

STRATEGY

Telling the Strategy Story

How did Jack Welch engineer GE's success? How did YouTube become a billion-dollar business in less than two years? Why is it that some strategic plans work, while others wind up on a shelf? The answer lies in how a business tells its story—how past and present choices seem to open up, or close down, options for the future. While many consulting firms offer strategy support, clients have chosen CFAR for nearly three decades because we help clients craft a strategy story that motivates action.

We close the gap between mission, vision, goals, and the work people in the organization actually need to do to realize their mission, vision, and goals. For us, strategy is the coordinated and collective choices made by an organization, where the choices are held together by an authentic story leaders tell about why *these* choices at *this* time will produce the desired organizational performance.

The CFAR Difference

CFAR's consultants think about implementation from the beginning of the strategic planning process. We test assumptions about business performance, the external competitive climate, and organizational culture. Because we understand both business and behavioral issues, we can help clients create a story about their organization that clarifies strategic trade-offs in quantitative and qualitative terms. We help prepare the business for change, and provide ways to keep strategy fresh by reviewing and readjusting it as new information or changes to the environment emerge. The outcome is effective, lasting performance improvement while honoring values that matter.

CFAR helps clients develop strategic plans that show up in results, not on a shelf.

Telling the Story

We start with a "Discovery Phase" that makes beliefs about the business context explicit, comparing performance data with the ways people talk about the business. We listen to the top team describe the focus of the business, the customer base, and the organization's values and aspirations. We study the company's financials and other performance indicators and surface the story in the data. Our goal is to illuminate assumptions about performance, assess their currency, and investigate with our clients the potential gaps between strategic goals and actual delivery. The result is a fresh, shared understanding of the current state of the business that helps leaders see choices about the future that are both realistic and culturally attuned.

Using the findings of phase one, the second "Design Phase" develops the strategic plot line. In this phase, we help the client scan the range of possibility, evaluate alternatives, and clarify the business and cultural implications of different strategic choices.

CFAR
center@cfar.com
www.cfar.com

Four Penn Center
1600 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215.320.3200 tel
215.320.3204 fax

44 Brattle Street, 4th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02138
617.576.1166 tel
617.576.3015 fax

An important feature of CFAR's method in this phase is the thoughtful engagement of select staff and line leaders in the exploration of options. This approach allows those most influential and knowledgeable about the organization to anticipate points where the strategic "plot" is unrealistic, and find connections between the emerging strategy and different parts of the business. The result is strategy that reflects the cultural and operational realities of the business, and has integrated leadership built into the design.

We know that strategy is what you do, not just what you say you do, so we help clients prepare for implementation with an essential third "Confirmation Phase," in which the broader organization is recruited into the strategic story about the planned future of the business and readied for the changes necessary to enact strategy. This phase identifies specific operational changes and the resources that will be required to support such changes, and suggests metrics and tracking systems. This phase also includes mechanisms for keeping strategy fresh as the business landscape changes.

Case Studies

INTEGRATING SYSTEM STRATEGY

CFAR worked with a multi-billion dollar, national health system to develop their first system-wide strategic plan. Partnering with the client's leadership team, CFAR facilitated a strategy summit in which over 100 system leaders discussed the future of health care delivery, the system's role in it, and their performance to date. Participants created a shared vision of the system's future and a detailed tactical plan to ensure that the local systems and central office were clear on their individual and collective contributions to the organization's long-term success. Leaders across the large, multi-facility system were able to agree on its direction and determine concrete actions to advance organizational goals.

ALIGNING LEADERSHIP

A new academic medical center dean needed to align competing interests while managing limited resources and launching a new capital campaign. CFAR's team helped the dean, administration, and faculty agree on a shift in research direction, a significant curriculum overhaul, and a new design of the center's administrative structures. The narrative about the outcomes for all parties proved so compelling that the university made a significant additional financial contribution to support building renovation, allowing the dean to fully invest existing resources in the research program itself. Results also included coordinated leadership of the research enterprise and a new senior team prepared to support the dean in the implementation phase.

STRATEGY FOR SUCCESSION

The founder of a multi-million dollar real estate and construction business had passed away, leaving no succession plan. CFAR helped the new leader form a senior team and develop a strategy and story about their future that allowed the company to grow from \$30 million to \$200 million in just five years while maintaining the founder's original vision and high standards for quality. In support of the strategic plan, CFAR helped the company establish growth and profit goals for each business unit, design an accountability system to track strategic initiatives, and expand the company's board of directors with high-level, influential leaders who could challenge the CEO.

1

DISCOVERY

- Understand the current state through interviews and analysis of financial and performance data
- Test assumptions that underlie the current state

OUTCOME

- Top team shares a fresh, data-driven view of the current state of the business

2

CREATING THE STRATEGY

- Consider alternatives and develop one to three desirable future states
- Understand implications of strategic choices
- Characterize cultural changes that might be demanded by those choices

OUTCOME

- A chosen strategy built around a coherent story that integrates economics and culture

3

ENACTING THE STRATEGY

- Communicate the strategy story
- Clarify behavioral changes

MONITOR PROGRESS <-> READJUST

OUTCOME

- A strategy story that communicates purpose
- A dashboard to monitor progress
- A motivated organization that is moving in the desired direction, and learning to adapt as it goes