

Collaborate to create great strategy



At changeosity, we've seen companies reinvigorate their strategies and create a detailed road map of growth initiatives through a process of attentive and powerful collaboration.

Big strategic calls don't happen like that. We have to ...[design] a social process such that people can really grapple with the big ideas and come to grips with changing deeply held biases about what the company should do in the future. *Angus Dawson, The Art of Strategy, McKinsey*

In this article we share the top seven ways to create a successful collaborative strategy that transforms your business.

Number 1 – Adopt diversity and inclusion

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
Aristotle

I recall on multiple occasions, arriving for the start of a strategy away day, only to discover that some key contributors had been omitted from the list of participants. If we preoccupy our choices with attention to hierarchy and managing others' expectations, we may miss out on critical views, ideas and insights. More options are generated, and more change agents in the organisation gain buy-in, if the right people are involved from the beginning. Some practical considerations:

- Include the top two layers of the organisation, plus other contributors from different functional and business teams that offer unique perspectives.

- Be brave and invite a few trusted external consultants, clients and suppliers to the brainstorming parts of your workshop.
- Seek prior input from your participants and other employees on their perspectives on vision and SWOT in order to compile your agenda and focus for the workshop. A great question: What one thing would you do change if you were CEO for the day?

Number 2 – Appoint an independent facilitator

If an experienced facilitator is out of your budget, identify someone in your organisation who can command a room and ask them to facilitate the workshop. The CEO and the nominated facilitator should plan the workshop together. The CEO should then hand over the reins to the facilitator. Your independent facilitator moves the group through the strategy development process by explaining the process, providing instructions on each activity, encouraging participation from everyone, pushing for outcomes, when needed, and ensuring decisions are documented.

changeosity facilitates strategy workshops for our clients. We also offer a **DIY strategy refresh program** that provides step by step instructions for an in-house facilitator, together with all the materials, presentation slides and assessments. Contact us for more information.

Number 3 – Leave ego at the door

I've sat in enough strategy workshops to see that many leaders see it as an ideal opportunity to shine, point score, show that they are the most important or intelligent person in the room or generally use it as a platform to raise their profile. Arranged correctly, the optimum environment for collaborative discussion requires a radical shift from "me" to "us". Some practical considerations:

- Set up a box at the entrance to the room and call it "The Ego Box". Ask each participant to write a small personal note of commitment to submerge their ego and place it in the box.
- CEO's introductory message should highlight what success is intended to look like by the end of the workshop; positive outcomes more than showboating.



- Start with a kick-off activity that invites participants to state something positive to the group about what they want to learn from others during the workshop.
- Empower the facilitator to police bad behaviour. If an individual is overbearing or otherwise preventing positive progress, firmly apply TYALMO (thank you and let's move on).

Number 4 – The CEO should talk less, listen more

In my experience, the most successful strategy workshops are those in which the CEO participates with the rest of the team. Whilst there is always great value in a 10-minute CEO introductory pep talk to help set the scene, the CEO should transition quickly from host to participant. The objective is to shift the dial from a natural default state of chairing discussion and being the focal point of attention to being one amongst equals. The CEO's role is to create, what Nancy Kline calls, a "Thinking Environment"; the quality of the CEO's attention will determine the quality of the thinking of the group. Some practical considerations:

- CEO should sit back, actively and wholeheartedly observe and listen.
- Facilitators should:
 - see that the CEO sits in peer position amongst the participants;
 - remind participants that they all have roughly an equal percentage of 'talk-time'. If any individual significantly exceeds that share (say, double), they are preventing others from raising great ideas; and
 - use plenty of group exercises, always creating as much diversity in the groups as possible.

Number 5 – Create a "Thinking Environment"¹

Adopt Nancy Kline's 10 component approach to creating the optimum environment for thinking. These essential behaviours that help people think relate to what you say (ask incisive questions, provide information, give recognition and encouragement), how you behave (be human, be free from urgency, treat everyone as peers, apply respectful listening) and what choices you make (create a safe space, encourage diversity, allow dissent and criticism). Some practical considerations:

¹ "Time to Think; Listening to Ignite the Human Mind", Nancy Kline.

- Facilitator should:
 - encourage participants to adopt open, powerful questions. These start with who, what, how, when, where. These open explorations and allow idea generation much more effectively than closed questions such as “Do you know...?”, “Haven’t you thought...?”, “Why didn’t you...?” (ouch!).
 - at the beginning, give everyone a chance to speak their views, in particular, what they see as going well in their team, processes and organisation.
 - throughout, be aware of whether thinking or engagement is stalling and change up dynamics; create thinking partnerships or small groups, introduce creative activities or interludes such as use of visual cards to re-connect to self and allow dissent or frustration to be expressed.
 - at the end, invite participants to acknowledge what went well in the workshop and what they have learnt about or from others.

“A Thinking Environment is the core of team effectiveness. Giving everyone a turn increases the intelligence of the group.”
Nancy Kline

Number 6 – Don’t dismiss an idea before it becomes an option

Every idea has intrinsic value. All ideas should be treated of equal relevance until the selection process begins (at changeosity, we refer to this phase as Opportunities Navigator). Dismissing an idea too earlier could be leaving money on the table. Some practical considerations:

- Use Edward De Bono’s “six hats” thinking and utilise the green hat for creativity, ideas and lateral thinking.
- Use different brainstorming techniques such as “symbol analogy” which involves picking a random object in the room and getting inspired by its various characteristics. These techniques may seem a bit left field, however, they raise unexpected and interesting perspectives, ideas and options.
- Ensure you have some “creative thinkers” in the room. They may not have the strengths you believe are critical to your strategy workshop but that’s exactly why they should be given an opportunity to contribute; they think differently to you.

Number 7 – Make your decision making democratic

The overall benefit of reaching democratic decision-making is that input is sought, and opinions are heard from all relevant participants and a consensus view is ultimately reached. It's often unpopular as the way to progress in business because it is seen as weak leadership, overly bureaucratic or unnecessarily delays outcomes. There are certain decisions, however, that are core to an organisation - such as business values and drivers - where there is no single expert and personal ownership is critical to success. In these situations, accountability will flow if the participants had personal buy-in on the decision from the beginning, secured when they were integral to the consensus view formed. Practical considerations:

- Decide, in advance, what aspects of the strategy development are core to the leadership team, whereby ownership by all participants is critical to success. These aspects should be the focus for joint decision-making.
- Once decisions are made, be clear as a group on what steps need to be taken in respect of individual and group implementation plans and communications plans.

"Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilisation work." Vince Lombardi



About changeosity

We are a Dubai-based boutique consultancy firm. Our three founders have over 70 years of leadership experience in government and multi-national corporates in 50 countries, including 30 years in the Middle East.

Together, we have delivered highly profitable and award-winning transformation in a wide range of sectors in the Middle East.

Our diagnostic, development and implementation programs, together with our coaching, facilitation and leadership services, enable businesses to regenerate, grow and inspire.

All rights reserved, 2020