FROM GLOBAL VISION TO AGILE EXECUTION A PROPOSED PLANNING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This article looks to explore the value of strategic planning and how that impacts the coordination of global and remote teams. Additionally, it will be seeking to understand how the agile planning process works and if it could fill the void that separates formalized strategic planning and execution of designed actions. Many organizations do not prioritize their planning process and fail to align their workforce to an end goal beyond their day to day activities due to various reasons. For those that do craft a vision and strategic plan, many fail to incorporate the workforce or stakeholders into the planning process for a more robust perspective during the development phase, other organizations fail to properly communicate the vision and strategy. The overarching issue with strategic planning has been the actual completion of the identified goals. While many organizations succeed in the development and communication of the plan, many fall into the trap that the organization defaults to the frenetic pace of their routine work and fails to accomplish their goals or the change efforts that it sets out to accomplish. This research helps clarify the importance of strategic planning as it aligns teams across a global and virtual scale, giving teams and individuals the right priorities and where to focus their efforts.

Key Words: Strategic Goals, Agile Planning, Operational Modeling, Operational Alignment, and Global Leadership

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

This paper looks to explore the value of strategic planning and its impact on coordinating global and remote teams. It aims to understand why strategic plans fail and are not executed. Additionally, this paper attempts to understand how the agile planning process works and if it could potentially fill the void that separates formalized strategic planning and execution of designed actions.

The world economy has becomes more interconnected as well as shown an increase in the number of global organizations that are currently operating across foreign boundaries. That added complexity has created issues with aligning operational goals between domestic and foreign headquarters creating a significant gap between expectations and performance. Khanna et al. (2005) research on emerging markets, speculates organizational defeat if that global company does not establish strategies for incorporating local infrastructures into their value chain process. One area where a number of organizations have failed when expanding into emerging markets is the assumption that they can conduct operations in the same manner that they do domestically. Further believing that there is a cultural intelligence needed to bridge the expectations of organizational goals with foreign business cultures and practices (Khanna, Palepu, & Sinha, 2005).

There is a great deal of research that has been completed on strategic planning, global leadership, and agile planning. In that research though, there is a gap between how those three areas intersect. Most notable is the lack of research on the agile planning methodology on a macro or global scale. This is a key topic to explore as there are noteworthy implications to organizations not achieving their strategic initiatives. In addition to completion of goals and engaging remote members, there are other key attributes of strategic planning to include the aligning resources to priorities and the ability to match organizational strategy to changing markets. The objective of this paper is to thoroughly understand the current issues that surround the strategic planning to execution process within a global environment.

SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Leadership

Advances in transportation and communication has exposed businesses to growth opportunities throughout the world. With those opportunities come complex challenges and Ghemawat (2012) found that thirty percent of United States corporations believe that they have failed to capitalize on those opportunities because they do not believe that they have enough capable managers to execute those global strategies (Ghemawat, 2012). McKinsey surveyed over five-hundred executives on human capital priorities and found that two-thirds identified leadership development on a global scale was their number one priority (The Conference Board and McKinsey, 2012). A number of organizations are proactively addressing these gaps by diversifying their senior leadership teams, emphasizing values over policy, deemphasizing hierarchy over organizational flattening, and expanding leadership development outside of the domestic headquarters (George, 2012).

Petite's (2014) study found that there were a number of criteria that make global leadership so difficult beginning with communications. While communication is difficult enough between two homogenous persons, that when you incorporate a large number of interacting variables from language and context to ambiguity and cultural perspectives that minute alterations can enable disproportionate effects. Coupled with technological advances, generational shifts that violate previously held taboos, and an informational overload paired with a continual flux of organizational change, global leadership is becoming one of the most complex sciences that is affecting mankind (Petrie, 2014).

Virtual Environment

During the previous twenty-years the world has seen an expediential growth in the location diversity of organizations. This is the employee telecommuting from their home location using technological advances to work from anywhere, the manufacturing of products in a different country to lower product costs, and the expansion of remote teams attempting to penetrate new markets trying to turn a domestic company into a global one (George, 2012). While this has changed the dynamic of the work environment and how work gets accomplished, it does not change the focus from work actually needing to get accomplished.

