

STRATEGIC

PLANNING WORKBOOK

INTRAFOCUS ACADEMY

eBooks, presentations and tools to help demystify strategic planning



Intrafocus Limited

1 Park Road Winchester Hampshire SO226AA United Kingdom

First published in Great Britain in 2019

Published as a Kindle version in 2019

This version published in 2019

© Intrafocus Limited

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the author. This book may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without prior consent of the author.

All trademarks used herein are the property of their respective owners. The use of any trademark in this text does not vest in the author any trademark ownership rights in such trademarks, nor does the use of such trademarks imply any affiliation with the endorsement of this book by such owners.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Step 1 – Foundation	4
Step 2 – Assessment	9
Step 3 – Strategic Objectives	18
Key Performance Indicators	24
Projects	25
Communication	26
Automation	27
And Finally	28



Forward

Thank you for downloading this workbook, we hope you will find it useful.

It has been designed to provide guidance for your strategic planning process and should be used in conjunction with our *Strategic Plan Template* and the *Strategic Plan Summary* one-page presentation. Both of which can be found on the eBooks page of the Intrafocus Academy. If you work though the seven steps contained within this workbook, the result will be a strategy that can be presented to your organisation.

As each step is described you will be invited to provide your own input. This should be written directly into the Strategic Plan Template.

If you have not done so already, we strongly recommend you take out a free trial of Spider Impact, the world acclaimed online strategy and KPI management system. In the document we will provide some screenshots to show how easy it is to build and manage your strategy with the software.

Introduction

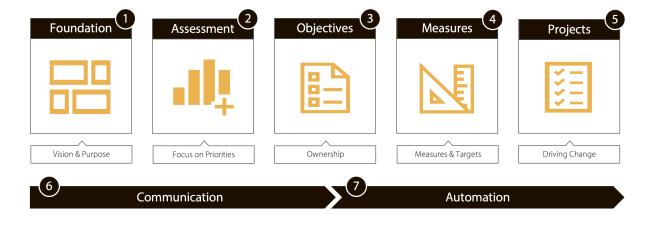
The success of a strategy is not determined by how well it is written. Most strategies are written with great thought and insight. Unfortunately, they are often left on the shelf in head-offices around the world gathering dust.

Companies and organisations are good at *writing* strategies; very few are good at *implementing* them.

Strategic Process

This is where a strategic process really helps. The most successful companies, governments and organisations in the world use a strategic process. It is either part of their operational process or works seamlessly alongside it.

The strategic process we use looks like this:

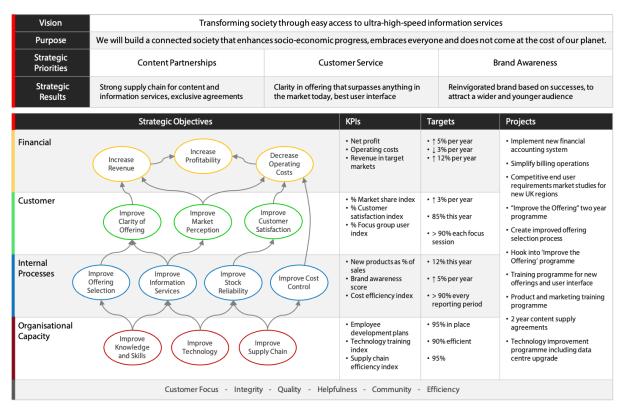


What does it mean in practical terms to use a strategic process? Simply that everything that needs to be included, is included. A process acts like a checklist. It also ensures that your strategy is embedded into your existing processes and is managed effectively.

The Output

It is imperative that the output of a strategic process is clear and concise and if at all possible short. Do not be tempted to write reams of material describing everything in detail. The detail will come, but not as part of your strategy document.

