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Strategic Management - An Introduction

Strategic Management is all about identification¹ and description of the strategies that managers can carry² so as to achieve better performance and a competitive advantage for their organization. An organization is said to have competitive advantage if its profitability³ is higher than the average profitability for all companies in its industry.

Strategic management can also be defined as a bundle⁴ of decisions and acts which a manager undertakes and which decides the result of the firm's performance. The manager must have a thorough⁵ knowledge and analysis of the general and competitive organizational environment so as to take right decisions. They should conduct a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), i.e., they should make best possible utilization⁶ of strengths, minimize the organizational weaknesses, make use of arising opportunities from the business environment and shouldn't ignore the threats.

Strategic management is nothing but planning for both predictable⁷ as well as unfeasible⁸ contingencies.⁹ It is applicable to both small as well as large organizations as even the smallest organization face competition and, by formulating and implementing appropriate strategies, they can attain sustainable competitive advantage.

It is a way in which strategists set the objectives and proceed¹⁰ about attaining them. It deals with making and implementing decisions about future direction of an organization. It helps us to identify the direction in which an organization is moving.

¹recognition

²bear; transport; continue

³advantageousness

⁴number of objects that have been gathered together; package

⁵a number of things that belong or are dealt with together

⁶use of

⁷able to be predicted, can be prophesied, can be foretold

⁸impossible, unlikely

⁹possibility, chance

¹⁰continue, carry on; advance, progress, move forward

Strategic management is a continuous process that evaluates and controls the business and the industries in which an organization is involved; evaluates its competitors and sets goals and strategies to meet all existing and potential competitors; and then re-evaluates strategies on a regular basis to determine how it has been implemented and whether it was successful or it needs replacement.

Strategic Management gives a broader perspective to the employees of an organization and they can better understand how their job fits into the entire organizational plan and how it is co-related to other organizational members.

It is nothing but the art of managing employees in a manner which maximizes the ability of achieving business objectives. The employees become more trustworthy,¹ more committed and more satisfied as they can co-relate themselves very well with each organizational task. They can understand the reaction of environmental changes on the organization and the probable response of the organization with the help of strategic management. Thus the employees can judge the impact of such changes on their own job and can effectively face the changes. The managers and employees must do appropriate things in appropriate manner. They need to be both effective as well as efficient.

One of the major role of strategic management is to incorporate² various functional³ areas of the organization completely, as well as, to ensure these functional areas harmonize and get together well. Another role of strategic management is to keep a continuous eye on the goals and objectives of the organization.

Strategy - Definition and Features(characteristic)

¹dependable, reliable

²formed into a corporation

³Functional-level strategies are strategies aimed at improving the effectiveness of a company's operations

The word “strategy” is derived from the Greek word “stratēgos”; stratus (meaning army) and “ago” (meaning leading/moving).

Strategy is an action that managers take to attain one or more of the organization’s goals. Strategy can also be defined as “A general direction set for the company and its various components to achieve a desired state in the future. Strategy results from the detailed strategic planning process”.

A strategy is all about integrating organizational activities and utilizing and allocating the scarce resources within the organizational environment so as to meet the present objectives. While planning a strategy it is essential to consider that decisions are not taken in a vacuum and that any act taken by a firm is likely to be met by a reaction from those affected, competitors, customers, employees or suppliers.

Strategy can also be defined as knowledge of the goals, the uncertainty of events and the need to take into consideration the likely or actual behavior of others. Strategy is the blueprint of decisions in an organization that shows its objectives and goals, plans for achieving these goals, and defines the business the company is to carry on, the type of economic and human organization it wants to be, and the contribution it plans to make to its shareholders, customers and society at large.

Features of Strategy

1. Strategy is Significant because it is not possible to foresee the future. Without a perfect foresight, the firms must be ready to deal with the uncertain events which constitute the business environment.
2. Strategy deals with long term developments rather than routine operations, i.e. it deals with probability of innovations or new products, new methods of productions, or new markets to be developed in future.

٣. Strategy is created to take into account the probable behavior of customers and competitors. Strategies dealing with employees will predict the employee behavior.

Strategy is a well-defined roadmap of an organization. It defines the overall mission, vision and direction of an organization. The objective of a strategy is to maximize an organization's strengths and to minimize the strengths of the competitors.

Strategy, in short, bridges the gap between “where we are” and “where we want to be”.

Components of a Strategy Statement

The strategy statement of a firm sets the firm's long-term strategic direction and broad policy directions. It gives the firm a clear sense of direction and a blueprint for the firm's activities for the upcoming years. The main constituents of a strategic statement are as follows:

١. Strategic Intent

An organization's strategic intent is the purpose that it exists and why it will continue to exist, providing it maintains a competitive advantage. Strategic intent gives a picture about what an organization must get into immediately in order to achieve the company's vision. It motivates the people. It clarifies the vision of the vision of the company.

Strategic intent helps management to emphasize and concentrate on the priorities. Strategic intent is, nothing but, the influencing of an organization's resource potential and core competencies to achieve what at first may seem to be unachievable goals in the competitive environment. A well expressed strategic intent should guide/steer the development of strategic intent or the setting of goals and objectives that require that all of organization's competencies be controlled to maximum value.

Strategic intent includes directing organization's attention on the need of winning; inspiring people by telling them that the targets are valuable; encouraging individual and team participation as well as contribution; and utilizing intent to direct allocation of resources.

Strategic intent differs from strategic fit in a way that while strategic fit deals with harmonizing available resources and potentials to the external environment, strategic intent emphasizes on building new resources and potentials so as to create and exploit future opportunities.

1. Mission Statement

Mission statement is the statement of the role by which an organization intends to serve its stakeholders. It describes why an organization is operating and thus provides a framework within which strategies are formulated. It describes what the organization does (i.e., present capabilities), who all it serves (i.e., stakeholders) and what makes an organization unique (i.e., reason for existence).