This spatial separation of virtual teams and telecommuting combined with global work environments create a number of challenges to include alignment of priorities, accountability of goal accomplishment, and team cohesion. Cascio (2000) points that there are two key factors when evaluating remote or virtual positions that are shifting from a focus on time to a focus on results. The second key is the recognition that remote employees and teams need additional leadership time, support, and attention based on their lack of availability (Cascio, 2000).

Klompé points out that any organization that is in this predicament of being spread apart is dependent upon alignment to achieve any level of future success. Using alignment in a broad sense, but also specifically that if a company is in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, every team member needs to understand and be actively working towards the same goals, metrics, and budgets. This includes how operations are executed, how support is elicited, and how the regions team together (Klompé, 2003).

Vision and Strategic Planning

A vision statement, while a victim of overused business jargon, is also an extremely powerful tool to help affiliate a mass of people with different ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives into a single focus of what the end will look like and how it will feel. Being able to use this vision as a catalyst for a workforce in generating progressive movement, it is also a tool in which the members can synthesize their creativity, their perception, and passions into a cohesive vision of direction (Mintzberg, 1994). Once a vision is established, the organization has greater clarity in its ability to create actionable steps to achieve that vision giving birth to strategic planning.

Elentably (2015) defined a strategic plan as a management tool used to improve the performance of an organization that outlines the organization's direction and priorities. Each of the objectives identifies a series of strategies intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation, a fresh approach to something that will be undertaken to accomplish that objective. Each strategy will then be championed by a divisional leader at the executive level who would further identify that objective with a level of significance and organizational importance (Elentably, 2015).

Strategic planning is a routine managerial function that happens in most organizations to a varying degree of effectiveness. There are a number of organizations that do not implement a strategic plan, Robinson's (1982) study found that organizations that continuously do not plan due to "not having enough time to plan" historically penalized themselves with decreased sales, profitability, and productivity. While he found this was more prevalent in smaller firms than larger organizations, he did find that the desire for strategic planning was recognized across all businesses and their need to pause, reflect, assess, and determine their path forward (Robinson Jr., 1982).

Execution

Gluck (1984) stated that vision was the essence of an organization and that by developing a sound and foundational end state proves to be effective in organizational success. A thorough understanding of the organizational dynamics, the industry, suppliers, market, competitors, and how to integrate all these factors into a comprehensive vision and strategy were essential. Most importantly, however, is that all of this is useless without the ability to execute and actually accomplish what was intended to be completed (Gluck, 1984).

Gluck's studied the successes of Bill Anderson of NCR, Harry Gray at United Technologies, and Charlie Brown at AT&T abilities to craft a compelling vision but also their success at executing their vision. Gluck found that there were four key attributes that all three individuals shared. The first skill was their ability to deploy resources shifting the right budgets and supporting departments to focus their efforts on the vision.

Secondarily, these three leaders were able to implement capability building by developing their internal talent to help carry the vision forward. The tertiary skill is driving external initiatives of changing the beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors of external stakeholders which would include, government agencies, consumer groups, customer associates, and suppliers. Lastly, these leaders all excelled at removing obstacles and barriers to their team's success (Gluck, 1984).

Visions that are achievable from initiation are more likely to be accomplished. One consideration is to determine if realistic judgements have been considered to include an assessment of the organization to determine if the right resources and human capital are in place to properly execute the vision. This also includes evaluating if the organization has the right functional areas and culture that would align to the vision and if the executive management team has the ability and motivation to drive the vision's success. Lastly, organizations that create a realistic timeline that aligns to follow the cultural pace of work and goal achievement increase the likelihood of accomplishing their initiatives (Gluck, 1984).

