categorize similar ideas, rather than identify the overarching business benefit. If that happens, simply iterate through the process again by asking how the objective transforms the business.

Objectives should include an action verb and identify a change that will occur

Conclusion

When you're done, you should end up with a number of objectives across the top of the **STRATEGIES** box and a number of strategies sorted into their respective departments.

These objectives will be brought forward to the next activity as candidates for prioritization.



The Rank Activity

This is an excellent activity for filtering through a number of ideas and identifying just the ones you actually need to be talked about.

In the Sort and Combine activity, participants have already divided the strategies between departmental and cross-departmental and then further by boiling strategies down to their core themes to create objectives for the organization.

Even after all of this distilling, there is still too much to talk about.

As a group, you will now separate the objectives into desirable, important, and critical.

Setup

Prior to running your Rank activity, set up your Miro board.

Explain to the participants the differences between the different categories:

- **Critical:** Must be done this year if the company wants to stay on track, or get back on track to achieving its long-term goals. May cause harm or add risk to the status quo if not done.
- **Important:** If done this year, will improve the status quo and move the organization towards its long-term goals.
- **Desirable:** Does not need to be done this year

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Step 1

Take one of the objectives from the Sort and Combine activity and ask the participants:

"Is this critical, important, or desirable?"

Allow for debate and discussion and when the decision is reached, move the sticky note to the appropriate ring of the Rank board.

Step 2

Repeat Step 1 with the next objective until all objectives are ranked as desirable, important, or critical.

The facilitator plays an important role in this part of the process. Participants will know objectives relegated to the "desirable" category will have a low chance of being green-lit this year. If this is one of their pet projects, expect there to be push back.

The facilitator needs to ask probing questions about how the objective will benefit the organization, what value it will bring, and how its contribution compares to others.

Play out **"what if?"** scenarios with the strategies already prioritized.

If all else fails, fall back on a democratic vote.

Conclusion

Through this activity, you will reduce the number of objectives that the Leadership team will have to talk about, thereby increasing the productivity of the conversation.

With any luck, the number of objectives remaining in the critical category will be minimal and you will be able to move forward to the Prioritize activity.

The Prioritize Activity

The Prioritize activity is the last activity of Strategic Planning week. By now the participants have identified the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; brainstormed several strategies to address them; sorted and combined the strategies to discover organizational objectives; and organized them into desirable, important, and critical

Now it's time to pick the top 5 strategic priorities for the year ahead.

Setup

Before running your Prioritize activity, set up your Miro board.

Explain to participants that you will now move sticky notes from the Rank activity, beginning with those in the "Critical" category first into the Strategic Priorities grid.

When the grid is full, you will have the top 5 strategic priorities for your organization for the year ahead.

Remind participants that a strategic priority is an objective that must be accomplished within a specified amount of time, with a specified set of resources.

You will capture some information about each strategic priority during this activity, but it should not be considered final. Owners of strategic priorities will get the following weeks to add details and confirm expectations.

Step 1

Ask participants to select the most critical objective in the **"Critical"** category and drag the sticky note over to cover the **number 1** on the Strategic Priorities grid.

The facilitator should expect healthy debate from all participants. This is a big decision and will impact the direction of the organization.

Ensure everyone has a voice by calling out each individual by name. Do not ask "Does anyone have anything to add?". Be specific and ask *"Dave, do you have anything to add?"* or *"Mary, what are your thoughts on this?"*

Step 2

Repeat step 1, but this time, drag the sticky note to cover the number 2 on the Strategic Priorities grid.

If you run out of sticky notes in the Critical category, move on to the Important category. Repeat until you have a maximum of 5 strategic priorities.

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Step 3

For each strategic priority identify:

- An owner who will the one responsible for collaborating with others and capturing the plan to complete the strategic priority
    - Owners can expect a small investment of time to meet with colleagues to discuss the priority, create a strategic priority one-sheet, and follow up and communicate with strategic priority stakeholders.
    - Finally, at the end of the Define phase, owners present their plan for the strategic priority they own.
- An initial set of success criteria. Be sure to capture measurable success criteria. Ask participants "How will we know this is done?"
- An initial set of key deliverables. Outline a list of deliverables based on conversations so far. What do people expect this strategic priority will deliver this year?

This step helps capture valuable insights while they are still fresh in everyone's heads.

The facilitator should be careful to set the expectation that they are not final. The owner of the priority will be responsible for confirming deliverables and success criteria in the next phase.

