

# con bri<sup>o</sup>

the newsletter

People making a difference in the lives of people  
Results building companies, organizations and communities

Dear Clients and Friends:

**Write the word "strategic."**

**Now put any of the following after it...**planning, visioning, thinking, conversation. Throw these **words in the mix:** scenario, catalyst, implementation.

**What do you get?** Something you believe in? Or something that falls short?

**The world of strategy is a complex place...**with believers on all sides of the concept.

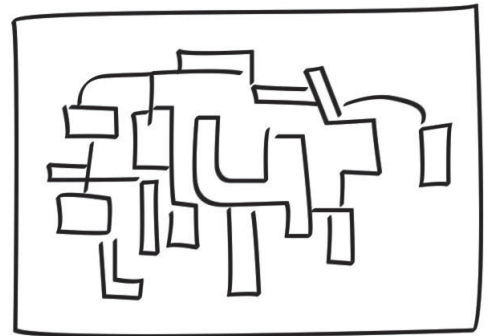
**Everyone seems to agree on one thing: You've got to have it.**

Without it, you, your company or your organization is out there, wandering around without any direction. That's the extent of the agreement. That's what I've found in working with clients, and staying current with the literature which has been pretty thin since the mid-1990s.

**Yet executives spend little of their time actually doing it...**

**about 3%.** That's the number estimated by strategy scholars Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad. In their book, *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner say leaders need to do better in building a collective perspective on the future in their organizations.

**A vision at least 3 to 5 years out** is what's needed. It's part of being a good leader.



**In making strategy, what makes sense? Cross strategic planning off your list.**

**Gurus say it doesn't work.** The old Soviet Union failed miserably using it. American businesses found it wasn't what it was cracked up to be and many have discarded it.

Recognizing that strategic planning often had no relationship to reality, Jack Welch shut down GE's 200-person planning department in 1983.

**The reason: Old-style strategic planning is all about control** and leaves no room to be either creative or opportunistic along the way. So says Henry Mintzberg in his exhaustive and leading book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*.

**Companies need both the orderliness of a plan AND the ability to be opportunistic.**

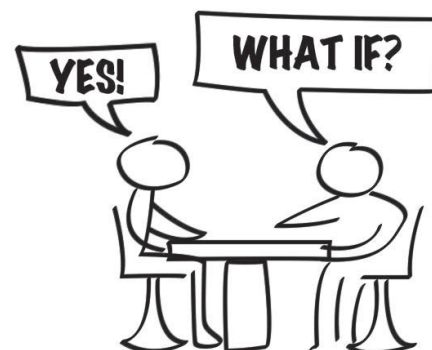
Ability to be opportunistic means strategy can come from anywhere in the organization. It means trying things out, being creative, jumping on unexpected things that happen.

**Why does the use of strategic planning linger on?** One reason: One person's strategy is another's tactics. A company calls it a strategic plan when it's really a very specific mapping of activity for the next 12 months, often attached to a budget. Another reason: Leaders' understanding of what strategy is, how it's created is limited.

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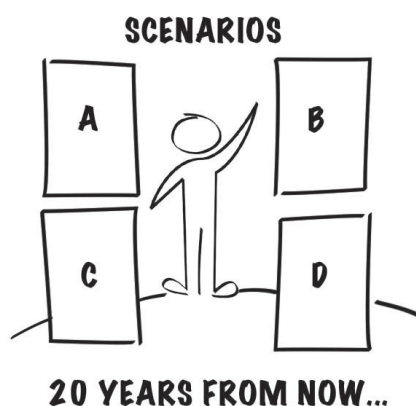
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**Strategic conversation is the term that makes the most sense... But what is it, really?** Look at this 3-part definition by the Global Business Network, pioneers in the field. First, an organization is a community with a common purpose, which exists in a strategic conversation. Second, a strategic conversation is an on-going learning loop of perception, conceptualization, decision-making and action. Third, strategy is a coherent pattern of action that consciously intervenes in the ongoing evolution of the organization.



**Several ways to get the conversation going and keep it going:**

**Use strategic visioning as a catalyst.** Take anywhere from one to three days to look back at an organization's history, the environment in which it operates, the strengths and weaknesses it has and the opportunities and threats it faces. Then look ahead five years, envisioning the future, distilling specific vision points, figuring commitments to action and writing an implementation plan. As people actually implement, much more strategic conversation will occur, plans will be adjusted, new ideas added.



**Use scenarios to spur strategic conversation.** Scenarios are tools to learn from the future. They recognize the future is complex, uncertain and not in our control, that prediction is impossible, that forecasting is generally wrong. They allow leaders to think about multiple possible futures and "what if" situations. With scenarios, leaders draw implications, create options and chart direction, depending on how the scenarios play out.

**Treat action planning as an opportunity for strategic discussion.** In sorting out who does what and by when, strategic insights fall out, ideas surface. Those insights and ideas warrant further discussion, lead to new directions. Keep track and circle back to consider them in more detail later.

**Reach back into the past to identify unrecognized patterns** that amount to strategy and put them on the table for people to look at. In many organizations, strategy emerges because someone in an out-of-the-way department tried something that worked and managers were smart enough to bring it to others' attention, elevate it to the level of strategy for the entire organization. lands, but in seeking with new eyes.

