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Developing a Strategic War Room through Facilitation

By Krister Forsberg and Per-Olov Olsson

The War Strategic Room represents a management team's shared perception of their business; a virtual room from which the business strategy will be planned and executed. It is a metaphor for the shared global view of the business and its environment.

Building a War Room starts with building the common understanding of the supply chain and the basis on which key stakeholders evaluate management performance and capability. The management team's collective intelligence provides the basis for consensus on the priorities for changes. Workshops led by an experienced facilitator enable managers to prioritize the information to set direction and establish goals for their units. The facilitator's role is to build consensus of the outcome of the workshop.

Five maps form the war room – the Business Environment Map, the Delivery Map, the Stakeholder Map, the Strategy Map and the Goal Map. All maps are needed to get the shared global

view of the business and its environment, and to select the right goals and strategies.

The business logic of our approach can be summarized in four principles:

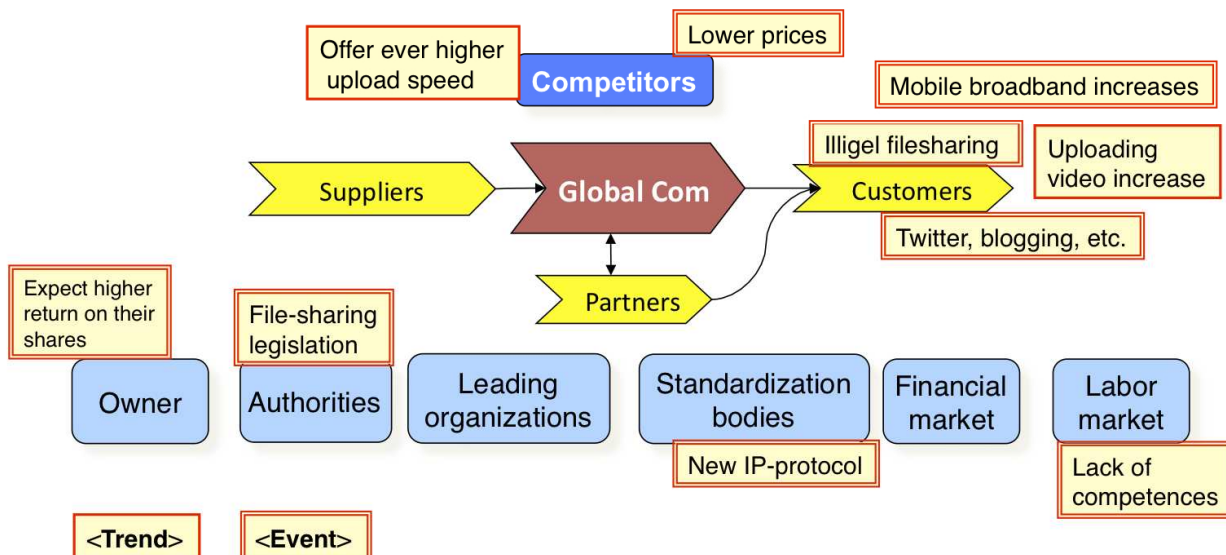
- Using managers' empowerment to take the initiative based on their own mission and own insight
- Focus on how key stakeholders (interested parties) evaluate the organisation's performance and capability
- Track and improve the organisation's capabilities which improve performance
- Collaborate with key stakeholders in developing the most competitive supply chain

The balance between strategic and operational tasks is a significant one. A manager's traditional task is to plan, organize, follow up, report and affirm by signing. Most managers are also responsible for recruitment, salary negotiations and, where necessary, terminations, and these are operational tasks that cannot be delegated. But

