

Developing a strategy for the firm

Discussion Paper



ENGAGING HUMAN PERFORMANCE
TO DELIVER STRATEGIC RESULTS

Warning - strategy is hard!

Strategy means different things to different people, it requires us to see the 'big picture', think long-term, plug into future trends and make collective decisions that affect the future of the firm. All of this is a very long way from the 'operational' activity that consumes our typical working day. Consequently it is often desirable to involve external consultants in the strategy crafting process. However be warned, their role should be confined to help shape an approach, guide you through the process and provoke a challenge to the prevailing mindset and group thinking. It is important that the actual content of the strategy should remain firmly in the hands of the leaders of the firm.

Crafting a winning strategy and then translating this into a robust 'Agenda for Change' is the most important 'job to do' for those who hold responsibility for the leadership of the firm. Having a robust process for developing and deepening the commitment of the Partners is critical and this is where our speciality comes into play.

The strategy process has a 'big dirty secret' buried deep in the middle of it. Despite the reams of books, articles and gurus who talk on the topic, there comes a point when the Partners have to make some really difficult decisions. At this point none of the experts can help; a judgement has to be made and this requires real engagement, courage and a capacity to face real risk with full commitment. We will help you to navigate this point in the process successfully. Many organisations duck this difficult decision so the strategy produced lacks 'edge' and is, by definition, no more than a revised operational plan. What we call 'the past plus 5%' strategies are sadly all too common.

Unfortunately there is no proven mechanism to help you do this 'hard bit', the leaders simply have to agree

what choices they want to make and agree with real conviction. However, beware! There is nothing as dangerous as a single idea, one that is firmly held by the senior partner! I know from experience I would rather have a number of real choices and not one '*right answer*'. A slightly ill thought through strategy that was brave and fully committed to, is preferable to an analytically superior strategy that no one wants to implement or believes will actually work in your organisation.

The strategy process requires real thought and reflection and a good balance between facts + logic and emotion + commitment. In truth senior partners get few genuine opportunities to practise these skills. Our unique approach helps to create an environment where they can think, reflect, engage in authentic discussion and respectfully challenge each other. If the results are to be truly significant and valuable, the decisions that have to be made not only require the right mindset but also the right emotional and intellectual support.

Yet when we get it right it all looks so obvious! Our approach is proven to help leadership teams make this process work smoothly and effectively for the benefit of the firm.

Our Process and Approach

We start with a *scoping and preparation* step where we agree the scope and boundaries for your process. The purpose of this step is to understand what strategy means for you, why the process is needed now and also to set the boundaries for your strategy development process. In this step we meet with the key leadership group and typically ask the following questions:

- Why bother? This is hard, so what do you hope to achieve?

- Which strategy process steps are relevant for you and what do you need to really focus on?
- What are the 'big' questions your strategy process should address?
- Who are your stakeholders and what are their aspirations?

When this step is complete we usually enter an **assessment phase**, where we help your key leaders lift their heads and take a look outside your firm to see what others are doing in your competitor group. We also take a critical look inside your firm to tease out real strengths and known weaknesses. It is important that this review should be done by your partners as it is mostly a mind opening exercise and not a technical or analytical review. Some of the key questions we address in this phase include:

- What do clients really think about us and our industry?
- What does our recent performance really tell us about our capabilities?
- How do we rate alongside the best in our industry?



Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

We focus on areas where companies can raise the bar on performance, productivity and profit. We ensure that any work we do has clear line of sight to specific business outcomes of value to the organisation, so that a solid return on time, energy and investment is realised.

We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ... **'We do the really hard part of the soft stuff.'**

This then leads us directly into the 'hard part' of the strategy process where we need to **craft a higher purpose and create some strategic options**. This is fundamentally a piece of 'imagineering', which requires a stimulating working environment and an open mind to create a set of strategic scenarios that are genuinely appealing and stand a real chance of succeeding. To do this well requires full engagement from all of the key equity partners and those who will be tasked with delivering this new future. In this phase our role is to create a suitable working environment fit for these discussions to take place and provide respectful provocation to stimulate new thinking. Some of the key questions we address in this phase include:

- Where will we compete and why?
- What value will we create for our clients and our key stakeholders?
- How will we be superior and distinctive?

We will reset / create strategic goals and allocate prime responsibility across the leadership team to develop the detailed action plans required to make the strategy a reality.

The next phase, '**Creating an Agenda For Change**' is a critical linking step to ensure everyone in the organisation is aligned with and fully engaged in the strategic intent of the firm. The purpose of this phase is to convert the strategy into a concise set of key tasks and to develop the goals and plans that will ensure strategic change is driven throughout the firm. Some of the key questions we address in this phase include:

- What are our key strategic tasks?
- Who in the leadership team is responsible for the delivery of each?
- How can we involve others in developing the supporting plans.

Once detailed plans have been developed, the really interesting and often badly executed part of the process starts – turning all this thinking and planning into reality!

This is where our experienced external coaching and ongoing support can play a vital role, to ensure those that commit to change have the support they need to make change happen.