

The DNA of the Chief Strategy Officer:

Don't wait for the
perfect move before
making your first move

EY Strategy



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Introduction

What does it take to be a successful chief strategy officer?

In the third quarter of 2018, EY conducted a survey of senior strategy leaders – chief executive officers, chief strategy officers and their equivalents – from Canadian companies in various industries to gain insight into the role of the Chief Strategy Officer (CSO), what makes the role successful, and the elements of strategy development and execution they find most important.

Today's business environment is increasingly complex and dynamic, as technology, the geopolitical climate and consumer demand have intersected for radical disruption in many industries. The negotiation of the new United States- Mexico-Canada Agreement on trade (USMCA) has meant many months of uncertainty for Canadian businesses that are heavily reliant on doing business with some of their strongest trading partners. Canadian organizations are facing a global environment where the rapidly increasing pace of change has become the norm. New business models and advancements in technology have brought opportunities for new businesses to disrupt well-established organizations.

To combat these increasing threats, businesses must adopt a strategic mindset to approach competition and look beyond current times to observe and predict what changes, risks and disruptions might impact their business in the future.

To gain a deep understanding of what makes a CSO successful and where the individual focuses, EY surveyed senior executive leaders on strategy development, preparation, execution and planning. They were then asked which specific dimensions were the most important for them to be successful in their roles, and gained additional insight into the most important elements of strategy for those who are closest to it.

Overall, respondents generally considered their involvement in strategy successful, with most CSOs believing that the “upstream” side of strategy – planning and development – constitutes the most important areas that contribute to their success. In comparison, strategy execution was on the bottom of their radar, since it was seen as something that was the responsibility of other groups, including other leaders, business units and functions. We also saw a strong focus on future market analysis and strategic planning, as CSOs undertake the role of being future-oriented, blue sky thinkers who are primarily externally focused.

EY is excited to provide additional detailed findings throughout this report, as well as a breakdown of what attributes and key success factors contribute to the making of an excellent CSO. We believe this analysis provides important insights into what drives high performance and how CSOs can best set themselves up for success in their organizations.

Lance Mortlock
Senior Strategy Partner, EY Canada

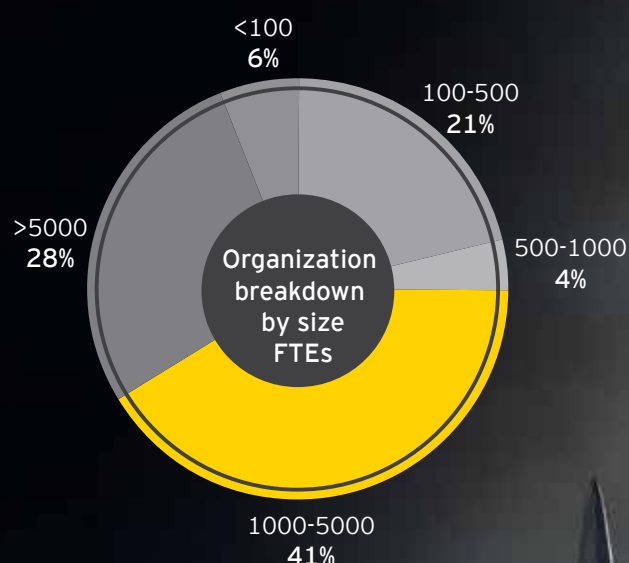
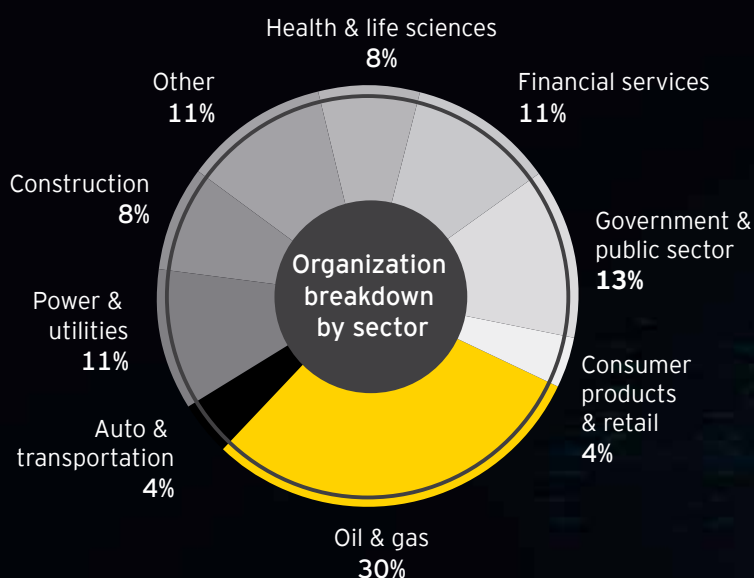




Demographics

We received a total of 40 responses from senior executives of Canadian organizations of various sizes, operating in a broad spectrum of industry sectors. These organizations represented both those who have a designated CSO role (or equivalent senior executive) and those who do not. Survey respondents were either CSOs or CEOs at their respective organizations.

