

# First Things First: Why Sequence Matters

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Over the years, we have observed time and again that companies, when presented with management, operational or organizational challenges, jump right into solving the problem without considering the overarching business vision and strategy. Problems get solved in the short term, but solutions often prove unsustainable in the long term as similar issues pop up again and again. But if our actions are clearly supporting our Vision and Business Strategies, they will prove sustainable over time. It is useful to consider the hierarchy of strategies involved.

## **Mission, Values and Business Vision**

The first priority is to determine why we are here and where are we headed. Why do we exist as a company – what is our Mission? What are the Values we want to exemplify towards our employees, our customers, and in the marketplace? What do we want this organization to become and accomplish in the future? This Business Vision needs to be specific, tangible, and shared throughout the organization.

## **Business Strategy**

There are many product and service offerings and corresponding market and competitive positions that could lead to the fulfillment of the Business Vision. Which strategies will generate organizational wealth and viability? In our experience, many organizations do not think through their business strategy in a disciplined manner.

## **Marketing, Management and Operational Strategies**

What marketing and sales strategies would effectively create market dominance and avoid or outsmart the competition? What management structure and strategies would most effectively support execution of our major objectives and help us be operationally effective and efficient?

## **Organizational Structures and Strategies**

Organizational structures should exist in support of the other business strategies. How do we need to be organized internally? Do we have the right people ‘on the bus’ and in the right seats? Several companies we’ve worked with made changes in organizational structure and reshuffled management roles, only to redo the structure within a year. They had not clarified their Business Vision and Business Strategy. As the company’s direction evolved, frequent and disruptive organizational changes became common.

## **Systems and Local (Departmental) Strategies**

What departmental strategies are optimal to support our larger scale strategies? What are our current and future systems strategies and requirements?

The following diagram illustrates the optimal hierarchy of strategic decisions. Although there is usually a great appetite to problem solve on a departmental or personnel level because this is where it likely ‘hurts’ right now, it is critical to take a step back. Will the efforts we are contemplating support our Vision and Strategy? If our actions are fully aligned with the driving forces of the business, the positive outcomes will be sustainable over time.

# Strategic Framework



Adapted from The Path of Least Resistance for Managers by Robert Fritz