The seven-step process we will be using drives towards the publication of a short document and a one-page summary that will look similar to this:



Here we can see the key elements of a strategy:

- Vision & Purpose
- Strategic Priorities
- Strategic Objectives
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Targets
- Projects

If you have not done so already, download the *Strategic Plan Summary* one-page presentation and the *Strategic Plan Template* from the Intrafocus website.

Step One

Step 1 – Foundation

People: Executive Leader or Strategy Director

Workshop: Not required

Time: Lots of thought and time to review, elapsed one week

In recent years organisations have been forced to think about the environment, the people who work for them and the people they serve. These things have become just as important as business growth or making a profit. To that end, whereas in the past we may have looked at a Vision and Mission, today, we tend to look at a Vision and *Purpose*.

The difference is we are looking at what we can give back to society, our staff, and our customers as well as what we can earn from them.

Vision

Creating a vision is not usually a group activity. For this exercise we suggest that one of the executive leaders or a strategy director is tasked with writing a vison statement that will be reviewed and signed off by the executive team.

Core Values

To create a vision (and purpose) statement you need to look at core values first.

The example output in the introduction had the core values written along the bottom of the diagram. Core values are the foundation of a strategy. They often include things like Customer Focus, Integrity, Quality, Helpfulness, Community and Efficiency.

The key is to be sure you state exactly what you believe. The best core values are the ones that already exist within an organisation. Focus on what you and your staff believe to be true. Try not to think of strap-lines or slogans. Core values that are held internally are always more powerful than core values that are generated by a marketing team.

It is okay to be aspirational if you need to be. Sometimes you need to force a culture change as part of your strategy. As long as you recognise this and therefore include a change programme, then include the core value.

Write a long list of core values and then prioritise it. Select the top five or six.

Any less than six and you are not really thinking about the contribution your company or organisation is making. Any more than six and the list will become unbelievable. Write the core values into the Strategic Plan Template and the Strategic Plan Summary.

What do you do?

This may seem pretty obvious, but it needs to be stated. Vision statements that simply say 'We want to be the best' do not carry much weight. The best vision statements are the ones that include an element that describes exactly what you do. Remember, your vision statement might be read by people who do not know your company or organisation.

Write what you do - take some time to write one or two sentences that describe exactly what your company or organisation does. Then highlight the key words in the sentence. Re-write the sentence as a short statement. Add the sentence to the Strategic Plan Template under *What do we do today*. Set this aside, it will be used to formulate your Purpose statement later on.

How will you be different?

You need to differentiate yourself from your competition. Why would someone use a product or service from you rather than your competitor?

It may be that you have been in business for decades and have a premium brand. It may be that your ingredients are locally sourced, or your components are responsibly sourced. In our example it is that the company can provide *ultra-high-speed* wireless connectivity and *information* services. This is a combination that is currently not well served in the market.

Write how you are different - This exercise may need input from other people, and you may need to talk to your customers or users of your services. If you cannot find anything that you do differently, then put this exercise on hold, but it will have to be revisited after step two Strategic Priorities. Write a short sentence describing how you are different. Add it to the Strategic Plan Template under *How will we be different*. Set this aside for later use.

Target audience

Finally, consider your target audience. Many vision statements are too bold. Our example is a good case in point. The target audience in the statement "Transforming society through ease of access to ultra-high-speed wireless information services" is everyone! In this instance, it is probably okay as the example is for a multinational mobile phone and network provider. However, if your company is a local brewery, then your target audience should be more clearly defined.

Describe your target audience - this is an important vision statement parameter. It can be applied to provide differentiation and add real weight to your vision statement. Write a statement describing your target audience into the Strategic Plan Template under *Who is our Target Audience*

Write your final vision statement

Using all of the elements above, write your vision statement. It should be short and inspirational. A good test is to read it out loud to see if you would like to work for a company with that vision. If you are really stuck, take some guidance from the following real examples:

Nike: "Bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world" (*if you have a body, you are an athlete)

Microsoft: "To empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more"

Amazon: "To be earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online"

Sainsbury's: "To be the most trusted retailer, where people love to work and shop"

Write your final vision statement into the Strategic Plan Template under *Vision* and the Strategic Plan Summary.

