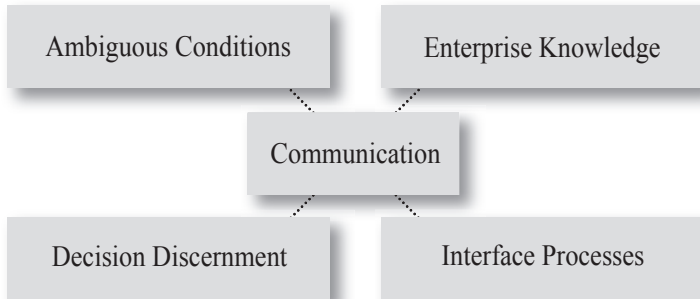


NUANCES IN THE STRATEGIC AGENDA

The company's strategic agenda may encounter nuances that temper and season the approach of the organization. We live in a time when *clear and unambiguous plans are a luxury*. There are emergent issues and occasional bumps in the pathways that define a company's journey. It's important to recognize these business nuances for what they are – punctuations and subtle brushstrokes in the agenda for business growth, performance and change. Exhibit 02.H illustrates some of the nuances that we encounter in the strategy management and leadership agenda. Ambiguity is often part of the equation. How knowledge is engaged and applied to plans and choices is a major nuance. How decisions are crafted, finessed and engaged is nuance-rich. How the interfaces of ideas, people, plans and actions work is full of meaning, and the meaning-making schema is nuanced.

Exhibit 02.H

NUANCES IN THE STRATEGY AGENDA



Notes: The common denominator in this complex environment is communication. That means information sharing, engagement, conversations and thoughtful, pragmatic, resourceful debate. How organizations recognize, discuss and explore their strategic issues is a cultural matter. The way companies communicate is part of their thought and behavior edge, the edge that yields their unique strategic agenda. Military agencies have reset their training cultures to address the inherent volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of the conditions under which they serve. This so-called VUCA theme is a useful idea for companies as they tackle their strategic agenda in the context of uncertain and evolutionary business environments.

The days of simple, clear, concise business conditions are over for most companies. The days of five-year plans with modest risk and little change were probably a fantasy of post-war economic times, shaped by steady predictability. Going forward, the strategy agenda of most companies is subject to a greater array of technical, market and economic turbulence. These nuances percolate across and beyond a company's strategy agenda.

Nuances Explored Further

A sound framework for strategy leadership and management is one that considers and contemplates ideas that influence the options a company might entertain. At the same time, we would want our people to act in ways that are decisive, aware, prompt and connected. Government leaders in wartime and peacetime are called upon to recognize and account for the nuances of actions and the absence of actions. Inventors and integrators are called upon to combine their perspectives and their perceptions to conceive new things and new ideas. We look at nuances in the strategy agenda as part of the success equation for companies. To understand these nuances may itself be a source of competitive edge. To contemplate the effects, risks and choices brought about by these nuances may be a special scheme that powers the most innovative companies. Serious questions from the boardroom, and from senior executive discussion might sound something like this:

What is the real value of the accumulated knowledge of the organization, and who is working to create and sustain the value of knowledge? Who owns this knowledge and its linkages?

How are simple and complex strategy decisions made in the organization, and by whom, and when? What kind of dispersion of leadership, decision power and authority makes sense? And, how are business decisions engaged by the people of the organization? What engagement risks are in play?

What is the right formula for crossing and matching the many functional and resource processes of the organization, and who is involved in this work? Who balances the agenda?

While it would be wonderful if the answers to these questions were precise and concise, it's the additional issues that get raised when questions like these power and engage strategic thought and behavior. In their 2005 book, *Freakonomics*, Levitt and Dubner described the importance of looking at the world of nuances through multi-faceted lenses. We look at this as an opportunity to engage the people of the organization in a continuous conversation on strategy. Perspective and thoughtful, pragmatic engagement of people is critical stuff. Looking beyond the current reality of a company requires time for discernment, and in many cases, it requires a greater base of open communication, providing the basis for true strategic foresight.