Strategic performance takes on a number of efforts to ensure completion to which the Lean management philosophy specializes in being able to measure value and value creation. Taggart points out that operational performance measures should be customer-focused, where on-time-delivery as measured by the customer is a prime measure, as well as product lead time and average cost relative to the markets. He also points out that direct labor efficiency should not be used as a measure, as it may encourage the use of resources to produce waste (Taggart, 2013). Master's assessment of the deployment of Lean 'tools' found that it could result in short-term savings and performance improvements, but believes that the adoption of Lean thinking as a comprehensive management approach is more likely to bring about fundamental improvements (Masters, 2009). The application of the Lean methodology centers on an iterative improvement process the mimics the agile execution process.

Agile

Agile is a project management term coined by software developers creating a new way to manage large scale projects. The previous methodology was to develop software using traditional project management practices that included beginning-to-end plans that would resemble a waterfall of major phase accomplishment. One issue with this operation was that it led to a client or customer receiving an end product based on requirements and not resembling what their vision of the completed product would be. Agile was developed out of these frustrations, which focused on numerous iterations, of product review sessions with the customer, and a customizable operational model based upon the makeup and specialties of the team. The overarching operational flow of an agile model begins with a confirmation of the end state and determining what smaller part of that vision can be accomplished in a short period of time, typically two to four weeks. During that time period the team meets daily in a short meeting to discuss what was accomplished, what will be accomplished, and any issues that arose. At the conclusion of the two to four week period, the team will review their results with the client to ensure that what they are building adheres to the requirements and aligns to the client's vision. This model high resembles the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) model and the action research model of numerous iterations based upon learning from each stage (Young, 2013).

Facilitation

While Robinson's (1982) study found that firms that do not engage in systematic planning put themselves into a tenuous position. He also found that outside facilitators when brought into firms to guide strategic planning sessions resulted in greater organizational performance-to-established plan. This may be attributed to a skilled individual being able to lead a team and balance their intentions with reality. Facilitation can also bring a level of eliciting innovation and matching it to logical actionable steps to accomplish that (Robinson Jr., 1982).

Understanding how the creative process works has been a focus not only for academics but for corporate researchers as well, as the ability to enable innovation will be the knowledge management version of El Dorado. Harvey's 2014 study focused on creative synthesis as a routine where by an individual or a team's cognitive, social, and environmental resources are combined into a creative production. He believed that group composition, team dynamics, and an environment that supports autonomy establishes boundaries and conditions where a group can experience risk, failure, and learning. This was linked to the finding that without enough conflict and failure that it denies the synthesis process resulting in a less creative product (Harvey, 2014)

Open Collaboration

Taking the next step from internal teaming to external teaming one phrase identified was the term open collaboration. This is the foundational philosophy where individuals or organizations create value, they exchange and use others work, they work with unstructured coordination, and allow anyone to use their knowledge trust. Ideal examples of this model is the Apache source code or Wikipedia, where the domain knowledge has been open sourced without restriction (Levine, 2014). Dougherty's work in 2011 takes this even further with the belief that products and services are so integrated into the fabric of society that they have become not only too complex for an individual to handle, but too complex for a single organization to manage and truly hit a breakthrough that resonates with the globally interconnected market. However, the existing organizing structure in these ecologies stifles emergence and precludes much innovation, simply because theory and practice do not adequately address how to organize for complex innovation (Dougherty, 2011). While the focus of this study is not to evaluate the merits of open sourced innovation this does open the avenue to explore virtual work environments and how or if their design elicits creativity. Some suggest that the innovative individual is entirely virtual with on-demand resources to support their endeavors (Bortolot, The Un-Office, 2014). In addition, Elerud-Tryde & Hooge (2014) found that virtual idea campaigns elicit creativity in large firms by facilitating innovative thought and enaging the entire diverse workfore.

SECTION III: INTERSECTION OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Overarching Issues

Three overarching issues were identified during the review of literature beginning with a predisposition of organizations to practice parochial strategic planning. While the negative impact of having a single perspective for domestic strategies may be overcome, having a singular outlook for a global strategy can prove to be fatal for an organization. Much of the research and studies highlight the endeavors of global field offices aligning to the home country's strategy versus the shaping of the organizational strategy to the conditions of their global markets. This creates the opportunity for potential misfortune by lacking the cultural cognizance to understand how strategies will be received in an emerging market. This one-way communication can also lead to the inability to recognize new opportunities that can be exploited and new innovative ways that value can be created.

