



Research Paper

## Stractics instead of strategic management

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### I. Introduction

Traditionally, business operations are carried out in accordance with the adopted strategy which sets the goals as well as determines how and when to achieve them. Methods of determining the organization's strategy have a fairly long history and are widely known and used. The application of new technology in management processes has resulted in a significantly shortened horizon of strategic planning and in the modified strategy development methods. It seems that taking advantage of methodological experience used while implementing IT solutions can be applied when developing the organization's strategy.

More and more often we come across the phrase "now nothing will be the same as it was before" in reference to the operation of companies or organizations, behavior patterns or various activities that have changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. The need to modify existing solutions arises from the need to change the style of functioning under the pandemic conditions. Extreme situations necessitate rapid adaptation to new conditions, which often means no return to the old solutions. The environment in which we are functioning undergoes irreversible changes, and certain processes that were previously implemented in an evolutionary manner gain significant momentum.

Due to the pandemic, broadly understood digitalization, accompanied by the implementation of ICT communication, has dominated social and economic life. Traditional operating methods have been quickly replaced by IT solutions, skipping the natural for such processes phase of preparation, training and implementation of processes that allow for normal activity. The Covid-19 pandemic and war obviously disrupted the functioning of companies and organizations. The need to change the existing modus operandi occurred almost overnight, for which most companies had not been prepared.

The radical and very rapid change caused by the anti-covid strictures has disrupted the implementation of the adopted and consistently implemented strategies. The question arises as to whether it will be possible to return to the previously established and implemented operating strategy once the restrictions disappear. In most cases, the principle will apply that "... nothing will be the same as it was before", which impels to take a new look at the adopted strategy and quickly develop a new one that will adapt the company operations to new conditions. The dynamics of change and the widespread use of new technology will force a new approach to managing the organization's operation. What can be valuable here is the experience of teams implementing management processes in situations when new technologies are applied. It seems that knowledge gained from the development of IT project management methodologies can be quite relevant as it is there where we can see the growing popularity of agile methods. (Szyjewski, 2004, Trocki, 2017)

It seems reasonable to ask whether it is at all possible to return to traditional strategy building where well-known and widely used methods are employed; whether the existing methods of strategy building and the traditional methods of achieving objectives through planning, task division and their consistent implementation will prove effective in the new, post-pandemic conditions. If the thesis that "nothing will be the same as it was before" is justified, then it is necessary to take an entirely new look at the company organization and operations, at the adaptation to the new landscape and business environment, at seeking new methods of setting business objectives and preparing the way to achieve them. The change should concern not only the modus operandi resulting from the solutions adopted during the pandemic, but also a different approach to building strategies and its further implementation in practice<sup>1</sup>.

It seems that the agile approach, which is gaining popularity and is widely used in the methodological approach to the implementation of IT projects, can also be applied to organization management.

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<sup>1</sup> Of great interest is the experience resulting from the pandemic period and the functioning of sales and marketing during that period published in a special issue of ICAN Management Review titled "Agility Begins with Sales" (ICAN, April - May 2021)

### **Strategic management objectives and methods**

Usually, the basic tool that determines the objectives and directions of companies' and organizations' operations is strategy which, after being developed and approved, sets out in detail the tasks to be implemented over a long period of time. The construction of strategy and its consistent implementation and execution by individual agendas of the company or organization constitute strategic management.

According to Alfred Chandler's classic definition, strategic management means defining long-term goals, directions, and methods of an enterprise in the context of allocating its resources. (Nasierowski, 2018, 13) Strategic management is also an information and decision-making process that is supported by such business operations as planning, organization, motivation and control. It is designed to help to solve problems concerning company growth and survival while taking into consideration the impact of the environment. (Sołtysik, 2016, 224)

In general, strategic management is supposed to reduce uncertainty resulting from a long time horizon and set a course of action. By default, we assume relative stability of the business environment. Sequentially implemented stages are distinguished with possible modifications over the implementation and execution process. (Romanowska, 2017) These stages consist of:

- Strategic planning, where on the basis of the analysis and diagnosis of the track records as well as the present and predicted state, goals are set and ways to achieve them are decided,
- Strategy implementation, which involves the decomposition of objectives into specific actions; their detailed planning; preparation of resources and conditions for action; and subsequent implementation of these actions,
- Monitoring of operations and verification of compliance with the established assumptions, possibly followed by any modification necessary due to changes in the business environment; and, last but not least, adjusting deviations from the approved plan.

