

Two Questions, One Page

Building a Winning Strategy through Relentless Focus and Clarity

By Harry Kangis and Mark Schar

Introduction

“OK, what do we do now?” asked the Vice President of Product Supply for Home Products, a \$1.6B operating subsidiary of a \$6B consumer product company. It was a good question, and as he scanned the faces of his team seated around the table, he detected no sign that anyone knew the answer.

Home Products needed a business strategy, so they did what many businesses do when looking for “magic” answers—they hired a big-name consulting firm. You know, one of those management-consulting companies, who specialize in strategy and are referred to by one name or just a group of letters. The engagement was big and fast, totaling \$1.6M and completed in a breath-taking 90 days. Morale, which had been struggling to stay out of the pessimism pit during a long period of being “stuck,” was rising into the hopeful, positive zone and gaining momentum as the senior team eagerly anticipated the master plan that would move them forward. Like a group of young, devoted students, they opened their minds and awaited wisdom.

The end result was a 224-page PowerPoint presentation, delivered at a top management review by the lead consultant—a very polished, smooth presenter who had befriended the subsidiary President during the engagement. The presentation was full of data: sales figures profit by line and geographies, competitive analysis, unusual correlations and even a top-line customer survey. The management “summary” was 27 pages with a total of 42 “next steps.”

With all the data, the accrued knowledge and the numerous “next steps,” there was little wisdom and even less direction. So the question, “What do we do now?” was not only reasonable, it was necessary. The strategy was that complicated.

Effective and winning business strategy does not have to be this hard or this convoluted. Actually, the output of a strategy process can be quite easy to understand, clear and

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actionable if we keep the basic principles in mind. It all boils down to just two simple questions and one page of text.

Answering the Tough Questions

“What is winning?” and “How do we win?” These two questions are what we call: “the What” and “the How” of strategy. Oh, by the way, it does not take a multi-page PowerPoint document to describe the answers. It can all be expressed, quite effectively, on one 8 ½ by 11 inch piece of paper in a format we call **OGSP®**.

We have completed over 200 OGSP-based strategies for a range of companies from \$6B in global sales to Internet start-ups without a drop of revenue. OGSP works in all cases because it makes strategy choices clear to all and links directly with the actions required to make the strategy come to life.

Why Strategies Fail

We know why most strategy work fails because often we are called in to clean-up “strategic messes” like the one at Home Products. **Strategy fails** when there is a lack of clarity about what constitutes success and this clarity is obscured by oversized reports with too many “recommendations.” Instead, we ask our clients to describe what is success in one sentence. It is the first task we assign.

Strategy fails when an organization does not make clear choices—choosing what to do, and what not to do. Managers often set too many priorities, including everyone’s “pet duck” projects, and without a clear way to see all the work this muddle continues.

Strategy fails when the organization cannot understand it. Often, strategic plans are riddled with jargon and acronyms and little

Why Strategic Planning Often Fails

A Half-Hearted Planning Process

- Senior management not directly involved
- Leaders fail to clearly define success and then stick with it
- Moving on to the next theme before the strategic plan is properly deployed

Lack of Strategic Choice Making

- Failure to define target customers
- Managing too many priorities at once

Insufficient Capability Assessment

- Not matching strategic intent to organization resources or expertise
- Allowing resources to be siloed functionally

Little Follow-up After the Fact

- No on-going communication
- Absence of a quarterly measurement and review process
- Not renewing the plan once a year

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plain English. A simple experiment is to hand the completed strategic plan to any employee of the organization and ask them if they understand what they are expected to do. Most strategies would fail this test.

Finally, **strategy fails** when there is an absence of measurement and follow-up. Complicated strategies are tough to measure, so often, they are not measured. And it takes discipline to make strategy an everyday operating consideration instead of a once-a-year event forgotten the following week. Most organizations lack this discipline, if only because the strategy is so difficult to translate into action.

