Liberating Strategy

Walking the Fine Line Between Rigidity and Planlessness
Liberating Strategy
Surprise and Serendipity Put to Work
by Keith McFarland and Kevin Eikenberry

Overview
Organizations need a strategy to turn ideas and relationships into reality. The individuals need a strategic plan to evaluate the viability of their purpose and that action. Traditional strategic planning is often characterized by the assumption that the future is going to play out on a relatively predictable path, a linear path. A "random walk through a sea of opportunities" is often the reality of the business world. This approach is not well suited to the unpredictability of unpredictable events and fast-moving markets. The idea of a linear future is broken with a rapidly changing environment and lacks company, flexibility and resiliency in the face of sudden disruptions.

At the same time, methods like Agile development are gaining popularity. These approaches to strategic thinking are changing the environment in which we operate. They are changing the way we think about the future and the way we plan for the future.

In this monograph, we propose an alternative method. We illustrate "how to" with a hypothetical business school example. The methods provide a simple technique to be answered together by students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni stakeholders using a liberating structures. A compelling strategic statement is authentic, owned, and then operated by everyone.
Biggest Obstacles to Enterprise Agility

- Project portfolios
- Budgeting
- Strategy
Strategy
What's a Strategy?

A plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim

Source: Google Search
Common Approaches to Strategy

1. Forecast years into the future
2. Assume relative stability and predictability
3. Craft a vision of a desirable future state
4. Establish a set of ambitious company-wide goals
5. Develop an implementation plan, including change management efforts to get buy-in and alignment around ambitious goals, sub-goals, sub-sub goals ad infinitum
Progress in agile environments often looks like this:
So What to Do?
The ‘No Plan’ Approach

1. Don’t forecast or only for a limited timeframe
2. Assume unpredictability
3. Focus on incremental improvement
4. React to external factors and market dynamics
5. Focus mainly on a product scale
There’s Something Else
What Do We Want?

A strategy that

- Not only doesn’t flatten complexity but takes advantage of it
- Continuously looks into the future but is firmly grounded in the present moment
- Includes more voices in shaping it
Single Monolithic
Over-controlled: One way flow from the top down; engaging only a select few in strategy-making

Liberated
Distributed control: flow from any point; direction is shaped by participants out of local-global interaction

No Plan
Under-controlled: infinite possibilities; too uncoordinated to shape direction
Liberating Structures exist to

- replace unwitting practices that exclude, stifle, and over-control people
- unleash everyone to work at the top of their intelligence

liberatingstructures.com
Strategy
Knotworking
1. **Purpose:** What is the fundamental justification for the existence of our work? (9 Whys, 1-2-4-All, Drawing Together)

2. **Context:** What is happening around us that demands creative change? (Mad Tea, What³, CU, Celeb Interview, DAD)

3. **Challenge:** What paradoxical challenges must we face to make progress? (WQs, TRIZ)

4. **Baseline:** Where are we starting, honestly? (What³, TRIZ, CU)

5. **Ambition:** Given our purpose, what seems possible now? (25/10, CU, What³)

6. **Action & Evaluation:** How we are acting our way toward the future, evaluating what is possible as we go? (Ecocycle, 15% Solutions, WiNFY)

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**Diagram Notes:**
- **Renewal Networker**
- **Maturity Manager**
- **Birth Entrepreneur**
- **Creative Destruction Heretic**
- **Poverty Trap Not investing**
- **Rigidity Trap Not letting go**
Critical Uncertainties
Which factors are uncertain when it comes to the success of your business or your product? Make a list!

Critical Uncertainties
Identify two that are the most critical for your success!

Critical Uncertainties
Demand for healthy food

Global competition

High

Low

High

Low

High

Low

Demand for healthy food
Picking Cherries

Wilting Lettuce

Tough Nut

Peas in a Pod
Ecocycle Planning
Create a numbered list of items that make up your product portfolio!

Ecocycle Planning
Place the items (using the numbers) on your Ecocycle!

Ecocycle Planning
1  App
2  Website
3  Partnership with bear owner clubs
4  Collaboration with zoos
5  Collaboration with circuses
6  Social media initiatives
7  Lobbying
8  Online advertisement
9  Print advertisement
10  bearbnb forum
11  Biannual fundraiser
Choose an item that will help you make progress on your strategy!
What steps do you have to take to advance it along the Ecocycle?

Ecocycle Planning
What else?
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6. Action & Evaluation: How we are acting our way toward the future, evaluating what is possible as we go? (Ecocycle, 15% Solutions, WiNFY)

Diagram:
- Poverty Trap: Not investing
- Rigidity Trap: Not letting go
- Renewal: Networker
- Maturity: Manager
- Birth: Entrepreneur
- Creative Destruction: Heretic
A New Definition
A New Definition of Strategy

Strategy is a collective activity designed to make progress continuously on a worthy yet elusive purpose by focusing on and sharpening the interplay of actions and intention.
“Liberating Strategy” Paper available at liberatingstructures.eu/strategy

Join the #knotworking channel in the LS Slack workspace at goo.gl/u5YTWq
Thank you!

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