

Strategy by Design: How Companies Grow

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Every company is different. There may be prototypical organizational models or go-to-market strategies, but like fingerprints, design practices are not identical, even offices of the same firm. It's not just the terroir—the characteristic taste and flavor (style and culture) that a firm might develop—it's the talent and leadership and the individualized perspectives and expertise they bring to the work.

Marketers have become experts at brand design and positioning. As Ida Cheinman,¹ principal and creative director of Substance151, has said, we can create a brand promise that “communicates what an A/E/C firm says it will deliver.” But now, “a different brand element is taking a front-row seat, overtaking brand promise in how firms want to be perceived and remembered. That element is brand purpose.”

Purpose: The Foundation of Dimensional Value

Purpose-based development is dimensional rather than linear. It's focused on creating multi-directional future value for our companies and our clients and broader impact in our personal lives, communities, cities, institutions, and the world. It's how we change the way we think about what we do and why; the growth and transformation that we embrace to realize it; and the actions we take to mobilize and extend our resources to achieve it.

Purpose becomes the foundation for who we are and what we do. It causes us to ask how we can design our organizations and culture to create value for all stakeholders, now and into the future.

Today, any firm can dream big. Size still matters, but experience is the foundation for our services, and ideas and innovation are the currency of our business. As our business landscape has become more competitive, there is a greater

need for an approach that addresses a portfolio-based practice strategy and entrepreneurial issues—focused on markets and clients, as well as investments, initiatives, and risk.

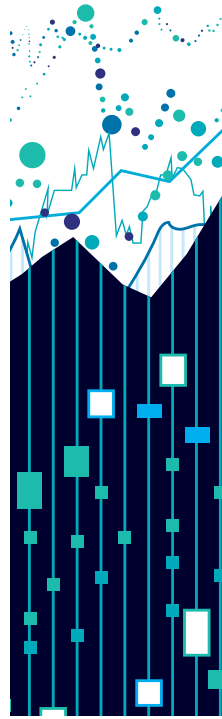
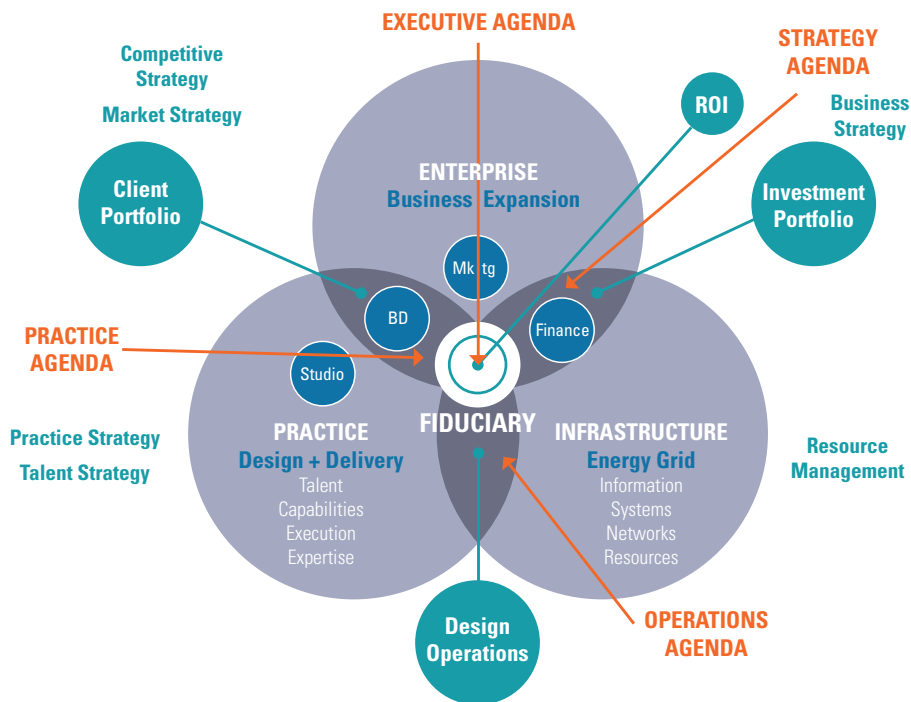
Defined Values Drive Everything

Successful enterprise strategy relies on an integrated coalition of leaders—a forward-thinking “futures council”—who consider top- and mid-level strategy from a holistic viewpoint, touching on all functional domains, both internal and external. As a firm engages in business transformation, all members of the firm must be aligned with the key initiatives to enable accelerated growth and return on investment (ROI).