OGSP solves these problems. OGSP stands for **Objective, Goals, Strategy and Plans**. OGSP is structured around the two principle questions: *What Is Winning?* (Objective and Goals) and *How Do We Win?* (Strategy and Plans). This can be simplified into the “What” and the “How”. And in a nod to the architectural principle of “form follows function,” OGSP is structured around one page of text. This makes it easy to understand, easy to explain to others and easy to see linkages to action.

Making Tough Choices

Recently, we started working with a \$600M industrial services company. We asked for copies of previous strategic plans. The company had just completed their internal strategy process and was unhappy with the output. No wonder. They began by listing 19 carefully crafted “objectives for success” ranging from sales and profit targets, new product introductions, geographic expansions and overhead reduction aspirations.

We asked the CEO and COO to help with a pre-meeting exercise: to write one sentence that describes, “what is winning” for their organization over the next three years. We wanted them to choose the one thing they simply must do to be considered successful and since this was an Equity Investment owned company, we thought this “one thing” exercise would be easy. It would center on profitability.

They couldn’t do it. They could not focus their own thoughts on what was most important, what they must accomplish above all. And they could not agree between themselves. After

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four attempts they gave up saying, "That's why we hired you!" This was going to be a tough assignment.

It is easy to ask, "What is winning for your organization over the next three years?" But, it is a hard question to answer. At its heart, this question forces the organization to make a choice. Choice is the essence of strategy and there is no choice more important than the definition of winning.

Focus to Win

Focus is hard. Incredibly hard. Lack of focus is deadly. Like termites in wood, it insidiously eats away at organization productivity, discipline, creativity, and energy. In our experience with dozens of businesses and volunteer organizations, we have yet to encounter one organization that could not improve its focus for a better outcome. Poor focus likely means below par accomplishment, burned out employees, and at the worst business and career failure.

Today, speed of change is quicker than ever, and expectations for immediate results never higher. Information bombards us at record speeds, competition is local and global, and attention spans are ever more fleeting. This has led to further erosion of focus. It is no surprise then that executive on-boarding expert George Bradt notes in his book ***The New Leader's 100 Day Action Plan***, that 40% of CEO's fail in their first 18 months. Why? They fail to quickly align their senior team around a "shared purpose" of just a few key priorities.

One of business's primary tools to drive focus is strategic planning. A recent HBR article highlights that strategic planning still scores well ahead of all other business processes for its usefulness, according to CEO's surveyed.

Yet the vast majority of strategic planning exercises lead to what we call "shelfware" - another large binder collecting dust in the bookcase. Or, in the case of the Home Products Company we wrote about earlier, a 224-page presentation with a 27-page summary and 42 "next steps." In our experience, these are the primary reasons why strategic planning exercises fail:

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- Half-hearted planning
- Lack of strategic choice; doing too much
- Expressed profusely so almost any action is justified
- Insufficient capability assessment
- Little follow-up after the planning event

It was our frustration as business leaders bumping up against these barriers that motivated us to develop an effective way to complete a strategic plan.

Focus Really Works

History helps us understand how vital focus and clarity are with an analogy. The Orteig Prize, initiated by hotelier Raymond Orteig in 1919, is an example of a clear, focused definition of success. Orteig offered a reward of \$25K for the first aviator to fly “solo non-stop from New York City to Paris France.” A total of 81 aviators had crossed the Atlantic before Charles Lindbergh did it in May 1927, but only Lindbergh did it solo, non-stop between New York and Paris. Lindbergh won; he claimed the prize and ultimately the fame as the premier aviator in the world.

The overwhelming majority of organizations winning today show a strong commitment to focus. These can be ones with a highly focused mission, like selling just packaged food products. Today over 90% of General Mill’s revenue comes from three product segments; in 1983 they sold golf equipment (Foot Joy), suitcases (Lark), jewelry, clothing (Izod Lacoste), outdoor gear (Eddie Bauer), ran restaurants (Red Lobster, etc), on top of cereals, baking ingredients and ready to eat foods.