Purpose

Where a vision is strategic and inspirational, purpose is cultural and aspirational. An organisation's purpose describes how it will work together with a community and the environment to share the dream of achieving the vision.

It is much more difficult to write. Our example from the strategy map above

"We will build a connected society that enhances socio-economic progress, embraces everyone and does not come at the cost of our planet."

may seem a bit over the top. However, the mobile phone industry has been forced to publicly adopt these standards due to pressure groups exposing previous unethical behaviour.

In this instance, it was necessary to publicly demonstrate a change in direction. By including the statement in their strategy, this company has stated that they will be held accountable in the future.

It may not be necessary to go so far in your statement of purpose. It should be of a form that is aspirational and related to your vison.

Write your Purpose

This exercise will require input from various areas of the organisation. We recommend that this is led by an executive manager and that a 'candidate' statement is written and distributed for comment. You should also publish all of the work you have done above as supporting documentation. The statement can then be refined and published. Write the final statement into the Strategic Plan Template and the Strategic Plan Summary under *Purpose*.

Conclusion

Together with your core values, the vison and purpose statements will be the basis of your strategy. Everything from this point forward should refer back to these statements and be aligned to them.

The next stage is to consider how to break these high-level aspirations into strategic priorities.

Step Two

Step 2 – Assessment

People: The Executive team, 3-5 people

Workshop: Three back-to-back exercises

Time: Two hours per exercise and write up afterwards

Setting out a vision and purpose is a great first step. It provides a general direction for the organisation and inspires people to act. However, a vison and purpose will not provide enough detail to set an organisation on the right path to achieve its goals. For this, a set of strategic priorities is required.

Strategic priorities force an organisation to look deeply into exactly what they want to achieve and describe the outcomes to ensure the right paths are taken.

Assessment

Using the guidance provided by the vison and purpose, the first step in defining a set of strategic priorities is to complete an assessment. There are many standard business assessment tools that can be used including:

- SWOT Matrix (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Pestle (Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, Technological, Legal and Environmental)
- Porters Five Forces
- Gap Analysis
- Strategy Canvas
- Benchmarking

All of the above are useful tools to assess a current situation and plan a future outcome. You can find details of each here: <u>Strategic Analysis</u>. In this workbook a variant of SWOT will be used.

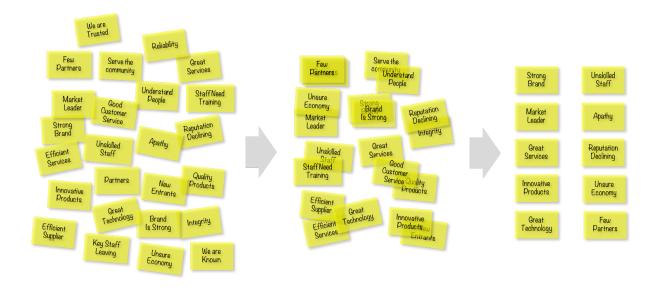
SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In its most common use, a matrix is created like this:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

The variant we use concentrates on the left-hand column, the *Enablers* and the right-hand column, the *Challenges*. Completing the table usually requires input from four or five people who have a good knowledge of the business or organisation. For example, this could be a senior management team with one subject matter expert.

Enablers and Challenges - Exercise

The exercise is best undertaken in a one to two-hour workshop where the attendees come armed with their own research. The first part of the exercise is to brainstorm ideas and amass as much information as possible. Typically, this is achieved by writing the statements on large post-it notes and sticking them on a flip-chart or wall. The statements should be related to things that *enable* the organisation to perform well and the *challenges* they face. The next stage is to remove duplicates and combine similar items. The last stage is to prioritise and reach a final list of 10-12 items. Keep these up on the wall.