40
senior executives



8 different sectors represented



Survey methodology

To evaluate the role of the CSO in today's organizations, the survey was structured around 5 strategy categories and 24 associated dimensions which were rated by the survey respondents (see page 6-7).

- 1 | Does your organization currently have a CSO or equivalent?
- 2 | What is your current role? CEO, CSO or equivalent, or other?
- 3 | With regard to your current role, how successful would you rate your involvement with your organization's strategy?
- 4 | For each of the 24 dimensions of strategy, please rate how important each of these are for you to be successful in your executive role, on a scale of 1 to 5, from "Not important" to "Very important."

Strategy categories



1. Strategy development: outside-in

Look outside at external forces and what competitors are doing.



2. Strategy development: inside-out

Look within the organization at performance and factors that impact strategy.



3. Prepare for execution

Look at what will be necessary to successfully execute the strategy.



4. Strategy planning

Drive the work in formulating the strategy and integrating its various components together.



5. Strategy execution

See the elements of the strategic plan through to fruition.



"We often spend more time, effort and money formulating the strategy rather than implementing it. It should be the reverse. A well-executed mediocre strategy beats a poorly executed masterstroke every time."

Dave Mowat
Former Chief Executive Officer,
ATB Financial

Without strategy, execution is aimless.
Without execution, strategy is useless.

Morris Chang

Founding Chairman,
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company



In today's business world, the overwhelming amount of information and the rate at which it changes the organization's outlook cannot be overstated. Charting course in this environment is a never-ending iterative loop requiring a focus on clarity and the resilience to persevere."

Shane Hooker
Chief Executive Officer, Sanjel Energy Services



Strategy execution is most successful when we bring a dimension past the "hockey stick" planning approach and look to those transformational 'top three ideas' that will have the most significant impact for our shareholders, our employees and our stakeholders. But the transition takes time to obtain corporate understanding, buy-in and delivery capability."

Samantha Stuart
Vice President Corporate Strategy,
TransCanada Pipelines



Context

There's never been a time when strategy has been more important to Canadian companies than it is today. Canadian industries are faced with a mixture of new opportunities and challenges simultaneously, requiring leadership to have a holistic understanding of their strategies over multiple time horizons.

Recent uncertainty around the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) left many Canadian companies concerned about the future of their businesses. Historically, Canadian businesses have benefited from NAFTA, with US and Mexican investments in Canada having tripled since 1993.¹ With the introduction of USMCA as a replacement for NAFTA, strategy leaders need to understand where important changes are necessary for their organizations, and where adaptations will be necessary.

Some of Canada's largest industries have seen major transformations and challenges in recent years. The energy industry is one that has been plagued by challenges, including an oil price decline, changes to utility and energy regulations, natural disasters and obstacles to tidewater access. A major impact of this uncertainty is a decrease in foreign direct investment in the Canadian economy to the lowest levels since 2010.

Canadian energy companies are increasingly facing challenges accessing capital, which impacts their ability to grow and scale and has forced them to prioritize their areas for strategic development while managing capital constraints.

In addition, the financial industry has been disrupted by fintech companies that are able to provide a better experience for many customers at a lower price point by bypassing financial intermediaries. Canada's well-established and

mature banking industry will be heavily impacted by the transformations brought on by advancements in fintech.

Uncertainty isn't limited to capital. The unprecedented speed of change and constant innovation is having a profound impact on Canadian businesses across sectors. Businesses are at increasing risk of being disrupted or even replaced, including by new business models being advanced by changes in technology. For instance, it took 62 years for cars to reach 50 million users; for credit cards it was 28 years; for TV, 22 years; and for Facebook, just 4 years. Technology plays a huge role in accelerating new industries and services into the market².

It's important to note that increasing uncertainty and complexity have necessitated that companies put a deeper focus on strategy. With disruptive technologies, political uncertainty, a changing workforce and much more, companies must consider what these layers of complications will mean for the future of their organizations. Strategists must understand both the pace of these external changes and the internal aspects of their organizations that could enable their success.

One thing's for sure – change is constant. Strategy is about looking for your next move and getting into an optimal state where you can make changes with strategic foresight.



Success has been the ability to create alignment on long-term strategic options given the volatile and dynamic nature of the business cycle."

