

# The Fallacies of Strategic Planning

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1. **The future is predictable.** In reality, the future is unknowable. Events occurring today or tomorrow can profoundly influence our future—and we have little control over these events. Highly analytical strategic plans make attempts to define and “capture” the forces in the environment and then to organize strategy around this knowledge. In reality, the environment, while following certain patterns, will largely move on its own path.
2. **Strategic planning protects the organization from the environment.** In reality, *nothing* can protect or insulate the organization from the vagaries of the marketplace, consumer demands, the global economy, etc.
3. **Organizational alignment ensures success.** While alignment with the vision and clear goals can focus energy and activity, focus isn't enough for success. In reality, strategic control and the desire to ensure organizational “alignment” tend to stifle creativity, learning, innovation, and risk taking. Planning tends to focus on control and stability — attempting to achieve a specific outcome by controlling from the center and reducing volatility and dissonance (instability) at the edges. This characteristic can actually impede independent (and necessary) action—which can undercut the organization's long-term future.
4. **The plan provides a helpful roadmap through an uncertain future.** Strategic plans tend to describe what is known, not what isn't known. As a result, managing by existing maps (charting the territory we already know) leads to imitation and repetition. Further, “deliberate” strategies (intentional plans) rarely make room for messy “emergent” strategies (responding to what is happening now).
5. **The plan prepares people to think and act strategically when required.** Strategic *planning* isn't strategic *thinking*. While strategic plans give people guidance in how to make specific strategic decisions and take specific actions, they don't typically prepare people to think strategically about their daily work (decisions and actions).
6. **The executive leadership team is the key strategic player in the organization.** While the leadership team must take the lead in building and shaping the plan, strategic thinking and acting must occur at every level of the organization. Unfortunately, the people who need to be strategic thinkers usually aren't expected to be.
7. **The strategic plan enables the learning and growth (and, therefore, the long term success) of the organization.** In reality, learning and growth are non-linear, often serendipitous, and no effort to “manage” learning and growth can guarantee that this happens. At best, a strategic plan can help create an environment that is *receptive* to learning and growth vs. guaranteeing it.