The labels that have been created only tell part of the story. For each label a description must be written, this is normally in the form of a table and should look something like this:

ENABLERS	CHALLENGES
 (Strengths) Number 1 provider of ultra-high-speed mobile network services Successfully launched a new handset and three new major content initiatives We own an ultra-high-speed network 	 (Weaknesses) Older company, seen as a bit stuck in the past especially by young Content provision, especially entertainment, it is good but not the best Leadership team has recently changed, no track record
 (Opportunities) Working closely with major content providers to secure exclusive distribution Building on a successful launch, reinvigorate our brand Capitalise on our ownership of an ultra-high-speed network 	 (Threats) Increase competition, especially from multiplay (TV, Broadband) entrants Changes in government regulations esp. free 0800 numbers Competition stepping up marketing and advertising rapidly

This table provides some useful information to help determine our strategic priorities. However, it is not enough. There are two more exercises we need to go through. The second exercise concentrates on our view of the future.

Add your enablers and challenges to the Strategic Plan Template under *Enablers* and Challenges.

Picture of the Future - Exercise

Strategy is all about looking to the future. Unfortunately, predicting the future is very difficult. A technique described in the Journal of Experimental Psychology 2018, Vol. 24, No. 1, 72–80 called *The Future Self* suggests:

If you imagine your successful self in the future looking back, it becomes considerably easier to plot the path you have taken.

This is a one to two-hour activity and should follow on immediately from the previous exercise to keep the momentum going. Ask the same attendees to imagine themselves in the future where your company or organisation has been immensely successful. Then brainstorm and write short statements on post-it notes that explain the success. Put them up on the wall next to the enablers and challengers. These notes might include things like; developed innovative products, we improved the efficiency of our supply chain, the brand was strengthened through an awareness campaign, we supported local charities.

Once a large number of statements have been added, remove any duplicates and combine similar statements. Try to end up with 10-12 statements. Write the final list in a table but keep the post-it notes up on the wall, they will contribute to the next exercise.

The table should look like this:

LABEL	DESCRIPTION
Strong Brand	Marketing awareness campaign produced a strong brand
Improved Efficiency	Specifically, through improvements to the supply chain
Serve the Community	Through charitable activities at a local level
Quality Products	Intense focus on quality and premium services
Customer Service	Vast improvements in the helpdesk service

You can add this table to the Strategic Plan Template if you wish. In the Strategic Plan Template, we provide a different example called a Strategy Canvas. The <u>strategy canvas</u> is technique used by the publishers of Blue Ocean Strategy. If you have not looked at the Blue Ocean website, then we recommend you do. There are a number of strategic tools including the strategy canvas, that you might find very useful.

Value Proposition - Exercise

It is vitally important that your company or organisation is able to describe the product or service that it offers in easy to understand terms. This description is often referred to as a Value Proposition.

A value proposition is a collection of the most persuasive reasons why your customers, and potential customers, should be interested in what you have to offer. It is usually described in terms of its *Attributes* of the product or service and the *Relationship* and *Image* you have with the customer.

This is a one-hour activity and should follow-on immediately from the previous exercise. Ask the same attendees to consider what the elements are that make up a value proposition. Do not write a value proposition yet. Each element should be written on post-it notes and put up on a wall next to the results of the previous two exercises. Typically, you may find elements like; error free, premium price, convenient access, responsive, trustworthy, knowledgeable.

As with the previous exercises, remove any duplicates and combine similar statements. Try to end up with 10-12 statements. Write the list in a table but keep the post-it notes up on the wall, they will contribute to the final stage.

The value proposition table should look like this:

ATTRIBUTES	RELATIONSHIP	IMAGE
Ultra-high-speed	Secure	Ethical
Extensive network	Convenient	Security conscious
Information services	Accessible	Dynamic
Wide range of products	Responsive	Sustainable

With this set of statements, you can go ahead and write the value proposition. Traditionally the format below is used:

For – a short description of the customer

Who – a short description of the problem

Our – a short description of the solution So that – a short description of the benefit derived.

