END-TO-END STRATEGY

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Much is written about how organisations should approach strategy: whether it be through workshop facilitation, strategic insights research, brainstorming sessions, or the application of preferred strategy frameworks models and tools. But there is a gap in the literature when it comes to describing how to engage in a structured process that guides the organisation on a journey from strategy design and development to effective implementation and delivery.

I introduce the term 'end-to-end strategy' to capture this holistic and rigorous approach to strategy. End-to-end strategy addresses all the necessary steps in the strategising activities of an organisation, where the intention is not only to envision future strategic paths, but also to translate these strategies into concrete reality, and align the essential elements of the organisation – structure, systems, process, culture, competence and the business model – with the strategy, vision and organisation purpose.

End-to-end strategy is designed to assist the Board, the CEO and the directors of the organisation with the shaping of its corporate and operational strategies, the alignment of the organisation with strategy, the implementation of strategy and the measurement and delivery of strategic objectives, initiatives and plans.

End-To-End Strategy©

1	**Engagement** Stakeholder Priorities	➢ *Interview* CEO, directors & key stakeholders ➢ *Review* existing research and strategy ➢ *Confirm* strategy development priorities
2	**Design** Scope & Approach	➢ *Design* organisation-specific strategy development and delivery process ➢ *Identify* key resources and timeframes ➢ *Agree* on required outcomes
3	**Positioning** Business Context & Options	➢ *Research* operating environment and competitive positioning ➢ *Analyse* prevailing trends and uncertainties ➢ *Aggregate* market and competitive intelligence ➢ *Distill* opportunities and threats, strategic insights and options
4	**Facilitation** Strategy Formulation	➢ *Engage* in application of strategy frameworks, models and tools ➢ *Integrate* corporate and operational strategy ➢ *Include* stakeholder inputs and link strategy to a viable and effective business model ➢ *Upskill* staff to facilitate strategy workshop sessions with required materials
5	**Alignment** Effectiveness & Resilience	➢ *Translate* strategy into customer value propositions (CVP) ➢ *Extend* strategy to include employee value propositions (EVP) ➢ *Map* culture to fit with strategic focus ➢ *Strengthen* leadership alignment to strategy
6	**Reporting** Plans & Presentations	➢ *Develop* strategic planning documents ➢ *Produce* Board presentations ➢ *Customise* strategy communication and planning materials ➢ *Construct* action and implementation plans
7	**Relevance** Marketing & Sales Strategy	➢ *Explore* implications of strategy for marketing and sales ➢ *Facilitate* the development of strategic marketing and sales plans ➢ *Coach* marketing and sales management to interpret and execute strategy
8	**Delivery** Strategy Implementation	➢ *Build* necessary competence for the implementation of strategy ➢ *Mentor* leaders for ongoing strategic focus ➢ *Monitor* the execution of strategy action plans
9	**Assessment** Performance Measurement	➢ *Establish* performance measurement criteria to assess strategy effectiveness ➢ *Introduce* balanced scorecard tools to align performance for individuals, teams and businesses ➢ *Evaluate* contribution from strategy intervention

Methodology For Strategy Design, Development & Delivery

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Figure 1

As displayed in Figure 1, end-to-end strategy involves multiple, related steps. These steps are not necessarily linear. There may be a need to loop iteratively through subsets of steps, depending on the organisation's size, structure and positioning.

The earlier steps that follow the initial engagement on strategy – in particular, facilitation, alignment and reporting - may need to be repeated in different parts of the organisation, and at different levels of strategy formulation. There may be a loop required for each of a number of different regions or discrete business units. There may also need to be an initial focus on corporate strategy, and then a subsequent loop for operational strategy.

The latter steps – relevance, delivery and assessment - which focus on strategy implementation, will also inevitably require a number of repeated loops, to address the level of detail and focus required for effective performance.

The role of the strategist or consultant with oversight and responsibility for end-to-end strategy must include a scoping out of the needed steps and repetitions, where required. This is an integral part of step two – design.

