



# Action Summary

Brian J. Rhiness

*"I never worry about action, but only inaction"*

- Winston Churchill

Why do 75% of strategic plans fail? Most fail due to poor execution. They fail to put those great ideas into action.

A strategic plan sitting on the shelf is a waste of time and money. It sucks the life out of people and organizations. Inaction on strategic priorities is the beginning of the end for any organization.

In this article, we will show you how to take those great ideas and ensure they get successfully implemented.

## Start with a plan

You must have a strategic plan. Without a plan, things will get done and usually not the right things. What is your staff executing? If you have not taken the time to build a plan, communicate it in simple clear terms, people will make it up and do the best they can. People want to do a good job. Give them the tools with a good plan.

Use the *Strategic Thinking Simplicity* model to build the plan that meets the unique needs of your organization. We give you all of the tools you need in other **Rhiness Group Articles**.

## You have a plan, now what?

A plan is only as good as the execution. We strongly suggest that when you have the draft plan completed you have a *plan-to-implement* conversation with senior staff members and the Board. This is critical to ensuring buy-in and to do the "sober second thought" on the plan. Great ideas come out of strategic planning retreats. Translating those great ideas into a workable plan is another matter.

The plan-to-implement step is where you start to assign timelines, accountabilities and strategic priorities. It is also an essential step for the budgeting process. Do you have the financial, staff, structural and cultural resources to execute? You must answer all of those questions, honestly and accurately to get the plan a chance of successful implementation. If you do not, what are you going to change and how?

The strategic plan is implemented through operational plans, annual plans, tactical plans, performance contracts, rewards and budgets. See other articles in this series on the yearly planning cycle.

The key pieces for successful strategic plan implementation are:

- ✓ Simple, clear strategies and actions
- ✓ Individual accountabilities for delivery of each action
- ✓ Clear, realistic timelines for delivery
- ✓ Regular check-ins on the status of each action project

The Action Bridge in the Strategic Thinking Simplicity model is the step that takes us from our current state (where we are today) to our desired future state (where we want to be in the future). The Action Bridge outlines the strategies we have determined will get us to our future state and the actions that will deliver those strategies.

Each strategy will have a series of actions that support it. Each of those actions will be a project, initiative or program that we believe best supports that strategy. Some of these actions will be short term, some will be long term and they will all need the full support of the organization. Failure of any action undermines the entire strategic plan.

The number of strategies should be limited to no more than seven. There is a limit to what any organization can successfully undertake. You will have on-going operations as well as the new strategic priorities. There should be some overlap, but time will be needed to adjust the day-to-day operations.

For each action, we will assign a lead person that will be held accountable for the successful delivery of that action. We stress it must be an individual person. Do not assign a committee, team or position. We need to know who to hold responsible. Accountability is a scary concept for many people. In our experience, the clarity of this accountability is very positive for staff. If they know what is expected, they then have the freedom to develop the project plan and get the job done. Supervisors also have the clarity to know what to expect from their staff. It is vital to adjust work plans and performance contracts to match the new accountabilities. People will deliver what their performance is measured on. Reward people accordingly and celebrate their individual successes.

Individuals will also need clear timelines on when they are expected to deliver on their action. Make sure the timelines are realistic. During the plan-to-implement discussion it may be necessary to delay some actions by a few months or longer to deal with higher priorities, resource issues or restructuring. Keep the actions in the draft document so they are not lost.

We strongly recommend recording all strategies and actions in an Action Summary document. This is a living document that will be updated regularly to keep the Board and senior management in constant contact with their strategic priorities. We use a very simple document with all of the key pieces needed for successful implementation included.

## Action Summary

Title:

Vision:

Mission:

Core Values:

Updated:

Strategies and Actions	Person Responsible	Timeline	Status
Strategy #1: We will ..... 1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Strategy #2: We will ..... 1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Strategy #3: We will ..... 1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.

### With a quick glance

The Action Summary includes our Vision, Mission and Core Values. A constant reminder of what is driving us forward.

With a quick glance we can see all of our strategy statements, the actions we are undertaking, who is accountable, the timelines and a status update. The status update can be as simple as arrows to indicate; on time, ahead of schedule, behind schedule or completed. You can also include a few words to indicate what is happening with that project or initiative.

We recommend that every Board meeting and senior executive team meeting start with a review of this document. If these are your most important strategic priorities, what is more important to discuss? This helps everyone stay focussed on what is really important. It also allows everyone to celebrate the successful completion of actions and reward those responsible. If there are problems, immediate steps can be taken to get things back on track.

The Action Summary is the document The Rhiness Group uses in the regular update sessions we hold with clients. It is the foundation of our implementation support guarantee.

As a living document, the Action Summary will constantly be revised. As actions get completed, new actions/next steps will have to be incorporated. It will be easy for the Board and management to track progress as revisions happen.

Remember in strategic management that having a plan is only the first step. We need to ensure that budgets, work plans, performance contracts, structures and maybe our culture must be adjusted to meet our strategic priorities.

Simple, clear actions and constant focus by everyone in the organization will give you the results you desire. Vision without action is a dream.

Check out our other articles for best practices, tips and  
tools to help your organization become an industry leader  
at strategic management

[www.rhinessgroup.com](http://www.rhinessgroup.com)

Simplicity – Clarity – Action - Results

