

Agile Strategy Management

Techniques for Continuous
Alignment and Improvement

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CRC Press is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an **informa** business
AN AUERBACH BOOK

CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group
6000 Broken Sound Parkway NW, Suite 300
Boca Raton, FL 33487-2742

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Printed on acid-free paper
Version Date: 20130916

International Standard Book Number-13: 978-1-4665-9607-8 (Hardback)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lyngso, Soren.
Agile strategy management : techniques for continuous alignment and improvement /
Soren Lyngso.
pages cm. -- (ESI international project management series ; 18)
Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-4665-9607-8 (hardcover)
1. Information technology--Management. 2. Strategic planning. I. Title.

HD30.2.L95 2014
658.4'012--dc23
2013035796

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Team Building for a Strategic Initiative

A Strategic Initiative is taken because an organization or someone with enough power, the sponsor, has seen or been convinced about an opportunity worth going for or a threat that can be avoided or mitigated. This opportunity or threat is the initial cause behind a need for change to a better situation.

The initial challenge of the Strategic Initiative sponsor is to formulate the basic need and the initial scope, and to find the competent people that can and will be involved with this Strategic Initiative to make it successful.

Team building is concerned with the establishment of the best possible organization to perform the Strategic Initiative:

- Selection of people to become key-stakeholders in the Strategic Initiative
- Establishment of the teams of people and the roles and responsibilities of the people in the teams
- Definition of the roles and responsibilities of the teams to perform the tasks required during the lifecycle of the Strategic Initiative
- Establishment of the physical and technological environment within which the chosen people can act and communicate in an optimal way
- Establishment of standards to be used for processes, documentation, and deliverables in order to manage the quality of work, deliverables, and final solution delivered by the teams

Team building is a way to generate synergy; that is, the teams are organized in such a way that the performance of any team is higher than the performance measured as the sum of the team members' individual performances.

The persons to be involved with the Strategic Initiative will contribute in different ways to the success of the initiative tasks:

- Initiate, approve, and govern the Strategic Initiative
- Implement the Strategic Initiative in the corporate strategy

- Coach and facilitate the Strategic Initiative activities
- Plan (develop) the Strategic Initiative
- Develop solution components
- Implement solution components
- Evaluate the Strategic Initiative quality
- Evaluate the Strategic Initiative performance

In order to ensure the best possible contribution to the Strategic Initiative from competent persons and teams, the sponsor provides them with the information, tools, techniques, environments, facilities, and whatever else that is needed to ensure their motivation and ability to perform well according to the “no excuse for failure” principle.

2.1 GET A STRATEGIC INITIATIVE OFF TO A GOOD START

Irrespective of what the Strategic Initiative is dealing with, which types and sizes of organizations are involved, what kind of people are available, etc. there is only one way to get the initiative off to a good start:

Get the key-stakeholders together and give them no excuse for failure to define the scope of the strategic initiative.

A key-stakeholder is someone with power, knowledge, experience, and competence within the context of the Strategic Initiative that you need to get involved in the initiative in order to make the initiative successful. It is a person who can create or sponsor the development and implementation of some part of the solutions you need. This part of the solution can be infrastructure such as land or public transport and institutions or it can be usage of new technology that can give you important benefits.

Other stakeholders are the classical ones that might benefit or suffer from the Strategic Initiative without being directly involved. You still need to make these stakeholders as happy as possible, which in some cases means “as little unhappy as possible.”

You use communication and remuneration to make stakeholders happy, but in order to make the communication and remuneration successful you need to know the stakeholders and their needs and expectations.

This simple stakeholder-based way to get the Strategic Initiative off to a good start poses some important questions to be answered before you can kick off the initiative:

- How do you identify the key-stakeholders?
- How do you communicate with the key-stakeholders?
- What is “no excuse for failure” in your Strategic Initiative?
- How do you get the key-stakeholders motivated for your Strategic Initiative?
- What is the scope of your Strategic Initiative?