Additionally identified, was the decreased leadership attention that foreign leaders receive. Due to location and time zone challenges, remote leaders often become ignored out of convenience and proximity. This is the opposite of desired intentions as remote leaders have a greater need to communicate with their leadership to maintain strategic alignment and to fully communicate the unique roadblocks and difficulties a foreign culture can create that slows progress. Lastly, a lack of frequent and routine communication between domestic and global bodies creates the opportunity for the remote employee to feel stranded and disassociated from their organization. This disassociation holds true for the home body as they will be missing the cultural exposure and link to those markets unless they are engaged with their foreign correspondent.

Lastly noted is the lack of change created by organizations. Maintaining planning processes that do not elicit flexibility results in a non-dynamic work environment. With a creation process that doesn’t necessarily take into account the realities of foreign markets, it also doesn’t typically involve a process to alter and change strategies during the implementation. With such significant potential differences between cultures, ideally an organization would want to match the cultural energy that is experienced and to continually mold their strategies to the cultures that they are participating in.

Opportunities

With issues identified in this review a number of potential opportunities present themselves to enhance planning processes. Beginning with the opportunity for co-created strategic plans with global locations being partnered with the headquartered office to create strategies with a greater global perspective. This application would also address issues identified in being aligned between the two partners as they both have a vested interest. Two linked opportunities is the potential for enabling a professional facilitator to guide this process ensuring a balance of strategy and idea generation. The associated opportunity is creating an open source mechanism within the organization to openly share feedback and ideas across boundaries in rapid speed.

The second prime opportunity for enhancing global operations is applying the agile project methodology. The iterative nature of the methodology could create an environment of routine, open communication ensuring alignment of priorities and accountability of accomplishments. This could lead to real time self-assessment of progress, issues, and opportunities that could position an organization with the flexibility to successfully adapt to emerging markets.

Lastly, is the opportunity of continued development of organizational global leaders. With expanding influence into foreign markets the need presents itself for savvy leaders to conform to the cultures they are in and to learn how to capitalize on that gained knowledge. This can also be a cross learning experience by developing foreign leaders into organizational global leaders further expanding the cultural depth of the organization. This greater organizational perspective potentially increases the organization's competitive advantage not only in its foreign environments, but domestic markets as well.

Proposed Strategic Agile Planning Model

The planning process is initiated by a single event in which the organization defines its future vision and strategy to achieve that vision. Subsequently, each strategy is then broken down into the tactics that will achieve each strategy. The tactics are then plotted across a timeline at its projected completion date creating the end product of a level-loaded twelve-month milestone plan of what goal will be accomplished during each month. This transitions into the next standalone event which is the monthly planning session which identifies the goals to be accomplished specifically during that month long period. This is mirrored into the weekly planning session of what actions will be accomplished during that specific week. Interlaced into this process are periodic checkpoints throughout the year to manage progress which consist of quarterly self-assessments of progress and monthly, weekly, and daily accountability progress checks and resolution of issues.