A mission statement differentiates an organization from others by explaining its broad scope of activities, its products, and technologies it uses to achieve its goals and objectives. It talks about an organization's present (i.e., "about where we are"). For instance, **Microsoft's mission** is to help people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential. **Wal-Mart's mission** is "To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same thing as rich people." Mission statements always exist at top level of an organization, but may also be made for various organizational levels. Chief executive plays a significant role in formulation of mission statement. Once the mission statement is formulated, it serves the organization in long run, but it may become ambiguous with organizational growth and innovations.

In today's dynamic and competitive environment, mission may need to be redefined. However, care must be taken that the redefined mission statement should

have original fundamentals/components. Mission statement has three main components-a statement of mission or vision of the company, a statement of the core values that shape the acts and behaviour of the employees, and a statement of the goals and objectives.

Features of a Mission

- a. Mission must be **feasible** and attainable. It should be possible to achieve it.
- b. Mission should be **clear** enough so that any action can be taken.
- c. It should be **inspiring** for the management, staff and society at large.
- d. It should be **precise** enough, i.e., it should be neither too broad nor too narrow.
- e. It should be **unique** and distinctive to leave an impact in everyone's mind.
- f. It should be **analytical**, i.e., it should analyze the key components of the strategy.
- g. It should be **credible**, i.e., all stakeholders should be able to believe it.

2. Vision

A vision statement identifies where the organization wants or intends to be in future or where it should be to best meet the needs of the stakeholders. It describes dreams and aspirations for future. For instance, **Microsoft's vision** is "to empower people through great software, any time, any place, or any device." **Wal-Mart's vision** is to become worldwide leader in retailing.

A vision is the potential to view things ahead of themselves. It answers the question "where we want to be". It gives us a reminder about what we attempt to develop. A vision statement is for the organization and its members, unlike the mission statement which is for the customers/clients. It contributes in effective decision making as well as effective business planning. It incorporates a shared

understanding about the nature and aim of the organization and utilizes this understanding to direct and guide the organization towards a better purpose. It describes that on achieving the mission, how the organizational future would appear to be.

An effective vision statement must have following features-

- a. It must be **unambiguous**.
- b. It must be **clear**.
- c. It must **harmonize** with organization's culture and values.
- d. The dreams and aspirations must be **rational/realistic**.
- e. Vision statements should be **shorter** so that they are easier to memorize.

In order to realize the vision, it must be deeply instilled in the organization, being owned and shared by everyone involved in the organization.

३. Goals and Objectives

A goal is a desired future state or objective that an organization tries to achieve. Goals specify in particular what must be done if an organization is to attain mission or vision. Goals make mission more prominent and concrete. They co-ordinate and integrate various functional and departmental areas in an organization. Well-made goals have following features

- a. These are **precise and measurable**.
- b. These look after **critical and significant** issues.
- c. These are **realistic** and challenging.
- d. These must be achieved within a **specific time** frame.
- e. These include both **financial as well as non-financial components**.

Objectives are defined as goals that organization wants to achieve over a period of time. These are the foundation of planning. Policies are developed in an organization so as to achieve these objectives. Formulation of objectives is the task of top level management. Effective objectives have following features-

- f. These are not single for an organization, but **multiple**.
- g. Objectives should be both **short-term as well as long-term**.
- h. Objectives must respond and react to changes in environment, i.e., they must be **flexible**.
- i. These must be feasible, **realistic and operational**.

Importance of Vision and Mission Statements

One of the first things that any observer of management thought and practice asks is whether a particular organization has a vision and mission statement. In addition, one of the first things that one learns in a business school is the importance of vision and mission statements.

This article is intended to elucidate on the reasons why vision and mission statements are important and the benefits that such statements provide to the organizations. It has been found in studies that organizations that have lucid, coherent, and meaningful vision and mission statements return more than double the numbers in shareholder benefits when compared to the organizations that do not have vision and mission statements. Indeed, the importance of vision and mission statements is such that it is the first thing that is discussed in management textbooks on strategy.

Some of the benefits of having a vision and mission statement are discussed below:

- Above everything else, vision and mission statements provide unanimity of purpose to organizations and imbue the employees with a sense of belonging and identity. Indeed, vision and mission statements are embodiments of organizational identity

and carry the organizations creed and motto. For this purpose, they are also called as statements of creed.

- Vision and mission statements spell out the context in which the organization operates and provides the employees with a tone that is to be followed in the organizational climate. Since they define the reason for existence of the organization, they are indicators of the direction in which the organization must move to actualize the goals in the vision and mission statements.
- The vision and mission statements serve as focal points for individuals to identify themselves with the organizational processes and to give them a sense of direction while at the same time deterring those who do not wish to follow them from participating in the organization's activities.
- The vision and mission statements help to translate the objectives of the organization into work structures and to assign tasks to the elements in the organization that are responsible for actualizing them in practice.
- To specify the core structure on which the organizational edifice stands and to help in the translation of objectives into actionable cost, performance, and time related measures.
- Finally, vision and mission statements provide a philosophy of existence to the employees, which is very crucial because as humans, we need meaning from the work to do and the vision and mission statements provide the necessary meaning for working in a particular organization.

As can be seen from the above, articulate, coherent, and meaningful vision and mission statements go a long way in setting the base performance and actionable parameters and embody the spirit of the organization. In other words, vision and mission statements are as important as the various identities that individuals have in their everyday lives.

It is for this reason that organizations spend a lot of time in defining their vision and mission statements and ensure that they come up with the statements that provide meaning instead of being mere sentences that are devoid of any meaning.

Strategic Management Process - Meaning, Steps and Components

The strategic management process means defining the organization's strategy. It is also defined as the process by which managers make a choice of a set of strategies for the organization that will enable it to achieve better performance.