Conclusion

Once complete, congratulate the participants for narrowing down and discovering the top 5 strategic priorities of the organization for the next financial year.

Provide additional direction for the next steps. The owners of each strategic priority will have the next week to work with collaborators to put more definition around their strategic priorities, including the high-level steps that must be taken to accomplish them.

Summary

Every planning session will have several activities. These range from the more creative ones like icebreakers, to the necessary ground rules, and activities such as SWOT that are essential for completing your strategic planning. Before you start, you should establish a schedule laying out each activity for that session and how long it will last. Just like establishing ground rules, this ensures everyone is on the same page and expectations are managed.

The meeting facilitator should have a clear understanding of what's needed for each activity. They'll also need to be the one who reins people in if things go off track or people get distracted by a brilliant but unrelated topic.

CREATING A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN

Sometimes called a high-level plan, the Long-Term Strategic Plan communicates where your organization is headed beyond the next year.

The existence of a long-term strategic plan largely depends on the maturity of your organization. Some businesses start with a long-term strategic plan as part of their bid to acquire investor funding. Others will run for the first few years without one while they discover more about who they are.

A Long-Term Strategic Plan is a combination of your business plan, 2 to 3 long-term goals, and a brief description of why they were selected and their importance to the organization. Often the goals will be presented within a general theme.

The Long-Term Strategic Plan is typically prepared by senior executives and owned by the CEO of the company.

For the remainder of this documentation, we will refer to the people responsible for the high-level strategy as the Executive Team. In many companies, this will be the same team as the Leadership team.

For an established organization, the Long-Term Strategic Plan should identify where you will focus your efforts for the next 3 to 5 years. For startups, it might be as short as 6 to 12 months.

The Long-Term Strategic Plan inspires the team and provides context for the years ahead and may include goals to:

- Sell or deliver a new product or service
- Go after a large customer or new market
- Hit a revenue target
- Solve a major operational challenge
- Increase efficiency, or lower costs
- Achieve an aspirational milestone

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Where to start?

Developing a Long-Term Strategic Plan is less prescriptive than a yearly strategic plan. You might need several meetings to discuss, review, and revise.

If you don't have a recently updated business plan, it's recommended you create an overview of your organization that can be used as a focal point for your discussions. Fill out the following:

OUR PURPOSE	OUR CORE VALUES
Why are you in business?	List your core values
WHAT WE SELL	**WHERE WE SELL IT**
Lists the products or services you sell	Identify the markets and geographic regions you sell in
WHO WE SELL IT TO	**OUR CORE COMPETENCIES**
Outline who your customer is	List the things your organization does well
OUR PEOPLE	**OUR INFRASTRUCTURE**
List the key people and their roles plus the total headcount	List key tools and processes
OUR REVENUE	**OUR COSTS**
Provide the revenue amount for the last few years	Provide the cost amount for the last few years

If you prefer there are several other canvas style formats available online. However, we feel this one cuts through the noise and tells it like it is.

Prepare Other Inputs

Similar to the yearly planning process, the Executive team needs to consider market trends, customer feedback, and the current employees when establishing a Long-Term Plan.

- The Market Analysis might identify a vulnerability
- The Sales Report might shine a light on an opportunity to exploit
- The Engagement Report might reveal a systemic cultural issue to resolve
- The Financial Report will help identify what growth was possible in the previous years.

Each of the reports generated has an opportunity to reveal an important piece of the long-term strategic puzzle.

Consider running a Collaborative Swot exercise with a focus on long-term ideas.

Ask Questions

With the organizational overview and the insights from your SWOT activity, ask the following questions:

- Do we have the right focus?
- Are we selling to the right market?
- Are we targeting the right customer?
- Are we selling the right products/services?
- Do we have the right expertise?
- Do we have the right roles?
- Are the right people in those roles?
- Do we have the right tools and processes?
- How fast do we want to grow?
- How much financial risk do we want to take on?

Another way of looking at it is, if you performed the same exercise in 3 years, what would your organization overview look like?

As you can imagine, some of the answers to these questions might take several rounds of discussion to land on a decision.

Create your Long-Term Goals

Now that you've discussed and worked through all of the tough questions, create 2 to 3 long-term goals that encapsulate the direction you want to drive your organization.