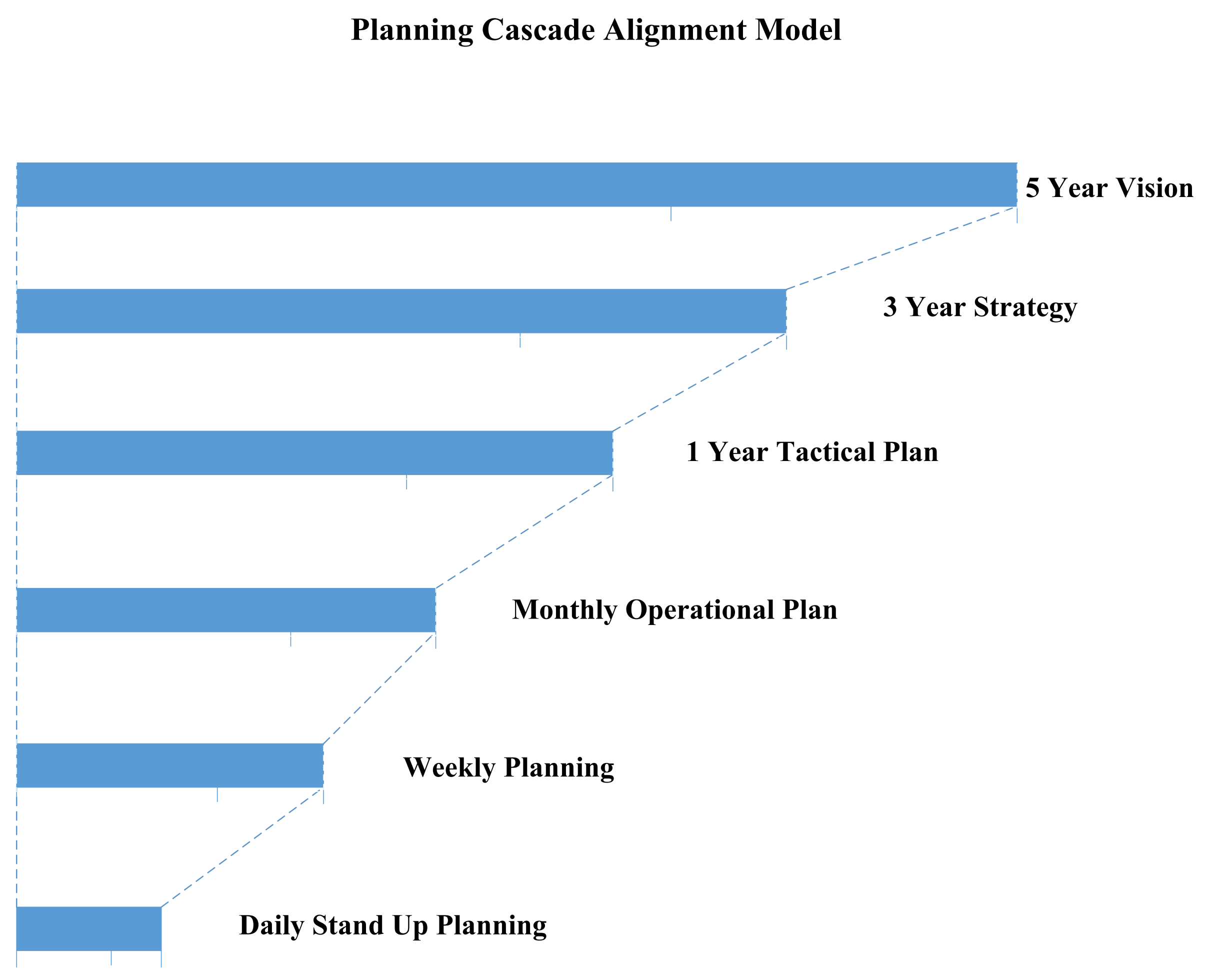
First explaining the kickoff event of establishing a vision there are a number of best practices an organization can follow to include using an external facilitator to guide the process, incorporating a breadth of organizational members and stakeholders, as well as using the affinity diagram process to help stretch ideas while still being able to define the actions to accomplish those ideas. More importantly than the best practices is that the end result be the ideal definition of what the organization will be in the future.

The strategic planning process takes place during two key points in the model, first during the initial planning session when identifying how to achieve the vision and secondarily during the quarterly self-assessment process when ensuring that the actions still align to the strategies and that the strategies are still capable in achieving the vision. These are the defined and actionable goals that are the tangible compliment to a more loosely defined vision. Strategic goals also represent the major organizational milestones that garner the attention of the entire organization representing major shifts of focus and allocation of significant resources in order to achieve.