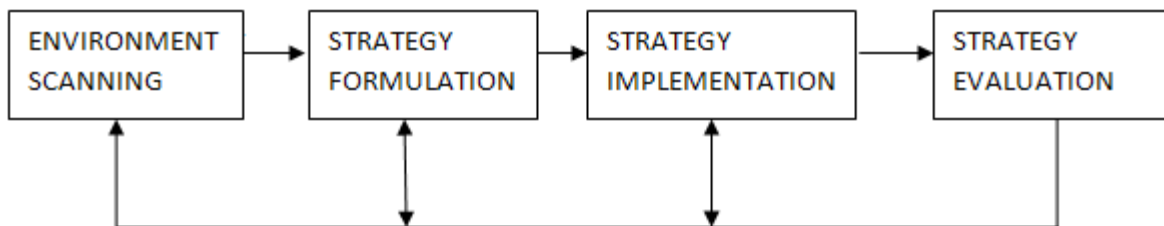
Strategic management is a continuous process that appraises the business and industries in which the organization is involved; appraises its competitors; and fixes goals to meet all the present and future competitor's and then reassesses each strategy.

Strategic management process has following four steps:

1. **Environmental Scanning-** Environmental scanning refers to a process of collecting, scrutinizing and providing information for strategic purposes. It helps in analyzing the internal and external factors influencing an organization. After executing the environmental analysis process, management should evaluate it on a continuous basis and strive to improve it.
2. **Strategy Formulation-** Strategy formulation is the process of deciding best course of action for accomplishing organizational objectives and hence achieving organizational purpose. After conducting environment scanning, managers formulate corporate, business and functional strategies.
3. **Strategy Implementation-** Strategy implementation implies making the strategy work as intended or putting the organization's chosen strategy into action. Strategy implementation includes designing the organization's structure, distributing resources, developing decision making process, and managing human resources.

- ξ. **Strategy Evaluation-** Strategy evaluation is the final step of strategy management process. The key strategy evaluation activities are: appraising internal and external factors that are the root of present strategies, measuring performance, and taking remedial / corrective actions. Evaluation makes sure that the organizational strategy as well as its implementation meets the organizational objectives.

These components are steps that are carried, in chronological order, when creating a new strategic management plan. Present businesses that have already created a strategic management plan will revert to these steps as per the situation's requirement, so as to make essential changes.



Components of Strategic Management Process

Strategic management is an ongoing process. Therefore, it must be realized that each component interacts with the other components and that this interaction often happens in chorus.

Environmental Scanning - Internal & External Analysis of Environment

Organizational environment consists of both external and internal factors. Environment must be scanned so as to determine development and forecasts of factors that will influence organizational success. **Environmental scanning refers to possession and utilization of information about occasions, patterns, trends, and relationships within an organization's internal and external environment.** It helps the managers to decide the future path of the organization. Scanning must identify the threats and opportunities existing in the environment. While strategy formulation, an organization

must take advantage of the opportunities and minimize the threats. A threat for one organization may be an opportunity for another.

Internal analysis of the environment is the first step of environment scanning.

Organizations should observe the internal organizational environment. This includes employee interaction with other employees, employee interaction with management, manager interaction with other managers, and management interaction with shareholders, access to natural resources, brand awareness, organizational structure, main staff, operational potential, etc. Also, discussions, interviews, and surveys can be used to assess the internal environment. Analysis of internal environment helps in identifying strengths and weaknesses of an organization.

As business becomes more competitive, and there are rapid changes in the external environment, information from external environment adds crucial elements to the effectiveness of long-term plans. As environment is dynamic, it becomes essential to identify competitors' moves and actions. Organizations have also to update the core competencies and internal environment as per external environment. Environmental factors are infinite, hence, organization should be agile and vigile to accept and adjust to the environmental changes. For instance - Monitoring might indicate that an original forecast of the prices of the raw materials that are involved in the product are no more credible, which could imply the requirement for more focused scanning, forecasting and analysis to create a more trustworthy prediction about the input costs. In a similar manner, there can be changes in factors such as competitor's activities, technology, market tastes and preferences.

While in **external analysis**, three correlated environment should be studied and analyzed —

- immediate / industry environment
- national environment

- broader socio-economic environment / macro-environment

Examining the **industry environment** needs an appraisal of the competitive structure of the organization's industry, including the competitive position of a particular organization and its main rivals. Also, an assessment of the nature, stage, dynamics and history of the industry is essential. It also implies evaluating the effect of globalization on competition within the industry. Analyzing the **national environment** needs an appraisal of whether the national framework helps in achieving competitive advantage in the globalized environment. Analysis of **macro-environment** includes exploring macro-economic, social, government, legal, technological and international factors that may influence the environment. The analysis of organization's external environment reveals opportunities and threats for an organization.

Strategic managers must not only recognize the present state of the environment and their industry but also be able to predict its future positions.

Steps in Strategy Formulation Process

Strategy formulation refers to the process of choosing the most appropriate course of action for the realization of organizational goals and objectives and thereby achieving the organizational vision. The process of strategy formulation basically involves six main steps. Though these steps do not follow a rigid chronological order, however they are very rational and can be easily followed in this order.

Setting Organizations' objectives - The key component of any strategy statement is to set the long-term objectives of the organization. It is known that strategy is generally a medium for realization of organizational objectives. Objectives stress the state of being there whereas Strategy stresses upon the process of reaching there. Strategy includes both the fixation of objectives as well the medium to be used to realize those objectives. Thus, strategy is a wider term which believes in the manner of deployment of resources so as to achieve the objectives.

While fixing the organizational objectives, it is essential that the factors which influence the selection of objectives must be analyzed before the selection of objectives. Once the objectives and the factors influencing strategic decisions have been determined, it is easy to take strategic decisions.