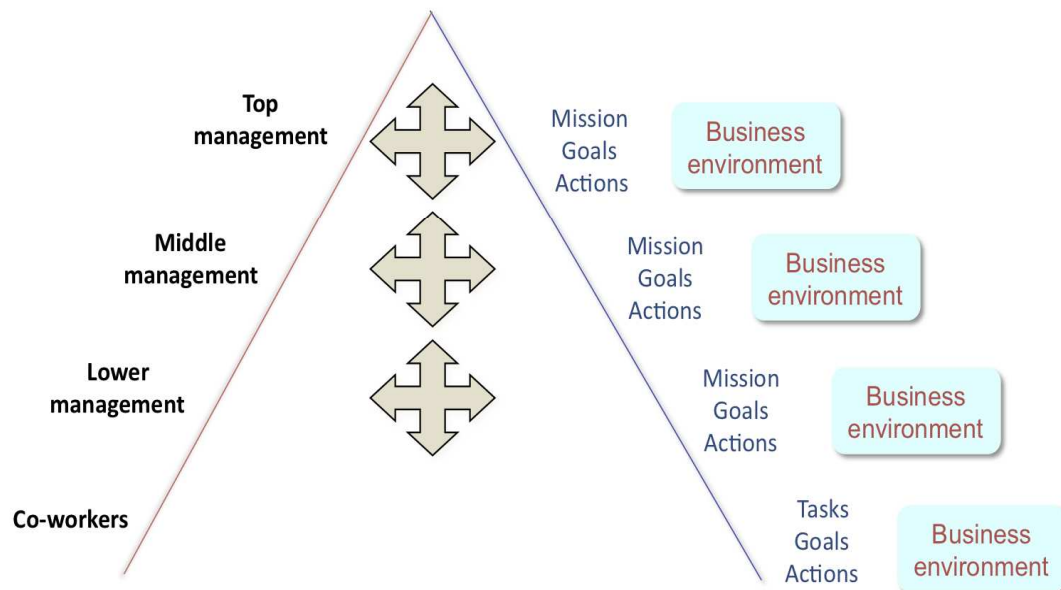
The Business Environment Map

Business Environment Analysis

What Trends and Events do we in our Management Team have to act on?



Empowerment on All levels/units



many other tasks, such as supervision and problem solving, can be.

Needs different skill set

Strategic tasks require a different skill set from operational tasks. A manager may work in a Management Team or alone, collaborating with their most important stakeholders.

Within the Management Team, managers will generate a global picture of the organisation and the environment in which it operates, including an analysis of the supply chain and the organisation's internal processes. Part of the management process involves prioritizing the trends and events which inform one's actions.

Outside the Management Team, the task is to engage key stakeholders, drive change, communicate with employees, and follow up on performance.

Assuming a strategic role requires managers to adopt several very different roles from those they occupy in daily operational work. Rather than taking all of the work on their own shoulders, managers can use the Management Team far more effectively by learning to share strategic tasks and act in the roles as goal drivers and relationship managers.

Many management models and methods

are not efficient to apply for managers working in a highly competitive environment in the 21st century. To be more efficient in the management process, empowered management teams need to adapt two shifts:

The first is to shift from the top down approach in which goals are cascaded from the top, to create a hierarchy of goals, to the empowered approach in which managers act on their own initiative out of their own mission and own insight. Each management team has its own business environment and supply chain to manage.

The second shift is from identifying goals from a vision and pre-determined perspective (e.g. finance, customer, process) to identifying goals from how the key Stakeholders evaluate performance and the ability to perform. In the management process, a manager may have one or several roles - Relationship Manager, Goal Driver and Goal Owner. As a Goal Driver, he/she is responsible for achieving a given goal by allocating resources and ensuring follow up. The Goal Owner is the head of the unit for whom the specific goals are designed. The key to success in Goal Ownership lies in the capability of the Goal Drivers and Relationship Managers that are selected and appointed.

Critical Roles in the Management Process



The MT Members (the workshop content owners)



Goal Owner
The head of the unit
Make the decisions



Facilitator
(the facilitation process owner)
Facilitating the Management Team
Building consensus of the outcome



Goal Driver
Allocate resources,
and follow up
progress and
performance



Relationship Manager
Dialog with the
stakeholder

Collaborate with key Stakeholders

As Relationship Manager, managers must engage key stakeholders, collaborating with them by sharing insights, aspirations and results; engaging them in commercial or non-commercial opportunities; involving them in solving problems; and sharing perceptions of risk with them.