There are no simple answers to these questions because the answers are hidden in the heads of quite a few people and some answers might only appear once you start asking questions to potential stakeholders and look into whatever experience material you can find.

I will show how I have handled these questions with some examples and let you judge the pertinence for yourself.

In all the examples, I have had the role as Coach/Facilitator for the Strategic Initiative sponsor; sometimes supported by other Coaches/Facilitators from my company or from other organizations. When I talk about “we” in the following examples, it means the Strategic Initiative sponsor and the Coach/Facilitator.

In rare cases, I have been faced with the problem of making some key-stakeholders “as little unhappy as possible,” which also will be explained by examples for you to evaluate.

2.1.1 The Sponsor Role

The sponsor initiates the Strategic Initiative and signs off on the scope as it is established originally and as it is adapted to new conditions and events during the lifecycle of the Strategic Initiative.

The sponsor establishes the Strategy Governance team.

In the case where a sponsor is a group of people such as shareholders or a public institution, such a sponsor is represented by a *de facto* sponsor role.

The *de facto* sponsor is a person who performs decisions on behalf of the original sponsor and who participates directly in planning and implementation on a high level, for example, on program management or the corporate management level.

The original sponsor might not exist as a person at all. Imagine a defense budget and a political decision to make the defense green with a part of the defense budget assigned to this objective. In this case, the sponsor is the government and the defense minister, but the government and the defense minister are not personally visible in the Strategic Initiative. However, a person has been made responsible for this task with a budget, and this person is the de facto sponsor.

For the purpose of Strategic Initiative treatment in this book, I will use the term “sponsor” for the de facto sponsor. If reference is made to the original sponsor organization, this is explicitly explained.

It is important to get to know the people with power and influence in the original sponsor organization. These people are key-stakeholders who are kept informed about the Strategic Initiative progress and who continually are motivated to support the initiative and the (de facto) sponsor.

The sponsor might be a CIO, a CEO, a CFO, or simply a program or a project manager appointed for the specific purpose of the Strategic Initiative.

The sponsor person might have more than one role in a Strategic Initiative.

2.1.2 The Coach/Facilitator Role

The Coach/Facilitator delivers the quality system and supports all directly involved team members and managers with appropriate guidelines, procedures, and documentation standards during the length of the Strategic Initiative.

The Coach/Facilitator role is most often delivered out of the corporate project office if this has been established.

The Coach/Facilitator ensures high-quality preparation and conduction of workshops, studies, and working conditions in support of teams to be established or already performing work.

The Coach/Facilitator has an important role to ensure the establishment of “no excuse for failure” teams.

The role that my company most often has delivered to our clients is the Coach/Facilitator role, especially in the case where the client wants to work according to a predefined set of methods.

In most cases, more than one person will take on the role of Coach/Facilitator during a Strategic Initiative because different organizational

levels and objectives of teams or workgroups demand different knowledge, skill, and experience from their Coaches/Facilitators.

A Coach/Facilitator who coaches a general manager or a program manager will normally have a profile other than a Coach/Facilitator looking after an agile team of developers and implementers simply because the methods and standards used are very different and therefore demand different experience and knowledge from the Coach/Facilitators.

You can combine a group of Coaches/Facilitators in a Process Governance Team that supports one or more teams and workgroups under a Strategic Initiative.

In most cases, my company has employed competent external Coaches/Facilitators for our own Strategic Initiatives. When being external to the coached/facilitated organization, Coaches/Facilitators can contribute considerably to the value of the result of Strategic Initiatives because of their broader experience and because an external Coach/Facilitator has no constraints of thought and ideas based on former experience with the management of the coached/facilitated organization.

2.1.3 The Unknown Unknowns

Before talking about how the Coach/Facilitator and the Sponsor can work together to identify key-stakeholders and to define the initial scope of the Strategic Initiative, I refer to a press conference with U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in NATO*, Brussels, June 6, 2002. Mr. Rumsfeld outlined the challenges faced in a complex defense situation, which could just as well be a Strategic Initiative situation:

Question from the audience: Regarding terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, you said something to the effect that the real situation is worse than the facts show. I wonder if you could tell us what is worse than is generally understood.