There are also companies that have broad ranging product lines, but use highly disciplined choice making to allot resources effectively. Former GE CEO Jack Welch’s mantra of “we will be #1 or #2 in each business area or we will get out” is one example. Studies have shown that the #1 player in

“What is strategy but resource allocation? Strategy means making clear-cut choices about how to compete. You cannot do everything to everybody no matter what the size of your business or how deep your pockets.”

Winning
Jack Welch

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most categories earns about 50% of all category profits and the #2 about 25%, leaving only scraps for everyone else.

Two recent publications highlight this stark contrast. The global leader in consumer products, Procter & Gamble, highlighted in their FY 2007 Annual Report the widely acclaimed results generated by CEO A.G. Lafley over the past seven years: doubling of sales to \$75B, the 5th highest market cap on the NYSE, the growth in brands over \$1B in sales from 8 to 22. From the outset, Mr. Lafley not only made intense focus the core of his corporate strategy - big brands, big customers, high margin categories and growing consumer market - but also communicated these in the same "one page strategy" approach we discuss here: Objective, Goals, Strategies, Plans.

This February, P&G announced it was spinning off the \$1.5B Folgers and Millstone coffee businesses, to enable even more intense focus on more strategic categories. The best strategic plans chose to avoid certain ideas and businesses that can be successful for someone else, because they recognize even the largest organizations simply can't do everything.

On the other hand, Fortune discussed still another turn-around at General Motors in their Jan 21, 2008 issue. Is it unfair to dub them an icon of poor focus? Too many brands, too many model variations, too many layers, and certainly too many restructurings. CEO Rick Wagoner is now trying to focus this monster on four easier to understand themes, but it may be too late.

Author Stephen Covey of "7 Habits" fame, recently published ***The 8th Habit***. In it he highlights disturbing results collected from over 25,000 employee surveys that identify how much productive energy is wasted in most companies due to poor focus and clarity:

- **63% of employees** did not have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve and why
- **80% of employees** did not have a clear line of sight between their tasks and their team and organization's goals
- **Only 14% of employees** stay diligently focused on our most important goals

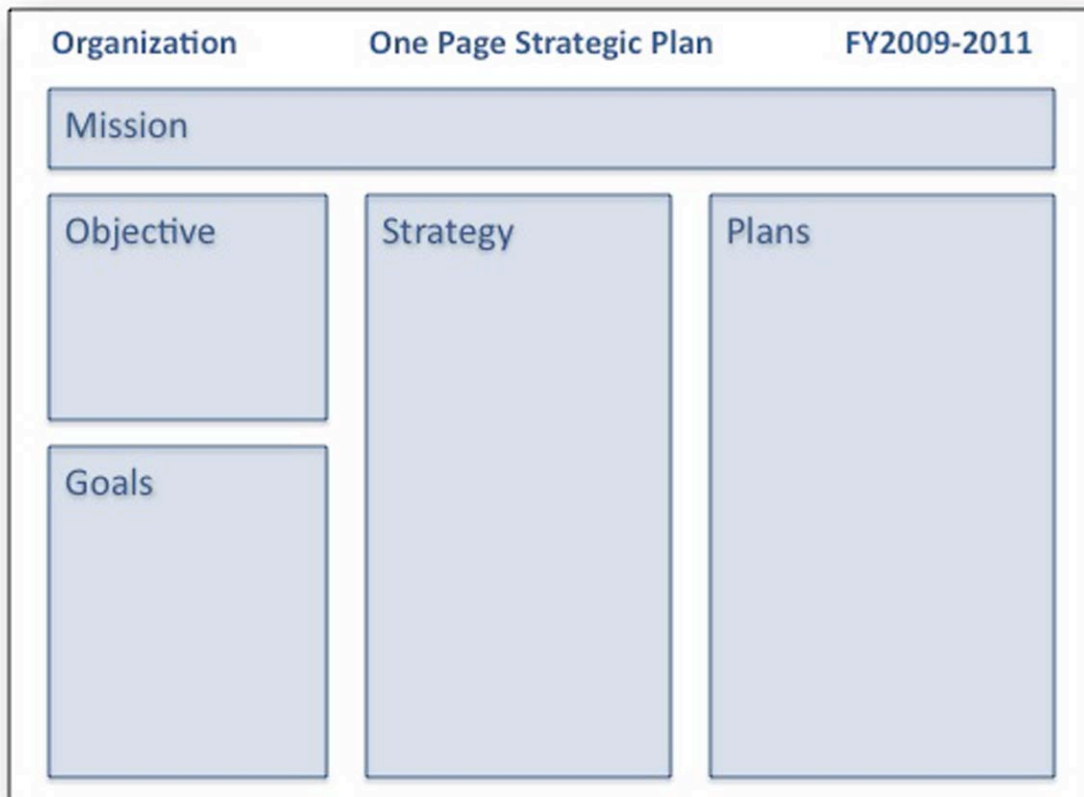
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If you were an investor, would you feel confident backing a venture with such poor internal dynamics? Yet Covey's data suggests this is the norm in most organizations. Employees are hungry for clarity on WHAT success looks like for their organization, and a focused agenda for HOW the organization will achieve that success.