The value proposition should be around 30 words, for example:

For people **who** need secure fast communications wherever they are **our** extensive networks provide ultra-high-speed wireless connections **so that** they can send and receive information in any format including documents, images and video.

Add the value proposition to the Strategic Plan Template.

Creating Strategic Priorities - Exercise

At this stage you should have a wall full of post-it notes (between 30-40 in total) that describe your enablers, challenges, picture of the future and value proposition. All of these elements are things that you believe are important to the success of your strategy. They will now be used to create your strategic priorities.

In this penultimate stage we will be using a technique called *Affinity Grouping*. As the title suggests, you will be grouping all of the post-it notes into groups that deal with a similar subject. The aim is to find:

- Three groups that will become your strategic priorities
- One group that should inform you about your core values
- One group that will contain items that are non-contributors or will be dealt with in a different time frame

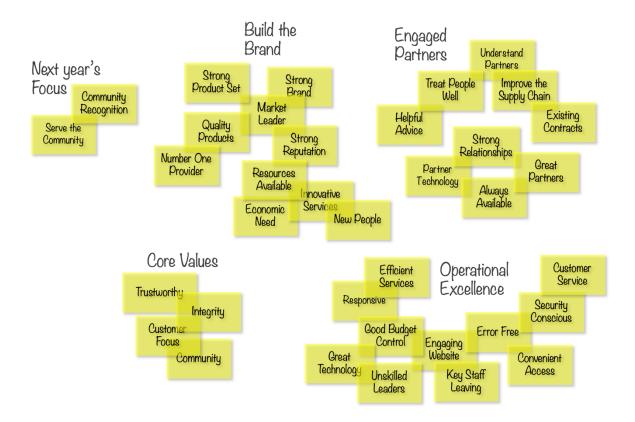
There are very good reasons why we look for only three strategic priorities. It has been well established through countless research studies that the *Law of Diminishing Returns* applies directly to prioritisation:

- If you have 2-3 priorities, you are likely to achieve 2 or 3
- If you have 4-10 priorities, you are likely to achieve 1 or 2
- If you have 10+ priorities, you are likely to achieve nothing

Ask the attendees of the workshop to stand and look at all of the post-it notes on the wall. In the first step, remove any exact duplicates. In the second step, start to move the post-it notes in to groups that relate directly to each other. In the third step move the post-it notes into groups that indirectly relate to each

other. This step can be aided by adding a *candidate* title to the groups you have identified.

The result should look like this:



In this example we have ended up with three strategic priorities, one set of core values and one group containing a couple of related outliers that will be dealt with in the following year.

Strategic Result - Exercise

The final stage is to take the three defined strategic priorities and describe exactly what is meant by them. This must be done before the post-it notes are taken off the wall and thrown away! The set of post-it notes is the culmination of around a full day's work. They contain valuable information that can be used to create a short description called a *Strategic Result*.

Labels are fine and allow you to create good visual representations of your strategy. However, the work started in the previous workshop will almost certainly be given to someone else to implement. This being the case, they will need more than the label, to create a set of strategic objectives, measures, targets and initiatives.

Based on the labels and tables you have created above, you need to write a strategic result for each strategic priority. The result should be written using an 'outcome' based language. For example, for Build the Brand you might write:

"Wherever there is a need for ultra-high-speed technology, our brand is the first to come to mind for young people seeking quality information and entertainment services" rather than writing "We will be the best brand for quality information and entertainment".

The first sentence sets the mindset that that the priority has been achieved. The second is less directive and sets the mindset that we have a hill to climb.