Rumsfeld: Sure. All of us in this (defense) business read intelligence information. And we read it daily and we think about it and it becomes, in our minds, essentially what exists. And that is wrong. It is not what exists.

I say that because I have had experiences where I have gone back and done a great deal of work and analysis on intelligence information and looked at important countries, target countries, looked at important subject matters with respect to those target countries and asked, probed deeper and deeper

* Donald Rumsfeld press conference, June 6, 2002. <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020606g.htm> (With permission of NATO).

and kept probing until I found out what it is we knew, and when we learned it, and when it actually had existed.

And I found that, not to my surprise, but I think anytime you look at it that way what you find is that there are very important pieces of intelligence information that countries, that spend a lot of money, and a lot of time with a lot of wonderful people trying to learn more about what's going on in the world, did not know some significant event for two years after it happened, for four years after it happened, for six years after it happened, in some cases 11 and 12 and 13 years after it happened.

Now what is the message there? The message is that there are no "knowns." There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we do not know. However, there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we do not know. So when we do the best we can and we pull all this information together, and we then say well that's basically what we see as the situation, that is really only the known knowns and the known unknowns. And each year, we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns.

It sounds like a riddle. It is not a riddle. It is a very serious, important matter.

There is another way to phrase that and that is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It is basically saying the same thing in a different way. Simply because you do not have evidence that something exists does not mean that you have evidence that it does not exist. And yet almost always, when we make our threat assessments, when we look at the world, we end up basing it on the first two pieces of that puzzle, rather than all three.

Together with the key-stakeholders to be involved in the Strategic Initiative, we want to define the Strategic Initiative scope precisely:

- Why the Strategic Initiative is required
- The organizations to be involved and why
- Solutions and products to be delivered and why
- The needed quality of the solutions and product and why

We are faced with conditions that are not only the known ones. The Strategic Initiative conditions also comprise the unknown ones that we will meet in the future.

The current and future conditions present us with threats and opportunities that demand our response:

The known knowns	These conditions have been documented in whatever requirements spec or problem list that has already been established.
The known unknowns	These conditions are known by stakeholders that have not yet been involved. It is the current pertinent tacit knowledge that you need to activate to understand more about your opportunities and threats.
The unknown knowns	These conditions should have been documented in requirements spec and problem lists, but these conditions are so obvious that no one thought about documenting them.
The unknown unknowns	These conditions you might discover as group synergy or by simple luck, but you will not find them if the minds of you and your stakeholders have not been set to be observant and creative—to “think out of the box.”

2.1.4 Stakeholder Identification

Strategic Initiatives can have many different preconditions that will play an important role for the initial identification and selection of stakeholders:

- There might be a requirements specification that explains in detail what is expected from the Strategic Initiative.
- We might have signed a contract that explains in detail what is expected from the Strategic Initiative and what our roles are expected to be.
- There might be only a wish list established by the original sponsor who has only a vague idea about what is at stake in order to succeed with the initiative.
- There might be only a list of problems to be resolved and it is up to us to decide on our respective roles (Coach/Facilitator and Sponsor) and the roles of other key-stakeholders to be involved in the Strategic Initiative.

Once contracts, direct orders, or other agreements have ensured that the original sponsor supports the initiative, we start searching for the key-stakeholders to participate in the future Strategy Governance Team.

Although the preconditions are important and we have to know and understand them, they are historical. Requirements specifications, wish lists, and even contracts are merely guidelines to get the initiative started off.

In most cases, you will find a first answer to why the Strategic Initiative is conducted in these preconditions, but sometimes even this important “why” is answered only with a political decision that in vague terms addresses the real opportunities of the Strategic Initiative.

It becomes a task of the chosen key-stakeholders and ourselves to answer the why question and the what and the when and the how questions as well of course in order to fully get to a common understanding and agreement about our opportunities and threats.