Keeping It Simple

It's no wonder our early clients thought OGSP stood for "Oh, God, Strategic Planning." Strategic planning is not an event organizations look forward to with much energy. To give you the big picture of the OGSP process and output, here is the template the beginning template we use for each engagement:



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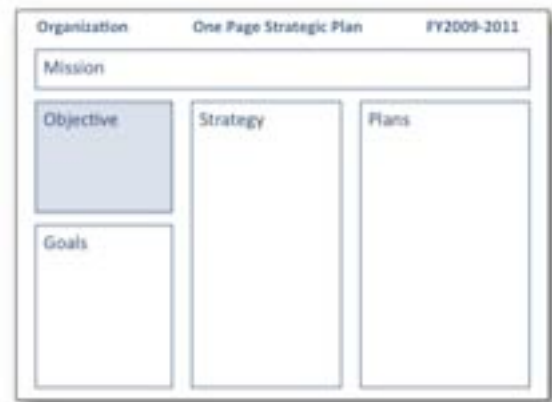
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The What – What Is Winning?

The OGSP Process is about 2 simple concepts: **What** and **How**. Clearly defining “what” is winning for the organization, and “how” resources will be allocated to achieve that success.

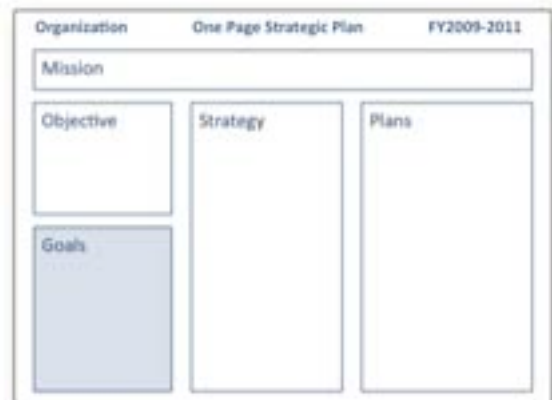
The answer to “what is winning?” is defined in two parts within the OGSP.

First is the **Objective** statement, which is a description of success for the organization over a set time period, usually the next 3 years. It is one-sentence in plain English. And it simultaneously answers two questions, “if we do this and nothing else we will be considered successful” and “if we do a lot of things but not this, we will have failed.” On the OGSP page, this sentence is placed in a box marked Objective in the top left corner.



Writing an Objective statement can be tough because it forces choice and focus. It requires discussion and negotiation, and ultimately the organization’s leader must choose the final statement.