It's recommended you set a financial target for at least one of your long-term goals. Each goal should be timebound and measurable. For example:

Increase our revenue to $15 Million by 2023

This long-term goal leaves the execution to achieve it to the leadership team.

Some other similar examples

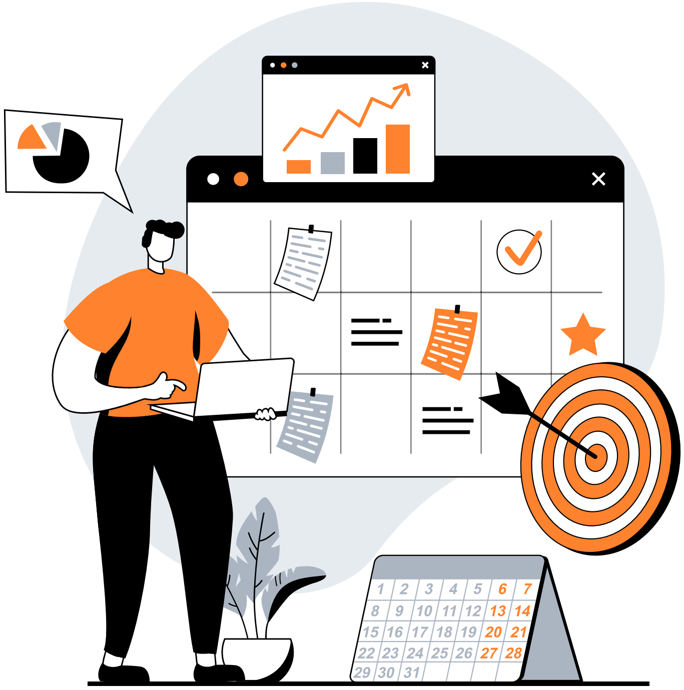
Increase our market share to 30% by 2025

Reduce production waste by 10% by 2024

Increase our distribution efficiency by 50% by 2026

Next, add a brief paragraph describing why the goals were selected.

Finally, you might find it useful to outline the general theme for the next 3 to 5 years that can be used as a battle cry for your employees.



What's Next?

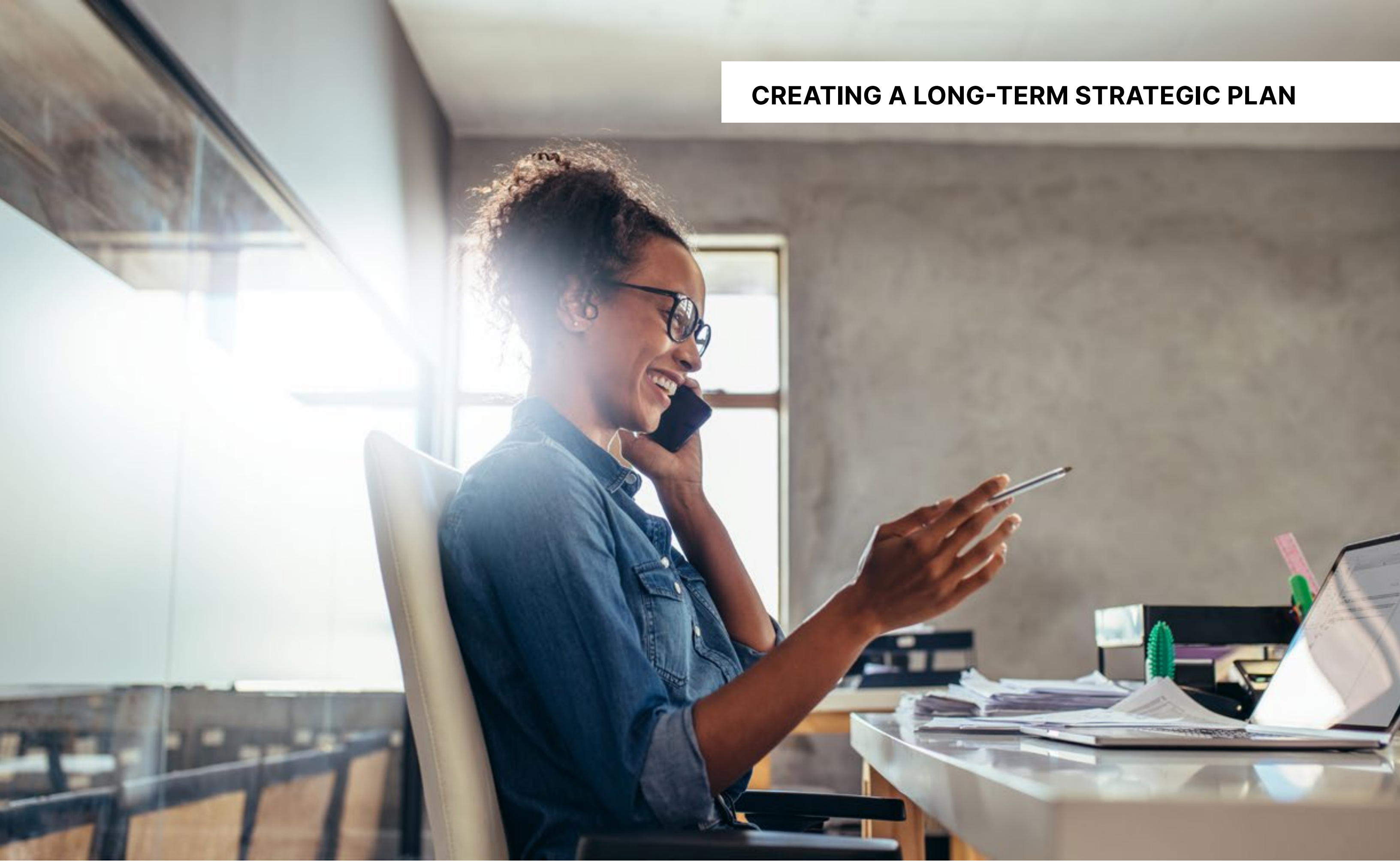
Add your long-term goals to the bottom of your business overview to create the Long-Term Strategic Plan. Broadly communicate it to the rest of your team.

