

Strategic Change Cycle

Christopher Bernard

American Military University

MGMT 414: D001

Professor Jonah Romanitch

26 July 2026

Strategic Change Cycle Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the Strategic Change Cycle; all ten steps of the Strategic Planning Process will be covered. The process as a whole was developed by John Bryson and further broken down throughout the Management 414 courseware. The dynamic approach is effective for organizations as a whole, whether public, nonprofit, private, or governmental in nature. By navigating each step, a better grasp of the importance each individual step will be gained, but also the understanding of how interdependent they are as well.

Strategic Change Cycle

In general, strategic planning is vital for organizations to be able to implement when navigating complex redesign or adapting to dynamic environments. A highly recognized framework for formulating a way forward in strategic planning is the ten-step Strategic Change Cycle developed by John M. Bryson. His model is cyclical and iterative, consisting of exclusive but interdependent steps. The process allows for adaptations, giving organizations the freedom to adjust where necessary, whether for culture, needs, or external conditions. When all ten steps are applied with competence, leaders can build a shared sense of purpose, identify roadblocks, address key issues, and foster a culture capable of achieving success.

Step One

The first step in the Strategic Change Cycle is to initiate and solicit agreement to engage in the Strategic Planning Process. It is impossible to start something without a decision to act. This step is foundational and fundamentally is planning to plan; key players in the organization need to be on the same page to move forward. Without genuine agreement or sponsorship for decision-makers or positions of influence, resources may not get allocated appropriately, or the authorization for change may not come from the appropriate level. If the first step fails, the subsequent steps in the process could lack legitimacy, and there will not be momentum in the process. This portion of the process can establish the purpose, identify stakeholders, outline engagement protocols, and develop feedback roadmaps (MGMT 414 W1/S3, n.d).

Step Two

Secondly is the step to identify organizational mandates. These mandates establish both the formal and informal requirements of the process going forward. Some of these will be

constraints; others will be expectations that the team involved needs to satisfy...left & right bounds of the process. Formal mandates can be regulatory, akin to laws or contractual obligations. Informal mandates can include requirements of the board, traditional or historical practices, or even cultural norms of the organization. Mandates are the initial vector for the process, the can and cannot, allowing for the organization to remain legal and morally connected while fulfilling the success metrics throughout the process (Jean-Francois, 2015).

Step Three

For the third step, the focus will fall on clarifying the organization's mission and values. This step is hyper-important; the mission establishes the 'golden circle': what the organization does, how it does it, and why (The Optimism Company, n.d). The values are the common ground that the organizational culture is structured off of; they are the core beliefs and guiding principles that align behavior and decision-making. Often, determining mission and values requires engagement with stakeholders and middle- to upper-management. A well-crafted mission statement will provide direction, inspire autonomy, generate commitment, and create willingness to communicate throughout the process. A key part of this step is what happens after the statement has been crafted; it must be communicated and lived by the leadership team. Mission and values together can reinforce a culture of change, advancing the process.

Step Four

Fourthly, this is a keystone step: the organization will have to take a hard look down-and-in and up-and-out. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats/Challenges (SWOT/C) will need to be assessed to determine internal and external environmental factors. A key objective of accomplishing this analysis is to provide actionable data and hone situational awareness to

inform decision-making, strengthening the way forward in the Strategic Change Cycle (Steward et al., 2016). For internal assessment, strengths and weaknesses, factor in resources, competencies, culture, organizational hierarchies, and performance models. For external looks, opportunities and challenges, the PESTEL framework will be beneficial. PESTEL factors in political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal concerns and how they apply in exploitation or barriers to the process (Bryson, 2011).

Step Five

Sometimes referred to as the heart of the Strategic Planning Process, Step Five is all about identifying strategic issues the organization is facing (Bryson, 2011). The analysis that took place in the previous step, identified contributing factors, but this step melds them together into true strategy awareness. These issues are often compounding and not easily solved or avoided; they are riddled with existing conflicts, regulatory ambiguity, or present such high stakes that avoidance may sometimes be best. Leaders should focus the team to dial in on surviving the scenario, because the solution to the problem may present a greater rate of resource attrition than it is worth. This step appears to be more about awareness than eradication, a proactive approach in order to prevent a reactive one once trapped in a corner.