Goals are placed immediately under the Objective box. In OGSP terms, Goals are the key metrics, which will be used to measure progress toward the Objective. These typically include competitive measurements like market share, fiscal measurements like revenue and profit and organizational metrics like employee engagement. Goals can also cover key activity areas like geographic expansion or new product introductions. Less is better than more when it comes to Goals, and the list is usually limited to 4-6 Goal areas.



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Once the Objective and Goals are in hand everyone knows how to think about winning and, importantly, this sets the context for choosing how to win.

The How – How Do We Win?

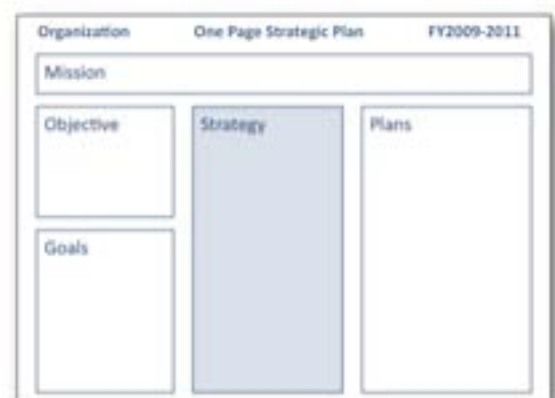
We all think about winning everyday in ways both large and small. How do I get a raise? How will I convince my spouse that we need a big screen TV? How do I avoid traffic on the way to work? How can I retire by the time I'm 50?

We are also surrounded by "how to win" examples, beginning as children. Consider the timeless Warner Brothers Looney Toons cartoons of Road Runner versus Wile E. Coyote. The Road Runner always wins because no matter what Coyote throws at him, Road Runner exploits his one amazing ability—speed. All the characters had winning "strategies:" Tasmanian Devil had his tornado attack; Tweety Bird had his calmness in the face of danger; Marvin the Martian had his unusual technology; Pepé le Pew the skunk had his disarming charm; and the list goes on and on.

There have been many good definitions of strategy and OGSP favors the simplest. Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Business at Toronto University and a former partner at Monitor consulting, has a simple and compelling definition:

*Strategy is an **integrated set of choices**, which positions the firm to create **a sustainable advantage relative to competition**.*

In the OGSP, "how to win" is spelled out by the **Strategy** and **Plans**. Strategy is all about achieving the Objective—the choices that define success. This usually means three to five focus areas that define a series of key choices, which will deliver the Goals and ultimately the Objective.



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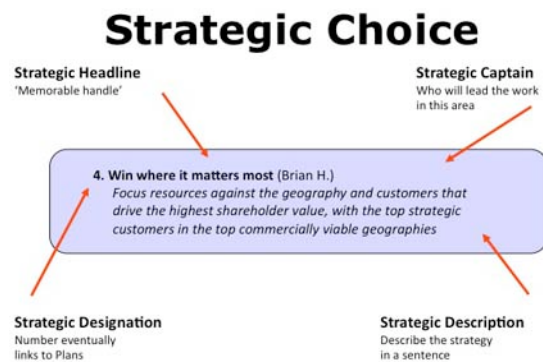
An effective strategy warm-up exercise, as choices are being formed, is “Where Play/How Win?” This two-step exercise first contemplates the arena of competition or “where will we play?” which usually includes choices about the desired consumer, the channel/customer who serves this consumer, the category of products or services which will be offered, the geographies of concentration and price points.

Strategic choices typically fall into “buckets” or more elegantly described as “strategic themes” by Robert Kaplan and David Norton of the Harvard Business School. These themes can include reinforcing current strengths, extending in new areas where strengths are relevant, lowering costs versus competition, innovation by bringing new ideas to the marketplace, and the organizational capability required to succeed.

Within the OGSP structure, strategic choices are expressed in a unique and powerful manner. Individual strategies are defined by a headline and then a sentence of description. Managers find it surprisingly easy to think in headlines—a short collection of words that express an action point of view on the strategic choice.

