

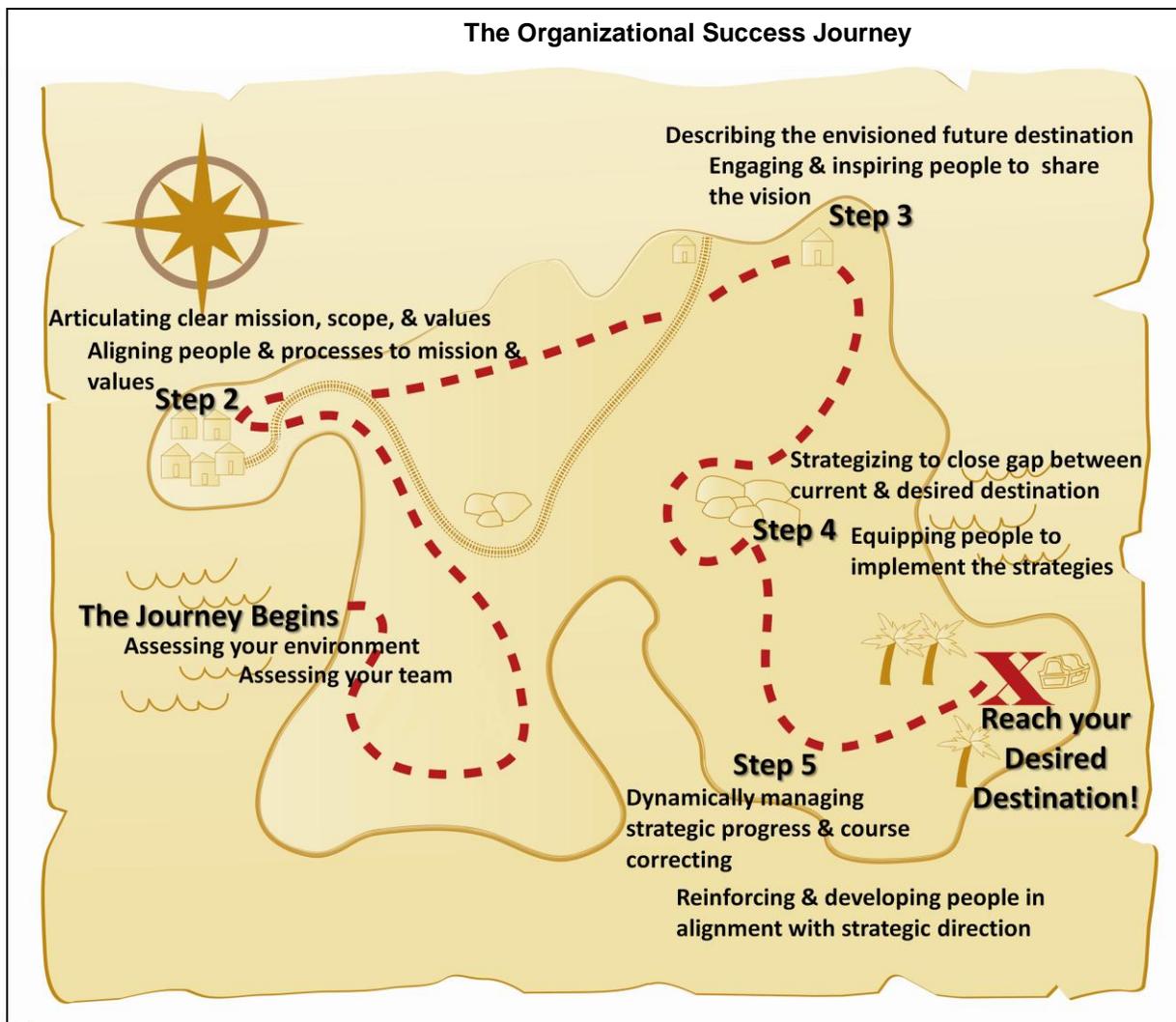
Aligning Organizational Strategy & People to Accomplish Your Goals

An organization is a community of people; and organizational success is like a journey. So, while your desired destination and chosen route will change over time, moving forward as an organization can only happen through people working together.

In any organizational endeavor, if your people are not effectively aligned with your organizational strategies, then...

- Customer satisfaction ratings and results are low.
- Turnover is high and good people are leaving.
- Sales results are poor or financial targets are missed.
- You experience conflict and competition between departments.
- Employee morale is low.

Strategic Organizational Development aligns your people, the organization's culture, and its processes with the organization's mission, values, vision and strategies, in order for everyone to successfully reach the desired destination together.



This diagram illustrates a methodology for keeping people processes and organizational development processes aligned every step of the way. Accomplishing each of these steps in sequence will ensure that your people journey forward together in alignment with the organizations goals.

But wait, you may be thinking, we don't have the time for a long, drawn-out planning process like this. In our environment there are only two kinds of organizations: the quick and the dead. Our environment is changing too quickly for us to plan. We just need to move!