If we do not get the why right relatively early, we will have a hard time to motivate future key-stakeholders to get on board and to stay active in and motivated for the Strategic Initiative until the initiative closes out. Only if people feel that they contribute to something valuable can you keep them motivated. We keep this feeling alive by involving the stakeholders in Strategic Initiative processes where they can and will contribute positively and visibly to the result.

The Sponsor has knowledge about who the key-stakeholders might be and the Coach/Facilitator has knowledge and experience about how stakeholders can be treated and made happy, once identified.

To help us identify the key-stakeholders of the Strategic Initiative we establish the organogram with the organizational units to be involved (Figure 2.1)

We will also use the Value Chain to identify pertinent organization units and business processes for the Strategic Initiative (Figure 2.2).

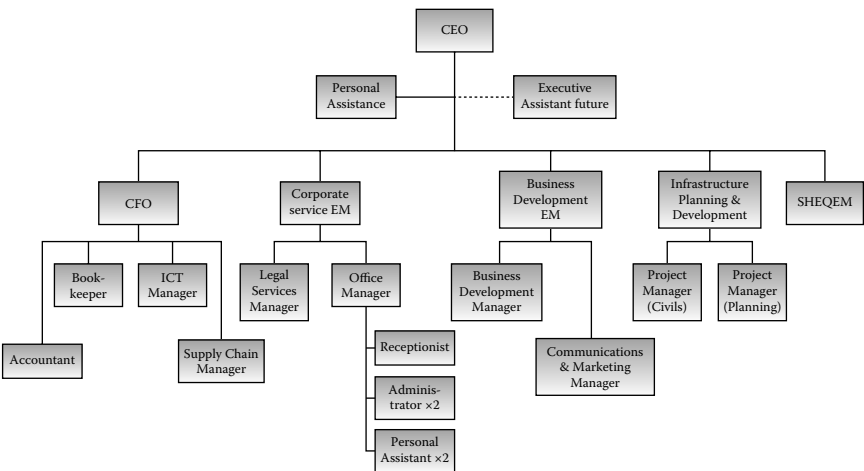


FIGURE 2.1
Organogram.



FIGURE 2.2
Value chain (from <http://bettyfeng.us>) and strategy.

For each pertinent organization unit we outline their quality objects:

- **Products**
 - What, how, and why they deliver what to or receive what from other organizational units externally and internally
 - Quality, that is, why the clients like what they deliver
 - What they produce in support of their own processes
 - Key figures such as number of employees, annual production volume, cost of operation, etc.
- **Processes**
 - What they do and why they do it
 - Productivity measures
 - Efficiency
- **Organization**
 - Functional Areas
 - Managers
 - Clients internally and externally
 - Key knowledge persons (skill, experience, competence)
 - Communication and knowledge sharing

We discuss and document why each of these quality objects has an influence on or is the reason behind the known problems and objectives for the Strategic Initiative. We use this knowledge—and, quite often, the lack of knowledge on our part—to prepare ourselves for the initial dialogues with identified key-stakeholders.

Sometimes enterprise management or another original sponsor has already pointed out the key-stakeholders, but we still need to get to know their motivation for involvement in the Strategic Initiative.

We ask the key-stakeholders to tell us what they think the opportunities and threats are if we pursue the Strategic Initiative. We also ask them what they think the opportunities and threats are if we do not pursue the Strategic Initiative.

Finally, we ask questions that are more personal in order to measure their motivation for getting involved with the Strategic Initiative:

- What is your vision of the future situation when the Strategic Initiative has been successfully completed?
- What could your mission and role be in this Strategic Initiative if or when you get involved?

This initial dialogue with potential key-stakeholders who are potential participants in the Strategy Governance Team makes it possible for us to answer the why question with focus on real pertinent opportunities and threats. We obtain the information we need to prepare the Process Quality Assurance (PQA) to kick off the Strategic Initiative on corporate or strategy governance level.

You use the same type of dialogue to prepare PQA processes for other PQA Teams that are established on a lower level.