Include a review of your Long-Term Strategic Plan in your onboarding process and before yearly strategic planning sessions. Update your team regularly on the progress towards achieving your goals.

Do not revise your Long-Term Strategic Plan every year. Continue to work towards it and replace it once the time is up. Only when you're widely offtrack should you replace the plan before the time is up.

It's for this reason you should keep the time range of you Long-Term Strategic Plan short until your organization matures and stabilizes. Changing your plan every year may impact the trust your employees have in the leaders of the organization.

Do not revise your Long-Term Strategic Plan every year. Continue to work towards it and replace it once the time is up.



Summary

Owned by the CEO, the Long-Term Strategic Plan typically sets the tone and goals for the company's next 3-5 years, or in the case of start-ups, 6-12 months. These goals often take more time to develop than yearly and quarterly goals but are just as important as they determine the direction you want your business to move in, and impact yearly goals.

Two important questions when creating this strategic plan are: why are you in business and what are your core values? Your Long-Term goals need to be aligned with these two questions. When deciding Long-Term goals, it's also important to take in several factors such as market trends and engagement reports, because just like any other goal you create, they need to be realistic and achievable.

BUDGETS & THE STRATEGIC YEARLY PLAN

This section provides a look at how the organizational budget fits into the yearly planning process.

Benefits of a Budget

Regardless of size, **every organization should have a budget.** If you are just starting and have not proactively set a budget, consider the following:

- Provides a profit and loss for the organization for the year ahead, which allows you to proactively address shortages or growing pains.
- Allows you to create a variety of forecasting scenarios to model your growth and help you understand what's required for reaching your long-term goals.
- Allows you to assign responsibility for certain purchases to individuals on your team. This can be especially helpful to reduce the amount of overhead required to make a decision. If, for example, each manager can spend $1000 on training, then they can purchase training material for their teams without requiring approval for every purchase.
- Is typically used to obtain financing from potential lenders and investors, who will want to know the financial viability of the organization before they invest in it.

Most importantly, it gets everyone on the same page about your approach for the various areas of the business:

- How much staff costs and when to hire new team members
- Approach to equipment, office costs, and software licenses
- How much to spend on marketing and advertising
- How much to invest in your team
- Amount of profit to share or dividends to payout

Integrating the Budget into the Yearly Strategic Plan

To add the following steps to include your budgeting process into your yearly strategic plan.

Step 1

When you plan for success, identify the individual accountable for preparing the budget for the next fiscal year and who will work with strategic priority owners to determine how you will pay for your strategic plan.

Determine who will be involved in budgeting. Depending on your organization, only a select few may be able to see the full budget and be able to speak about budget decisions.

