

# Pave the way for 'Collective Strategic Success' Adopt an integrated approach for excellence

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One of the greatest advantages for an organization that succeeds in combining a sharp strategy, a well-tuned culture, and a high-functioning leadership team is that they get their collective approach to excellence right. And it is such organizations that attain **Collective Strategic Success** – a phenomenon where the entire organization is doing well, and consistently exceeds expectations of customers and stakeholders. Conceptually, let us refer to them as **Strategic Champion** organizations.

In a contrast, there are organizations that may have a great strategy, but not a great culture or leadership to execute it. This can also occur in any other combination, where one or two of these factors are great but the others are not conducive. In such organizations, some things work well, sometimes, even very well. Yet there are other things that fail and keep creating a hurdle in collective success. So, while some teams and individuals flourish in such an organization, others suffer. As a result, the organization-as-a-whole doesn't achieve all its strategic objectives. Conceptually, let us refer to them as **Pockets of Excellence** organizations.

Come to think of it, all of us know of some or the other organization from multiple industries which belong to the Strategic Champion category. It is a pleasure to deal with such organizations whether as a business customer or as an individual customer. Not that they may not make a mistake or two occasionally, but they make things right quickly and learn how to do things better consistently. Hence, these Strategic Champion organizations become preferred service providers, brands, and/or partners.

At the same time, we also know of some organizations which get one or two things right, but overall, as a customer or consumer, it is a pain to deal with them. With such organizations, you expect one thing, and you get another. They commit to you one thing and go out and deliver something else. They give excuses and often flout the rule book for not doing something they are supposed to do, and for doing something the way they are doing. Such is the plight of Pockets of Excellence organizations.

## SO, WHAT DO STRATEGIC CHAMPION ORGANIZATIONS DO RIGHT?

In such organizations: teams and individuals zoom-in when they must, they zoom-out when they must and the rest of the time, they stay at vantage points that are most beneficial for the continued success of the organization. In such organizations, the brand promise is reflected in every single touchpoint, not just in the ads or branding. The business processes are built for speed to market, and the highest levels of customer satisfaction. Leaders and managers recruit, train, and retain people to do these things as a single-minded focus, not just to fill the vacancies. Similarly, individuals are devoted to extracting the maximum returns out of time, resources, and all activities.

**Basically, the culture and leadership of Strategic Champion organizations are aligned in the direction of the Strategy, and Strategy, in turn, feeds the culture and leadership.**

**This may sound like the Strategic Champion organizations are constantly training and performing in the Olympics of the business world. Indeed, they are! These organizations are training and performing in a perpetual Olympics of Economics, not just one in every 4 years.**

In doing so, these Strategic Champion organizations demonstrate the passion and astuteness that is required to *get things done*. In the order of functioning, this passion and astuteness are



observable in 4 Strategic & Collective Success behaviors:

So, is YOUR organization practicing these 4 Strategic & Collective Success behaviors?

Here are some questions for you to perform a self-check:

- Does everyone know what to observe and pay attention to, to be Strategic?
  - And if they are observing, do they know how, when and to whom they can report the observations?
  - Do they know what observations they can act upon independently?
- Does the organization have a well-defined process to come up with the relevant choices that will ensure significant present and future outcomes?
  - Are the organization's choices (individual and collective) based on astute observations?
  - Are the choices based on a rigorous process of thinking ahead?
- How does the entire organization take these choices and shape its approach to Customer Engagement, Brand Equity, Profits, and Stakeholder interests?
  - Is the organization evolving by choice, every passing day-week-month?
- And lastly, how does the organization respond to challenges in day-to-day working, and get things to a closure?
  - Does it have a distinctively progressive and collective problem solving and resilient approach?

Most organizations do some of this, and in some pockets, possibly even on just some occasions. But very few organizations, (the Strategic Champions) get all of them right, collectively, and consistently. And that's the key to significant and lasting success.

In case, this appeals to you, here are some actions to get right in each of these **4 Strategic & Collective Success behaviors**. These actions are not a comprehensive list nor are they fine-tuned to your organization, but these will get you started. Additionally, the 4 Strategic and Collective Behaviours are supposed to contribute to the excellence of Strategy, Culture, and Leadership approaches of the organization. The list is drawn out for direct application to build excellence.

**STEP 1: OBSERVE LIKE STRATEGIC CHAMPIONS**

**Action Items for Strategic Excellence:**

- Make relevance of strategy an everyday business, not just an annual exercise – so observe for this relevance regularly.
- Help people internalize what they need to observe,

how, and what tools to use.

- Ensure people are watching, understanding, and reporting things that matter to the strategic direction of the organization.
- Ensure no voices or points of view are lost in communication or translation – eliminate dismissive tendencies.

**Action Items for Cultural Excellence:**

- Regularly assess the astuteness of observation across levels.
- Have a clear stand in the organization on how to observe, view, and respond to the industry and competitors.
- Make conversations about the industry, customer, and internal dynamics a common phenomenon.
- Build a great induction program to initiate new employees into these behaviors.
- Reinforce all these messages to the entire organization at least twice a year.