What is crucial for implementing the company's mission and achieving the expected acceptable market position is the phase of strategic planning and applying working methods and techniques appropriate at this stage. The analysis of the past and current company's standing, and the resulting diagnosis for the future, are critical factors deciding about its success or failure. At this stage of works on strategy, well-known and widely used methods are employed, such as:

- SWOT,
- Porter's 5 Forces,
- BCG Matrix,
- Benchmarking,

The aforementioned methods are most often used to analyze a company's strategic position and to identify its future growth prospects. Forecasting the changes can be of quantitative and qualitative character and follows the analysis of trends and the company's position in the business environment.

SWOT is one of the basic methods of strategic analysis. Its name is an acronym of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The basic assumptions of the method were described by Harvard Business School employees in their work (Learned et al., 1965) published in the 1960s. The method quickly gained popularity in the American market, and then, after modifications and additions, it became one of the most popular methods of strategic analysis. (Jackson, et al., 2003, 801-830)

The analysis consists of an assessment of the company's internal situation and external position in the economic market, based on available historical data as well as on the evaluators' experience and forecasts. The company's strengths are assessed, as well as what should be improved, i.e. its weaknesses. Basing on anticipated market development directions and the changes being implemented in the company, chances of success are assessed as well as the perceived or anticipated threats. The results and observations of the participants in the analysis are grouped in a matrix. (Source: Cabała, et al., 2016)

It is noteworthy that decisions are based on accumulated historical data and past experience and facts that relate to the past situation. In case of a radical change in the business environment, they do not have sufficient value for developmental decisions. Currently, most often the accumulated data and experience come from the pre-pandemic period. The analyses of these data and the resulting conclusions are of little use in the post-pandemic reality, where operating conditions have changed radically and it has become necessary to radically shorten the time perspective.

Porter's 5 Forces is another method of strategic analysis that is very popular and often used in the processes of building a company's operating strategy. This method focuses on studying the business environment in which the company is operating. It assesses the company's position in relation to competitors operating in the same area of economic activity. This concept was proposed by Michael E. Porter in 1979 and focuses on determining the company's position in a given economic sector and on analyzing its competitiveness in relation to other market actors. (Gierszewska, Romanowska, 2002)

Porter's model examines the impact of 5 forces on the business market as well as the company's position in this competition. These forces are as follows:

- Rivalry among the existing competitors,
- Bargaining power of suppliers,
- Bargaining power of buyers,
- Product or service substitutes, the emergence of which could threaten the balance of power,
- Potential new entrants to the sector.

The positioning of a given company and the determined values of individual forces provide the basis for strategic development decisions in the future. The analysis of the economic sector in which the company operates is based on data referring to the past. The assessment of impact forces in the previously mentioned areas is therefore of historical nature and does not take into account the current situation in the sector.

The changes in the structure and the behavior of the economic market that are the consequence of the pandemic cannot be included in the assessments made today. Therefore, it is not possible to include in Porter's forces assessment the significant changes in the new business situation. Radical changes concern both the internal situation of the company as well as the company's competition and business environment. Conclusions that have been drawn on the basis of Porter's forces so assessed, and thus providing grounds for a strategy for further company operation, may significantly differ from the current situation taking place in the sector it is operating in.

The BCG matrix, applied by the Boston Consulting Group in 1969, allows for assessing the opportunities and directions of a company's development and for identifying its strategic position. The assessment is focused on the company's products and their current evaluation, i.e. their qualification to the appropriate cell of the matrix according to their current position and market evaluation. (Oblój, 1993)

Naturally, the company's products do not have a fixed position in the matrix, but depending on the product's development phase they move from one cell to the next. The current state of the product depends on its market situation which has effect on how it influences the company's situation.

Most often, products are initially placed in the cell called *stars* where new products are placed that are likely to become market hits but require large financial outlays for promotion and production. When their market position stabilizes, they may become *milk cow* bringing substantial and stable benefits to the company. The *question mark* cell groups products that are in short supply and have a low market share. Their prospects are unclear and depend on active promotion and market developments. They can become *stars* or *dogs*. This cell contains scarce products, which do not bring the expected benefits and their market position is low. Most often in this group we find products in a declining phase of development or failed ventures of a company.

The dynamics of changes in the positioning of products in particular cells depends very strongly on the business environment and market behavior. The post-pandemic situation is so indeterminate and poorly predictable that the positioning of products in the matrix is a big unknown. Historical data from the stabilized market period are of little use and the dynamics and indeterminacy of market directions are strongly blurred and volatile.