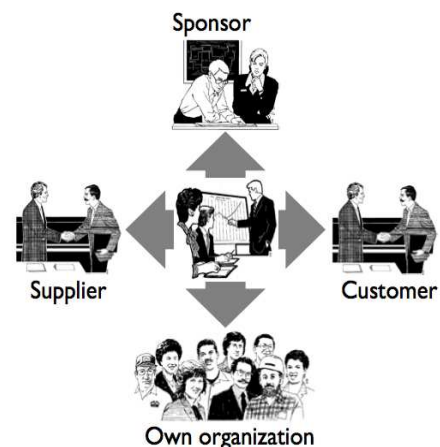
The effect is to create a dialog with Stakeholders – one that is characterized by trust and transparency. The purpose is to build the most competitive supply chain, which requires empowered Management Teams working in networks and driven by their own shared sense of mission.

For managers, stakeholder analysis involves identifying their most important stakeholders. Their line manager or sponsor is a key Stakeholder. The stakeholders have expectations of their performance and capability. The owner of the business, chairman of the board, investors and authorities all belong to the

circle of important stakeholders. Their most important stakeholder is, however, their customer.

Finally, within their own organisation, they will cooperate with their own people on

Managers' communication paths



how to efficiently communicate changes, goals, and so on.

Facilitator is key to success

Top team effectiveness usually requires an experienced facilitator, as not all management teams have reached the level of maturity needed to manage strategically. When facilitating Management Teams in identifying strategies and goals, the facilitator is focused on what the managers already know, rather seeking out new ideas through brainstorming. The answers to the key questions are in the heads of the managers.

Our experiences from facilitating these teams suggest that:

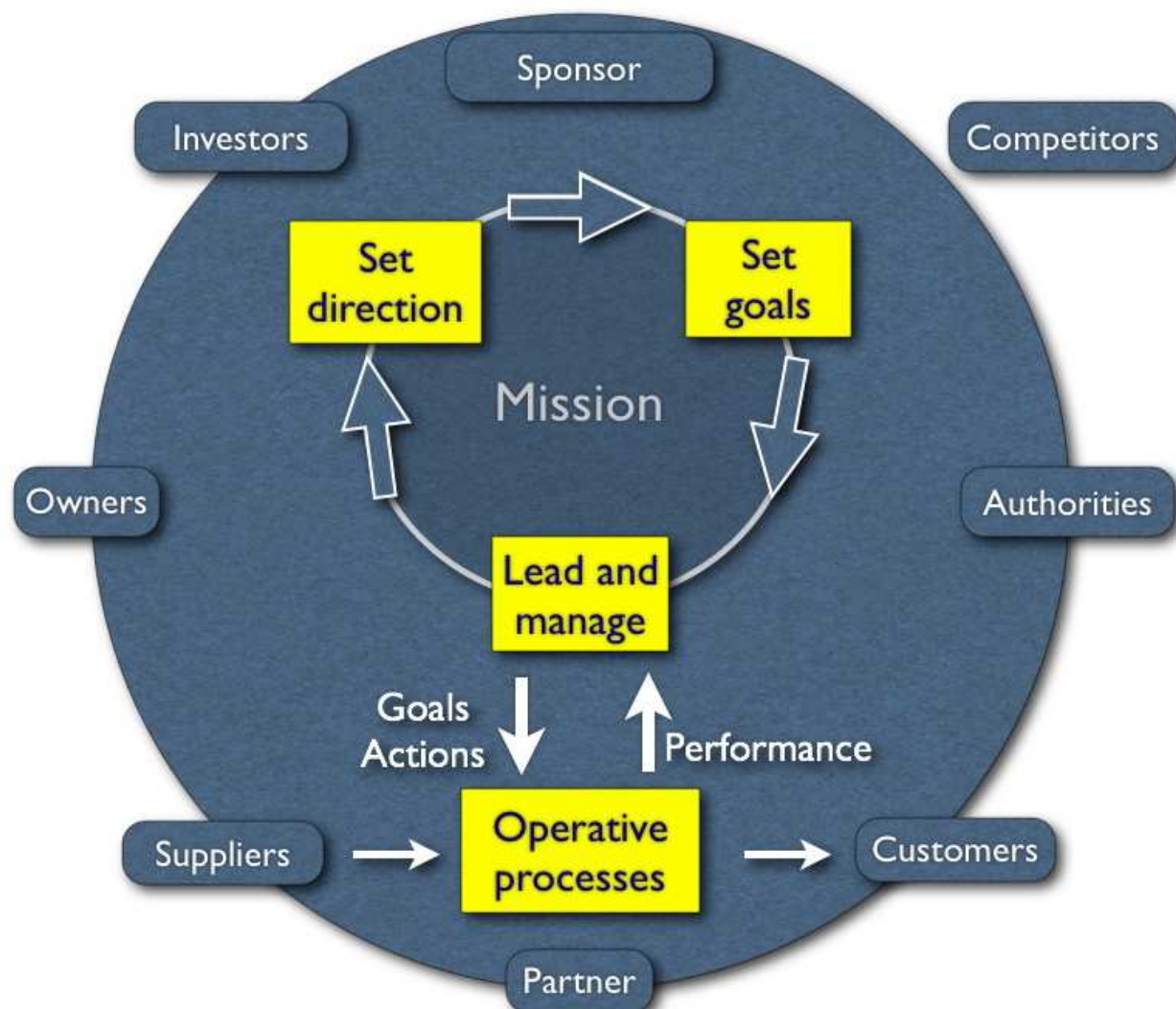
- Management teams need time to learn to work efficiently and effectively together. Immature management teams are likely to be diverted by conflicts and power