1-how to fix objectives

2-the manner of deployment of resources

Evaluating the Organizational Environment - The next step is to evaluate the general economic and industrial environment in which the organization operates. This includes a review of the organizations competitive position. It is essential to conduct a qualitative and quantitative review of an organizations existing product line. The purpose of such a review is to make sure that the factors important for competitive success in the market can be discovered so that the management can identify their own strengths and weaknesses as well as their competitors' strengths and weaknesses.

After identifying its strengths and weaknesses, an organization must keep a track of competitors' moves and actions so as to discover probable opportunities of threats to its market or supply sources.

1- important factors for competitive success

2-conduct a qualitative and quantitative review

3- competitors' moves and actions to discover opportunities for market or supply sources.

Setting Quantitative Targets - In this step, an organization must practically fix the quantitative target values for some of the organizational objectives. The idea behind this is to compare with long term customers, so as to evaluate the contribution that might be made by various product zones or operating departments.

Aiming in context with the divisional plans - In this step, the contributions made by each department or division or product category within the organization is identified and accordingly strategic planning is done for each sub-unit. This requires a careful analysis of macroeconomic trends.

Performance Analysis - Performance analysis includes discovering and analyzing the gap between the planned or desired performance. A critical evaluation of the organizations past performance, present condition and the desired future conditions must be done by the organization. This critical evaluation identifies the degree of gap that persists between the actual reality and the long-term aspirations of the organization. An attempt is made by the organization to estimate its probable future condition if the current trends persist.

Choice of Strategy - This is the ultimate step in Strategy Formulation. The best course of action is actually chosen after considering organizational goals, organizational strengths, potential and limitations as well as the external opportunities.

Strategy Implementation - Meaning and Steps in Implementing a Strategy

Strategy implementation is the translation of chosen strategy into organizational action so as to achieve strategic goals and objectives. Strategy implementation is also defined as the manner in which an organization should develop, utilize, and amalgamate organizational structure, control systems, and culture to follow strategies that lead to competitive advantage and a better performance. Organizational structure allocates special value developing tasks and roles to the employees and states how these tasks and roles can be correlated so as maximize efficiency, quality, and customer satisfaction-the pillars of competitive advantage. But, organizational structure is not sufficient in itself to motivate the employees. An organizational control system is also required. This control system equips managers with motivational incentives for employees as well as feedback on employees and organizational performance. Organizational culture refers to the specialized collection of values, attitudes, norms and beliefs shared by organizational members and groups.

Follwoing are the main **steps in implementing a strategy:**

- ✓ Developing an organization having potential of carrying out strategy successfully.
- ✓ Disbursement of abundant resources to strategy-essential activities.
- ✓ Creating strategy-encouraging policies.
- ✓ Employing best policies and programs for constant improvement.
- ✓ Linking reward structure to accomplishment of results.
- ✓ Making use of strategic leadership.

Excellent formulated strategies will fail if they are not properly implemented. Also, it is essential to note that strategy implementation is not possible unless there is stability between strategy and each organizational dimension such as organizational structure, reward structure, resource-allocation process, etc.

Strategy implementation poses a threat to many managers and employees in an organization. New power relationships are predicted and achieved. New groups (formal as well as informal) are formed whose values, attitudes, beliefs and concerns may not be known. With the change in power and status roles, the managers and employees may employ confrontation behaviour

Strategy Formulation vs Strategy Implementation

Following are the main differences between Strategy Formulation and Strategy Implementation-

Strategy Formulation	Strategy Implementation
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Strategy Formulation includes planning and decision-making involved in developing organization's strategic goals and plans.	Strategy Implementation involves all those means related to executing the strategic plans.
In short, Strategy Formulation is placing the Forces before the action.	In short, Strategy Implementation is managing forces during the action.
Strategy Formulation is an Entrepreneurial Activity based on strategic decision-making.	Strategic Implementation is mainly an Administrative Task based on strategic and operational decisions.
Strategy Formulation emphasizes on effectiveness.	Strategy Implementation emphasizes on efficiency.
Strategy Formulation is a rational process.	Strategy Implementation is basically an operational process.
Strategy Formulation requires co-ordination among few individuals.	Strategy Implementation requires co-ordination among many individuals.
Strategy Formulation requires a great deal of initiative and logical skills.	Strategy Implementation requires specific motivational and leadership traits.
Strategic Formulation precedes Strategy Implementation.	STrategy Implementation follows Strategy Formulation.

Strategy Evaluation Process and its Significance

Strategy Evaluation is as significant as strategy formulation because it throws light on the efficiency and effectiveness of the comprehensive plans in achieving the desired results. The managers can also assess the appropriateness of the current strategy in today's dynamic world with socio-economic, political and technological innovations. Strategic Evaluation is the final phase of strategic management.

The significance of strategy evaluation lies in its capacity to co-ordinate the task performed by managers, groups, departments etc, through control of performance.

Strategic Evaluation is significant because of various factors such as - developing inputs for new strategic planning, the urge for feedback, appraisal and reward, development of the strategic management process, judging the validity of strategic choice etc.

The process of Strategy Evaluation consists of following steps-

1. **Fixing benchmark of performance** - While fixing the benchmark, strategists encounter questions such as - what benchmarks to set, how to set them and how to express them. In order to determine the benchmark performance to be set, it is essential to discover the special requirements for performing the main task. The performance indicator that best identifies and expresses the special requirements might then be determined to be used for evaluation. The organization can use both quantitative and qualitative criteria for comprehensive assessment of performance. Quantitative criteria includes determination of net profit, ROI, earning per share, cost of production, rate of employee turnover etc. Among the Qualitative factors are subjective evaluation of factors such as - skills and competencies, risk taking potential, flexibility etc.
2. **Measurement of performance** - The standard performance is a bench mark with which the actual performance is to be compared. The reporting and communication system help in measuring the performance. If appropriate means are available for

measuring the performance and if the standards are set in the right manner, strategy evaluation becomes easier. But various factors such as managers contribution are difficult to measure. Similarly divisional performance is sometimes difficult to measure as compared to individual performance. Thus, variable objectives must be created against which measurement of performance can be done. The measurement must be done at right time else evaluation will not meet its purpose. For measuring the performance, financial statements like - balance sheet, profit and loss account must be prepared on an annual basis.