Where are you in the development process?

- Are you living up to your stated purpose and values?
- Are you operating as if there was/is no pandemic and the world hasn't changed?
- Is your office structured like a spreadsheet?
- Are any of you still doing “old work”—structured, repeatable, and predictable?
- Are you assessing current and future demands?
- Are you creating a culture that emphasizes agility and learning?
- Are you designing your firm's organization and culture to create value for all stakeholders?

Functional Domains



Leadership Framework

As we learned in *Aligning the Stars: How to succeed when professionals drive results*,² People are more than valuable assets; they are the source of competitive advantage.

Within the A/E/C industries, practice leaders drive the creation of value and are catalysts for change. They lead organizational knowledge and perspective, focused on strategy, expertise, and integration of information and resources. They help us understand what we can do to achieve success and resiliency.

- 80% of a firm's operational focus is metabolic conversion—feeding the firm—getting the work and doing the work, achieving performance goals (qualitative and quantitative), generating revenues, and ROI.

Practice Strategy (process + operations management)

1. Talent Capability Mix
2. Service Offerings
3. Process Development
4. Portfolio Management
5. Resource Management (including all project resources)
6. Execution Systems

- 20% is evolutionary transition—growing markets, talent, capabilities, and expertise—creating higher value (qualitative and quantitative), enabling growth and transformation over time.

Portfolio Strategy (markets + client strategy)

1. Go-to-Market Strategy
2. Brand/Market Positioning
3. Client + Revenue Mix
4. Relationship Strategies (including clients, alliances, and key collaborators)
5. Client Development + Retention
6. Execution Systems (including all marketing/BD/PR resources)

Creating Your Future

Best-selling author, Professor Rita McGrath, stated, "The word 'strategy' has come to mean anything in an organization that is important. But great strategies drive real purpose and decision-making. Define one that is meaningful, and you can guide real-time choice-making across your organization."⁴

Step One:

Create a brain trust including a mix of generations and disciplines. They will lead the effort to look at the puzzle pieces in new ways and consider novel approaches:

- What are the trends that will impact our clients and our practice?
- What commitments has our firm made toward ESG and DEI (J.E.D.I.) within our practice?
- Who could we work with to gain new insights and perspectives?
- Who could we bring into the firm to help us activate change and transformational change?

Step Two:

Working with practice leaders and other designated champions and catalysts, the brain trust will have an opportunity to lead the development of the firm's collaborative strategy related to practice and talent development, including:

- Develop priorities regarding work-life balance, social issues, wellness, trust, and technology
- Redeploy talent to new roles (and new ways of working)
- Invest in skill-building
- Define roles around skills, affinity, or passion versus traditional models

Trends³

3 Trends That Are Here to Stay in 2022

Gensler 12/17/2021

<https://www.gensler.com/blog/3-trends-here-to-stay-in-2022>

The Unspoken Burden on Women in Architecture

Julia Gamolina, Metropolis

12/27/2021

<https://metropolismag.com/viewpoints/women-architecture/>

Women in the Workplace 2021

McKinsey & Company

09/27/2021

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

- Find consultants or other firms to partner with
- Look beyond your ZIP code—it's a virtual workplace
- Plan to test and retest

Supercharge Your Current Team

Care for the people you have. They are your greatest champions, and they create and hold valuable knowledge and expertise.

1. Trust is number one!
2. Create a culture of enabling vs. control
3. Lead with compassion and competence
4. Communicate often, especially during hard times

5. Elevate the quality and frequency of employee recognition
6. Commit to long-term employee happiness over short-term productivity
7. Develop a robust and flexible remote-work strategy

Simon Sinek's Golden Circle⁵ model helps us articulate why we do what we do, and more importantly, why it matters. Sinek has said, "An organization communicates its WHY through everything it says and does—it's marketing, the products and services the company provides, the decisions its leaders make...everything." More importantly, the adoption and catalytic conversion of brand purpose impacts relationships, engagement, and reputation, enriching the roots of our practice so we can thrive and grow. ■

