

Title

A Strategic Plan in One Day

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a method of facilitating a One Day Strategic Planning meeting covering: 1) *Meeting Preparation*, 2) meeting *Structure, Content and Flow*, and 3) proper use of the *Results* in the days and weeks following the planning session. The facilitator's duty is summarized, including facilitation techniques to embrace and avoid.

CHALLENGES.

The one-day strategic planning meeting must deal with several challenges, including: 1) client expectations and mindset, 2) time constraints, and 3) selection of planning method.

1. The client expects a strategic plan in one day. This is especially true for clients not familiar with strategic planning. Their expectations are unrealistic. However, rather than tell the client that producing a strategy in a day is impossible, seize the moment and accomplish as much as possible. Can something useful be developed in a day? The answer is yes, but only with advance planning and a properly run meeting. The result will "jump start" the strategic planning and decision making processes in the organization, setting them on a course of decisive action.

The participant mindset also presents challenges. Managers often think (and work) one level too low, and usually tactically as opposed to strategically. They also may have a poor understanding of roles and values (their own and those of their organization). These are common problems, so they must be factored into meeting content and methods. Dealing with the preconceived notions adds to the time pressure.

2. The extreme time compression of the meeting presents its own challenges. There is no time for facilitation mistakes that cause the meeting to get sidetracked. The people in the meeting will be managers, who are accustomed to running meetings. From the first minute, the *facilitator* must be the one in total control of the meeting for the entire day.
3. A strategic planning method must be pre-selected. This is mainly a problem of translation. There are many wonderful approaches and philosophies on strategic planning that have been published in books and literature for thousands of years [1][2]. All of these approaches remain useless to management and leaders until they are made accessible to the players in a manner that is engaging. The method of strategic planning must be translated into an interactive meeting where the subject matter experts can produce a viable strategy. The strategic planning "expert", who is both a consultant and meeting facilitator, performs this translation.

Producing a result in one day requires two things: 1) clarity of purpose and 2) a well run meeting. Clarity of purpose can take shape during planning, subject to refinement by the clients at the beginning of the meeting. In a well run meeting, the consultant will rapidly engage and enlist the participants (a small group of 8 to 16) in the process of quickly developing a logical and cohesive strategy. The specific approach (to strategic planning) is less important than keeping things moving quickly toward the result.

PLANNING THE MEETING

Planning is key. A one-day strategic planning meeting is very densely packed. The day is very intense, both for the facilitator and for the attendees. Because the pace is so fast, there is no time for mistakes, in content or in facilitation. Both the facilitator and the attendees must be prepared. This section will describe a method of working together in a manner that meets the needs of both facilitator and participants. Most strategic planning meetings (I have attended many) are inefficient, primarily due to lack of planning and preparation. For every hour of in-meeting time, there should be at least 2 hours spent planning and preparing, and another hour per hour for post meeting reporting, summarizing, and debriefing.