Joe Vetrone
SVP Strategy & Projects,
Suncor Energy

¹ "What is NAFTA and why does Trump want it renegotiated," Al Jazeera website, www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/nafta-explainer-170427005642970.html, accessed 29 November 2018

² "How long does it take to hit 50 million users?," Visual Capitalist, www.visualcapitalist.com/how-long-does-it-take-to-hit-50-million-users/, accessed 29 November 2018



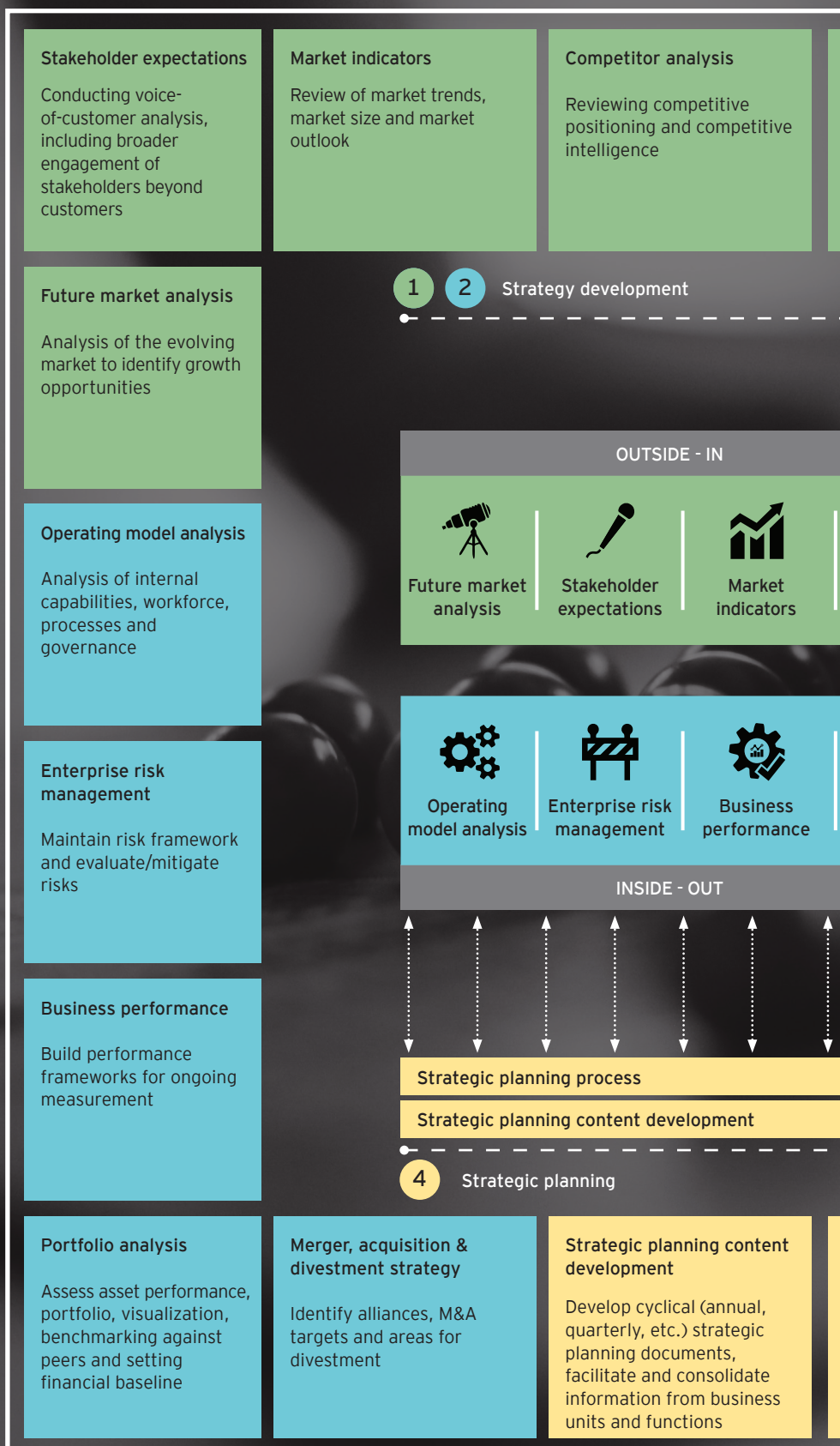
Strategic framework

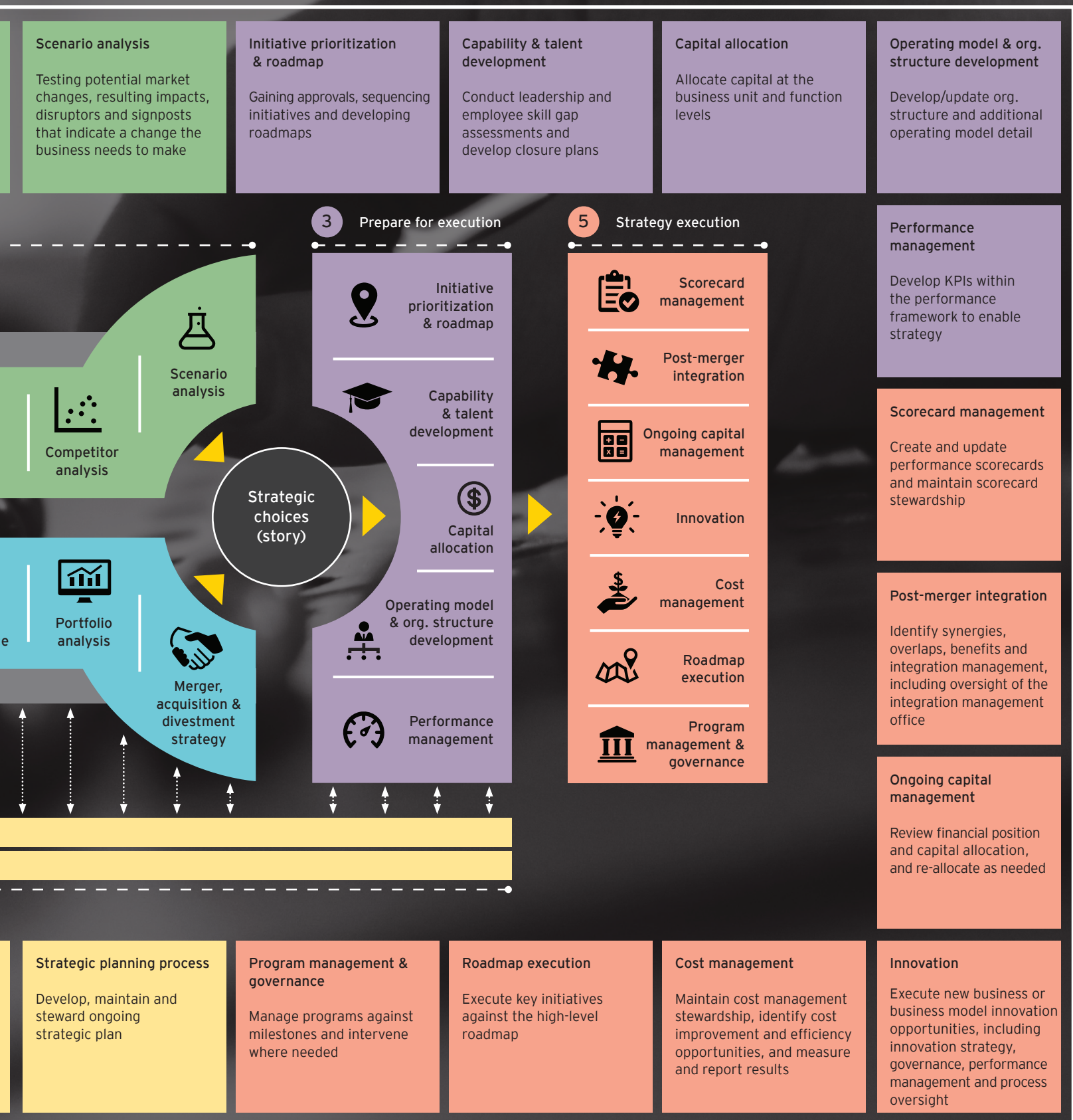
EY developed a framework that can help strategy executives in the development and execution of their strategy, and to get around potential blind spots in their thinking. This framework contains five strategy categories, along with their associated dimensions.

Ranking of dimensions:

This ranking shows what dimensions of the framework CSOs and CEOs consider most important to least important.

Rank	Dimension
1	Strategic planning process
2	Future market analysis
3	Strategic planning content development
4	Performance management
5	Business performance
6	Enterprise risk management
7	Portfolio analysis
8	Initiative prioritization and roadmap
9	Operating model analysis
10	Roadmap execution
11	Market indicators
12	Capability and talent development
13	Capital allocation
14	Scenario analysis
15	Stakeholder expectations
16	Ongoing capital management
17	Innovation
18	Cost management
19	Competitor analysis
20	Operating model and org. structure development
21	Scorecard management
22	Program management and governance
23	Merger, acquisition, and divestment strategy
24	Post-merger integration







Observations by category

The survey identified a number of insights related to the five major categories of the strategic framework. We've broken down these results below, and included commentary on the insights drawn.