Benchmarking is a management method that involves comparing a company with its competitors, particularly with the recognized market leaders. Comparison with competitors is supposed to encourage copying good solutions and to prevent failures. Systematic comparison and quick reaction to observed phenomena helps to avoid bad decisions, to modify one's own solutions and to outperform the competition. (Martyniak, 2002, Zairi, Al.-Mashari, 2005)

Benchmarking is a method to perfect processes and organizations by introducing changes resulting from the observation of competitors' performance and by creatively implementing best practices. Of course, benchmarking is multidirectional and is carried out in stages, starting with the planning stage, where we define the object of examination and choose the method of examination as well as the competitors to whom we will compare ourselves. Then we conduct research by collecting data from a certain period, which we then compare with ours, identifying the deviation and moving on to the analysis of the expected results. The next stage is integration, where the results of the comparisons allow us to define the functional objectives of our activity. In the final stage, we implement solutions and monitor the process as well as control of the effects of the implemented solutions.

The turmoil caused by the pandemic obviously affects all market participants and therefore there is no stable benchmark to which the data being compared can be related. In addition, the pandemic has led to severe market disruption and hence it is difficult to assess the market positions of the competitors selected for comparison. An unstable post-pandemic situation offers a good chance to achieve a high competitive position if appropriate and market-acceptable measures are taken that do not result from imitating previous leaders or copying solutions that have been proven effective in the past.

A cursory review of the methods used in the process of building the company's operating strategy indicates a strong reference to historical data and past experience, as well as to the course of action that prevailed in the past. Referring to the past and drawing conclusions from historical data is justified when operating conditions are stable. However, in the situation when we agree that "... *nothing will be the same as it was before*" the applicability of such approach is not only doubtful, but it may lead to completely false conclusions and to decisions that have no *raison d'être* in the new situation.

### **Determinants of method use in post-pandemic times**

The return to business activity after the pandemic poses a new challenge for many companies that have survived the difficult period of suspended business activity and are beginning to function in new conditions, having to face the new situation in their business environment. Under what new conditions will companies operate in the post-pandemic time? Which of the existing data, operating methods, behavior patterns and operating conditions will remain unchanged or the change will be minor, and which are subject to dramatic changes and need to be completely reorganized? These key questions should form the basis for building the company's strategy in the post-pandemic period.

Traditionally, strategic management and setting the direction of the company's long-term activity is most often based on forecasting the expectations and behavior of the company's customers and business environment. The expectations are formed and the forecasts are created on the basis of collected and specially acquired data about future customer behavior and future business situation. The most commonly used method of obtaining these data is a survey. The reliability of data obtained from a variety of surveys supporting the process of building a company strategy is rather questionable. (Szyjewska-Bagińska, Szyjewski, 2018) The poor reliability of the data obtained by means of the survey method should be further attributed to the respondents' most likely manner of reasoning, as most of their reactions are influenced by previous experience which may prove irrelevant in new operating conditions.

Historical data, which is used by the most popular methods of building company strategy, are of course the resource on which analyses and business decisions are founded. However, their interpretation and conclusions concerning their effect on future activities should be modified. The collected data is subject to interpretation in reference to the known business environment conditions, but this has changed radically and therefore the conclusions prior drawn must also be revised and very often completely changed.

When taking into account the poor reliability of data collected by survey methods, which results from the intentional way of answering questions, it should also be remembered that, while answering, the respondents referred to a different reality. These factors that weigh down the historical data make the collected information of relatively low value for the methods applied because these methods take the past behavior and operating conditions as the basis for future strategic decision making.

The consequence of changed style of doing business and the rapid growth of electronic communication in all areas of life in the pandemic times is the fast development and extensive use of IT means. The IT solutions, that were previously introduced cautiously and with appropriate prior training and organizational preparation, had to quickly and effectively replace the traditional methods of remote communication with all its implications. Digitization of documents and dematerialization of everything possible resulted in significant changes in behavior patterns and day-to-day business operations.

The dynamic development of ICT accompanied by progressive improvement of infrastructure are a driving force behind the modern trend oriented at advancement of information solutions which is present in diverse domains of economic and social life. The 5G networks, allowing for a meaningful and user-satisfying use of communication and high-speed data transfer, are here to stay, leading to a new style of business communication with all the consequent implications. The use of augmented reality or the Internet of Things has brought significant cultural changes that will permanently alter behavior patterns and ways of responding. Mobile technology, aided by effective video imaging, both coming along with the ever-improving ICT infrastructure, signify fundamental changes in business operations. (Ostruszka, 2021)

The pandemic has made remote work the primary mode of communication for both business, social interaction and even entertainment and learning. Young people, who had already been extensively using the electronic means of communication, switched almost completely to living in the realms of the Internet during the pandemic. Basic school activities moved to the digital world and remote communication, as well as all other sports, entertainment, or social activities were done through mobile devices by means of electronic communication and powerful applications. The change of a lifestyle at such young age will have very serious implications for the future. The fact of radically re-modelled behavior and reactions of the future user cannot be ignored when deciding on future strategies.