३. **Analyzing Variance** - While measuring the actual performance and comparing it with standard performance there may be variances which must be analyzed. The strategists must mention the degree of tolerance limits between which the variance between actual and standard performance may be accepted. The positive deviation indicates a better performance but it is quite unusual exceeding the target always. The negative deviation is an issue of concern because it indicates a shortfall in performance. Thus in this case the strategists must discover the causes of deviation and must take corrective action to overcome it.
४. **Taking Corrective Action** - Once the deviation in performance is identified, it is essential to plan for a corrective action. If the performance is consistently less than the desired performance, the strategists must carry a detailed analysis of the factors responsible for such performance. If the strategists discover that the organizational potential does not match with the performance requirements, then the standards must be lowered. Another rare and drastic corrective action is reformulating the strategy which requires going back to the process of strategic management, reframing of plans according to new resource allocation trend and consequent means going to the beginning point of strategic management process.

Strategic Decisions - Definition and Characteristics

Strategic decisions are the decisions that are concerned with whole environment in which the firm operates, the entire resources and the people who form the company and the interface between the two.

Characteristics/Features of Strategic Decisions

- a. Strategic decisions have major resource propositions for an organization. These decisions may be concerned with possessing new resources, organizing others or reallocating others.
- b. Strategic decisions deal with harmonizing organizational resource capabilities with the threats and opportunities.
- c. Strategic decisions deal with the range of organizational activities. It is all about what they want the organization to be like and to be about.
- d. Strategic decisions involve a change of major kind since an organization operates in ever-changing environment.
- e. Strategic decisions are complex in nature.
- f. Strategic decisions are at the top most level, are uncertain as they deal with the future, and involve a lot of risk.
- g. Strategic decisions are different from administrative and operational decisions. Administrative decisions are routine decisions which help or rather facilitate strategic decisions or operational decisions. Operational decisions are technical decisions which help execution of strategic decisions. To reduce cost is a strategic decision which is achieved through operational decision of reducing the number of employees and how we carry out these reductions will be administrative decision.

The differences between Strategic, Administrative and Operational decisions can be summarized as follows-

Strategic Decisions	Operational Decisions	Administrative Decisions
Strategic decisions are long-term decisions.	Operational decisions are not frequently taken.	Administrative decisions are taken daily.
These are considered where The future planning is concerned.	These are medium-period based decisions.	These are short-term based Decisions.
Strategic decisions are taken in Accordance with organizational mission and vision.	These are taken in accordance with strategic and administrative decision.	These are taken according to strategic and operational Decisions.
These are related to overall Counter planning of all Organization.	These are related to production.	These are related to working of employees in an Organization.
These deal with organizational Growth.	These are related to production and factory growth.	These are in welfare of employees working in an organization.

Benefits of Strategic Management

There are many benefits of strategic management and they include identification, prioritization, and exploration of opportunities. For instance, newer products, newer markets, and newer forays into business lines are only possible if firms indulge in strategic planning. Next, strategic management allows firms to take an objective view of

the activities being done by it and do a cost benefit analysis as to whether the firm is profitable.

Just to differentiate, by this, we do not mean the financial benefits alone (which would be discussed below) but also the assessment of profitability that has to do with evaluating whether the business is strategically aligned to its goals and priorities.

The key point to be noted here is that strategic management allows a firm to orient itself to its market and consumers and ensure that it is actualizing the right strategy.

Financial Benefits

It has been shown in many studies that firms that engage in strategic management are more profitable and successful than those that do not have the benefit of strategic planning and strategic management.

When firms engage in forward looking planning and careful evaluation of their priorities, they have control over the future, which is necessary in the fast changing business landscape of the 21st century.

It has been estimated that more than 100,000 businesses fail in the US every year and most of these failures are to do with a lack of strategic focus and strategic direction. Further, high performing firms tend to make more informed decisions because they have considered both the short term and long-term consequences and hence, have oriented their strategies accordingly. In contrast, firms that do not engage themselves in meaningful strategic planning are often bogged down by internal problems and lack of focus that leads to failure.

Non-Financial Benefits

The section above discussed some of the tangible benefits of strategic management. Apart from these benefits, firms that engage in strategic management are more aware of the external threats, an improved understanding of competitor strengths and weaknesses

and increased employee productivity. They also have lesser resistance to change and a clear understanding of the link between performance and rewards.

The key aspect of strategic management is that the problem solving and problem preventing capabilities of the firms are enhanced through strategic management. Strategic management is essential as it helps firms to rationalize change and actualize change and communicate the need to change better to its employees. Finally, strategic management helps in bringing order and discipline to the activities of the firm in its both internal processes and external activities.

Closing Thoughts

In recent years, virtually all firms have realized the importance of strategic management. However, the key difference between those who succeed and those who fail is that the way in which strategic management is done and strategic planning is carried out makes the difference between success and failure. Of course, there are still firms that do not engage in strategic planning or where the planners do not receive the support from management. These firms ought to realize the benefits of strategic management and ensure their longer-term viability and success in the marketplace.

Business Policy - Definition and Features

Definition of Business Policy

Business Policy defines the scope or spheres within which decisions can be taken by the subordinates in an organization. It permits the lower level management to deal with the problems and issues without consulting top level management every time for decisions.

