

Meyer's Management Models

41. Strategic Action Modes

How can I get my organization to move forward in a strategic way?

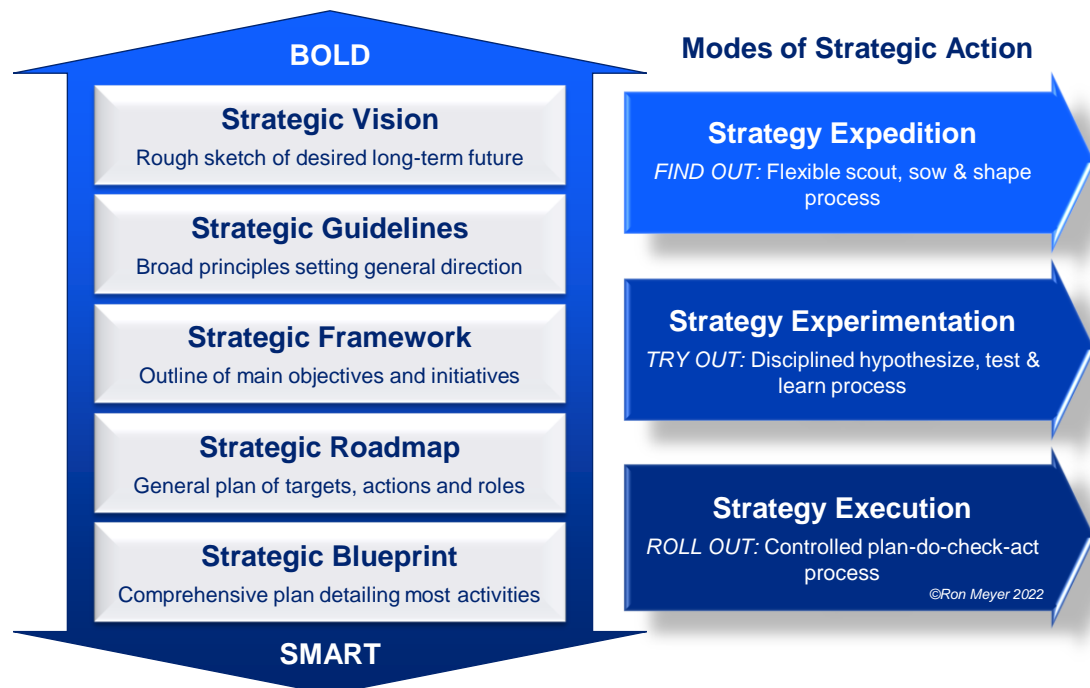
Key Definitions

A *strategy* is a *course of action* to achieve a particular purpose. An individual or organization has a strategy when they don't behave in a random or ad hoc fashion, but there is a pattern in what they do and don't do. Strategy is the logic in the actions as they move forward.

To realize a coherent pattern, strategic action needs to be guided by some deliberate choices made before getting underway. Such a *plan of action* can be very general and only sketch the 'big picture' (setting BOLD goals – broad, optimistic, long-term, and daring) or can be very detailed (setting SMART goals – specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound).

Conceptual Model

The *Strategic Action Modes* framework outlines three different manners of moving forward in a strategic way, each requiring a different level of deliberate choices to be made upfront. The key message of this framework is that the archetypical approach called strategic planning – first formulate a blueprint and then move to execution – is not the only form of strategic action. Where detailed choices are hard to make in advance and then *roll out*, people can still move ahead by *trying out* and *finding out*. To be effective, strategists need to run a portfolio of actions (see model 10 – Strategic Agility Model), using all three complementary strategic action modes and formulating just enough beforehand to have sufficient direction for each action.



Key Elements

The five levels at which the intended strategy can be specified are the following:

1. **Strategic Vision.** When the intended direction is only set by offering an attractive big picture outline of what the future state could look like, we speak of a strategic vision.

2. **Strategic Guidelines.** Once a strategic vision has been specified, the general principles (main routes) that will guide the organization to get there are called strategic guidelines.
3. **Strategic Framework.** Along these main routes there will be major initiatives that will be the steppingstones to get to the vision. Together they should form a consistent framework.
4. **Strategic Roadmap.** Each of these initiatives can be worked out into a roadmap of key activities, general milestones, main responsibilities, and required budgets.
5. **Strategic Blueprint.** Finally, general roadmaps can be filled in to create comprehensive plans detailing all activities, timings, responsibilities, and resources.

The three modes of strategic action are:

1. **Strategy Execution: Roll Out.** To execute is to carry out as intended – to roll out a plan that has been determined beforehand. If you know where you're going and can largely anticipate what will happen, it is efficient to first plan (making a roadmap or blueprint) and then implement. After this 'planning and doing', you can always do some adaption along the way ('check and act'). Planning helps with clarifying priorities, allocating resources, aligning stakeholders, setting performance measures and tracking progress.
2. **Strategy Experimentation: Try Out.** To experiment is to field test an assumption – to try out a possibility that you have identified beforehand. If you are not certain enough about the best route forward but have a few hunches as part of your strategic framework, you can give them a trial run and see how things go before proceeding to execution. This lowers the risk of prematurely committing too much time and resources to an unpromising option, while increasing the flexibility to learn, adjust, and develop along the way.
3. **Strategy Expedition: Finding Out.** To go on an expedition is to investigate an area – to find out whether an attractive idea has further potential, not by thinking behind your desk, but by going on a voyage of exploration. Inspired by a vision, an expedition mobilizes internal and external stakeholders to see the future differently, scouting for promising options that could later make it to experimentation. An expedition not only looks around but sows ideas that might grow into future options, while also building political support.

Key Insights

- **Strategy is a course of action.** Your strategy is what you do (*pattern of actions*), not what you say you will do (*plan of actions*). Strategists need to get the organization moving in the best direction, not dwell on making the best PowerPoints. Effective strategists have a bias for action and creating facts on the ground, while making just enough choices ahead of time to help the action to be well-considered and coherent.
- **A plan of actions can vary from BOLD to SMART.** Before acting (*implementation*), some strategic choices need to be made (*formulation*). These don't always need to be very specific (SMART), but can also be kept broad (BOLD), or at various levels in between.
- **You can act without knowing the exact direction.** If you know with a high level of certainty where you want to go, you can draw up a detailed strategic plan (a strategic blueprint). But waiting to act until you know the exact direction into the fog of the future can lead to procrastination (*paralysis-by-analysis*). You need to move despite the fog.
- **You can act strategically in three ways.** Execution is about acting on a detailed plan (*rolling out*). Experimentation is about acting on a substantiated hypothesis (*trying out*). Expedition is about acting on a compelling vision (*finding out*). All get things moving.
- **You should act strategically in all three ways.** Effective strategists initiate actions using all three approaches. This makes a strategy a *portfolio of initiatives*.

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Roles of the Corporate Center</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>

June 2022	Change Manager's Toolbox	Change Methodologies
July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Reasoning Routines Model	Thinking Skills
February 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
March 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
April 2023	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
May 2023	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
June 2023	Needs Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Stakeholder Heat Map	Stakeholder Management
September 2023	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness