

*So little pains do the vulgar take in the investigation of truth, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand.*

**-Thucydides**

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# Strategy and Not Strategy

Distinguishing Between the Value and the Buzz



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Unfortunately, most organizations abuse the term “strategy”. One need only review a panoply of conference keynotes, quarterly earnings statements, and prospecti to see that most initiatives and campaigns reacting to the market’s developments are deemed “strategy”. As a result, many executives have not only lost an understanding of strategy’s value, but even what the term itself means. At So Little Pains, we place an outsized value on first principles and path dependency. Therefore, our introductory whitepaper focuses on our concept of strategy, the necessity of strategy for organizations of every size and industry, and the different roles we provide as companies seek to develop their own strategies and strategic understanding.

Perhaps our best starting point is to define what strategy is **not**. As prefaced above, strategy is not marketing, or sales, or public relations, or even operations. It is more than planning, which develops a comprehensive blueprint for using known resources to achieve identified objectives. Strategy is certainly more than the disparate steps that many companies cobble together when responding to market changes or damaging missteps.

After decades of experience developing public- and private-sector strategies, we have narrowed our concept of strategy to the following, mutually reinforcing definitions:

- **Strategy** embodies the pursuit and fulfillment of a founder’s vision – doing so with a comprehensive and robust understanding of the present and future strategic environment in which the organization will operate.
- **Strategy** is the long-term synchronization of *ends* (the essence of what an organization seeks to achieve), *ways* (the methods that an organization has at its disposal to execute), and *means* (the resources to be committed) while identifying and mitigating risk. Unlike a plan bounded by defined objectives and known resources, strategy is predicated on an understanding that ends, ways, means, and risk are constantly impacting each other - requiring both flexibility and constancy as an entity seeks to fulfill its core purpose.
- **Strategy** is the development and provision of a unique set of activities that provide outstanding value – in terms of cost-effectiveness or product/service differentiation – in a way that cannot be easily replicated by competitors.

Herein lies the paradox – while strategy is hard, real strategy is not an ephemeral illusion that cannot be developed and implemented by an overwhelming number of organizations. Strategy’s development, which relies on some unique educational aspects and an ability to take a comprehensive view of one’s environment, more than anything else requires the focus, prioritization, timing, and long-term thinking that many firms are unwilling to dedicate as they focus on quarterly earnings and a particular morning’s CNN/Fox/MSNBC reports.

So Little Pain Consulting’s unique value proposition is that we have the expertise, experience, and education to assist you at every step of your strategic journey. Whether your company is just starting-out, pursuing opportunities in a radically new area, or focusing after a long period wallowing in an aimless purgatory uninformed by strategy, we have the experts and tools to make you successful.

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