

April 2025

The Art of Cascading Strategy

From Abstract Intent to Concrete Action

(Take 15 minutes to reflect on these core questions)

Briefing
#3

Is Your Strategic Plan Doing Its Job?

Every organization needs a strategic plan. But not every plan delivers.

A good plan doesn't gather dust in a drawer—it's a living tool, referenced often, much like a sailor's compass on an unfamiliar course. It should **clarify direction, focus attention, and translate strategic initiatives into coordinated action** across every role and down each level of the organization.

As a senior leader, your role isn't to create or "own" the plan, but to ensure it's structured in a way that helps your people see its layers, know where and how they fit, and understand how their contribution moves the organization forward with purpose and momentum.

This month's brief offers a more precise lens—and a tested structure—to help you assess whether your current strategic plan is actually doing what it was built to do: enable your organization to move with clarity, alignment, and impact.

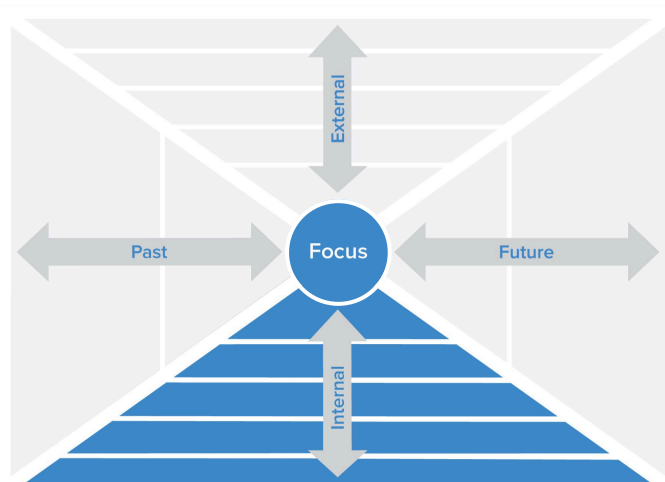
Strategy Is Multidimensional

Three grand, multi-layered, and interconnected dimensions shape a robust and usable strategic plan. These include:

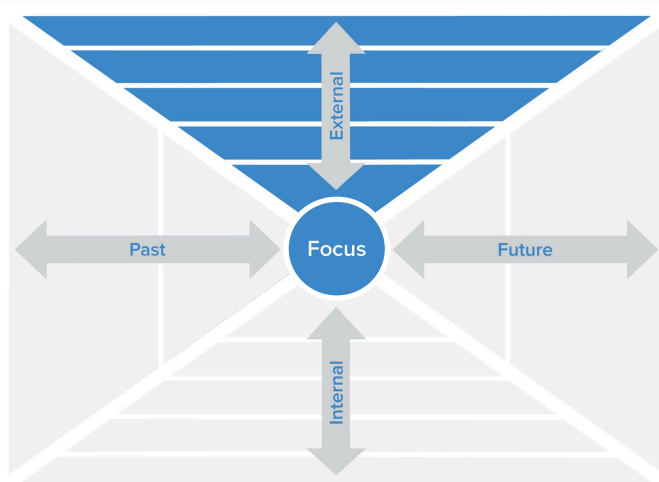
- **Internal Dimensions** – principles, beliefs, values, thinking, climate, systems, processes
- **External Dimensions** – stakeholders, partners, competition, and broader economic, political, social, cultural, technological, environmental context
- **Temporal Dimensions** – lessons from the past, challenges of the present, and priorities for the future

Together, these dimensions provide what we refer to as a **1080° view**—a full-spectrum scan of the many dimensions (we look at 15 in total) your plan must assess, address and respond to.

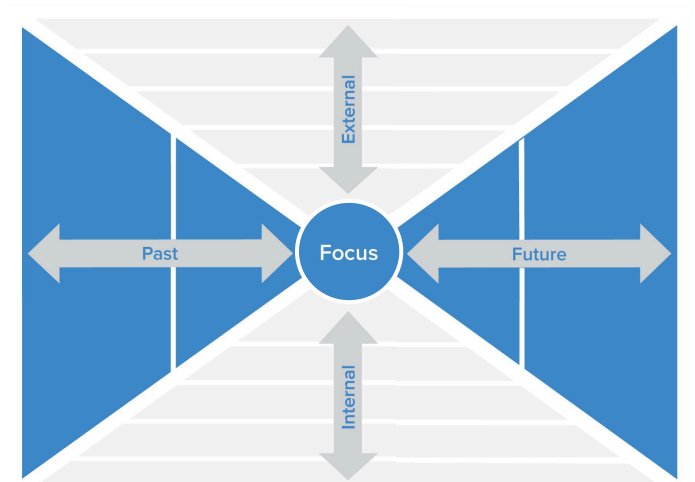
If your current plan doesn't help your team understand and navigate these many dimensions, layers, and connections that are influencing your current initiatives and goals, it may be a good time to discuss what dimensions are contributing to your focus and which are taking you off your game.