Strategy is about constantly making deliberate choices. Choices in what to do, but more important what not to do. The choices don't stop once the strategy is developed – they must continue. Over time, deliberate choices can become very hard when those choices become clouded by perceived immediate urgencies or shiny new ideas. Strategists have to be able to see through this cloud and pursue the work that is important in the longer term."

Tiffany Novotny
VP Strategy, Alberta Energy Regulator



Implementing a new strategic direction during times of turbulence requires a lot of thoughtful analysis, risk assessment and just enough grit to launch yourself forward instead of standing still and waiting for the world to stop moving. If you equip your people with enough of a sense of 'why,' you'll course-correct as needed."

Helen Wesley
Executive Vice President & Chief Financial Officer, Enmax Corporation

1.

Strategy development: outside-in

Strategy development from the outside in involves looking at the external forces at play that will impact an organization and its strategy, including future market analysis, stakeholder expectations, market analysis, competitor analysis and scenario analysis.

As they look to respond to the changing business environment, leaders need to have a thorough understanding of the impacts on their organizations. Unsurprisingly, respondents rated the future market analysis component of this dimension as the most important. Knowing where the market is headed provides a foundation for strategic decision-making.

While not rated as highly, all other components of this dimension were deemed important by respondents, further illustrating the importance of setting up a future-looking fact base for strategy development.

Industry insights

Intensely competitive industries – including automotive, financial services, and consumer products and retail – all rated competitor analysis as highly important. This underpins the competitive nature of these industries and demonstrates the importance of the strategy leader in driving conversations to ensure the organization is focused on differentiating in some way.

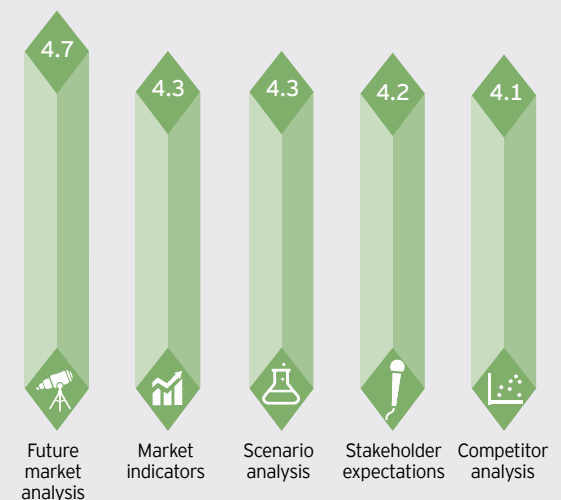
Government and public sector respondents placed a much higher than average importance on stakeholder expectations. This is likely a result of these organizations being required to balance the needs of a number of diverse, and often vocal, stakeholder groups.



“As economic developers, we connect with dozens of civic partners, and the strategic plan we collectively create serves as a north star that guides us toward the same goals. We’d be lost without it.”

Court Ellingson
Vice President Research & Strategy,
Calgary Economic Development

Ranked dimensions





Observations by category

2.

Strategy development: inside-out

Strategy development from the inside out is largely about taking stock of the company's internal tools and capabilities to consider its strengths and weaknesses while developing the strategy.

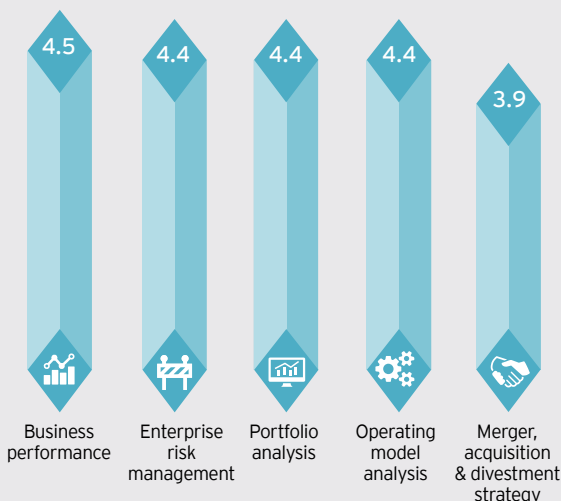
While most of the elements of this dimension were rated highly, mergers and acquisitions stands apart. Most respondents rated M&A low on their agendas. This may be a symptom of traditional separation of responsibilities in some mature organizations. In many organizations, while a senior leader is responsible for corporate development, this leader may not be the same person as, or even aligned to, the strategy leader. In these cases, it's critical for the two to maintain regular communication, as strategic priorities should be aligned with M&A activities

Industry insights

Industries that are highly regulated or that face a high degree of public scrutiny – such as government entities, regulators and energy producers, among others – are much more likely to place a higher degree of importance on risk management. These organizations tend to invest significant amounts of effort into mitigating risks in their organizations.