New ICT solutions and their widespread use, both in professional, social and private life, have proven not only to completely change the organization of work and procedures, but very often to significantly reduce costs. The wider the use of new technology, the greater the savings. Of course there are necessary initial



investment costs and additional effort to train staff in order to learn the details of new technological solutions, but their later use results not only in lower expenses, but also in time savings and in improved comfort of work. Accelerated implementation of ICT solutions due to the pandemic strictures proved to be very attractive and effective in economic terms. In practice, despite the gradual lifting of the anti-pandemic regulations, general interest in new ICT and the actual number of its users is growing.

These additional benefits, that manifested themselves in a relatively short period of time, have become a permanent element of our lifestyle and our companies' day-to-day operations, disregarding our age or social status. Of course such a radical change, driven by a pandemic conditions, has not been advantageous for everyone. There are some actors on the market who, for various reasons, have failed to implement new solutions and now the environment that has already switched to modern technologies have become inaccessible for them. Digital exclusion is a social problem but rapid technological changes and radical change of lifestyle forced by the pandemic are unstoppable and therefore the creation of current strategies requires new thinking where referring to previously employed methods and data is of little use.

### **Stractics - a new approach in management**

Fundamental changes have occurred due to the dynamic development and spread of digitization and ICT applications. The first symptoms of the change in the approach to planning and setting courses of action could already be seen in areas where the use of new ICT solutions and the digital economy was relatively broader. Planning periods were becoming much shorter and the response to changes in the business environment became relatively faster. Articles and statements announced by business people pointed to the rapid response to the dynamically changing business environment. (ICAN, April - May 2021) Traditional approaches aimed at building an operating strategy and consistently executing it over the long period of time were proving less and less practical and prompted the implementation of agile solutions.

This trend is clearly seen in the approach to creating IT solutions (Szyjewski, 2020). The popularity of adaptive programming methods and the development of agile methods for creating IT solutions have progressed concurrently with the dynamics of the Internet development and applications. (extremeprogramming.org, Chabik, 2002) Traditional methodologies, called heavyweight, are being replaced by agile approaches like SCRUM. (Szyjewski, 2004, Trocki, 2017) The majority of new IT solutions is developed with the use of the agile approach, which is now becoming the methodological standard for developing ICT solutions.

The popularity of agile management which has replaced traditional action planning while implementing IT solutions is due to dynamically developing technology and environment for the production of IT solutions, which resulted in turn in the need to shorten the planning periods and in numerous modifications to the already adopted long-term plans. An equivalent situation occurred in the case of companies which were introducing more and more IT solutions and, consequently, their day-to-day operations were subject to the same changes.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly accelerated these processes and traditional development of strategies and long-term plans proved to be of little use in the rapidly changing business environment. The search for new approaches to the functioning of companies and organizations has led to the emergence of stractics. (Outram, 2016) Changes resulting from the technological revolution are transforming strategy from a linear process to an interactive one in which strategy and tactics intersect to form a new construct referred to as stractics. This innovative approach is changing the traditional static approach to executing developed and written plans to a modern one that responds to current needs and behavior patterns in nearly real-time.

Traditional methods of strategy development based on historical data of doubtful reliability must be replaced with dynamically collected and processed current data that are immediately analyzed with the use of digital algorithms in order to make short-term decisions adequate to existing operating conditions. It does not exclude setting and meeting long-term goals, but their importance and effect on current business activities and operational decisions have eroded. The time horizon of plans being developed has been significantly shortened. New methods of data collection with the use of digital technologies combined with IT algorithms employed to process data and draw conclusions allow for faster and more accurate decision making.

In the new conditions of business competition, innovation has become a natural driving force. Broadly defined, innovation is often called "*reinventing oneself*", which means far-reaching changes in not only the operating methods but also in procedures, planning processes and business behavior. (Outram, 2016) The innovative approach to strategic planning calls for new data, collected differently than before in order to enhance their reliability; new methods for analyzing these data, a different approach and computer aided inference; and more importantly, a shorter time horizon for plans as well as their flexibility that will allow the company to promptly respond to the dynamics of the changing business environment. (Szyjewski, 2020)

Widespread use of information technology in businesses should be focused not only on supporting structures and procedures that are essential to the functioning of the organization but also on the customer and service efficiency as well as on examining their present needs and expectations. This new look at the applied IT solutions requires a different approach to the numerous processes implemented in a conventional way.