Effective strategy headlines usually involve logical sentence structure, an active voice and strong present-tense verbs that are memorable. Good examples from actual OGSP’s include:

- *Drive Annual Franchise Growth*
- *Win Where it Matters Most*
- *Push Premium Pricing Power*



Each Strategy is numbered with #1 typically being more important than #5, but the commitment must be to allocate appropriate resources against all strategies.

There are several tests of a good strategic choice. For example, consider the Breath Test (*Can you say it in one breath?*) or the Substitution Test (*Put another organization in the sentence, does it make sense?*) or the Get Yourself Out of Bed Test (*Is it motivating?*). Perhaps the best test, however, is the Opposite Test - *does the opposite represent a real*

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choice? If the strategic choice has a legitimate opposite choice that could be used successfully by a competitor, then the original strategy is a real, legitimate choice. If not, it is a platitude

The final step of OGSP, and arguably the most important, is **Plans**. Plans are the work required by each Strategy over the next 12 months – the most near term time horizon within the OGSP. Each Plan is designated with the Strategy number it links to and is given a letter designation to distinguish it (i.e., 1a, 2b, 3e, 4c) from other Plans in the same Strategy. All Plans are assigned a single point owner and expected completion date.

Plans are grouped by Strategy and placed to the right of each strategy on the OGSP page. In this manner, it is plainly evident what important work is required to deliver each strategy—no mystery, no confusion, the choices are relentlessly clear and focused.

On the one-page OGSP, the Strategies and Plans are listed in vertical order, directly in the middle of the page and to the immediate right of Objective and Goals. This enables one of the most powerful aspects of the one-page OGSP format called the **“1-inch journey.”** If there is a question as to what is meant by the Objective, a “1-inch journey” south (down) will provide specific perspective in the Goals section. Similarly, if the question is “how are we going to accomplish that?” a “1-inch journey” east (right) shows the strategic choices to win.

Yet the biggest benefit of the OGSP format and a “1 inch journey” is the test of sufficiency. It’s easy to both ask and answer the question “Is this enough to win?” The Objective is clear and directly linked to a set of agreed Plans and it is easy to judge if these choices, put together, are capable of delivering on the Goals.



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“Houston, we have a problem” – Mission

Alert readers will have noticed another section of the OGSP that has not been discussed – Mission. This is not meant to trivialize the importance of a Mission statement. It is very important to setting the stage for making good strategic decisions and the Mission “over arches” the organization, which is why it stretches across the page and over the OGSP choices.

A Mission statement simply answers the question: *Why do we exist as an organization?* or more specifically, *What business are we in?* You think this would be both obvious and simple to answer – and sometimes it is. Often, however, managers have completely different views of the organization’s mission and this needs to be ironed out.

We typically start an engagement with a Mission statement exercise, usually as warm-up. Most organizations have a well-established and useful Mission statement and for others it takes a bit of discussion to get agreement. If there is deep disagreement over the Mission statement, then the organization is not ready to proceed with OGSP. Full Stop! Spend as much time as you need to get agreement on the Mission of the organization and then re-start the OGSP process.

But wait ... there’s more!

At this point, the OGSP is essentially finished but certainly not done. To make this strategic plan “come to life” three additional steps are required – the Won’t Do List[®], Capability Discussion and the development of Deployment Plan. None of this is especially hard to do, but without this work the OGSP becomes just another piece of paper to be ignored.

Examples of Good Mission Statements

“... organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

Google

“Always low prices, always!”

Wal*Mart

“We will provide products and services of superior quality and value that improve the lives of the world’s consumers”

Procter & Gamble

“We make great games that sell.”

Activision

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The first post-OGSP step is to have a **Won't Do** discussion. It is both liberating and adds credibility to the process if top management is honest about limitations. The "Won't Do" conversation results in a list of activity that is not on the OGSP but will be affected by the choices of the OGSP. This includes work that will Stop all together, work that will be put on Hold and may be done later, and work that will continue under a Limit of resources.