Each of the nine steps of end-to-end strategy is explained in more detail below.

1. Engagement

Engagement Stakeholder Priorities	➢ **Interview** CEO, directors & key stakeholders ➢ **Review** existing research and strategy ➢ **Confirm** strategy development priorities

The natural starting point for any strategy intervention is an initial conversation with the CEO. Regardless of the ultimate approach to strategy – even if it begins with a review from the bottom-up or an investigation of the operating environment from the outside-in – the strategy development process is unlikely to succeed without engaging effectively with the CEO, to understand leadership objectives, challenges and concerns.

A second, important, step is to engage in in-depth interviews with the directors and key executives on key strategy themes. If there is sensitivity in the disclosure of information, the answers can be aggregated in the analysis and reporting that arises from these interviews. It is also useful to get the views of key stakeholder representatives (for example, target customers, suppliers, partners and other groups closely aligned with the organisation) as an early input into the strategy development process.

A third starting point for strategy is to review all recent existing research and analysis on various aspects of organisation activity. There are often relevant and useful inputs to be found that will inform the strategy.

Once these engagement activities are complete, the strategist is in a position to confirm the strategy development priorities and outline a suitable process for further engagement.

2. Design

Design Scope & Approach	➢ *Design* organisation-specific strategy development and delivery process ➢ *Identify* key resources and timeframes ➢ *Agree* on required outcomes

There is an art to designing the optimal, organisation-specific strategy development and delivery process. It is tempting to apply a one size fits all approach that is well known and tested, but the structure and workings of the internal organisation, and its position in the operating environment, must be carefully considered if the approach is to be effective. Failing to do so can result in the strategist missing out on points of leverage, on key themes that require emphasis, and on cultural nuances that must be considered.

An integral element to scoping is to identify who will be involved in the strategy development process, and what roles they will play; also, what the necessary steps and timeframes will be. Before the scoping and the associated proposal for the strategy intervention is signed off, the strategist and the CEO must have achieved clarity and agreement on the required outcomes of the intervention.

3. Positioning

Positioning Business Context & Options	➢ *Research* operating environment and competitive positioning ➢ *Analyse* prevailing trends and uncertainties ➢ *Aggregate* market and competitive intelligence ➢ *Distil* opportunities and threats, strategic insights and options

The strategy development team, often a combination of internal staff and external strategy consultants, will need to engage in a data-gathering and research process, to identify all the important themes, trends, issues and uncertainties that apply to the organisation in its current positioning, and that will apply, given its future intended positioning (usually established at a later stage in the strategy development process). Also required, and often more difficult to obtain, is market and competitive intelligence - in particular, foresight into planned or intended moves by competitors.

The team needs to distil the opportunities and threats that are constantly emerging, derive strategic insights, and recommend possible options for consideration and possible testing. These strategic support activities provide valuable inputs to the executives who are engaged in and responsible for the strategy development process, and assist with identifying strategic positioning options that have potential for the organisation.

4. Facilitation

Facilitation
Strategy Formulation

> ➤ *Engage in application of strategy frameworks, models and tools*
> ➤ *Integrate corporate and operational strategy*
> ➤ *Include stakeholder inputs and link strategy to a viable and effective business model*
> ➤ *Upskill staff to facilitate strategy workshop sessions with required materials*

At the heart of almost every strategy development intervention is a workshop or a series of workshops in which relevant frameworks, models and tools are applied to the organisation, usually by a specialist strategy facilitator, in order to tease out the essential elements of the strategy. The facilitator, along with the participating executives, need to be clear about the strategy focus. The approach will inevitably be different for corporate strategy versus operational strategy in large organisations, although smaller enterprises may not draw this distinction. The focus may need to shift, depending on what is already known and decided, and what is still unclear. The sequence of engagement is likely to vary, depending on the organisation culture (more externally or internally orientated; more hierarchical or more flexible in decision-making), on the nature of competition, and on the current positioning of the organisation in the operating environment (more of a rule-maker and innovator, or more of a rule-taker and follower).