Business policies are the guidelines developed by an organization to govern its actions. They define the limits within which decisions must be made. Business policy also deals with acquisition of resources with which organizational goals can be achieved. Business policy is the study of the roles and responsibilities of top level management, the

significant issues affecting organizational success and the decisions affecting organization in long-run.

Features of Business Policy

An effective business policy must have following features-

١. **Specific-** Policy should be specific/definite. If it is uncertain, then the implementation will become difficult.
٢. **Clear-** Policy must be unambiguous. It should avoid use of jargons and connotations. There should be no misunderstandings in following the policy.
٣. **Reliable/Uniform-** Policy must be uniform enough so that it can be efficiently followed by the subordinates.
٤. **Appropriate-** Policy should be appropriate to the present organizational goal.
٥. **Simple-** A policy should be simple and easily understood by all in the organization.
٦. **Inclusive/Comprehensive-** In order to have a wide scope, a policy must be comprehensive.
٧. **Flexible-** Policy should be flexible in operation/application. This does not imply that a policy should be altered always, but it should be wide in scope so as to ensure that the line managers use them in repetitive/routine scenarios.
٨. **Stable-** Policy should be stable else it will lead to indecisiveness and uncertainty in minds of those who look into it for guidance.

Difference between Policy and Strategy

The term “policy” should not be considered as synonymous to the term “strategy”. The **difference between policy and strategy** can be summarized as follows-

١. Policy is a blueprint of the organizational activities which are repetitive/routine in nature. While strategy is concerned with those organizational decisions which have not been dealt/faced before in same form.

- २. Policy formulation is responsibility of top level management. While strategy formulation is basically done by middle level management.
- ३. Policy deals with routine/daily activities essential for effective and efficient running of an organization. While strategy deals with strategic decisions.
- ४. Policy is concerned with both thought and actions. While strategy is concerned mostly with action.
- ५. A policy is what is, or what is not done. While a strategy is the methodology used to achieve a target as prescribed by a policy

BCG Matrix

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Matrix is a four celled matrix (a 2 * 2 matrix) developed by BCG, USA. It is the most renowned corporate portfolio analysis tool. It provides a graphic representation for an organization to examine different businesses in its portfolio on the basis of their related market share and industry growth rates. It is a two dimensional analysis on management of SBU's (Strategic Business Units). In other words, it is a comparative analysis of business potential and the evaluation of environment.

According to this matrix, business could be classified as high or low according to their industry growth rate and relative market share.

Relative Market Share = SBU Strategic Business Units

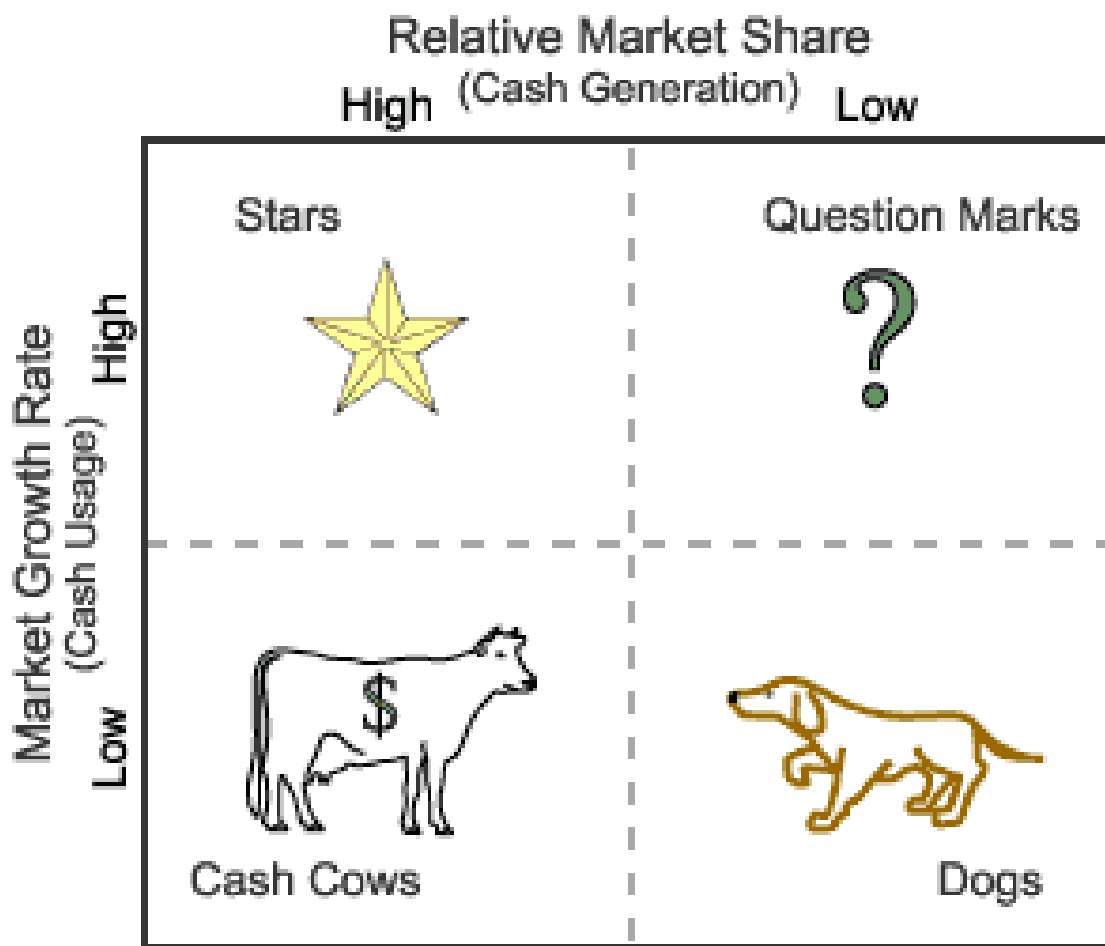
Sales this year leading competitors sales this year.