I hear this all the time. And all I can say is go ahead. Do it your way. I sincerely wish you the best. But I fear you'll be calling me or someone like me eventually saying something like, *we have so much talent, but everyone is just not on the same page, or, we have so much energy, but it just isn't focused.*

If that resonates with you, then you have enough *been-there-done-that-experience* to know you could really benefit from a methodology like this. The good news is the point is not to finish all 5 Steps of Strategy Development before beginning any work to align your people. The journey diagram depicts both strategy and people development evolving in tandem toward your desired destination. It's both an organic approach and a dynamic one.

The methodology is organic in that, it doesn't involve having a consultant "put answers in" and tell you and your people what you need to do. Instead, it involves your people and "pulls answers out" recognizing and utilizing the full measure of their combined experience, creativity and resourcefulness.

The methodology is also dynamic. As each element is developed by you and your people and implemented by you and your people, even as you're working on the next step, you're continuing to monitor the impact. This dynamic approach recognizes that the elements developed each step of the way represented your best thinking at the time, so you always keep an eye and ear tuned to whether your hypotheses were correct and, if not, responding, while continuing to journey forward.

For each step of the organizational success journey depicted in the diagram, you'll notice that there are always two distinct but related elements listed. That's because one represents what's happening in the strategic planning process at a particular juncture, and the other represents the equally important work with your personnel, which must be integrated into the strategy work, if, in fact, you hope to have all your people working together in alignment with your organization's goals.

In short, here's an overview of what needs to happen each step of the way:

The Journey Begins...

- (a) *Accurately assess your organizational environment or business landscape, and*
- (b) *Accurately assess your current team's talent (skills, abilities & attitudes).*

While this seems like an obvious starting point, you'd be amazed who many leap frog right over this. It is critical to have an accurate understanding of your current business, market, or operating environment, as well as a forecast of what's coming on the horizon.

Use the analogy of our journey to prove this point. If I were planning a vacation to Florida with my family and I want to spend the least amount of time on the road as possible, and I want to spend the least amount of money possible to get there, wouldn't it be wise to assess a few environmental elements? Maybe I would want to check out the road conditions of optional routes (no getting stuck in Interstate road work – spare me that!) If I have small children, I might want to know a little bit about the distance between and conditions of rest stops and food sources (this would be substantially more important, if, instead of Florida, our destination required traveling across some desolate stretches of Texas.) And I would definitely want to know about the possible hotels we might stay in. Do they share my "mission" and "values," i.e., are they family-friendly or swinger-friendly? Do they have availability? Is it a desirable accommodation for us? And can we afford it? These are all obvious considerations. But that's not all. I definitely need to think about the vehicle that's going to get me there! The best understanding in the world of the desired destination, and its roads, hotels, restaurants and facilities is of no use, if the clunker in the driveway can't get me there.

Once we have an understanding of the environment, we need to take inventory of the talents, abilities, skills and attitudes of the people in your organization. Skills, and to some degree abilities, can be taught and/or, with

experience, learned by your people. Attitudes, with the right coaching and facilitation, can be changed and brought into alignment with your values and goals. But with talents, and even some abilities, the challenge grows more difficult. The bottom line is you should know which natural talents will enable people to be most successful in the various roles in your organization, and you need to have been “hiring for talent” all along. If you haven’t, and it’s here at the beginning of your journey that you recognize that reality, the journey isn’t over before it’s ever even started. But it will certainly need to be taken into account and appropriate contingencies devised. If you determine, as a result of this team assessment, that any of these needs exist, don’t ignore it and start out on a journey across the Serengeti with porters who can’t carry the load. Begin, at the earliest stages of scoping and planning the journey, to incorporate plans for training, coaching, facilitation, hiring or any other necessary prep work into your initiative’s time and financial budget.

Step 2...

(a) *Articulate clear purpose, scope, principles and values, and*

(b) *Communicate clearly and align people processes to reinforce the purpose and values.*

At this stage, now that you and, perhaps your leadership team, have completed your assessment, now it’s time to state the guiding purpose or mission, and values or principles, which will not be compromised or abandoned on the journey. These form both the foundation of your organization as well as the foundation of your journey. Elements like purpose, mission and scope describe why the organization exists, or why we’re going on this journey. Principles and values guide the interpersonal dynamic. They are critical because not only do they describe the behavioral characteristics of the organization, but also they describe *how* we intend to interact without compromise on our journey to success. These elements are independent of current environment, competitive requirements, or management fads. They provide a cohesive identity and guide all activities.

Now comes the people part. Gathering a small team behind closed doors and discussing and agreeing on these elements is a huge step forward, but don’t forget the vehicle! In order to experience the full power of mission and values, they must be communicated clearly and people need to have a chance to buy in. Putting them in a plaque on the wall, or giving everyone a pocket card printed with them, or sending them out in an email reminder, or even stating them in an all-staff meeting, or all the above is *not* enough. These elements must be woven into the very fabric of the organization and reinforced through every single policy, performance standard, and people-related process. Everything about the organization’s ways of working needs to enable and empower each individual to not just talk it but walk it.