Step Six

Step Six provides the formulation of strategies, whether for the identified issues or for the whole reason the process was initiated to begin with. An effective strategy will need to address what needs to be done, how it will be accomplished, and by whom with what resources. Additionally, as with most tasks...a suspense and metrics of performance should be identified. This step along with the next one will be vaulted by having creative members on the team,

sliding countermeasures and alternatives can be evaluated on this step against anticipated criteria. This step allows for throwing everything against the wall to see what sticks, figuring out why it did not, and choosing the best course of action going forward for further implementation and evaluation. As strategy development moves through its paces, bring on the who will action them for further refinement before implementation.

Step Seven

Now it is time to adopt the strategies to the plan. Step Seven brings the thinkers to the doers alongside the deciders. Oftentimes there are a couple of options to exercise when faced with identifying the best way to address a strategic change. The appropriate authority will choose the best way forward, but the team needs to be able to identify the pros & cons of each option. Feedback is a key piece to this step; 360 communication needs to be supported during this process in order to establish the rationale for the strategy and related implications. Upon strategy selection, this is the official way forward, although, once again, its success is codependent on commitment and communication throughout the organization.

Step Eight

Earlier on Step Three, the mission and values were framed to build momentum and foundation for the process. Step Eight establishes the organizational vision, the future, an aimpoint of desirable outcome that the Strategic Change Cycle hopes to achieve. An analogy would be: let's take a road trip. The vehicle is prepped, bags are packed, snacks and stops are planned, destination is decided...the vision is how the travelers feel when they get there...was it worth it. The vision should be inspiring, something that guides the organization through its challenges, reminding them along the way why it will all be worth it. In general, the vision is

long-term, forward-looking, aligns members of the organization, instills membership in something bigger than oneself, and guides the team when faced with road bumps on the journey (Strategic Vision, n.d.).

Step Nine

A lot of steps have been accomplished, and now, now is the time to put it all into action. The ninth step is where implementation occurs, but it is again a step that requires nurturing. Strategy implementation will require attention to resources, responsibilities, identified timelines, and performance metrics to ensure the organization is indeed moving towards success in their goals. From the top down, accountability is going to be key, especially when faced with dynamic external factors and internal resistance to change. Solicitation of and willingness to accept feedback will prove useful in fine-tune implementation; sometimes the course correction may come from a team member one would least suspect.

Step Ten

Many folks' favorite part of the scientific process...why did that not work? Step Ten is the final piece to the Strategic Change Cycle; it challenges organizations to look at the process in a cyclical manner. Periodic evaluation can determine that initial success is not enduring and continued monitoring is vital. Commonly, what got you here will not get you there; consistent adjustments are needed. Whether a strategy needs refinement, is abandoned as a whole, or is restructured entirely is where Step Ten shines. This phase has multiple purposes, whether it is identifying areas of improvement, functions of the strategy that did not provide value, or spaces that have overlap or redundancy that can be streamlined for efficiency purposes (MGMT W6/S8, n.d).

References

- American Public University System. (n.d.). *Focus and Immediate Requirement of the Initiate and Agree Phase* [MGMT 414, Week 1, Slide 3]. Brightspace. <https://myclassroom.apus.edu>
- American Public University System. (n.d.). *Reassessment Stage* [MGMT 414, Week 6, Slide 8]. Brightspace. <https://myclassroom.apus.edu>
- Bryson, J. M. (2011). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations : A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Grammarly. (2026). *Grammarly* [For editing]. <https://www.grammarly.com>
- Jean-Francois, E. (2015). *Organizational mandates, define or revise mission, vision, and statements*. In *Financial sustainability for nonprofit organizations*. Springer Publishing Company. https://ebrary.net/8653/business_finance/organiational_mandates
- Steward, R., Humphrey, A., Stanford Research Institute, & SRI, International. (2016). *Academic Program review*. https://info.montgomerycollege.edu/_documents/offices/learning-outcomes-assessment/college-area-review/resources/swot.pdf?form=MG0AV3
- Strategic Vision: A guide for developing a clear roadmap for your organization*. (n.d.). TSI. <https://www.thestrategyinstitute.org/insights/strategic-vision-a-guide-for-developing-a-clear-roadmap-for-your-organization>
- The Optimism Company. (n.d.-b). *The Golden Circle | The Optimism Company*. Simon Sinek. <https://simonsinek.com/golden-circle>