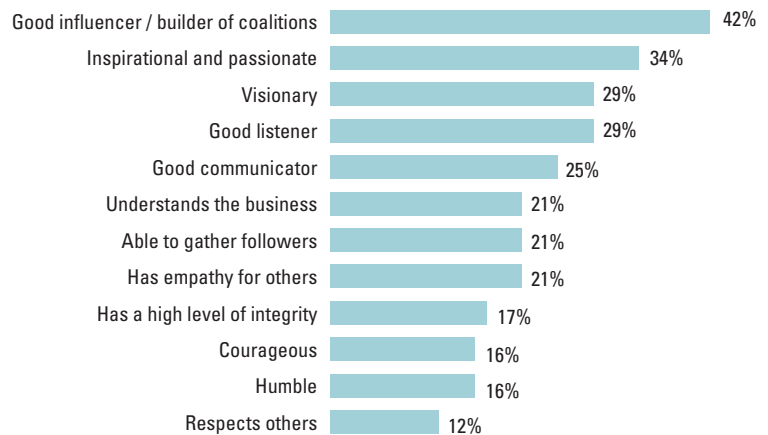
Leadership Roles and Criteria

Characteristics of a Successful Leader⁷

"The core missions of a leader—to build the long-term value of a business and to protect and promote its brand—are goals that professional service leaders share with their counterparts in other industries. However, how those objectives are achieved differs dramatically in the professional services arena, where creating a cohesive, collaborative, and efficient environment is essential to success.

"In a professional service setting, influence trumps control. Leadership requires powerful motivational skills and adroit maneuvering, coupled with the willingness to make tough calls and to take the heat for them. It also requires a consummate communicator to manage a partnership of equals in which everyone is an owner and entrepreneur."

The Art of Managing Professional Services – Maureen Broderick⁷



The Four X Factors of Exceptional Leaders⁸

"In defining 'best performing leaders' we focused on a number of factors but gave priority to actual delivery against the organization's strategy: the clarity and alignment those leaders generated and the pace of transformation they were able to drive successfully. We prioritized the 'how' of their leadership, while also considering the 'what' of their results."

1. They simplify complexity and operationalize it.
2. They drive ambition for the whole enterprise.
3. They play well on teams they don't lead.
4. They build leaders.



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LINDA WALLACK's integrative approach comes from a history of creating at the intersection of four critical elements—environments, processes, communications, and leadership. These elements are necessary for organizations to flourish. Contact Linda at 312.550.3120 or linda@hellotoko.com.

Resources

Brand Promise

¹ *Brand Purpose Is the New Brand Promise* – Substance151 (Ida Cheinman) – December 2018

- <https://www.substance151.com/brand-purpose-is-new-brand-promise/>
- *Elements of a Successful Brand 4: Brand Promise* – Hinge Marketing – 04/27/2020
- <https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/elements-of-a-successful-brand-4-brand-promise1>

Career Development

⁶ Jungle Gym

- *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* – Sheryl Sandberg, Deckle Edge 03/12/2013
- <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6565764-the-most-common-metaphor-for-careers-is-a-ladder-but>

Leadership

² *Aligning the Stars* – Jay W. Lorsch and Thomas J. Tierney, Harvard Business Review Press, 2002

- <https://www.bain.com/insights/books/aligning-the-stars/>
- ⁷ *The Art of Managing Professional Services* – Maureen Broderick, Prentice Hall, 2011
- ⁸ *The four X factors of exceptional leaders* – Strategy+Business – 09/11/2018
- <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/The-Four-X-Factors-of-Exceptional-Leaders>

Organizations

Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow – Harvard Business Review (Larry E. Greiner) – May–June 1998

- <https://hbr.org/1998/05/evolution-and-revolution-as-organizations-grow>

Strategy

⁴ *Uncertain about the future? A well-defined strategy can help.* – Rita McGrath, Thought Sparks, 2022

- <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/uncertain-future-well-defined-strategy-can-help-rita-mcgrath/>

⁵ The Golden Circle – Simon Sinek

- <https://simonsinek.com/>

Trends

Year in Review: Top 5 Topics of 2021 – Gensler Design Review 12/16/2021 <https://www.gensler.com/blog/2021-top-5-architecture-and-design-trends-topicsview>

The Unspoken Burden on Women in Architecture – Julia Gamolina, *Metropolis* 12/27/2021

<https://metropolismag.com/viewpoints/women-architecture/>

Women in the Workplace 2021 – McKinsey & Company 09/27/2021

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>