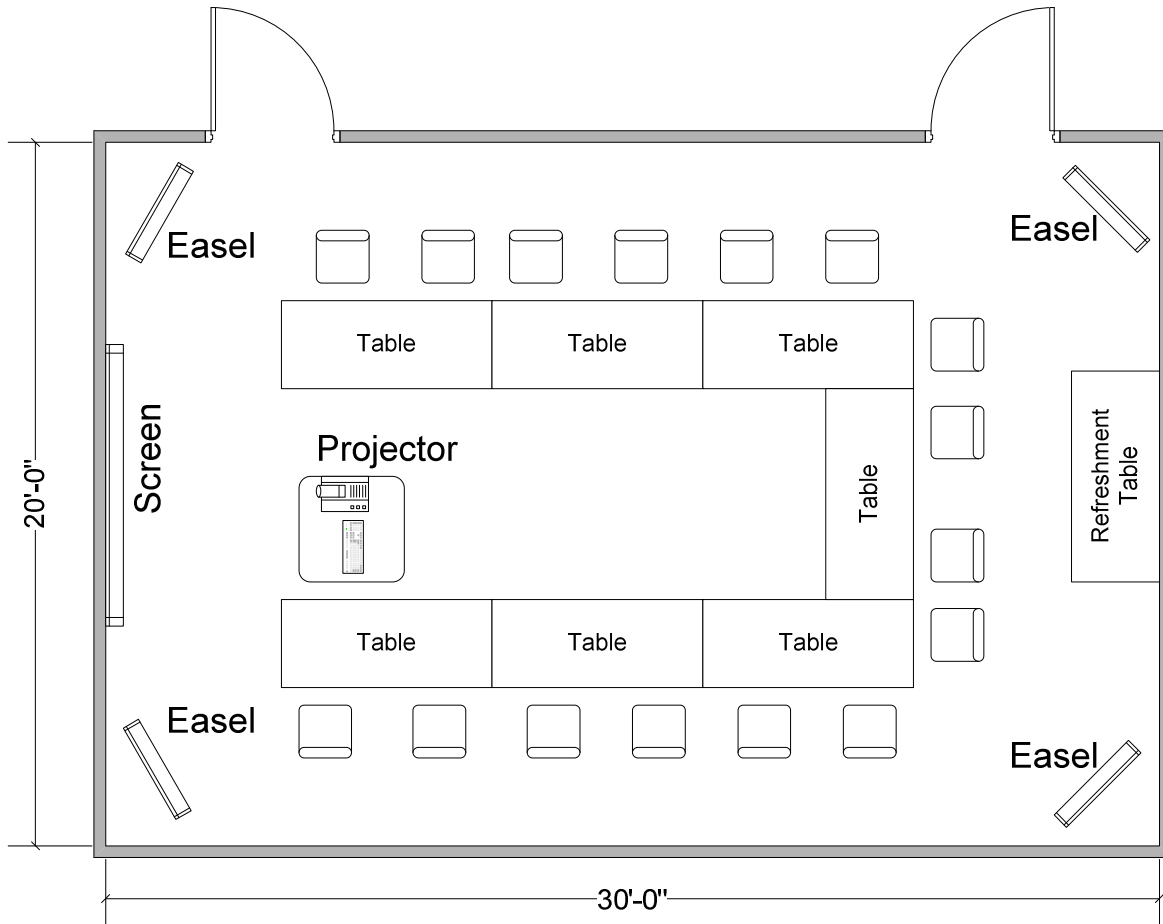
In a one day meeting, there is no time for issue “discovery”, also known as surprises. The issues need to be well known, at least by the facilitator, before the meeting. In fact, the facilitator must anticipate the major issues, and cause them to be revealed in the meeting by asking the right questions. How and when should discovery be done? A very effective technique is 20 minute one-on-one telephone interviews with each attendee, about two weeks before the meeting. These interviews *must* be conducted with the assurance that the content of the discussion will remain confidential [3]. This technique has several advantages: 1) people tend to open up and be candid in one-on-one conversations, 2) the facilitator can take notes during the interview, and 3) a good rapport can be established before the meeting.

The client should select a representative who will work with the facilitator to plan the meeting. Effective planning is not a group effort. The facilitator (consultant) should lead the planning effort at all times. The facilitator drafts a plan, and refines it through discussion with the client representative. Extensive conversation and written exchanges will occur between the two during the month of planning before the meeting.

MEETING ROOM

The venue can help or hinder the meeting. The size and shape of the meeting room is critical. Ideally, allocate about 40 sq.ft. per person. A meeting for 15 people would require 600 sq.ft. This is much larger than the typical conference room designed to hold 12 to 16 people. Why so large? There are two reasons: 1) lots of wall space is needed for putting up flipcharts while the work is in process, and 2) space is needed for creating breakout groups in the 4 corners. Avoid meeting rooms that do not have enough clean smooth wall space. There should be enough space for a flip chart easel in each corner of the room. Additionally, the refreshment table should be inside the meeting room rather than in the hallway outside the meeting rooms.

Room Layout – Strategic Planning Meeting



Some venues have prohibitions against push-pins (creates holes in the wallpaper) and tape on the walls (tears wall paper). Many venues have carpet on the walls, window walls, curtain walls, and all types of protruding decorations ranging from sconce lights to ornate framed pictures. These are all obstacles to be navigated by the facilitator. Venue selection is very important, and the facilitator is well advised to scope out the venue before the meeting. If an on-site inspection of the meeting room is not possible, do the following: 1) request a stock photo of the room and a scale floor plan with dimensions, 2) call the hotel and pose many questions to the business meetings manager, and 3) come prepared for all types of wall surfaces.