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Step 2

Proactively include additional dates on your calendar during the Define phase for headcount planning and budgeting.

Step 3

Create a draft budget for the next fiscal year during the Prepare phase. **If you have never prepared a budget before:**

Start with a recent profit and loss statement and assume your spending and your income will remain static.

Then factor in known variations and the seasonality of your business based on the previous year.

Determine decisions you can offload to various departments. Can you give IT a budget and parameters for purchasing equipment, for example?

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Step 4

Schedule headcount planning and budget planning in the second week after strategic planning to amalgamate all of the anticipated costs and new hires into the budget.

Strategic Priority owners should be encouraged to work with the Budget Owner during the Define phase to proactively plan for their needs. This will reduce the risk of a surprise when everything is added up.

For example, a strategic priority owner may need to confirm additional funding for a large purchase or new hire.

If the total costs of the strategic priorities do not fit, the Budget Owner should have the authority to delay the strategic planning process until everyone agrees with the costs of the strategic plan.

This may involve selecting different strategic priorities.

Step 5

During the approval phase, the CEO will approve the budget along with the strategic plan as a holistic acknowledgment of the plan and what it will cost to implement it.

Step 6

Throughout the execution phase include a budget review every month. This will help in more areas than just the strategic plan and will keep the leadership team engaged with the profit and loss of the organization.

Quarterly, schedule a headcount review following recalibration.

Headcount and Budget Planning

As a best practice, we recommend you maintain a headcount plan and update it during yearly strategic planning and quarterly recalibration.

What is a Headcount Plan?

Headcount plans are typically prepared in a spreadsheet such as MS Excel, SmartSheet, or Google Sheets. It forecasts how many people you will have in each department for the year ahead.

A typical headcount plan for a Marketing department might look like this:

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Marketing	Role	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Lynn Kimberly	Manager of Marketing	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Colby Bentleigh	Marketing Coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sydney Meryl	Social Media Manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Loryn Malin	Graphic Designer	1	1	1	1								
TBH	Graphic Designer			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

From the above, we can see the Marketing department has 4 team members and plan to hire a new one in March.

Then, after a two-month overlap, Loryn is leaving the team.

A complete headcount plan will include all of the departments and team members of the entire organization.

The Headcount Review

On a quarterly basis, managers meet to review their headcount plans with senior members of the Finance, Operations, and HR departments to review the headcount requirements for the year ahead.

It provides an opportunity for Operations to review the capacity needs of each department and discuss any changes the manager expects.

For a growing firm, the manager might predict when additional capacity will be required if the increased demand continues. This gives Finance the ability to budget the new costs and HR the opportunity to be proactive with the recruitment process.

For a firm in decline, the manager will be able to discuss a plan for who will be impacted should the current trends continue.

The headcount review also gives the HR department the opportunity to ask the manager about how each of the members in the department is doing. This helps take the manager out of the day-to-day and recognize exceptional performance that needs to be rewarded or a struggling team member who might need additional support.

When scheduling a headcount review remotely, invite all managers to a 1 or 2-hour block of time and invite the managers into the meeting one at a time to discuss their departments.

Combined with Budgets

The headcount plan review is an ideal time to also review the budgets and spending to date for each department.

If, for example, each department had $1000 to spend on training, the conversation could include questions around why it wasn't being spent, what plans the manager had to spend it, or why they'd overspent it.

During Yearly Strategic Planning, the headcount plan meeting can be extended to include conversations with strategic priority owners to cover any additional costs or headcount required to support their strategic priority.

During Quarterly Recalibration, strategic priority owners can be held accountable for the costs and spend to date on their strategic priorities - providing an additional layer of governance for your organization

Summary

Regardless of what your business is or how much revenue you generate, a budget is vital to the long-term health and growth of your business. Knowing your budget allows you to address potential issues, forecast, and attract investors.

Your budget will need to be discussed as part of your yearly planning strategy and should be done during the Prepare Phase. Knowing your budget will help you know whether or not you can afford a new hire or new equipment that would be required to achieve the goals you are setting out.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL SETTING

As a supplement to yearly strategic planning, you may decide to ask individual team members to pick 1 or 2 personal goals for the next quarter.

An individual goal should be an activity that promotes the advancement of an individual's career. Or in other words, it should stretch the individual's current skill level through learning and development.

If done well, individual goal setting can increase engagement and reduce turnover within your organization.

