Chapter 4
Developing Your Strategy

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a definition of strategy and explains the purpose of a strategy. Strategy design and structure are treated as critical success factors. The chapter also explains that the two most important elements of any information management strategy are a clear vision of the long-term future of information and an honest and accurate assessment of the current information management situation.

DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF A STRATEGY

There are several accepted definitions of a strategy. Mintzberg (1978) defines strategy as a pattern in a stream of decisions. Von Scheel defines strategy as a set of activities to deliver a unique ix of value – how an organization goes about deciding how to define and operationalize capabilities. McKeown (2013) defines strategy as a method the organization uses to define its future – the organization’s way of achieving the desired future with the resources available. Henderson (1981) tells us that a well formed strategy depends on the organization’s ability to foresee the future using what we commonly refer to as business and competitive intelligence methods. While the words and emphasis of each of these definitions vary, the core focus is the same.

For the purpose of this book we strategies are critical tools for ensuring that business decisions are aligned with long and near term business goals. Strategies – when well-formed and grounded on broad engagement and buy-in across the organization – ensure that business decisions made across the
organization are aligned, reasonable and suitable. When a well formed strategy is in place, business decisions - regardless of who makes the decision, where they are located in the organization, or their administrative level resources – will ensure that resources are allocated to achieve short and long term vision.

Strategies are often confused with other management tools perhaps because all of these other tools have ‘strategic value’. Annual or quarterly plans are not strategies. Tactics and projects are not strategies. Mission statements are not strategies. Value networks are not strategies. Neither is a simple vision or a detailed business intelligence report a strategy. While each of these methods may play a role in an organization’s strategy, they are not strategies. How can you tell whether or not you have an information management strategy? Here are some tell-tale signs:

- Do different parts of your organization have different answers when you ask them how they manage their information assets?
- Does meeting a legal discovery order or providing a response to a project audit a major effort which generally results in resources being drawn away from regular business to fulfill the request?
- Have multiple information management plans have been put in place over the years but none have achieved their goals?
- Is information management is a consistent bottleneck within business units?
- Are there multiple areas of information practice in place focused on the same activities, using different and sometimes duplicative or contradictory technologies?

If the answers to these questions were “Yes!” – It is unlikely that you have a strategy for managing information capital assets. What do you need to develop a strategy?

**STRATEGY DESIGN AND STRUCTURE**

Strategies – in this case a strategy to manage information capital assets – should have three essential components, including (1) a vision of the future and a long term strategy to achieve that future; (2) an honest assessment of the organization’s current situation and a near term strategy for addressing deficiencies; and (3) a living process for continuous review of current conditions and their relationship to the long term strategy (Figure 1).
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