As Jim Collins says in his book **Good to Great**, "The good-to-great companies did not focus principally on what to do to become great; they focused equally on what not to do and what to stop doing..."

Next, it is necessary to have a conversation on the **Capabilities** required to succeed. This requires a frank assessment of the resources needed to accomplish the Plans at hand. This conversation should cover all the resources of the organization – skills, people, money and time. Again, an open and honest conversation adds credibility to the process and encourages enrollment in the Plans.

And last, but certainly not least, there must be a plan for **Deployment**. The beauty of the OGSP is that it is inherently easy to deploy. It is one-page with the choices and work required clearly visible. This leads to one of the most valuable aspects of the OGSP output and process - conversation about the future.

Most conversation within an organization revolves around the past. Kim Krisco, a communications expert and author of the book **Leadership and the Art of Conversation**, estimates that about 80% of all corporate conversation is about the past, while 15% is about the present and only 5% deals with the future. As Krisco states, "This proportion is not necessarily bad. However, the past is not the place to be if you want to make things happen. It's not the place you want to be as a leader, because leaders focus on the future."

OGSP conversations center on the future—a place that is filled with both hope and dread. And the future is the only place where "winning" happens.

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Clear and Simple isn't Easy ... But Consider the Alternative

Paul Saffo, the Silicon Valley futurist, has a saying from his childhood growing up on a ranch in the wide-open spaces of the West. It goes, "never mistake a clear day for a short distance." This is certainly true for OGSP.

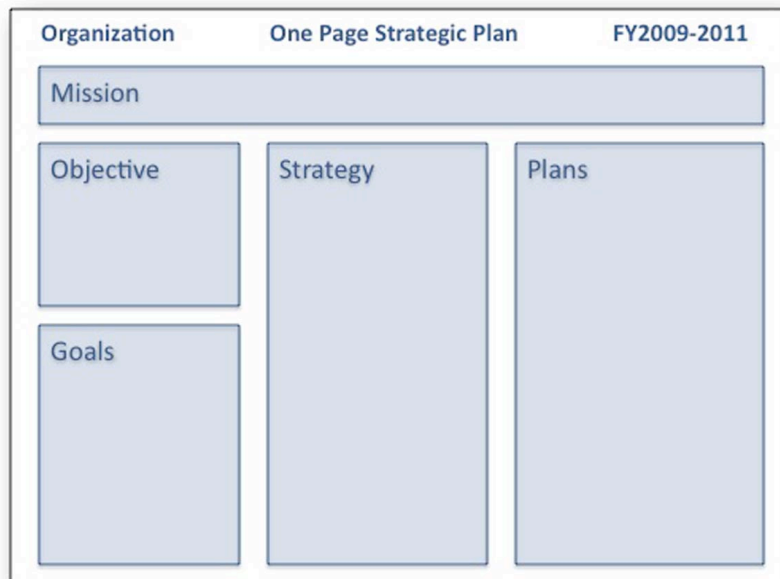
Strategy is as simple as two questions and one page. The resulting OGSP makes the important choices clear, just as a "clear day." However, don't mistake this for a "short distance." Making choices, structuring work around those choices, deciding what not to do and having conversations about the future is hard, hard work.

But consider the alternative.

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APPENDIX: Glossary of Terms



Objective: One brief sentence that defines success for the organization over the planning horizon, typically 3 years. The Objective statement include both a quantitative elements (doubling sales, enhancing margins, etc) and qualitative aspects (best in class product, customer preferred service).

Goals: The measures that will determine whether the Objective is being realized. About 4 to 6 are preferred, and they should be areas that the entire organization can embrace. Includes a base year to provide context, and targets for each year covered by the strategic plan.

Strategies: Usually 4 to 5 areas of focus, defining in a sentence how the organization will achieve its Goals and prevail versus competition. Strategies flow from some tired and true themes; they are expressed with a Strategic Headline, a one-sentence Strategic Description and each Strategy has a single Captain. Strategies are numbered from #1 to #5 and listed in order of importance.