The final output for Strategic Priorities should look like this:

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES		
BUILD THE BRAND	ENGAGED PARTNERSHIPS	OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE
Wherever there is a need for ultra-high-speed technology, our brand is the first to come to mind for young people seeking quality information and entertainment services	Our partners feel valued and want to work with us. They understand our long-term goals and come back time and time again	Our customers consistently remark that our products and services are delivered on time and at the right cost. Our helpdesk operatives never fail to meet our customer demands

Step two, strategic priorities is complete. You can now enter your data into the upper section of the Strategic Plan Summary and the Strategic Plan Template. If you have not done so already, download a blank copy from the Intrafocus website

Step Three

Step 3 – Strategic Objectives

People: One executive, three-four senior managers, one subject matter expert

Workshop: There are two back to back exercises

Time: Each session takes around two hours – the results to be written later.

What is a strategic objective?

Now that you have a vision, purpose and three strategic priorities it is time to break the work down even further and assign ownership to individuals.

Strategic Objectives fall into four major categories:

- 1. **Financial** These are usually the easiest to identify and always the outcome of any other strategic objectives. Examples are Increase Revenue, Improve Profit, Reduce Costs
- 2. **Customer** Looking from your customers viewpoint. What is important to your customers or the people you service. Examples include Improve Customer satisfaction, Improve Customer Retention.
- 3. Internal Processes The operational activities your organisation undertakes, this is about speed and efficiency. Examples include Improve Information Services, Reduce Waste, Improve Internal Communications
- 4. **Organisational Capacity** This is often the main investment area and focuses on people, infrastructure and knowledge. Examples include Improve Knowledge and Skills, Improve Technology, Improve Partnerships

You may have noticed that all of the example strategic objectives above start with the word Increase, Improve or Reduce. Strategic Objectives are generally continuous improvement activities, they are not projects. Identifying projects (or Initiatives) comes later. This is intentional. Until you know what you are really trying to achieve, you should not invest in a project that may or may not have a positive impact.

Create some strategic objectives

Bring together a small team for a two to three-hour workshop to create a set of strategic objectives. You can use a similar brain-storming approach as in the

previous exercises, however the output here should be more focused. Every strategic objective must contribute to one or more of your strategic priorities.

Ask the attendees to write down an objective or two that they believe will result in an improvement in your organisation.

Here are some examples that usually come up in the early stages:

- Increase company profit
- Increase revenue by 10% next year
- Reduce sales costs

These are really good objectives and easily measurable and starting at the top is admirable.

However, think about some objectives that can be more easily controlled to contribute to these top-line strategic objectives, for example:

- Increase the number of projects worth £250k or more
- Improve skill level of senior consultants
- Implement a sales plan (more on this 'objective' later!)

At this stage it is not important to be precise, during the next stage we will crisp up the objective definitions.

Thought should be put into how the objectives will contribute to the vision and purpose; whether or not your organisation has any control over the objectives (it's best to have some level of control); that the objectives are single objectives and not several under the guise of a single objective and finally they should be important or related to something in need of attention.

Go back to the objectives you have written and answer these questions:

- 1. Do they contribute to the vison and purpose?
- 2. Are they important and will they make a difference?
- 3. Are they single objectives?
- 4. Do you have some level of control to influence the result?
- 5. Can they be measured?

If the answer to all (or most) of the questions above is yes, then move on. If the answer to most of the questions is no, then refine the objectives. They do not have to be perfect, but they do need to be more than halfway there.

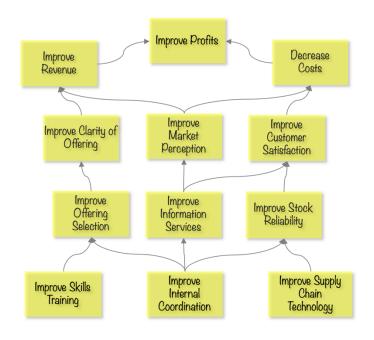
Causal Relationships

To ensure that the right things are being looked at and that all improvement areas are included you should look at the causal relationships between the objectives you create. This should be done by the same people as above to ensure continuity and to enable speedy rework if things have been left out.