Energy industry respondents placed a higher-than-average emphasis on portfolio management. This is likely a result of the importance in the industry of maintaining a strong balance sheet, acquiring assets to aid in inorganic growth while also strategically disposing of underperforming and misaligned assets.

Ranked dimensions



Identifying a clear long-term vision and combining it with concrete and understandable actions are the critical elements to ensure strategy development work is successful."

Nina Birgitte
President, Equinor Canada



Strategy development is not something you do once a year. It needs to be ongoing, it needs to come with recommendations and actions and the company needs to be willing to act. The strategic goals then need to be visible for the entire population, with proper measurement mechanisms in place to monitor progress as we work towards achieving our goals."

Quinn Wilson
Chief Executive Officer, CNOOC North America

3.

Prepare for execution

Pulling all the components of the strategy together sets the stage for successful execution, and preparing for execution is critical to ensure a successful rollout.

Respondents generally rated most of the components of this element highly, with one notable exception: operating model development.

While respondents consistently rated the other four elements of this dimension highly, operating model development was left behind. Executives may see the operating model as synonymous with organization design, or HR-related activities, as opposed to a core business component.

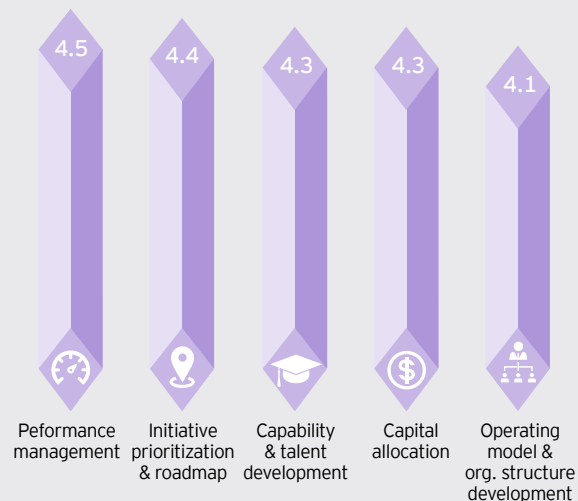
However, without a strongly linked and consistently understood operating model, the quality of execution is put at risk. On the opposite side of the spectrum, respondents rated performance management highly, which reinforces the idea that “what gets measured gets done.” Measurement demonstrates the success of the strategy, and highlights areas for course correction.

Small organizations arose as outliers, particularly with regard to capability and talent development. These small organizations are very reliant on having strong, highly capable employees who can work cross-functionally. As such, these smaller organizations are more likely to stress the importance of capability and talent development.

Industry insights

Different industries value talent development differently. In those industries where employees have common skills and are easily replaced – for example, banking – there’s a much lower emphasis placed on this element. Automation may also play a role in this, as organizations with workforces that may be candidates for automation are less likely to invest time and effort in talent development.

Ranked dimensions



"We have spent over 12 months developing our new strategic direction. Now comes the hard part – execution."

Rob Palmer
Chief Financial Officer,
Calgary Airport Authority



Observations by category

4.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning underpins the development of strategy and the preparation for executing it, and involves the strategic planning process and the strategic plan itself, which aid in integrating the various components of strategy together.

Perhaps not surprising given the audience and topic of this study, strategic planning was the most highly rated dimension overall. Each of the two components of this dimension were also among the most highly assessed overall. The importance of strategic planning cuts across organizational size and industry.

Industry insights

Government and public sector respondents consistently rated the importance of the strategic planning process at the highest possible rating. This aligns with the typical understanding of these organizations as highly process and planning centric. Conversely, health and life sciences respondents rated this same component lower than respondents in all other sectors, likely as a result of the pace of change occurring in that industry, which makes planning less certain.



Strategy often fails for two reasons: lack of clear alignment between the strategic plan and annual business plans, or an inability to bridge a plan developed in the boardroom with what happens on the “shop floor” day in and day out.”

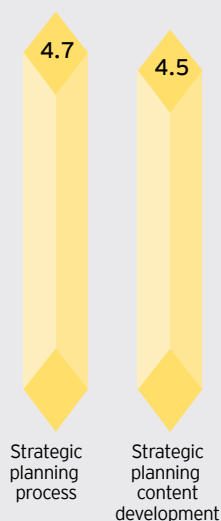
Bob Sartor
Chief Executive Officer,
Calgary Airport Authority



The weight of socio-political risks is dramatically increasing and presenting significant challenges as we develop strategic plans for our investment in Canada.”

