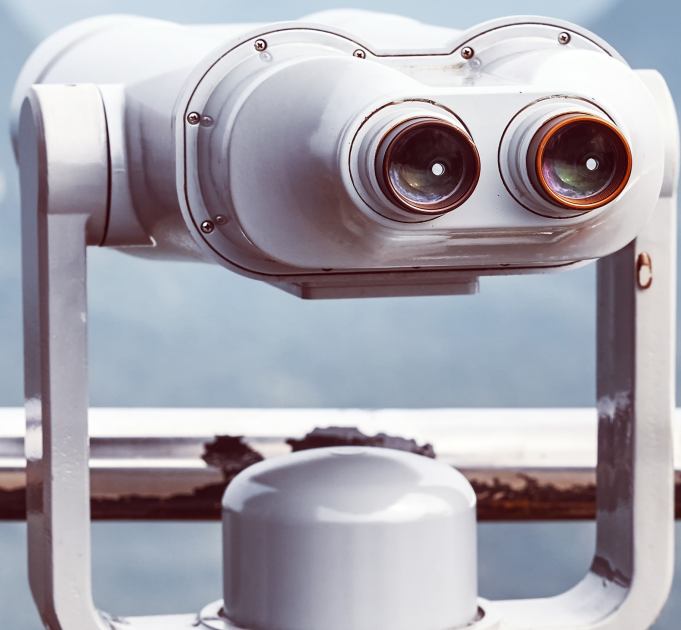


WHEN FORCED TO FOCUS

The awesome power of prioritization



If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we can act quickly when we must. Healthcare, an industry not known for a strong competency in moving quickly, has made advancements in areas it has been considering for decades and crafted creative solutions for new unforeseen problems. Witness the step-change advancements in telehealth and other on-the-fly adjustments implemented to enable patient access, address supply chain issues, and support staff.

If necessity is the mother of invention, focus is the father of rapid execution. And there are lessons to take into the new normal that will help instill focus and urgency around what you determine is most important, even when there isn't a pandemic to force it.

THE AWESOME POWER OF PRIORITIZATION

When you prioritize, you reap amazing benefits. What enabled the unprecedented implementation speed we just witnessed was organizational focus driven by unprecedented prioritization. There's no question this was prioritization on the pandemic's terms, and there was a cost. The lesson here is not that near-term needs should always get all-hands-on-deck attention. But imagine being able to establish pandemic-level focus on the initiatives of your choosing, on your own terms. The key lesson is realizing the power that prioritization put into practice has on an organization's ability to rapidly deliver.

So how can you channel the level of focus that enabled quick implementation during the crisis to drive strategic initiatives of your own choosing?

STRATEGY FIRST

Organizational focus requires narrowing the field of work to be done, and that starts at the top with the executive team. Leadership must set the vision and



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In this article:

- *We just witnessed how quickly healthcare organizations can implement when our efforts are focused (in this case, forced to focus).*
- *You can produce focus on executing your strategy and reap its implementation benefits too.*
- *Define clear goals first, before you determine the work to be done; while this seems straightforward, this is not how most healthcare organizations define strategic initiatives today.*
- *Prioritize, and give an important subset (Tier 1 initiatives) pandemic-like focus.*

clearly define the strategic imperatives (growth, quality, margin improvement, etc.) and goals that will drive the vision. They consider current market conditions, opportunities and threats, and other factors. Executives communicate the rationale, context, and relevance so the organization understands the imperatives and goals. Whether the vision is to improve the quality of more lives or to stay solvent, it's important to emphasize why the imperatives are important and what are the consequences of not meeting them. If you do not do this already, this is where you must begin.

It is critical that the strategic imperatives and goals come first. They are the lens that creates focus. Focus gets lost when organizations generate a list of ideas they want to pursue or things they want to fix in isolation from the strategy. What then typically occurs is the ideas and strategy merge in a mapping exercise, where the full list is organized into how it aligns with the strategy. You start with X ideas, and you end up trying to implement X ideas. This type of mapping exercise does not drive focus; in fact, it all but assures that everything is deemed strategically important and guarantees dilution of the organization.

When well-defined imperatives and goals come first, the organization can better identify the work necessary to achieve them. The pandemic forced this process. There was no mapping exercise. A situation was presented, and the organization focused on the specific jobs to be done to address it. You can apply this same process with your strategy at the core. At Integrated Project Management Company, Inc., we use a Strategic Realization Model when guiding clients and for our own business planning.

LEADERS MUST SAY NO (OR NOT YET)

While ideas for initiatives to achieve the goals can and should come from across the organization, when building the strategic portfolio, decisions must be based on how much the initiative contributes to the strategic goals. Even with the focusing power of starting with the goals, there will still be more ideas than the organization can accomplish. Objectively assessing initiatives will uncover those that will have the greatest impact.