Computer support should be provided not only to algorithm-aided routine procedures but also to conceptual, growth-oriented activities performed with the use of modern hardware and technical and software solutions in order to create dynamic plans and strategies. The flexibility, agility of these plans, their relatively short time horizon, and their ability to cope with the high dynamics of change within the business environment are the basic premises of the new approach, which stem from the experience of the pandemic period.

Digital assets and ICT solutions must be integrated with the physical assets and company customers thus creating an integrated business model. IT and digitalization should not be a means in itself, but an effective tool to achieve the adopted business goals in the new information technology environment. They also necessitate a change of mindset and procedural flexibility in most job positions, in particular in the relationship between the company and its customers. New technologies should ensure customer participation, not only in the current business operation. It also should have an impact on the strategies being built through a reliable examination of customer expectations and needs. These changes are not easy to implement because they require extensive amendments that affect the whole organization and almost every employee. The new quality of work and thinking applies to every position, which is a serious limitation especially for large organizations. Hence the indication of de-concentration and favoring small task teams. A fast-paced digital environment supporting the organization's operations should be built into the company's structures.

Stractics, which intertwines strategy and tactics, combines elements of the traditional approach with the new operating environment. Thus, strategy becomes a fluid concept with multiple shifts in direction and alterations to the business model. It is no longer a long-term action plan written down into shorter periods and goals, but the direction of actions tested as to its effectiveness in short, often quarterly, cycles of assessing the results of operations and as to possible modifications or adjustments. Outram Ch. in his work (2016, 123-132) proposes a four-stage cycle:

- Start with a bold vision,
- Adopt 90-day strategic goals for each team in the organization and revise them every 90 days,
- Refresh and revise your financial plans annually,
- Introduce new indicators of success.

Such a management model replicates the agile approach known from the methodologies used for implementing ICT solutions.

## **II. Summary**

High-impact events that occur unexpectedly give start to accelerated change that would normally take a long, evolutionary course. The instance of such an event is the Covid-19 pandemic which has considerably accelerated the digitization process and the widespread use of ICT. With the restrictions on personal mobility and communication in place, the wide use of remote working and remote teaching as well as the IT communication tools have become the only means of maintaining social and business contacts and relationships. Business relationships and operation faced revolutionary changes, which led to the transformation of management methods.

The changes in the functioning of companies and organizations have considerably redefined many areas of life and economy. Traditional methods of everyday functioning have been severely limited in favor of more effective solutions provided by new technology. They quickly gained popularity and are here to stay bringing important economic benefits. Fast-track universal IT education and extensive use of digital technology tools have also resulted in changes in other areas. What is more, the new way of operating have helped to verify the effectiveness of the existing business models.

What seems particularly important is the ability to forecast and determine the direction of operations, combined with flexibility and responsiveness that ensure the company's success. Strategic analysis, traditionally responsible for setting business objectives and determining the path to achieve them, has become subject to specific verification. Practice has shown that companies and organizations that were more advanced in the use of ICT solutions and took advantage of digital technology in their operations, found it easier to survive the pandemic with all its strictures. Others were forced to quickly transform their processes to the digital version, often in an emergency mode.

Traditional ways of doing things, which assume operating in a linear manner in a stretched time perspective, had to accelerate and become more flexible to keep up with the rapidly changing business environment. The proven efficiency and effectiveness of information and communication technology have led to the re-evaluation of many areas and the statement that "... *nothing will be the same as it was before* " has become a reality. In particular, building a company's strategy in the new conditions must be modified and hence the growing popularity of a new approach called stractics which integrates strategy with tactics, thus creating conditions for companies to promptly respond to changing business conditions. Agile management, which shortens the time perspective and combines strategy with tactics, turns out to be an effective tool for managing a company in conditions of digital solutions effectively supported by ICT solutions.

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### **Summary**

Changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have had a very strong impact on many areas of activity. Long-term plans set out in the operating strategies of companies and organizations have become of little use in the new business conditions. Many companies have been urged to develop a new strategic approach that takes account of the situation after the pandemic. The question arises whether the traditional approach to strategy building and strategic management can apply. This paper analyzes strategic management under new conditions and proposes a new agile approach called stractics.

Keywords: strategic management, new technology

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### **Stractics instead of strategic management**

#### **Summary**

The changes caused by a pandemic have a very strong impact on many areas of activity. The long-term plans set out in the operating strategy of companies and organizations have become of little use in the new business conditions. Many companies are urgently required to develop a new strategic approach that takes account of the post-pandemic situation. The question is whether the traditional approach to strategy building and strategic management can be applied. The article analyzes strategic management in new conditions and proposes a new agile approach called digital stractics.

Keywords: strategic management, new technology