**Action items for Leadership Excellence:**

- Ensure all functions leaders, critical role holders and top talent across levels generate observations and bring them to strategy conversations.
- Eliminate the monopoly of the strategy team or finance function on strategy crafting and planning.
- Make discussions and decisions on strategy a participative process.
- Ensure regular external expert touchpoints, to stay abreast of the industry movements.
- Assess the efficacy of observation of individuals and teams.

**STEP 2: CHOOSE LIKE STRATEGIC CHAMPIONS**

**Action Items for Strategic Excellence:**

- Make decision-making for future success a priority.
- Benchmark the future trends across industries to enable decisions. Don't just benchmark your competitors.
- Make decisions well ahead of time – have no fear of being a trendsetter or trend breaker.
- Create the design and systems for fast and progressive decisions.

**Action Items for Cultural Excellence:**

- Make decision-making a priority for everyone.
- Train all levels on decision-making speed, accuracy, and learning from the outcome of decisions.
- Actively reward decision-makers and strategic risk-takers.
- Actively curb social loafing, bystander effect, and diffusion of responsibility.

- Actively discourage decision postponement and decision blockers.

#### Action items for Leadership Excellence:

- Make decision-making and risk-taking a priority for leadership hiring, training, assessment, and rewards.
- Monitor leadership efficacy on decision making and risk-taking to create remedial actions.
- Release and realize the potential of teams stuck under underperforming leaders, by replacing the ineffective leader with a known high-performance creator. This will help recondition the team. Don't just take any random actions.
- Accelerate top talent that shows strong decision-making and strategic risk-taking ability.

### STEP 3: SHAPE LIKE STRATEGIC CHAMPIONS

#### Action Items for Strategic Excellence:

- Shape the organization structure to suit the strategy.
- Let the teams and headcounts be fluid and subject to strategic initiatives. Don't keep everything in a traditional, functional, and fixed structure.
- Explore dynamic relationships with the market, customers, and consumers to accelerate mindshare and market presence.
- Use technology where needed and human touch where needed, purposefully. Do not overdo, do not underinvest. Find a balance of design of humans and technology in a way that works for your business.
- Do not have a lift and shift approach for strategy, based on what competition is doing.

#### Action Items for Cultural Excellence:

- Find the cultural roots of success and enhance them.
- In line with this, find the cultural torchbearers and help them become a force multiplier.
- Find the cultural roots of failure and eliminate them permanently.
- When it comes to culture do not do any band-aid fixes; eliminate the root cause.
- Find the culture dilutor behaviors, processes and people – repurpose, realign, or replace them.
- Find what is blocking Communication, Cooperation, and Coordination. Fix it right away! This will create collaboration naturally.

#### Action items for Leadership Excellence:

- Hire great generalists, who happen to be specialists in their core areas.
- For the existing talent – develop their generalist capabilities and encourage them to specialize in one or two areas.
- Build mindset and abilities that facilitate tolerance, vision, drive, agility, psychological safety
- Ensure the leaders and their teams deliver.

### STEP 4: MANEUVER LIKE STRATEGIC CHAMPIONS

#### Action Items for Strategic Excellence:

- Accept crisis, complexity, and ambiguity as opportunities. Let them drive the imagination, design, and systematization of new ways of working.
- Know the difference between what is intended, what emerges, and how to maneuver the approach to achieve strategic goals.
- Repurpose goals if required to accommodate new market realities. Don't put good resources into bad conditions and hope to achieve great outcomes. Eliminate Sunk Fallacy at all levels! Have an organization-wide adherence to Zoom-in and Zoom-out as and when required.

#### Action Items for Cultural Excellence:

- Progress, Progress, Progress – no stalling, no going round in circles, and no excuses.
- Let the culture be one where the norm is progress. Train and condition everyone to get work done and progress every day.
- Backtrack the very moment it is required, and course correct. Let there be no shame in remediating things. Establish this, preach this, practice this.

#### Action items for Leadership Excellence:

- Know that in today's world, it is possible to be 'absolutely wrong' in a few hours or days, after being 'absolutely right'. This is because markets, competitors, and consumers are shifting like never before.
- Learn and perform every day.
- Learn and leave behind baggage every day.
- Practice humanness with a goal-oriented approach – both can coexist. We do not sacrifice either one for the other. This is a critical part of the job of leaders.

Some of these actions will be intuitive and will be straightforward too, while others may be counterintuitive and may require deeper effort. Some of this, you will be able to do on your own, yet you will need help with some actions. Some of these actions are the role of everyone, yet other things will have to be owned by a person senior enough to influence. But to begin with, I invite you to read and re-read this to absorb. Then start a dialogue around this in your organization and mature some ideas. Then comes implementation.

But first decide, do you want to break away from being pockets of excellence organization and become a **Strategic Champion organization?**

This decision is important, the rest is a journey and process that can be created.

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