Step 3...

(a) *Describe the envisioned future of the organization, and*

(b) *Engage and inspire people to share the vision.*

Once you have your foundation built—describing who you are, what you’re about, and where you’re coming from—it’s time to describe where you want to go. Create a vivid and real picture of what you want to become as an organization. An effective vision captures the imagination of each individual and provides a firm destination within a defined timeframe.

If your vision is sufficiently linked to the mission, true to the values, and clear enough to understand—both in terms of *where* we need to go and *why*—it will compel your team to higher levels of engagement, productivity and teamwork than you’ve ever seen before.

But to create those high levels of performance, this is the stage at which leaders need to draw upon the trust they’ve built over time—their *personal* power—to inspire each member of the organization to share the vision. Leaders must “walk the talk” by reinforcing expectations and supporting changes that result from aligning the organization with the vision. And inspiring and engaging the organization must be balanced with handling resistance and managing change. You won’t have everyone pulling together in the same direction until you’ve accomplished this. So if you’re not sure you’ve developed the trust and personal power or change management abilities to pull this off, be sure to, once again, build your own personal development or coaching help into your time and financial budget.

Step 4...

- (a) *Identify the gap between current state and desired destination and develop strategies to close the gap, and*
- (b) *Equip people to implement the strategy.*

Your strategy represents your best ideas for achieving your vision. But if your vision is sufficiently *aggressive*, you shouldn't be able to achieve it all in one leap. It's a marathon, not a sprint. It's a journey. So to make it *achievable* you need to dissect it into manageable chunks. First, estimate how far it is from where you are versus where you want to be. This defines what you need to achieve. Then, apply a robust decision making process to analyze priorities, interdependencies, and cost-benefit. This will enable you to set major objectives, at which point strategies will emerge and implementation plans can be developed.

Another important part of the process at this point is to compare the team assessment you conducted at the beginning with future talent and skill needs illuminated by the vision. Now that you know where you want to go and what it takes to get there, you'll also see gaps in the skills, abilities and attitudes of the organization. Establish plans for filling these gaps using various methods such as training & development programs, strategic hiring, and job or organizational structure re-designs.

Step 5...

- (a) *Dynamic management of strategic progress and course-correcting as needed, and*
- (b) *Reinforcement of strategic direction with ongoing management and development of people.*

No environment is static. As U.S. General George Patton accurately described, "No battle plan survives contact with the enemy." You will experience the same situation when you begin implementing your strategy. That's why you will need a system to facilitate collection of measurements and various forms of feedback, so that you can adjust your course when necessary. Ongoing management of strategic plans by tracking progress using key indicators, changes your strategy from a static document covered in dust at the bottom of someone's desk drawer, into a dynamic, living document, whereby results can be routinely confirmed to be in alignment with the vision.

Likewise, measuring and managing strategic plan implementation and results associated with interventions designed to eliminate talent gaps is very important to assure your organization is equipped for the next challenge of the journey.

During this stage of the strategic plan implementation, everyone in the organization will benefit from change management interventions. There is an art and science to achieving full acceptance of change, especially when the change you desire involves the employee's skills and abilities. Setting clear expectations and actively managing performance are critical to helping people be successful and fully engaged and, ultimately, getting what you need.

Reach your desired destination!

When your people and organizational strategies are aligned, then...

- Your leadership team has clarity and agreement on the organization's Mission, Values and Vision.
- Every member of the organization understands where you want to go and what their specific contribution needs to be.
- Every person is fully engaged and has the opportunity to utilize their unique talents.
- Ongoing management and course-correction efforts become more effective.

This view of the journey of organizational success illustrates a very important reality.

*Often the shortest route between two points is **not** a straight line; it's a zigzag line.*

Learning and growth and change are iterative processes. Here's what you should expect. Despite our best planning efforts, what's produced is more like a compass than a map. Once we've launched out on the journey, it may feel like

we're moving two steps forward and one step back. Everyone will be at a slightly different level of confidence or commitment from one time to another. And here's what you need to know. That's all normal.

I once heard a Senior Vice President tell the story of the compass test he had to undergo in Boy Scouts. Deposited in the wilderness with nothing but his compass, he was to use it to accurately navigate his way back to base. But, he says, he had no more than begun his journey when he began to doubt his compass. He was just absolutely convinced he knew the way...and it wasn't the course his compass suggested. "I panicked," he explained. For some time, he tried to follow his gut instincts. And so he wandered...and wandered...and wandered...before finally learning one of the biggest leadership lessons of his life, "You have to trust your compass."

Don't abandon your course at the first sign of resistance or trouble. Accept it as a normal part of the process. Don't give up on this process before it even has a chance to work. It will work. Trust your compass. Seek out and respond to feedback. Keep your people involved every step of the way. And your organizational journey will be successful.