

## **theGrogroupp guide to strategic development – right now!**

There are very few people and businesses who have not been affected in a significant way by the Covid-19 crisis. Most organisations are rightly focused on the here and now – firefighting and dealing with the essentials. Yet it is still vitally important to plan – for the immediate, the short term and for when the current crisis will end. To be proactive and on the front foot.

Many senior teams believe that it is virtually impossible to undertake strategic planning under current conditions. But now more than ever, organisations need a clear and flexible strategy to define the actions that will protect the business in the short term and re-establish it post-crisis.

The definition of strategy is very different to what people often think it is. It is certainly not a periodic and mainly academic project (think a two-day offsite for senior management ‘creating’ a new way forward, often through gut-feel). It is instead an ever-shifting appraisal of a how an organisation should position itself to best meet the challenges it faces and take advantage of any opportunities.

Shaping strategy is part marketing, part money, part people, part culture, part innovation, part products and services, and mostly an appreciation of an ever-shifting and developing world and unpredictable agendas.

We have devised some steps to help organisations create practical plans for aligning the team on what matters.

### **Stage one: Map out future scenarios**

No-one can be certain on exactly what things might look like when ‘normality’ returns. But we are in control of identifying possible scenarios and looking at what impact each would have. In particular, how your customers’ needs will change and what their businesses may look like - immediately on exiting the lockdown, and in the coming year.

Scenario planning is a way to begin a structured conversation about the future with your teams, and helps you be sensitive to market signals and stay ahead of the game when upturn finally comes.

We are working with a client which has divided the board into three units – one focusing on immediate issues, one on navigating through the turbulence and another on creating options for how the world may look post Covid-19.

### **Stage two: Revisit the existing strategy**

All short-term actions are significantly impacting the existing strategy. Instead of ripping this up, revisit it and understand which initiatives are still valid and which need to be changed to maintain a focus on future value. This then forms the baseline for your new strategy.

### **Stage three: Collate**

Bringing the current tactical actions based on what could be / should be and those surviving strategic initiatives (from Stage two) together into a single plan unites the management team and builds confidence. A clear framework provides a sense of control and focus for delivery of short-term actions and a mechanism for alignment and communication of evolving future priorities.

#### **Stage four: Seek input**

Using the framework to set team objectives, goals and priorities and monitor progress provides transparency of challenges. This 'picture' helps focus management attention, highlights resource constraints, and raises questions about strategic choices. Reviewing and resetting the plan allows you to stay responsive to learnings and changes in external conditions.

#### **Stage five: Build the future strategy**

Turning your plan into a visual representation of your strategy by grouping the components by outcomes (financial: sales, EBIT, working capital, non-financial: people numbers, client satisfaction scores, brand reputation etc) provides clear focus and clarity on the future state of the business. As the situation evolves, you can address gaps in the plan to converge to a long-term strategy with the best outcomes.

#### **Stage six: Get buy in**

In times of crisis clear, open and honest communication up, down and across the organisation is essential and will support the transition from crisis management back to an empowered organisation with clear direction and shared purpose.

This dynamic and tactical approach to strategic planning better fits around near-term priorities and current isolation constraints. It ensures that planning becomes a continuous way of working together (not a separate remote event) and each step brings incremental value. And you can start now.