Liberating Strategy

Walking the Fine Line Between Rigidity and Planlessness
"Liberating Strategy" Paper available at liberatingstructures.eu/strategy
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?
Strategy
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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**Strategy Knotworking**

- **Renewal**
  - Networker
- **Maturity**
  - Manager
- **Creative Destruction**
  - Heretic
- **Birth**
  - Entrepreneur

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**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

Demand for healthy food

Global competition
Briefly describe what the future looks like in each scenario!

Critical Uncertainties
How would you need to operate in each scenario in order to be successful?

Critical Uncertainties
Identify which strategies are robust (can succeed in multiple quadrants) and which are hedging (can succeed in only one scenario but protect you from a plausible calamity)!

Critical Uncertainties
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!
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?
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, What^1, CU, Celeb Interview, DAD)

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

4. Baseline:
Where are we starting, honestly?
(What^2, TRIZ, CU)

5. Ambition:
Given our purpose, what seems possible now?
(25/10, CU, What^3)

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

Diagram:
- Renewal
- Networker
- Entrepreneur
- Creative Destruction
- Maturity
- Manager
- Heretic
- Rigidity Trap
- Not letting go
- Poverty Trap
- Not investing

Legend:
- Blue arrows indicate the progression through the cycle.
- Red arrows indicate potential traps to avoid.
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.
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Join the #knotworking channel in the LS Slack workspace at goo.gl/u5YTWq
Thank you!

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