

# ***Strategic Doing: Ten Skills for Agile Leadership***

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*Strategic Doing: Ten Skills for Agile Leadership* outlines a unique approach to strategic planning. Specifically, it recommends a superior method for strategic planning (Strategic Doing) in a decentralized environment which has no clear hierarchy—such as that found in entrepreneurship start-up teams.

Five writers have collaborated to create *Strategic Doing*. Ed Morrison (JD/MBA), Scott Hutcheson (PhD), and Elizabeth Nilsen all work at the Agile Strategy Lab at Purdue University. Mr. Morrison is the director, Dr. Hutcheson is the associate director and a faculty member at Purdue University's School of Engineering Technology, and Ms. Nilsen (MBA) is the senior program director. Janyce Fadden (MBA) is director of strategic engagement at the University of North Alabama. Nancy Franklin (EdD) is one of the principal a Franklin Solutions. These five authors possess over 50 years of Strategic Doing experience.

To employ an analogy, Strategic Doing is to strategic planning as Business Model Canvas is to business plans. The Strategic Doing process is focused on action. Just like in business plans, strategic planning is usually a time-intensive endeavor that results in no action. Additionally, like Business Model Canvas, Strategic Doing aims to shorten that process, make it simpler, and spark action. Morrison et al. do an excellent job of distilling many fundamental academic principles (e.g. strategy, behavior economics, psychological safety, S-Curves) for the practitioner, while still providing academic support. Indeed, our reading list of both books and academic peer reviewed journal articles grew with *Strategic Doing* because it includes two helpful reference sections.

Morrison et al. first outline compelling reasons to illustrate why strategic planning practices must change. They explain that the rise of more complex adaptive systems, networks' structure of organizations, and an increasing dynamistic environment now strain the traditional strategic-planning process. Further, the authors of *Strategic Doing* define strategy as the answers to two basic questions: Where we are going, and how we will get there? The crux of their argument, and the reason *Strategic Doing* is reviewed in an entrepreneurship journal, is that the environment the authors define to be appropriate for their version of strategic planning matches many items and concepts seen in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Specifically, *Strategic Doing* addresses a lack of resources, decentralized team structures, the need to fail fast, to adapt, and to achieve momentum in a new endeavor. This partial list of items is germane to both the entrepreneur practitioner and the academic and are skillfully addressed in this book.

Though Morrison et al. agree with the strategy definition they listed, they make it clear from their strategic planning mentorship that these two questions usually do not provide enough guidance to motivate team members. Instead, they expanded those two questions into four overarching stages which include questions about what a start-up team could do, what a team should do, what a team will do, when the team is going to meet again.

These four question sections are the basis of the Strategic Doing iterative loop process. *Strategic Doing* explains how to implement this process through ten specific skills which Morrison et al. then flesh out in the following chapters, although it is not expected that one individual possesses or employs all ten skills. These ideas are presented well with a segment on cognitive diversity and the need for teams.

Following the first chapter, each of the ten Strategic Doing skills has its own chapter, and each chapter follows a similar pattern: a definition of the skill, academic empirical support, practical examples of where the skill would be seen and used, and methods to develop the skill. A case study example of the application and results for the use of each skill is provided at the end of the chapter. Further,

*Strategic Doing* is written to make the process of learning these skills much more intuitive to a practitioner or to a class. *Strategic Doing* discusses many critical issues (and the following are only a sample from Chapter 2): deep conversation, psychological safety, trust, the Teddy Bear Principle, respect, optimal group size, agile leaders, and equity of voice, and the authors support these terms and ideas with academic empirical results. After clarifying and defining their points, Morrison et al. illustrate how to learn or employ the specific skill. For example, in Chapter 2, they discuss “common assumptions of civility.” Here, the reader is reminded to not assume people will be civil and to instead define what civility means and to give the team examples of civility. For instance, when another person is talking, one should not look at a phone. Distractions should be put aside, and complete attention should be given to the speaker. The skills discussed in Chapter 2 might be common courtesy, but by making them explicit, a tone is set that helps develop psychological safety and eventual trust, which will more likely result in successful teamwork or teaming.

The final chapter further synthesizes these ten skills and guides the reader through an clearly delineated four-step iterative model. All in all, the delivery of each chapter and the final summary all superbly teach the Strategic Doing process.

We feel this book has a number of strengths. First, it clearly defines a problem and a possible solution in such a way that the book is readable and actionable for a practitioner but is supported empirically to satiate an academic desire for evidence. Second, the structure and flow are presented in such a way to facilitate learning and incorporating the new knowledge. Third, we feel this book will be beneficial to entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship instructors as this process trains an entrepreneur to strategically plan for the ecosystem in which they may find themselves. Additionally, we do not feel the Strategic Doing system is a simple tweak, but it is rather a redesign of the strategic planning process. Morrison et al. are not just rephrasing a known process. Instead, they have created a novel strategic approach to address the new reality of how to strategically plan and implement in a dynamic and open-

network environment. We (both authors of this review) have attended Strategic Doing workshop. One author is an entrepreneurship/strategic management professor, the other is a professor of social psychology who also researches entrepreneurship phenomenon; we can fully appreciate and evaluate the strategy, entrepreneurship, and psychological aspects of this book. For the vast majority of concepts, the authors of *Strategic Doing* have illustrated the different skills that are covered correctly. For example, in Skill 10, behavior economics and nudging were correctly included to explain that skill.

We did identify two weaknesses, however. Oddly, though we feel Morrison et al. didn't quite get two points right, these deficits do not undermine the assumptions or main arguments in *Strategic Doing*. As stated above, one author of this review is a strategy/entrepreneurship professor. The strategic planning process described in *Strategic Doing* is what entrepreneurs and strategists would call old school, and is not how these subjects are currently taught in capstone classes. Current strategy instruction places a greater emphasis on implementation, on multiple points of view (i.e. cognitive diversity), on more teams, and is less hierarchical. However, even though Morrison et al. might not have described current strategic management correctly, we feel this does not weaken their argument that Strategic Doing addresses the more dynamic, open networked, quick to test and fail, resource-deprived environment that many entrepreneurs find themselves in. They did point out that another strategist had similar concerns. In summary, we still feel the Strategic Doing planning method is superior to the traditionally taught method for the environment Morrison et al. describe. Our belief is supported because we have conducted empirical research on STEM teams and start-up launches.

The second concern we had with *Strategic Doing* is minor, but to be thorough, we feel it needs to be addressed. Morrison et al. cover the concept of emotional intelligence. For the vast majority of the discussion regarding emotional intelligence we feel they are correct; however, for one point we feel they are not. Morrison et al. state that "Emotional intelligence is largely something that people have as a

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result of their genetics, temperament, and/or early upbringing—you can't really change it to any large degree" (p. 141). This view is not supported by current research.

Overall, we would recommend *Strategic Doing* for anyone in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, or the open network, high dynamism, and resource-scare environments described. *Strategic Doing* is intended to be a "how to" book but is supported well empirically. Although much writing in this field only echoes current trends, *Strategic Doing* is vitally innovative. Morrison et al. have surely created a valuable addition to the existing body of strategic literature.

**References**

Morrison, Edward, Scott Hutcheson, Janyce Fadden, Nancy Franklin, & Elizabeth Nilsen (2019). *Strategic Doing: Ten Skills for Agile Leadership*, Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.