Plans: The project work that brings each Strategy to life, usually about 3 to 5 work areas per Strategy, each aligned with a specific Strategy, notated with a letter (1a, 2c, 3e, 4b, etc.) with a single point owner and completion date identified. The Plans cover shorter-term work, usually the current fiscal year. As work is completed, new Plans replace the old ones.

Mission: Answers the question: *Why do we exist as an organization?* or more specifically, *What business are we in?* Most organizations have a well-established and useful Mission statement. If there is deep disagreement over the Mission statement - Full Stop! Spend as much time as you need to get agreement on the Mission of the organization and then re-start the OGSP process.

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Speed and Results versus Process

Why does the One Page Strategy help organization leaders to break this cycle of disappointing strategic planning outcomes? Primarily because it puts clarity and simplicity ahead of process, it forces real choices via focus, and because it is dramatically easier to develop and then deploy to the full organization. Let's look at each area briefly:

Clarity and Simplicity – Today's attention-challenged leader have no tolerance for long, jargon-laden planning processes. No one is willing today to go offsite for days at a time, putting faith in a promise that a magic answer will emerge months later. This process has only one acronym (OGSP), made up of common sense terms: Objective, Goals, Strategies, and Plans. The process uses real English, not Dilbert style jargon, wherever possible. The format necessitates terse, easy to understand descriptions.

Forcing Real Choices – The One Page Strategy format drives many important outcomes. It limits selection to a compelling one-sentence Objective statement of success (The "O"), about 5-8 Goals to help track that success (The "G"), 4-5 Strategies defining where the organization will play and how it will win versus competition (The "S"), and correspondingly 4-5 Plans per strategy (The "P") – anything more simply does not fit on a page. One non-profit client of ours previously paid a strategic consultant and in the end proudly announced to the Board that they had 57 Goals to share!

Successful Deployment – Stephen Covey's data highlights the extremely poor track record leaders have in aligning their organization to a well-understood and consistent business plan. Most humans have trouble remembering more than just a few key themes and priorities at a time. Since the One Page Strategy necessitates succinct sentences, and a limited number of Strategies and Plans, it dramatically improves the likelihood executors at all levels will embrace and remember the key themes and priorities.

What's Necessary to Succeed – Even if you decide to use the One Page Strategy to guide your strategic planning efforts, there are three mandatory's you must accept going-in for success to be likely:

Top Down Leadership – Senior leadership must participate in the OGSP development – be "in the room thought-out." They must clearly and concisely define success and be prepared to stick with it. And they must be willing to make "hard call" decisions using what we call "benevolent dictatorship": listen sincerely to all points of view and then make the final decision.

Organization First – All functions and regions must be prepared to migrate key resources to the most critical organization-wide priorities. There should be clear "scorecard" measures for each plan element, regularly reviewed. "Won't Do List" items should be captured and communicated broadly.

It's Not An Event – The strategic plan is not a destination but a journey. The strategic plan should be reviewed quarterly and renewed once a year. There should be an internal process owner, so the planning consultants become obsolete.

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Ten Truths About Strategic Planning:

- Truth #1:** People do not naturally focus their efforts – if not clearly lead, they will always try to do too much
- Truth #2:** Most organization leaders don't really understand how to make a clear strategic choice – they will try to "straddle" across broad options
- Truth #3:** Deciding what NOT to do is more important than choosing what to do
- Truth #4:** Single point accountability, and a clear completion date, is needed for if you ever want to get something done
- Truth #5:** You get what you measure – measure wisely
- Truth #6:** Order matters, in everything – people will look at a list and always assume the items on top are more important
- Truth #7:** Fewer words and choices are easier to remember than many – simple is better than complex
- Truth #8:** There is magic to telling the story on just one page – your eye only has to love an inch to learn more; people will carry a page with them
- Truth #9:** Strategic planning is not an event; it's a journey – and that means deployment is forever
- Truth #10:** Focused organizations win far more often than those who aren't