Market Growth Rate = Industry sales this year - Industry Sales last year.

The analysis requires that both measures be calculated for each SBU. The dimension of business strength, relative market share, will measure comparative advantage indicated

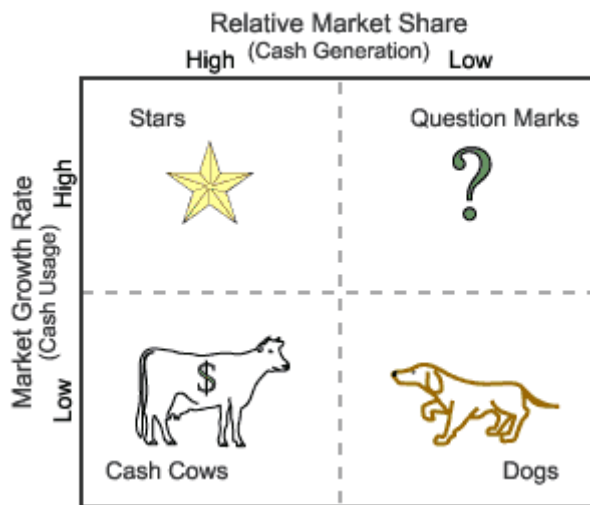
by market dominance. The key theory underlying this is existence of an experience curve and that market share is achieved due to overall cost leadership.

BCG matrix has four cells, with the horizontal axis representing relative market share and the vertical axis denoting market growth rate. The mid-point of relative market share is set at 1.0. if all the SBU's are in same industry, the average growth rate of the industry is used. While, if all the SBU's are located in different industries, then the mid-point is set at the growth rate for the economy.



Resources are allocated to the business units according to their situation on the grid. The four cells of this matrix have been called as stars, cash cows, question marks and dogs. Each of these cells represents a particular type of business.

<p>1-Stars- Stars represent business units having</p> <p>large market share & high growth market share === huge investment</p>	<p>2. Cash having a large market share in a mature, but slow growing industry</p> <p>Cash cows</p> <p>===little investment & follow stability strategies.</p>
<p>3. Question Marks-</p> <p>having low relative market share and located in a high growth industry. They require huge amount of cash</p> <p>There is no specific strategy</p> <p>huge investment</p> <p>= face cost disadvantages</p> <p>have weak market share because of high costs, poor quality, ineffective marketing</p>	<p>4. Dogs</p> <p>weak market shares in low-growth markets.</p> <p>They neither generate cash nor require huge amount of cash.</p>



10 x

1 x

0.1 x

Figure: BCG Matrix

1. **Stars-** Stars represent business units having large market share in a fast growing industry. They may generate cash but because of fast growing market, stars require huge investments to maintain their lead. Net cash flow is usually modest. SBU's located in this cell are attractive as they are located in a robust industry and these business units are highly competitive in the industry. If successful, a star will become a cash cow when the industry matures.
2. **Cash Cows-** Cash Cows represents business units having a large market share in a mature, slow growing industry. Cash cows require little investment and generate cash that can be utilized for investment in other business units. These SBU's are the corporation's key source of cash, and are specifically the core business. They are the base of an organization. These businesses usually follow stability strategies. When cash cows lose their appeal and move towards deterioration, then a retrenchment policy may be pursued.
3. **Question Marks-** Question marks represent business units having low relative market share and located in a high growth industry. They require huge amount of cash to maintain or gain market share. They require attention to determine if the

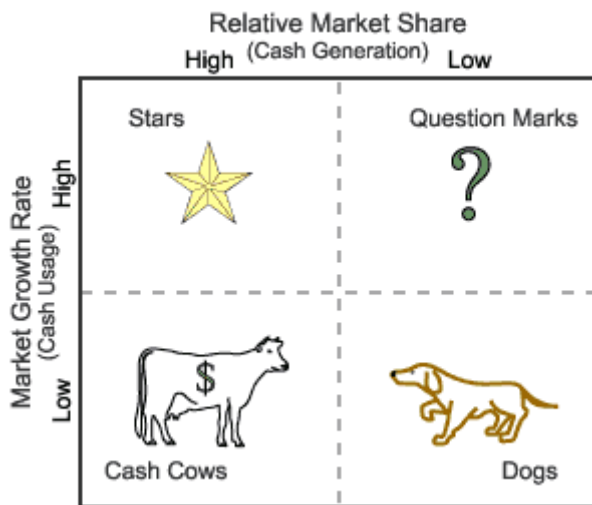
venture can be viable. Question marks are generally new goods and services which have a good commercial prospective. There is no specific strategy which can be adopted. If the firm thinks it has dominant market share, then it can adopt expansion strategy, else retrenchment strategy can be adopted. Most businesses start as question marks as the company tries to enter a high growth market in which there is already a market-share. If ignored, then question marks may become dogs, while if huge investment is made, then they have potential of becoming stars.

- ξ. **Dogs-** Dogs represent businesses having weak market shares in low-growth markets. They neither generate cash nor require huge amount of cash. Due to low market share, these business units face cost disadvantages. Generally retrenchment strategies are adopted because these firms can gain market share only at the expense of competitor's/rival firms. These business firms have weak market share because of high costs, poor quality, ineffective marketing, etc. Unless a dog has some other strategic aim, it should be liquidated if there is fewer prospects for it to gain market share. Number of dogs should be avoided and minimized in an organization.

Limitations of BCG Matrix

The BCG Matrix produces a framework for allocating resources among different business units and makes it possible to compare many business units at a glance. But BCG Matrix is not free from limitations, such as-

- ١. BCG matrix classifies businesses as low and high, but generally businesses can be medium also. Thus, the true nature of business may not be reflected.
- ٢. Market is not clearly defined in this model.