MEETING STRUCTURE

Each of the six meeting sessions is divided into roughly ten segments of 7 minutes. To introduce the topic, each session begins with a 5 to 10 minute “mini-lesson” delivered by the facilitator and assisted by some PowerPoint slides (no more than ten, with 5 being ideal). The slide content includes: goals of the session, brief training on the topic, examples, and a glossary of terms (to be understood, we must all speak the same language). The balance of the session is divided into “7-minute” drills, where the participants are in breakout groups of 3 or 4 in each corner, creating the content. The 7-minute segments create a fast pace and highly participatory environment that

produces quick results. It is important that no one sit back and coast, therefore attendees are required to stand during the break-outs. The 7-minute segments also assure that all content originates with the participants. The facilitator asks good questions (based on known issues) to elicit the raw content. After each breakout, there is a 7 to 14 minute discussion and compilation, where the raw content is refined and condensed. Each 70 minute session can accommodate about 3 to 4 breakout segments of 7 minutes each, with the balance of the time allotted for sufficient discussion and summary.

Notice also that each meeting session is no more than 70 minutes long. This is by design. Everybody can last 70 minutes before they need to go to bathroom or get a cup of coffee. Going longer than 70 minutes decreases the meeting quality: people fidget, leave the room to go to the bathroom, and start fading when their attention span has lapsed. Productivity goes downhill quickly. The table below shows the recommended meeting structure, content, and flow.

Time Structure – Strategic Planning Meeting

Item	Duration	Start Time	Finish	Description	Accountable
1	0:30	7:30 AM	8:00 AM	Breakfast (optional)	Venue
2	0:03	8:00 AM	8:03 AM	Review Agenda, Glossary, Roles	Facilitator
3	0:04	8:03 AM	8:07 AM	Message to Set the Tone	CEO
4	1:10	8:07 AM	9:17 AM	Strategy - Session 1	Facilitator
5	0:10	9:17 AM	9:27 AM	Break	Venue
6	1:10	9:27 AM	10:37 AM	Strategy - Session 2	Facilitator
7	0:10	10:37 AM	10:47 AM	Break	Venue
8	1:10	10:47 AM	11:57 AM	Strategy - Session 3	Facilitator
9	1:10	11:57 AM	1:07 PM	Group Lunch	Venue
10	1:10	1:07 PM	2:17 PM	Strategy - Session 4	Facilitator
11	0:10	2:17 PM	2:27 PM	Break	Venue
12	1:10	2:27 PM	3:37 PM	Strategy - Session 5	Facilitator
13	0:10	3:37 PM	3:47 PM	Break	Venue
14	1:10	3:47 PM	4:57 PM	Strategy - Session 6	Facilitator
15	0:03	4:57 PM	5:00 PM	Wrap Up & Next Steps	Facilitator
	9:30			Total Time	

MEETING CONTENT & FLOW

At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator asserts his or herself as the leader of the meeting, in sole control of the flow. The facilitator must control the meeting, running it fast and tight so there is no opportunity for any of the attendees to co-opt the meeting. All others in the room are asked to “give themselves up” to the process and trust that the meeting leader (the facilitator, not the CEO) will bring them to a successful outcome. A well planned and tightly run meeting elicits the essential information from the attendees. The results of each session segment must be immediately compiled into useful information that supports the next meeting session.

The order of the subjects is important. The content of the six sessions are presented in the specific order of occurrence in the meeting. The first session is devoted to achieving clarity of purpose, which is critical to the rapid development of the content in the rest of the meeting. The Strategic Modularity, Inc.

meeting MUST produce a RESULT; a one page summary containing Alternative Strategy Bundles. Otherwise, the client will not feel like they got a strategic plan in one day. In the table below, the content in session 1 is inspired by Boylan [4]. The content for sessions 2 through 6 is inspired by Abraham [1].

Session Content - Strategic Planning Meeting

Session	Topic	Key Points
1	Direction	Develop a clarity of purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Values • Vision • Mission
2	Situation Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Environment 	Forces That Shape the Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry Analysis • Competitive Analysis • Market Analysis • Environmental Trends
3	Situation Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Environment 	SWOT Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths - internal • Weaknesses – internal • Opportunities - internal • Threats – external
4	Synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ID the Strategic Issues 	Facing The Brutal Facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are we most concerned about? • What are we worried about? <p>The list of issues becomes the catalyst for generating the strategic alternatives.</p>
5	Strategic Alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 40 to 50 alternatives 	Each strategic alternative must meet the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be mutually exclusive • Be plausible • Be worthwhile • Address or respond to one or more of the strategic issues
6	Strategic Alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 2 to 4 Bundles 	Create bundles of strategic alternatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical groupings of alternatives • Meet the 4 criteria. • Each bundle of alternatives forms a complementary and cohesive group. • Each Bundle must be “dollarized”.

