



Planning as a Process to Change

By Jim White

Strategic planning is not an end in and of its self. It is a frame work for continuous, productive, strategic change within an organization. The framework supports the surfacing of issues and provides a structure for their effective and profitable resolution.

Planning as a Change Process

Like any change process, strategic planning is most likely to succeed in an organization that prepares itself in advance by gaining the support of those affected and by equipping them with the skills they need to make it happen.

Before you embark on a course of strategic planning, you need to understand why and how organizations change, what barriers and resistance to expect, and how to overcome the barriers and convert the resistance into support.

The Pressure to Change

Companies embark on change for one or more of the following six reasons:

PRESSURES FOR CHANGE

- **Financial disaster**
- **Competitive threats**
- **Visionary leadership**
- **Threatened markets**
- **Organizational pressure**
- **Poor benchmark performance**

The Strategic Planning and Change Process

1. ***Financial disaster***, impending or current, that forces a rethinking of the business's structure.
2. ***Competitive threats***, either immediate or anticipated.
3. ***Visionary leadership*** that intuitively, objectively, or analytically "sees" the wave of the future and is determined to spearhead it.

4. ***Pressure from below***, which is usually focused on specific issues such as lack of direction, management failure, shortage of capital, or inadequate opportunities for personal progress. Submarine levels of the organization can force change up.
5. ***Recognition of poor performance***, impelling leadership to seek reasons and solutions.
6. ***Threatened markets***, which must be recognized and dealt with if the organization is to survive.

Pressures Against Change

- **Organization inertia, comfort**
- **Fear · Ignorance, don't know how**
- **Lack of skill · It's work, lack of payoff**
- **Day-to-day pressures**
- **Arrogance**

Resistance to Change and to Planning

People have to feel discomfort, pressure, and pain for an extended period of time before they will abandon the comfort of the familiar and struggle through the stressful change process. There are numerous reasons why employees at all levels resist change of any kind and planning in particular, including:

Organization inertia, which keeps us doing what we've always done and what we are comfortable with. Change disrupts the standing order-what and how people do things. It's always uncomfortable and distrusted, at least to some extent, by both human beings and organizations.

Fear of being held accountable for results, of failure, of being fired or demoted, of losing personal prestige

Ignorance of the outside pressures that are making change necessary and of how long it takes to get results; lack of information about what management expects, how to do what is necessary, and each individual's role in the process.

Resistance to the extra paperwork, analysis, and thinking involved, all of which are hated by everyone, particularly low-energy people and organizations. Always required, these tasks add to the day-to-day burden of running the business.

Perceived lack of payoff, immediate or future, in terms of monetary, psychological, or promotional rewards.

Time taken from day-to-day responsibilities. Planning and enacting change are usually burdens added to an already crowded schedule. They are also usually undertaken during periods of stress and in reaction to problems that already have the organization stretched thin.

Arrogance or cynicism, particularly on the part of an insular top management; usually manifested as "We've tried it before and (1) it never worked or (2) management didn't follow through." Alternative excuses are "We're already doing it" (however incorrectly or ineptly) and, worst of all, "We're king of the mountain and unassailable in our business."

What are your pressures?