There are thousands of strategy frameworks, models and tools. Good strategy facilitation involves choosing the right subset, applying them in the right sequence, and filtering out irrelevant data (noise factors) in order to discover positioning gaps that offer a compelling way forward for the organisation, that strengthen the business model, and that build on a winning formula over time.

5. Alignment

Alignment
Effectiveness & Resilience

➢ **Translate** *strategy into customer value propositions (CVP)*
➢ **Extend** *strategy to include employee value propositions (EVP)*
➢ **Map** *culture to fit with strategic focus*
➢ **Strengthen** *leadership alignment to strategy*

Optimising strategic alignment is a critically important and on-going challenge for organisation leadership. The best strategies can falter if they are too rigid in a fast-change operating environment. Strategic leadership requires a focus that extends well beyond strategy formulation. It involves engaging with stakeholders - both internal (staff and management) and external (customers, suppliers, partners) to get buy-in, and when necessary, adjusting organisation structure and culture, changing strategic emphasis, and changing leadership style to optimise alignment with strategic imperatives.

Culture mapping exercises can help with strategic alignment, acting as a dipstick into current issues affecting staff and organisational effectiveness.

There is an all-important internal consideration associated with culture mapping and alignment: namely, to sell, communicate and engage staff in the strategic vision of the organisation. This involves answering the underlying question 'why?' in a compelling way that resonates with staff and appeals to shared values. It will be the key to internal strategic alignment and buy-in. Internal alignment is also strengthened through engaging in workshops with staff to develop consciousness and personal mastery, in alignment with the important elements of strategic direction and delivery.

Then there is the challenging task of aligning the organisation with its target customer groups. This strategy interface between the organisation and its customers must be addressed through the devising of unique and relevant customer value propositions. The customer value proposition development process usually requires the involvement of market-facing expertise, and is worthy of its own strategic focus, aligned with the overarching development of strategy.
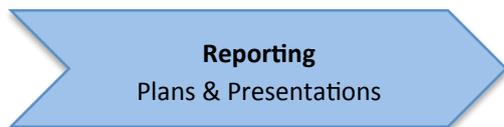
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6. Reporting

Reporting
Plans & Presentations

➢ *Develop* strategic planning documents
➢ *Produce* Board presentations
➢ *Customise* strategy communication and planning materials
➢ *Construct* action and implementation plans

The strategy development process for most organisations needs to fulfil certain minimum investigative and analytical requirements, to avoid blind spots that could be sources of potential weakness. To ensure that it does, and to reassure the Board and executive directors, both the process and their outcomes need to be clearly documented, along with recommendations for strategic direction and action.

Reporting is not just about documenting evidence of strategic analysis and decision making, it is also about communication. The strategy needs to be able to be clearly communicated to different stakeholders in appropriate formats, and at the right level of detail, to ensure that it guides behaviour and elicits the optimal responses.

The strategy must also be translated into initiatives and action plans, and progress on execution of these plans needs to be captured and reported to the decision-makers responsible for the delivery of the strategy.

7. Relevance

Relevance
Marketing & Sales Strategy

➢ *Explore* implications of strategy for marketing and sales
➢ *Facilitate* the development of strategic marketing and sales plans
➢ *Coach* marketing and sales management to interpret and execute strategy

An essential, and sometimes neglected, element of strategy formulation and development is the translation of the corporate (and even operational) strategy into a cohesive and relevant marketing and sales strategy, with associated marketing and sales plans. This is more often the case when the organisation culture is more internally than externally focused, which is in turn more often the case when the organisation is in the mature phase of its life cycle.