TECHNIQUES TO AVOID

Some very commonly used team meeting techniques must be avoided, mainly because they consume valuable meeting time while making the participants impatient. Avoid round robin. It puts shy people on the spot, while allowing verbose people to waste time. Avoid the conventional nominal group technique, where the facilitator polls people individually. Avoid being the scribe, except during summarization. It is important that participants do the work to encourage ownership of the result. Avoid binders. People don't want them because they are heavy and oppressive. Binders are rarely referenced after the meeting.

TECHNIQUES TO EMBRACE

Meeting Management. Many big meetings get off-track because the facilitator has to be “ON” for 8 hours, with no time to think. The facilitator can avoid this by clever use of the “7-minute” breakout group drills as “down time” to organize thoughts, respond to content, and make mid-course corrections. This is also the opportune moment to do a time check, and make additional adjustments to preserve the timing and pace of the meeting.

Rank Voting. To narrow the long list of ideas and options, the group must consider the total list and vote. It is important to vote quickly. Because the points are already listed on the flip charts, use colored sticky dots for the nominal group technique (NGT, or rank voting). Give each person a sheet of sticky dots, and ask them to paste the dots (about 4 to 6) onto the key items that they are voting for. In three minutes, the vote is done, accomplishing what could take an hour using a polling method.

PIN Method. To get content flowing before a break-out session, use the PIN method. For 5 minutes or less, ask each person to write two *Positive* things, two *Interesting* things, and two *Needs Improvement* things about the subject of the upcoming break-out session. Then, while in session, the small group can negotiate the content of the flipchart rather than trying to generate ideas and concepts.

ACHIEVING RESULTS

What can be the result of a one day planning session? Will it be an actual strategy? Practically speaking, this is not realistic. However, it is possible to develop an outline plan that features 3 to 4 bundles of strategic alternatives. While the bundles raise more questions than they answer, they do give the client an excellent basis for establishing in-house planning and decision making processes.

Example Results – Alternative Strategy Bundles

Exploit current market	Leverage technical competencies	External Growth by Orchestration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve existing products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell services to get business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactical acquisitions at the local level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More business with same customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage kit bag of solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliances and partnerships to obtain key capabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New business in same markets with new customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand into adjacent markets with system accessories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow capability via expanded legal staff for deal making.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salesforce initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply chain initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% CAGR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% CAGR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% CAGR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary – 4% of sales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IRAD – 1% ○ Proposals – 3% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary – 6% of sales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IRAD – 4% ○ Proposals – 2% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary – 8% of sales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IRAD – 3% ○ Proposals – 5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRAD/Proposal Ratio – 0.33:1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRAD/Proposal Ratio – 2:1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRAD/Proposal Ratio – 0.6:1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility - Existing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility – Modest Expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility – Existing

USING THE RESULTS

The *real work begins after the meeting*, at the moment that the one-day strategic planning meeting is over. If the meeting results go into a binder and nothing else happens, then what was the point? Within a few days of the meeting, the consultant summarizes the results of the meeting in a 5 to 15 page summary report. The 3-bundles (see example table above) comprise the 1-page plan, which each person can carry every day in their portfolios.

After the meeting, the participants should present the draft plan to the organization. The organization should be encouraged to push back and challenge the outcome. Questions, uncertainty, and differences of opinion can be resolved by a process that starts with the gathering of information. This is the time to begin dealing in facts. Research yields refined information, initiating a cycle of planning, decision making and communication. Between meetings, each player is responsible for their share of the assigned tasks (action items). This cyclical process is called *implementation*. The consultant can play an important role here, advising the client on an inclusive process that enlists and engages, while keeping the organization informed of progress.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes how a 1-day strategic planning meeting can be conducted by a skilled facilitator. This method works. The techniques presented in this paper have been used by the author in several 1-day strategic planning sessions. Clients ranged from the senior management team of an aerospace and defense manufacturing company to the board members of a religious institution. The methods described in this paper were used with all clients. The one-day strategic planning meetings were very effective, producing results that delighted the participants and served as the basis for the next 3 to 12 months of work with each client. It is easy to be dismissive, holding the notion that a one-day strategic plan is “impossible”. Instead, embrace the client’s desire to design a meeting that initiates the strategic planning process.

REFERENCES

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- [2] Bruya, Brian and Chung, Tsai Chih, 1994, Sunzi Speaks: The Art of War, Anchor Books, Doubleday.
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