Satoshi Abe
Chief Executive Officer,
Japan Canada Oil Sands Ltd.

Ranked dimensions



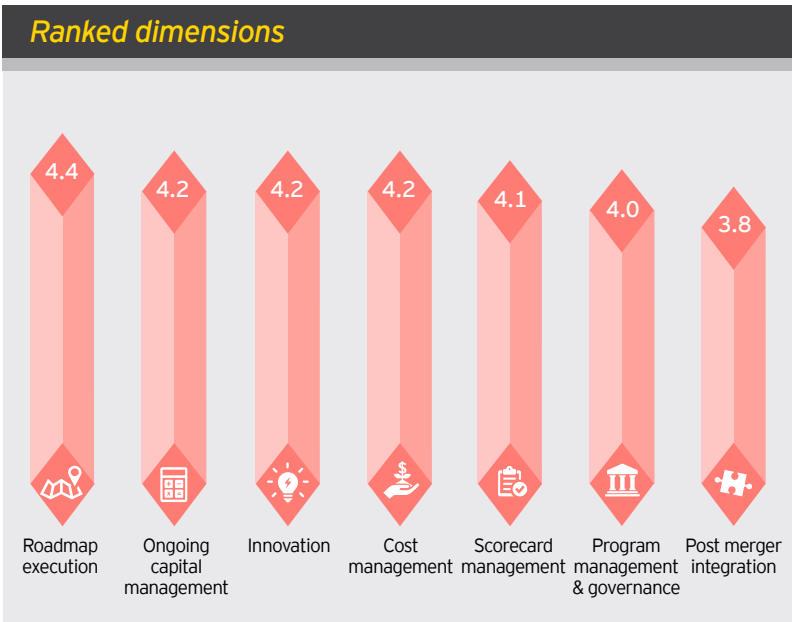
5. Strategy execution

Execution is the final stage of strategy, and it's where all of the development, planning and preparation are put into action as the strategy is enacted. Without successful execution, the strategy is ultimately useless.

Strategy execution is where many CSOs step back. But the importance of strong links between planning and execution cannot be overstated. The most successful strategy leaders are those who can maintain alignment and line of sight with those responsible for execution.

Within strategy execution, survey respondents rated roadmap execution as most important. This is to be expected, since it tends to have the most direct line to the planning that strategy leaders conduct, while they don't typically get involved in the other areas (project management, for example).

Larger companies were more likely to place an emphasis on execution in general, primarily as a result of executives maintaining a narrower focus. The smallest organizations placed a higher than average degree of importance on cost management and execution, likely because leaders in these organizations tend to have much broader scopes of work.



Industry insights

The automotive and oil and gas industries are highly capital intensive. As a result, M&A activity in those industries, particularly between big players, tends to be limited. Meanwhile, the data show significant differences between industries and the focus on internal programs and governance. Where government and public sector organizations place a lot of importance on these initiatives, likely as a result of policy direction, the financial services industry seems much more static, placing a relentless focus on financial returns and shareholder value.



I think a big challenge is ensuring the organization can effectively coordinate and respond to the constant changes in the operating environment – changes that can impact the organization's ability to deliver on its strategy."

Paul Jeakins
Chief Executive Officer,
BC Oil & Gas Commission



In today's world of change and disruption affecting all industries, there is nothing more important than strategic clarity and disciplined execution."

Michael Denham
President & Chief Executive
Officer, Business Development
Bank of Canada



Top characteristics

Based on experience in a variety of strategy functions, coupled with survey results and interviews with various executives, EY has found a number of characteristics that make for a successful and high-performing CSO. While finding someone who ticks all of these boxes is unlikely, the following should be used as directional considerations for the most important traits to look for in a CSO.



The Anticipator

Top superpowers: Understands marketplace trends; forward-thinking; often asks “what’s next” in terms of technological advances. Anticipates trends and risks – always has a finger on the pulse of the multifaceted business environment.

In practice: Well-read and stays on top of current business, economic, industry and political trends.



The Disruptor

Top superpowers: Constantly challenges the status quo; plays devil's advocate and challenges the organization to stay agile and open to change. Observes external changes affecting the organization and explores how they can be powerful catalysts for internal evolution.

In practice: Asks leadership the tough questions – What if, why not? What's stopping you? Have you thought of this? Fearlessly challenges the status quo to ensure the organization covers all bases.



The Learner

Top superpowers: Has a natural curiosity to bring in new ideas and insights to develop the organization. Is comfortable with ambiguity, adapting and thriving in unfamiliar environments to gain understanding and insight on how to successfully navigate uncharted territory.

