Connecting people
with the strategy

'We have a strategy. We have a long range strategic plan. We have all the necessary controls and metrics in place. And we have communicated the whole lot to everyone. So, what's the problem?'

Conventional strategic planning, setting up controls and communicating the plan might have been fine for a stable, predictable business world, but for times of turbulence, then the strategy model has to change. Even the language has to change, in line with new business realities.

"Strategising is not a once-a-year rain dance, nor is it a once-a-decade consulting project. Strategising must be a capability deeply embedded. Just as business processes can be reinvented in ways big and small, so too can business models. ... strategy doesn't simply emerge, rather it is emergent, in the same full-bodied sense that life itself is emergent. ... by creating the right set of preconditions, one can provoke emergence."[1]

This shifts the emphasis away from strategy as a product, to an organisational capability. It also means that strategy is not a fixed quantity – a product can be refreshed from time to time in episodic activities, but a capability is a continuing characteristic of the organisation. 'Deeply embedded' implies that strategising is not just for people at the top, or for a specialist function, but for everyone. That neatly sidesteps the need for communication of the strategy, as the people who have to deliver the strategy are its creators.

This raises two key challenges. If strategising is an emergent phenomenon, then how should management kick start and then enable the process in such a way that it has coherence; that it is self-organising; and that it is appropriate to the current and future needs of the business? Note - the concept of 'control' is absent here – no management controls can contain or predict the outcome of any sort of emergent process.

The second is how to create the conditions, as Gary Hamel indicates is required, to breathe life into ongoing, emergent strategising?

The first of these challenges requires that there is a clear, understood and committed-to strategic direction – of the Roughly West variety. There will be a sense of direction expressed in terms that real human beings can relate to. It will be one that allows for considerable freedom of movement, to enable people to 'tack according to wind and tide', so that movement in the required direction is always in place – an example of the adage that 'from simple guidelines complex adaptive strategies will emerge'.

The second challenge has three main dimensions.

- The need for clarification of strategic direction, and gaining commitment to its achievement – throughout the organisation

- The need to ensure alignment between investment decisions and other actions with the needs of the strategy

- The development of an organisational environment in which constant adaptation of tactics for strategy implementation is both expected and applied to handle a changing environment

And the whole structure of management decisions and other actions, formal and informal, needs to carry implicit messages, loud and clear, that the strategic direction is the way to go, and that everyone has a part to play in its achievement.

---

1 Gary Hamel ~ Strategy Innovation and the Quest for Value ~ Sloan Management Review, 1998

A practical, working solution

Creating the conditions for emergence is one of the key goals that Magus Networker was designed to achieve. Stimulating and enabling emergence that is coherent and self-organising is another. Creating developmental actions that do not encounter resistance is a fundamental characteristic of all Networker applications.

Conventionally, Magus Networker is custom-configured by the user for each problem resolution / organisational development application. Now the developers of Magus Networker have designed an application specifically targeting the issue of developing and enabling strategising – and hence connecting people with the strategy. This is in the form of a template that can, however, still be adapted to the specific needs of each organisation. The Magus Networker process includes front-end analysis to enable this adaptation, and the design of the sample to be used.

The design of the 'connecting people with the strategy' application uses extensive research into the three dimensions of the creation of conditions that enable an organisational capacity for strategising to be developed. It deals with both systemic and cultural drivers of emergence with the question set focused very specifically on strategy development. The strategy development model that was used to design the question set is itself both comprehensive and proven.

As with all Magus Networker applications, the information generated is self-validating – it is beyond challenge. Faced with a 'real-world' description of the current state, the insights that people work out for themselves enable hidden heroes to be identified; gaps in information and communication networks to be located; blockages to strategising capacity to be actioned. As organisational constraints on strategy are identified by a process of cross-functional review, the conditions needed for innovative problem resolution are automatically in place.
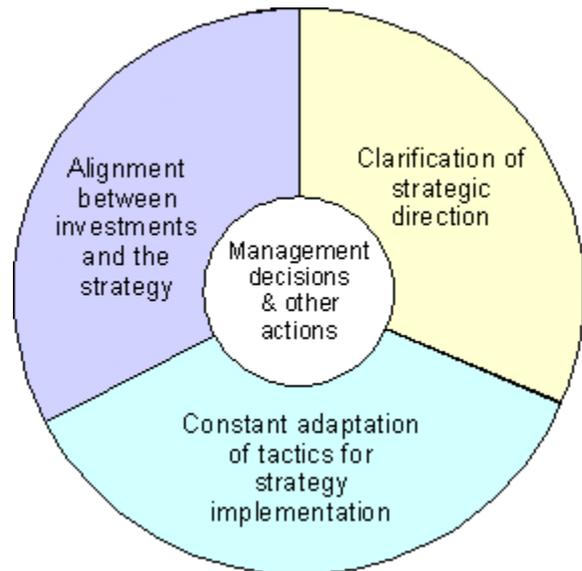
Magus Networker

Magus Networker is part of a complete methodology for resolving organisational problems and for developing greater performance. It handles complex data sets with ease, providing powerful insights into the nature of the problem, and its causes. It does this through graphical reports presented as network charts, that illuminate all the complex working relationships, formal and informal, that actually drive organisational performance. The Magus Networker process enables many people to be engaged, through open dialogue, with their attention focused on the issues, causes and actions illuminated through the network charts.

As with all Magus Networker applications, the process is fast, requiring weeks, not months. Developmental action flows automatically from the analyses for cause. These actions include those taken by delegates to the Magus Networker workshops, and by the people in management roles who sponsored the process. By default, priorities are determined according to the goals agreed at the start of the process.

For more information, please contact Magus Toolbox Limited at enquiries01@magus-toolbox.com