This is not an exercise to be taken lightly. There will be painful decisions since this is not a process to remove bad

IPM'S STRATEGIC REALIZATION MODEL



ideas. It is meant to compare good ideas against other good ideas. Every initiative on the list is there for a reason and has merit. There will also likely be hurt feelings because every initiative will be personal to someone. But to reap the benefits of focus, you must recognize that you can't do it all, and certainly not all at once. Leadership will need to make tough decisions, as leadership often needs to do. The key is making those decisions based on objective information.

Weigh initiatives against each other on their strategic goal contribution, as well as risk (likelihood of achieving that contribution), effort, and cost. Use a scoring model to identify the big bets and quick wins. Say no to ideas that require significant effort or risk but yield relatively little strategic gain. They are there. Just think of the initiatives that will never return post pandemic because no one will miss them. And if saying no is too great of a step for the organization, say "not yet." If there is real strategic value, you can reconsider the initiative in the future. But more often than not, the value proposition is not strong enough and the pull for it subsides before the next strategic planning cycle.

PRIORITIZATION THAT FORCES FOCUS

Prioritize the resulting strategic portfolio into tiers. Tier 1 initiatives have the greatest impact on strategic imperatives and goals. These should get pandemic-like focus and attention. Protect them and provide the resources required until they are accomplished. Don't allow Initiatives in other tiers to slow down Tier 1. Tier 2 initiatives have strategic value and can be addressed after Tier 1 initiatives are completed. Tier 3 consists of significant continuous improvement and sustainability initiatives; these should be considered operational objectives managed by functional resources.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

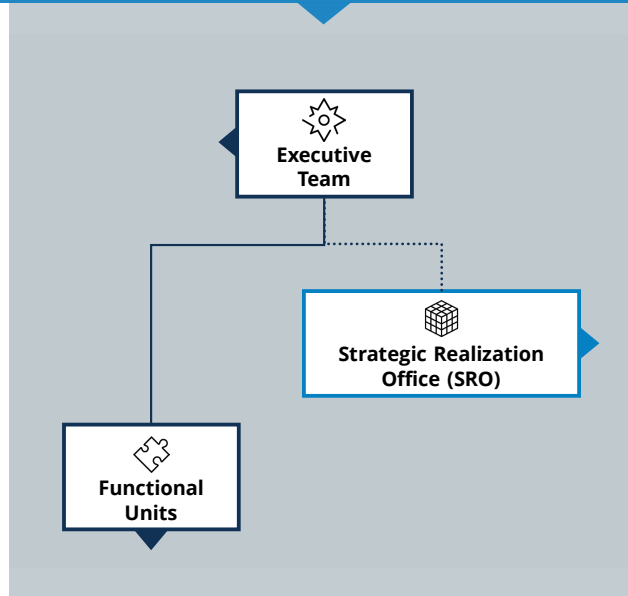
Initiatives don't get accomplished just by prioritizing them well. The executive team must communicate the rationale and urgency throughout the organization as the first step in change management, but an implementation capability is also essential. Reliable and rapid execution requires project leadership capacity and capability.

Some organizations utilize a Strategy Realization Office (SRO) to drive the effort of transforming the strategy into actionable plans, guide execution, and maintain focus. They report to the executive team and have authority to drive accountability and compliance. Their responsibilities include driving Tier 1 and Tier 2 initiatives, facilitating the strategic planning process, vetting projects against goals to balance priorities and measure impact to the organization, determining processes and resource requirements, and



STRATEGIC REALIZATION OFFICE DELIVERS FOCUS

- *Defines organizational values*
- *Creates and communicates vision*
- *Defines strategic imperatives & goals*
- *Approves prioritization criteria*
- *Approves strategic initiatives to meet strategic goals*
- *Approves resources to accomplish strategic imperatives*



- *Provide ideas for programs and projects to help achieve strategic imperatives*
- *Support approved programs and projects*
- *Lead projects when majority of work is within their area*

- *Facilitates strategic planning process*
- *Defines the project & portfolio management process and tools*
- *Defines prioritization criteria*
- *Evaluates & prioritizes programs & projects*
- *Determines resource requirements*
- *Leads execution of strategically critical projects*

monitoring implementation. An SRO, properly positioned within the organizational structure, provides an objective and holistic view, supplying the information needed to make decisions and adjust the portfolio as necessary.

MAINTAINING FOCUS

The COVID crisis has taught the healthcare industry what implementation speed is achievable, but in a way that was reactionary, disruptive, costly, and in some cases, risky. Those who can learn to direct the urgency and focus of handling a crisis to the implementation of their most critical strategies will be best positioned to succeed in any competitive climate and through any market changes and disruption.

Integrated Project Management Company, Inc.

Integrated Project Management Company, Inc. (IPM) is a business consulting firm focused on planning and implementing strategically critical initiatives across multiple industries, including life sciences, healthcare, consumer products, and industrial. Since its inception in 1988, IPM has served more than 500 clients and completed more than 4,500 projects. Headquartered in Chicago, IPM has regional offices in Boston, St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Parsippany. IPM was a recipient of the 2018 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. To learn more about IPM and its services, visit www.ipmcinc.com or call 630-789-8600.