Internal



External



Temporal

From Idea to Execution: The 5-Layer Cascade

A strategy only adds value if it **translates into action**. One practical way we’ve seen this happen is through five clearly defined levels:

1. **Strategic Initiatives**
2. **Goals**
3. **Outcomes/Metrics**
4. **Strategies**
5. **Tactics**

Each layer brings the organization closer to practical execution.

To support clarity and traction, we often recommend a **“Rule of 3”**:

- Up to 3 Strategic Initiatives (plus 1 on deck)
- Up to 3 Goals per Initiative
- Up to 3 Outcomes per Goal
- Up to 3 Strategies per Outcome
- Up to 3 Tactics per Strategy

This discipline isn’t restrictive—it’s clarifying.

It keeps the work focused. It makes the plan executable.

And it makes it easier for every individual to see how their daily work connects to something larger.

Strategic Initiative: A theme or area of development or course of action that is directional in nature.

Goals: Succinct descriptions of successful priorities within a strategic initiative with clearly defined outcome(s).

Outcomes: Quantitative and project based outcomes delivering on defined goals.

Strategies: Broad, driving, directional approaches to delivering on defined metrics and projects.

Tactics: Tasks or activities that are carried out to execute strategy.

Are You Pruning or Sprawling?

Some plans resemble sprawling oak trees—where every good idea gets a branch, but very few get properly pruned. The result is inspirational but undisciplined.

Other plans take the form of Bonsai trees—disciplined, shaped, and intentionally structured.

A well-structured but organically unique plan might include:

- Three goals under one initiative and just one goal under another
- Several outcomes supported by a single, high-leverage strategy
- A lone tactic that makes a difference over multiple goals

That’s not a flaw. That’s a sign of strategic maturity—the unfolding of your unique circumstances and strategic response to change, towards your unique mission, purpose, and desired outcome.

In summary: the structure of your plan should reflect your organization’s unique identity, priorities, and constraints—not someone else’s model—but your distinct strategic plan.



The Last Six Inches

You can build a plan from 100 feet above ground. You can even bring it down to eye level.

But in the **last six inches**—where strategies and tactics are executed, where metrics are tracked, and where results are expected—execution either **connects or collapses**.

Many plans break down here. They're clear at the top but vague beneath the surface.

If your staff and teams aren't sure:

- What initiatives and goals they're working on
- What strategies and tactics they're responsible for
- Or how their work will be monitored and evaluated

Then the plan won't drive results. It may instill a vibe but it will quietly stall.

A great plan doesn't just describe where you're headed—it **structures how you'll get there**. And it equips people at every level to take meaningful action that has ongoing feedback loops, which compel the work forward, and the culture to support it.

Leadership Reflection: How Well Is Your Plan Cascading?

Take 15 minutes to consider:

- Can your people clearly identify the five levels—Strategic Initiatives, Goals, Outcomes, Strategies, and Tactics?
- Is your plan focused on what matters most—or is it cluttered with well-intended but nonessential projects and efforts?
- Do staff understand what they're doing, why it matters, and how it contributes to organizational success?
- Are strategies and tactics clearly owned, tracked, and regularly evaluated?
- Can you trace front-line actions all the way back and up to the organization's core strategic priorities?

In short:

Is your plan structured to work—at every level—top to bottom? Are your staff focused and in their “zone”?

Closing Thought: A Plan Is a Leadership Structure

A strategic plan isn't just a document—it's a **framework for how the organization as a whole pays attention, which helps everyone involved pay attention to what matters most**.

When well-designed, it:

- Focuses your people's attention
- Aligns decision-making
- Converts direction into disciplined action
- Supports performance at every level
- Builds momentum and a high-performing culture

Sincerely,



Dr. Bruce H. Jackson
Principal
Attentional Leadership Institute

Remember, your role isn't to “own” but to be a steward of the plan. It's to ensure the plan **serves the organization**—not once every three years, but as a consistent reference point for where you've been, where you are, and where you intend to go.

We hope this brief offers something valuable—something you can apply directly to how you lead strategy, steward attention, and sustain alignment in a fast-moving world.

If you ever need a fresh set of eyes or an outside perspective on your current strategy, know that we are here to help you and your team leverage your **Strategic Focus** in the service of everyday **Performance Focus**.

And finally remember this: Everything you do to lead your organization is the same thing you need to do to lead yourself, same goes for your staff.

ALI offers quarterly personal/professional strategic planning workshops for senior leaders and staff. We are happy to offer tuition waivers to you and your team.

Our next workshop: June 18th, 2025

[Request Vouchers Here.](#)