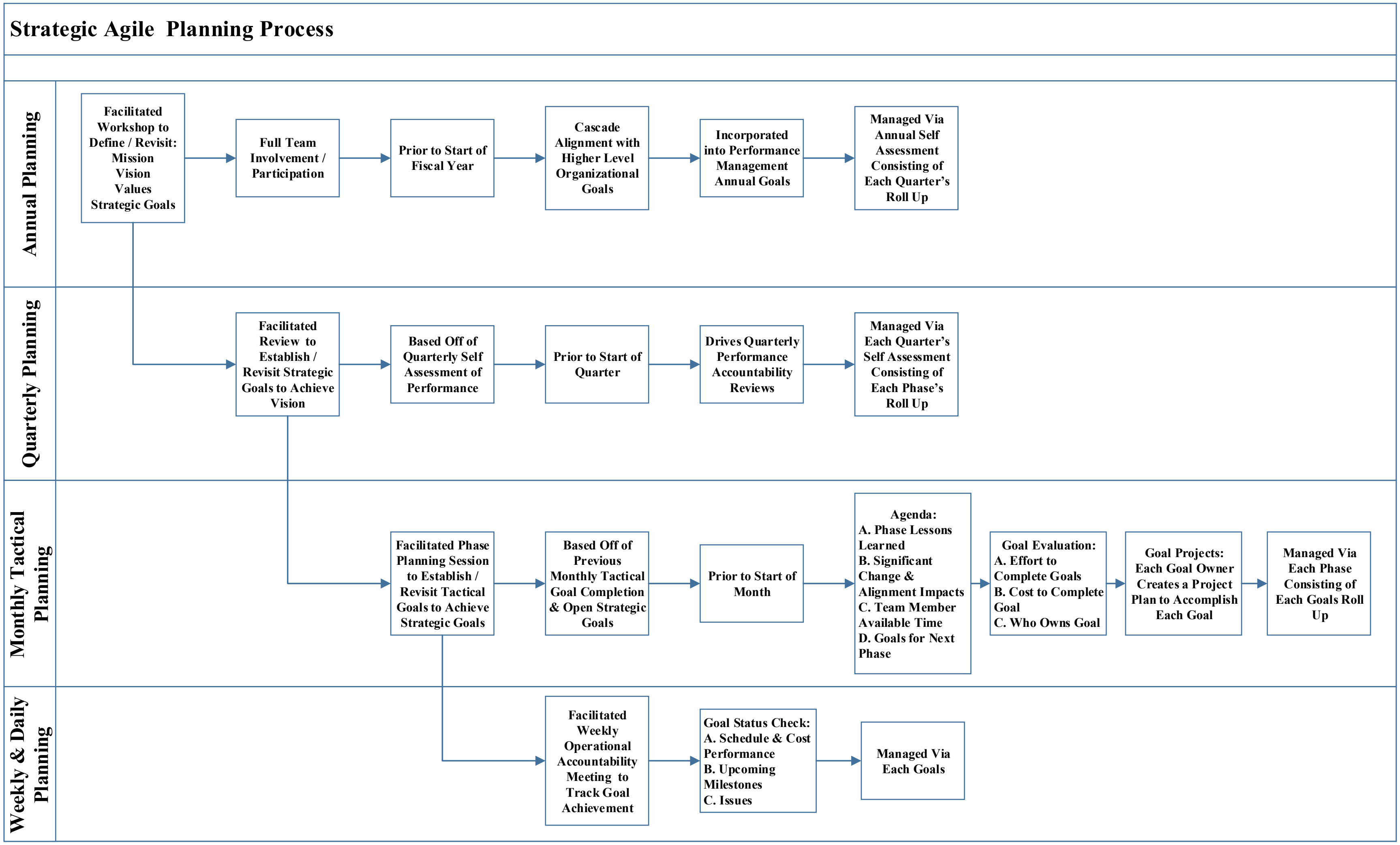
The tactical planning process occurs during key points in the model with the first during the initial planning session and the creation of actionable goals that need to be accomplished to achieve an overall greater strategy. These tactics are again reviewed during the quarterly self-assessment and monthly planning sessions to ensure progress is being made and that they maintain their relevancy in achieving the overall vision. This step is a necessary step to systematically break down each goal into a modular piece that not only makes it easier to comprehend and communicate, but additionally provides the capability to changing portions of the goal with greater ease when market conditions dictate needed changes.