Timing of Individual Goal Setting

Individuals should be given the month following the communication of your organization's strategic and department priorities to come up with individual goals.

Therefore, if your organization's yearend is the end of October, you will strive to communicate strategic and department priorities before Oct 31st, and then give individuals the month of November to establish personal goals.

Best Practices for Individual Goal Setting

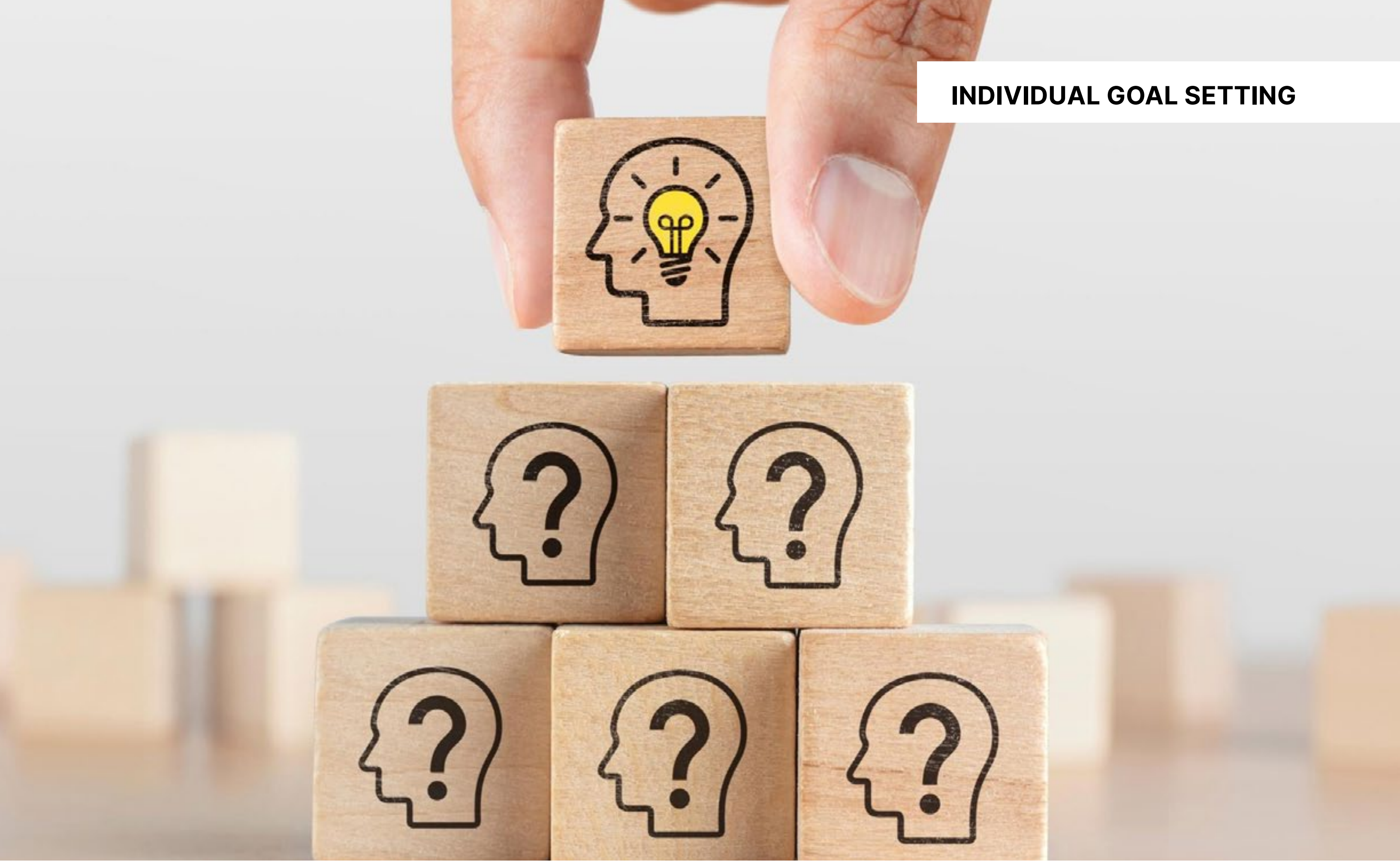
- **Is your organization mature enough to manage individual goals?**
    - Smaller organizations might find that this puts an additional strain on the organization when what they really want are all individuals focused on hitting the strategic priorities.
    - Perhaps the management structure isn't available to provide oversight to the goals
    - It may be possible the organization is too young to be thinking about advancement and the expectations goal achievement sets with employees.
- **Keep individual goals to a quarter's length.**
    - It's best for the individuals to work on goals that are near-term and achievable. Even if the individual has a long-term goal, to get certified in their craft, for example, get them to express their goals in terms of what has to be accomplished in the next 3 months.
- **Guide individuals away from goals that rely on the business achieving success.**
    - The goals the individuals set must be something they can accomplish themselves and not be dependent on external factors such as the performance of the sales team, or delivery of a group project.
- **Remember SMART goals.**
    - Specific: clear what the deliverable is
    - Measurable: able to tell when it's complete
    - Attainable: it's something the individual can do or should be able to learn how to do
    - Realistic: it's something that can be finished
    - Time-bound: it has a clear deadline when it should be completed by
- **Keep the number of goals to a maximum of 2**
    - Individuals are already working to accomplish 5 strategic priorities and 2 to 3 department priorities
    - If possible encourage 1 goal that aligns with a department priority, and one for self-improvement.