Take your objectives and write them on some large post-it notes, one on each. Place them up on a wall and arrange then into four tiers that correspond with the categories: Financial, Customer, Internal Processes, Organisational Capacity. You should be aiming for three or four strategic objectives in each layer. It is permissible to have five in one layer but remember what was said earlier about the law of diminishing returns, the same applies here.

When you are happy with the layers, draw in some arrows from the bottom to the top. You will be creating a **Strategy Map**. A strategy map shows that activity in the lower layers will have an impact on, or drive an outcome in, the upper layers. The arrows can go to the side, but they cannot go down.

The result will enable you to tell a very compelling strategic story starting at the bottom with an investment area and ending at a financial outcome at the top. You should be aiming for something like this:



Resulting in:

a decreased overall cost for both us and our customers through reduced warehouse costs

Therefore:

allowing us to deliver technology and components to our customers as and when they need them

We can:

improve the reliability of our stock delivery through a more consistent set of measured delivery processes

By

improving our relationships with the suppliers of base materials and securing longer-term supply chain contacts

As can be seen each strategic objective is connected, none have been left out. Looking at the strategic objectives on the right-hand side of the chart, the story from the bottom to the top is clear:

By improving or relationships with suppliers of base materials and securing longterm supply chain contracts, we can improve the reliability of our stock delivery through a more consistent set of measured delivery processes, therefore allowing us to deliver technology and components to our customers as and when they need them, resulting in a decreased overall cost for both us and our customers through reduced warehouse costs.

To get to the point where a clear strategic outcome can be written like this, we need to look closely at the labels we have created and for each define a Strategic Objective Result.

Strategic Objective Results

Strategic objective results are best written after the workshop by assigning specific objectives to one or two individuals. The results can then be refined and put out for review and comment.

It is essential to create a result for each objective using a results-oriented language. This forces us to think more precisely about what we are actually trying to achieve.

For example, if we look at one of the objectives given above: *Implement a sales plan,* this may seem to be a very sensible thing to do but it is **not** a strategic objective. It is a *project* that can only be measured through the time it takes to implement the plan. It will tell us nothing about success or failure relative to the business strategy.

[Important note: Tasks and projects **are** vitally important. They are the means by which we implement change to make improvements. However, we need to measure the improvement not the change, to demonstrate success or otherwise. Therefore, we need results-oriented objectives]

The previous example might be more useful if it included **why** we want to implement a sales plan. It may be to reduce the sales cycle. This is still a bit vague and may be better expressed as to reduce the time taken to convert a qualified lead into a sale. This is much better and has produced an objective with a tangible result.

In business we have a tendency to use words and phrases like *best practice*, *optimised*, *world class*, *efficient*, *effective*, *productive*. Although the implied meaning is positive, the actual meaning is vague. Objectives using these words are not results-oriented and will therefore always fall short when used in performance improvement activities. It is always better to use words that have common meaning and cannot be vaguely interpreted.

At this stage it is not important to go so far as including a target within the objective. It would have been easy to express our example as *reduce the* number of days to convert a qualified lead to a sale **from 30 to 25**.

Targets are the domain of the measure rather than the objective. When we look at measures in the next step, we will look closely at how to set targets in the context of viable comparators or benchmarks.

In summary, the step 3 task is to:

- Check that the objective is an objective (not an activity, task or project)
- Frame the objective using result-oriented language
- Remove vague words and include things that can be physically perceived

Examples:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE RESULT
Reduce Sales Lead Time	Reduce the number of days to convert a qualified lead into a sale
Improve Consultant Skill level	Improve skill level of all senior consultants to stage two accreditation in results chain analysis
Increase projects over 250k	Increase the number of consultancy projects worth more £250k in revenue per project

If you are happy with these objectives, continue. If this process has identified shortcomings loop back to the beginning of this step.

Add your final strategic objectives to the Strategic Plan Summary and add the objectives and results to the Strategic Plan Template.

Step Four

Key Performance Indicators

Join the Intrafocus Strategic Planning Academy for the complete eBook

Projects

Communication

Automation

And Finally