- २. High market share does not always leads to high profits. There are high costs also involved with high market share.
- ३. Growth rate and relative market share are not the only indicators of profitability. This model ignores and overlooks other indicators of profitability.
- ४. At times, dogs may help other businesses in gaining competitive advantage. They can earn even more than cash cows sometimes.
- ५. This four-celled approach is considered as to be too simplistic.

SWOT Analysis - Definition, Advantages and Limitations

SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. By definition, Strengths (S) and Weaknesses (W) are considered to be internal factors over which you have some measure of control. Also, by definition, Opportunities (O) and Threats (T) are considered to be external factors over which you have essentially no control.

SWOT Analysis is the most renowned tool for audit and analysis of the overall strategic position of the business and its environment. Its key purpose is to identify the strategies

that will create a firm specific business model that will best align an organization's resources and capabilities to the requirements of the environment in which the firm operates.

In other words, it is the foundation for evaluating the internal potential and limitations and the probable/likely opportunities and threats from the external environment. It views all positive and negative factors inside and outside the firm that affect the success. A consistent study of the environment in which the firm operates helps in forecasting/predicting the changing trends and also helps in including them in the decision-making process of the organization.

An overview of the four factors (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is given below-

1. **Strengths** - Strengths are the qualities that enable us to accomplish the organization's mission. These are the basis on which continued success can be made and continued/sustained.

Strengths can be either tangible or intangible. These are what you are well-versed in or what you have expertise in, the traits and qualities your employees possess (individually and as a team) and the distinct features that give your organization its consistency.

Strengths are the beneficial aspects of the organization or the capabilities of an organization, which includes human competencies, process capabilities, financial resources, products and services, customer goodwill and brand loyalty. Examples of organizational strengths are huge financial resources, broad product line, no debt, committed employees, etc.

2. **Weaknesses** - Weaknesses are the qualities that prevent us from accomplishing our mission and achieving our full potential. These weaknesses deteriorate influences on

the organizational success and growth. Weaknesses are the factors which do not meet the standards we feel they should meet.

Weaknesses in an organization may be depreciating machinery, insufficient research and development facilities, narrow product range, poor decision-making, etc. Weaknesses are controllable. They must be minimized and eliminated. For instance - to overcome obsolete machinery, new machinery can be purchased. Other examples of organizational weaknesses are huge debts, high employee turnover, complex decision making process, large wastage of raw materials, etc.

- ३. **Opportunities** - Opportunities are presented by the environment within which our organization operates. These arise when an organization can take benefit of conditions in its environment to plan and execute strategies that enable it to become more profitable. Organizations can gain competitive advantage by making use of opportunities.

Organization should be careful and recognize the opportunities and grasp them whenever they arise. Selecting the targets that will best serve the clients while getting desired results is a difficult task. Opportunities may arise from market, competition, industry/government and technology. Increasing demand for telecommunications accompanied by deregulation is a great opportunity for new firms to enter telecom sector and compete with existing firms for revenue.

- ४. **Threats** - Threats arise when conditions in external environment jeopardize the reliability and profitability of the organization's business. They compound the vulnerability when they relate to the weaknesses. Threats are uncontrollable. When a threat comes, the stability and survival can be at stake. Examples of threats are -

unrest among employees; ever changing technology; increasing competition leading to excess capacity, price wars and reducing industry profits; etc.

Advantages of SWOT Analysis

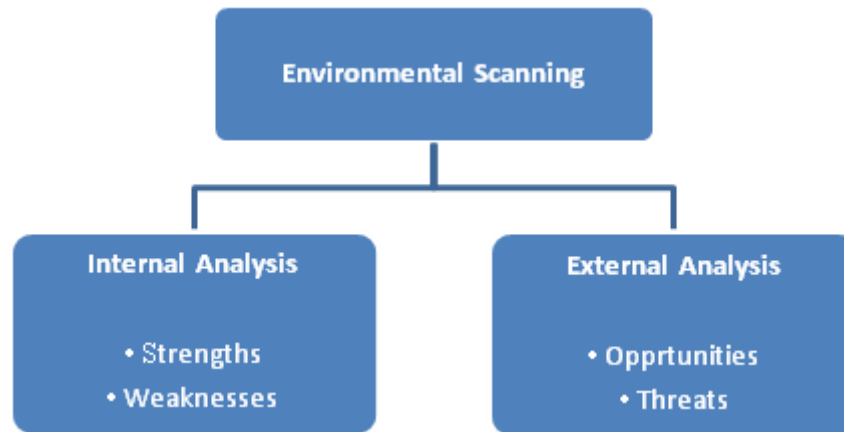
SWOT Analysis is instrumental in strategy formulation and selection. It is a strong tool, but it involves a great subjective element. It is best when used as a guide, and not as a prescription. Successful businesses build on their strengths, correct their weakness and protect against internal weaknesses and external threats. They also keep a watch on their overall business environment and recognize and exploit new opportunities faster than its competitors.

SWOT Analysis helps in strategic planning in following manner-

- a. It is a source of information for strategic planning.
- b. Builds organization's strengths.
- c. Reverse its weaknesses.
- d. Maximize its response to opportunities.
- e. Overcome organization's threats.
- f. It helps in identifying core competencies of the firm.
- g. It helps in setting of objectives for strategic planning.
- h. It helps in knowing past, present and future so that by using past and current data, future plans can be chalked out.

SWOT Analysis provide information that helps in synchronizing the firm's resources and capabilities with the competitive environment in which the firm operates.

SWOT ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK



Limitations of SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is not free from its limitations. SWOT Analysis may cause organizations to view circumstances as very simple because of which the organizations might overlook certain key strategic contact which may occur. Moreover, categorizing aspects as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats might be very subjective as there is great degree of uncertainty in market. SWOT Analysis does stress upon the significance of these four aspects, but it does not tell how an organization can identify these aspects for itself.

