

Why every company needs a plan-on-a-page

In order to be successful and deliver results, organisations need a good strategic plan that is concise, accessible and easy to understand. Many companies make the common mistake of thinking their plan has to be complex and lengthy for it to be “good”. In fact, the opposite is true. Your top level plan should be nothing more than a simple, at-a-glance description of where your organisation needs to go, and there’s no need for it to be more than one page long.

The problem with strategy execution and communication

Only 10% of companies manage to turn their strategy into actual results. This means that a shocking 90% of companies, even those that have a well-thought-out plan, fail to execute their strategy successfully - a dismal statistic. Clearly, something needs to change... and fast.

One of the main reasons why organisations fail to execute their strategy is because no one really understands the plan, the company’s objectives and its priorities. Most companies produce lengthy, overly complex strategy documents that nobody ever reads (or, if they do read it, they often pick the parts that seem most relevant to them and skip others). Plus, as well as being too long, the majority of strategies are far too woolly, not agile enough, and often resemble a random mix of objectives, action plans and measures.

When an organisation has a plan that is too woolly, long or static, it becomes difficult to implement and cumbersome to monitor and manage. Eventually, in my experience, such strategies die a quiet death or are relegated to a role of little importance.

To combat all this, your plan needs to be something that every single employee can pick up, understand what it says, and understand what needs to be done. After all, if your people can’t understand the plan, how can they be expected to get behind it and do what’s necessary to turn the plan into reality?

Distilling your plan into a one-pager

The answer is to keep your plan short and simple: a plan-on-a-page. The latest strategy management tools make it easy for organisations to clarify and communicate their strategy and priorities, and ensure the strategy is understood and delivered by everyone in the organisation. Tools like strategy maps can help you create a coherent plan and visualise it in a simple and easy-to-understand one-page picture.

I have worked with some of the world’s best-known brands to their plan on a page or one-page strategy map and high-profile success stories of organisations that have applied this tool include Tesco, HSBC, Shell, Tarmac, T-Mobile, the Royal Air Force or the FBI.

The importance of creating a clear plan has been demonstrated in previous research studies we have conducted. One study found that of 10 principles of good performance management, none was more critical than “create clarity and agreement about the strategic aims”. The most

powerful way to achieve this is by creating a one-page plan that can be read by anyone. This plan will immediately focus your employees' minds and provide direction. It does this by showing, at a quick glance, what the intended outcomes are, as well as the core activities and underpinning enablers that will lead to their achievement.

Knowing where to start

A useful launch point for creating your plan-on-a-page is defining your purpose and ambition, as these neatly encapsulate the ultimate goal (or goals) of the organisation. So, if you haven't already created ambition (or vision) and purpose (or mission) statements, now is a great time to start. And if you already have them, it's worth taking some time to carefully consider whether they are still fit for purpose. For example, has anything changed in your market that affects your mission/ambitions over the next few years?

Unfortunately, most vision and mission statements are typically generic and uninspiring, such as "being the number one supplier to our customers". In contrast, let's look at the very precise vision and mission statements from one of my clients, the educational foundation IB. Their vision is to "create a better and more peaceful world through education", and the mission is "The International Baccalaureate aims to develop a growing number of inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect." These are not only clear and specific, they're also inspiring and motivational – for those inside and outside the organisation.

With your vision and mission statements in mind, it becomes easier to craft the critical few financial and non-financial objectives that will deliver the company's success. I say "critical few" because your one-page plan absolutely should not turn into a list of 100 objectives that span every single function across the whole company. Your plan should drill down to the core objectives that are critical to delivering the vision and mission.

Looking ahead beyond the plan

There are many tools, such as strategy maps, that will help you arrive at a simple plan-on-a-page. Alternatively, you can follow my [six-step process for creating a one-page strategy](#). Then, once your plan is in place, there are other strategy management tools to help you align the organisation's activities (projects, programmes and initiatives) with the strategy. It's also important to manage, monitor and measure the strategy execution, as this is one of [the key areas where many strategies fail](#).

Having a simple plan, and putting the processes in place to deliver that plan, are often the key differentiators between top-performing organisations and those that would like to become one. That's why creating a one-page plan is perhaps my single biggest piece of advice for anyone who wants to take their business to the next level.