struggles;

- Many management teams try to grasp everything that they think is important; consequently, they set too many goals and lose focus on what is most important. Lack of prioritization is one of the most common obstacles to action;

Every management team needs a common understanding of the tasks the individual team members must perform if the organization is to achieve more. The most successful management teams are those that use defined strategic roles throughout the management process; the most important of which are Relationship Manager, Goal Owner and Goal Driver.

A management team will achieve more if its members know each other's strengths and are willing to compensate for weaknesses. All team members must accept that all roles in a management team are equally important.



Managers often form a diverted group of individuals, which will challenge the skills of the facilitator in any workshops. Group dynamics and the climate will also influence the results. Getting to know the team members is the essential first step for a facilitator. Is the management team a high-performance team good at managing group dynamics, or a group of frustrated managers still seeking their roles?

Providing methods and tools

What are the other prerequisites for a war room beyond understanding the stage of development of the management team? The facilitator needs to provide the management team with methods and tools to make high-quality decisions in consensus. His or her role is as enabler in the workshop process and building consensus of the outcome.

Over the years, we have developed a set of inter-related methods to meet five specific criteria. These methods should be:

- Generic – applicable to all organisations in terms of size, type, level and management system
- Selective – identifying the vital few pieces of information in order to exclude what is less important
- Stakeholder focused – the process must be centred on how key stakeholders evaluate the organisation's performance and capability, and on collaboration with those stakeholders
- Fast – applicable on all levels/units in parallel to save lead time. All steps interrelate seamlessly for the desired outcome
- Complete – provide support throughout the process from initial analysis to follow up on strategy implementation including progress reviews of actions and goals achieved

Once a management team has run its first successful war room, they find it much easier to repeat or develop the process. The Strategic War Room becomes their shared global view of their business and its environment both mentally and pictorially, and is their best source for creating a communication story that mobilizes and engages their people in achieving their goals and fulfilling their strategy.

About the author



Krister Forsberg runs his own business (www.kristerforsberg.com) in the area of operational development, management systems, management practices and, training and facilitating management teams. He has been member of several management teams in Ericsson within Mobile Internet and Mobile Systems.

Per-Olov Olsson now runs his own business as a facilitator and trainer of management teams. For many years, he worked as a trainer and facilitator of management teams, and was responsible for measurement process and performance reporting in Ericsson's radio network units. He was a champion in development of Ericsson's management process. He developed the Concept Delivery Map, Strategy Map and Goal Map.

The management approach discussed here is fully described in Goal-based Leadership, Forsberg & Olsson, Liber 2004 (In Swedish: Målbaserat Ledarskap.)