Each monthly operational planning session identifies which tactical goals are to be accomplished over the course of the month. While the tactical planning session identified which goals would be accomplished in each month, the monthly planning session then establishes what actions and goals are to be accomplished during each week to ensure that the identified tactical goals are accomplished by the close of the month. Associated with the monthly planning sessions are the weekly planning and daily planning sessions which identify down to the level of what individuals will be accomplishing over the span of a week and day respectively.

What is created above is a streamlined cascade of goals from a vision down to daily activities and how they align. While a standard planning process, the need for agility to adjust to normative changes is needed to ensure flexibility can be incorporated into the process. The infusion of quarterly, monthly, weekly, and daily check points ensures that progressive movement is being made on goals and that accountability is intertwined into the process. This also elicits a continuous discussion on the relevancy of the goals and if they are having the desired effect on achieving the vision or if they need to be altered to provide the highest value. These sessions are not intended to be extensively planned and formal presentations that hide perspective and context but more simply of what was accomplished, what will be done during the next iteration, what are the roadblocks, issues, and risks that will be faced, and what higher level of help is needed. There is also the intent during these planning session for each team and member to close out each day, week, and month with a visible sense of accomplishment as it is clear as to what was accomplished. Lastly, these sessions have the intent to open up the dialogue about continuous improvement amongst the participants where issues are raised with the expectation that participants and observers are available for consultation and assistance to ensure that progress does not stall.


Planning Cascade Alignment Model
5 Year Vision
3 Year Strategy
1 Year Tactical Plan
Monthly Operational Plan
Weekly Planning
Daily Stand Up Planning

Strategic Agile Planning Model Explained



Implications

This comprehensive planning model aims to achieve global and virtual alignment factoring in three specific elements to enable that alignment. The creation of a vision or better yet a shared vision through the participation of all of those impacted by the vision through joint participation leading to a potential higher level of self-efficacy. This model also adheres to a consistent alignment of priorities that are transparent, continually validated, and defines how resources should be distributed. Lastly, the model enables a stream of communication vertically and horizontally across the organization which brings a tighter forming of physically separate team members into the group.

Team dynamics have the possibility to evolve in this model to different levels beginning with the team determining their work and the accountability that naturally occurs in that process. In the natural checkpoints of the process, individuals and teams will be unable to hide lack of progress nor will roadblocks to progress be hidden as it will be explicitly transparent what is holding back progress. Due to the open nature of this planning methodology there will also be greater possibilities for integrating projects across historic functional work boundaries that are not typically crossed as well as creating unique partnerships and capitalizing on economies of scale. Additionally, there is an ability for team members and organizations to share workloads and to be able to provide immediate assistance due to the resonant nature of identifying constraints in an open forum.

This planning model most importantly creates the ability to act as a living organism that grows, alters, and evolves during the same intended time period. As markets change, as people leave and enter, so do visions, strategies, and goals. This iterative process enables the construct and foundation to make slight, medium, or significant adjustments in a short period of time while being able to communicate and elicit support across the organization. Lastly, significant to the team is the validation process that monitors goals and if they are having the desired affect or.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research would greatly benefit from a longitudinal study of effectiveness of goal completion, value creation, and overall organizational performance following the implementation of a global, agile planning model. An additional future research would be the impact a planning model of this consistency would have on global and remote workers on if they were able to better to integrate and assimilate into the organization. Lastly, a study focusing on the effects of co-created strategies could have on employee engagement and what the long term employee impacts would be.

Conclusion

What is proposed in this paper is an actionable planning model that focuses on incorporating global employees through strategy and operational planning processes to elicit greater engagement of remote team members. Additionally, this proposed model accounts for the need to change and adjust plans throughout the evolution of the plan as it is an ever changing environment that must establish stability in a dynamic environment. Lastly, it is identified to incorporate an outside facilitator to the methodology to help manage and execute the process adding an external perspective while also alleviating the burden of having the think strategically and also having to manage the planning process.

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