The obvious starting point for marketing and sales planning is the latest iteration of the corporate and/or operational strategy. But a different, extended set of models and tools are needed to develop the marketing and sales strategies, and to translate these strategic plans into high impact action plans that deliver results. It is also likely to involve a different set of people in the organisation, who may not have as much experience with strategy development.

It is therefore also useful to include a component of coaching at this stage of strategy development, to ensure that the participants in marketing and sales can engage with the overall strategy in a relevant and effective way, can communicate the strategic marketing and sales plans clearly to the Board and the executive team, and can confidently action key strategic initiatives in the market-place.

## 8.   Delivery

Delivery Strategy Implementation	➢ **Build** necessary competence for the implementation of strategy ➢ **Mentor** leaders for ongoing strategic focus ➢ **Monitor** the execution of strategy action plans

At the delivery stage of strategy the focus is on competence. Does the organisation have the necessary competencies to implement the strategy? What competencies are in place and can be applied or even leveraged drive the delivery of the strategy? What competencies need to be acquired, and how should the organisation go about doing this?

Questions about competence do not only apply to the organisation, where the right combination of core and distinctive competencies underpin the organisation's ability to deliver effectively on the promises inherent in its business model; they also apply to the leadership competence. Leaders may value the opportunity for mentorship while addressing the challenges of implementing a new strategy.

There is an important role for leadership, in partnership with the strategy implementation team (if these are separate entities), to monitor progress on the execution of strategy action plans.
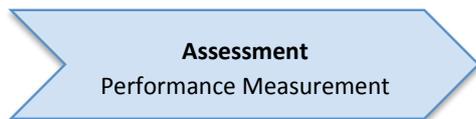
9. Assessment

Assessment
Performance Measurement

➤ **Establish** performance measurement criteria to assess strategy effectiveness
➤ **Introduce** balanced scorecard tools to align performance for individuals, teams and businesses
➤ **Evaluate** contribution from strategy intervention

Evaluation criteria for the strategy design, development and delivery process need to be established as early as possible, so reporting mechanisms can provide feedback to the Board and the directors at each stage of the process, not just at the end, when the focus is on the success of strategy implementation.

There are at least two sets of assessment needed. The first focus for assessment needs to be on the process to be followed for strategy design and development. Subsequent assessments, such as the assessment and evaluation criteria for the execution of the agreed strategy, can only be put in place after strategy formulation, when strategic initiatives are agreed upon. There will be a need to get agreement from internal stakeholders before assessment criteria are finalised. On-going communication with key stakeholders about the strategy needs to be a priority, within the constraints of confidentiality, to help get buy-in and agreement.

This paper has avoided mention of specific strategy models and tools, rather addressing the process of end-to-end strategy. One exception needs to be made at this point, in reference to Kaplan & Norton's concept of a balanced-scorecard*, a simple but elegant approach to assist in the on-going assessment of the execution of strategy, which can be applied at an organisational level as well as for key individuals, in relation to performance.

The Balanced Scorecard, Kaplan & Norton, HBR Press,1996

Applying end-to-end strategy in your organisation

Without a focus on the strategising process, strategy may just be a talkfest of bright ideas, or – worse still – a worry-fest of fears and concerns about threats and uncertainties, where the workshop outcomes don't translate into clear strategic direction or the delivery of

strategic objectives. And without extending the strategising process to its ultimate objective, the successful execution and delivery of new strategy, the benefits of strategising may not be realised, and the contributing value of new strategies may not be assessed or measured.

The end-to-end strategy process provides the framework for strategising, in a way that supports and guides the Board and the executive team, and provides some structure and purpose to an activity that is inherently fraught with uncertainty.

About the author

Dr Grant Sieff is CEO of the IC Growth Group, a research, strategy and leadership development consultancy. He teaches at leading business schools as a visiting professor and senior lecturer. Grant has worked as a vice-president for Citibank in Australia and a partner for Accenture. He consults to leaders at the top levels of organisations across African continent and abroad. Grant can be contacted at grant@icgrowth.co.za or on +2721 462 7902.