Maintenance of Individual Goals

Similar to strategic priorities, individual goals will be forgotten if not reviewed on a monthly basis.

Managers should be encouraged to set a reminder to check in on individual goals once a month during one on ones. Simply asking the question “how are you doing with your goal?” will keep it top of mind and spark conversation on their progress (or lack of progress).

Following Quarterly Recalibration, managers should work with their team members to set new goals for the next 3 months.



Summary

For mature businesses, individual goal setting should be considered as part of your overall yearly strategic planning. They happen after the company goals are set. These goals are more focused on developing individual employees and helping them advance their career.

When assisting employees create their goals, companies should be careful to consider the expectations they will set. Employees should not feel stressed or pressured to complete difficult goals.

Individual goals are to be short term (achieved within 3 months) and achievable by the individual. This means that the success of the individual’s goals is not tied to the success of a company goal. A monthly check-in from managers can help the employee stay on track as well as set new goals every quarter.

REVIEW AND IMPROVE

We've made every effort to provide you with a robust yet flexible process for planning and running your yearly strategy. However, every organization is different. You need to tailor the process to the people and purpose of your organization.

As a final step to yearly strategic planning, we recommend you take a moment to run a retrospective on your process to get feedback from those involved so you can make improvements for next year.

Improvements come in all forms and could be a matter of the timing of the events, the value derived from the pre-work, a step that was missed or one that wasn't necessary.

Document Your Process

As you make changes to it, be sure to keep a record of what you do each year. It's surprisingly easy to forget all of the nuances a year later.

Create a plan for your organization by capturing who should be involved, the max number of strategic priorities, whether you do department planning or individual goal setting.

Create a culture of successful strategic planning through small improvements and iteration.

Keep a Historical Record

Along with keeping track of your process, take time to capture all of the information you collected and keep it in a safe place.

This should include all of the reports generated during the Prepare phase, the results from all of the activities during yearly strategic planning, the one-sheets generated during the Define phase, and anything else that you created during the process.

Organize it all into an archive that's readily available to those involved in the process. Report writers will use last year's report as a template. Department managers will review their retrospective results throughout the year to create department priorities. And strategic priority owners will look back on one-sheets to confirm they are completing their priorities to plan. If they have a reliable place to look for the material, it will quickly become a resource for your organization.

GLOSSARY

There are a lot of terms and words used in remote planning. We recommend you create a glossary of the ones your team most commonly used by your team to improve clarity and reduce confusion.

Use this glossary as a starting point.

Goal

A goal is a specific accomplishment to be achieved at some point in the future.

Variations:

- Long-term goal: a specific accomplishment to be achieved in the long-term, usually within 2 - 10 years.

Project

A project is a temporary effort that creates value for the organization. It must have a start and end date, scope, and assigned resources.

Objective

Objectives are concrete steps that move you toward your goals. An objective is a measurable step you take to achieve a strategy.

Objectives are commonly set for a year, are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound, and move you towards achieving a long-term goal.

One-Sheet

A document that summarizes the purpose and high-level expectations of a project, initiative, objective, or strategic priority.

Strategic Priority

A strategic priority is an objective that must be successfully accomplished within a specified amount of time, with a specified set of resources.

An organization should set no more than five strategic priorities per year. They are the objectives the organization will focus on and complete ahead of any other objectives.

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