In practice: Joins industry associations and industry groups to learn about trends and leading practices in other sectors. Brings the most relevant pieces back and shares with leadership.



The Adapter

Top superpowers: Wears multiple hats and adapts to playing different roles simultaneously. Can quickly switch between tasks, adapt to changes in the business environment and stay flexible as external and internal conditions change. Nimble changes course and focus to enable the company to do the same.

In practice: One minute preparing for an executive leadership team strategy offsite, the next running a newly acquired business. Stays versatile and adaptable to the organization's many strategic needs.



The Storyteller

Top superpowers: Capable of transmitting across layers in the organization, explaining the importance of the strategy and connecting the dots to explain the “why” in strategic decisions. Defends decisions to investors and board members using a compelling narrative to gain support and build alignment.

In practice: Takes all the facts and details in formulating the strategy and turns them into a powerful story that engages and compels employees and investors.



The Translator

Top superpowers: Adapts to different tasks and translates insights to the executive team. Constantly scanning and learning about external changes and challenges and translating the learnings to make them the most relevant.

In practice: Acts as the link between the high-level strategic plan and the simple processes and tools that empower business units and functions to execute on the strategy.



The Navigator

Top superpowers: Proactively manages the organization's strategic direction, always keeping a line of sight on the end goal while navigating the rough waters of internal resistance and external change. Knows who and when to ask for assistance, specifically in areas that may be outside the company's expertise. Instinctively knows when to change direction and how to find an alternative route to success.

In practice: Sets the long-term strategic objectives and helps the leadership team understand short- and medium-term objectives. Develops a clear, realistic, prioritized and sequenced roadmap that supports execution of the strategy.



The Integrater

Top superpowers: Builds consensus with executive leadership and the broader organization about the right direction for the company. Aligns business unit strategies for clarity around the common goal, and brings cross-functional teams together to solve complex, company-wide issues.

In practice: Integrates many moving parts between different leaders – bringing together strategy with enterprise risk management (chief risk officer), with M&A (corporate development officer), with the budget and forecast (chief financial officer) and with workforce strategy (human resource officer).



The Influencer







Top superpowers: Scans the environment and challenges the organization to stretch. Stands as the strategy's ultimate champion and persuades others to take it seriously.

In practice: Builds credibility by spending large amounts of time with business unit and functional leaders engaging, listening and collaborating on strategy development and execution. Avoids the black-box syndrome of working in isolation on strategy for a “big reveal.”



Critical success factors

In addition to the inherent characteristics that make a successful CSO, the individual's specific skills, experiences, and relationships are also instrumental in driving success.

	Critical success factor	Why?
	Rapport with CEO. The CSO should feel comfortable enough to challenge the CEO's thinking, but should otherwise be in lockstep with each other as it relates to strategy development and execution.	The CEO is the ultimate owner of the strategy and is responsible for its execution. If the CEO and CSO aren't aligned, there's no way for the strategy to be approved by the board and rolled out successfully across the organization. If that happens, the CSO risks being sidelined by the CEO.
	Appropriate role scope. A CSO's duties will depend on the size of the organization and the complexity of the industry. The breadth of duties should be fine-tuned to these unique circumstances. All other executive team members should clearly understand what is in and out of scope for the CSO.	CSOs in smaller organizations need to undertake a broader set of tasks, while those in larger organizations need to be deliberate and specific in the tasks they take on, and avoid taking on too much so they're unable to do their best. Appropriate breadth of responsibilities allows a CSO to be most effective, able to do a few things very well instead of doing many things poorly. This workload needs to be defined and agreed with the executive team from the start. It's also important that other executives don't feel that their responsibilities are being encroached on and there is strong alignment.
	Deliberate role definition. Defining the role purposefully and clearly stating what is in and out of scope for the CSO from the onset is crucial to success.	Without proper discussion and deliberation in outlining the CSO's role, there will likely be a mismatch between the CSO and the executive team.
	Strong financial acumen. The CSO must have financial acumen to stay grounded as to what's financially feasible with the strategy, and to interpret data and make decisions informed by the numbers. A strong relationship with the CFO is integral to successful strategy development.	The CSO has to build realistic strategies that can be executed in order to meet stakeholder expectations, including shareholders. A CSO who is aware and understanding of financial realities can build these realities into strategic decisions.
	Tactical understanding. While strategy development has an inherent focus on the future, a CSO needs to have a tactical understanding of what needs to be done now to deliver value. The CSO must be able to play a role in the company's short-, medium-, and long-term direction.	Understanding and reacting to present circumstances is a large part of long-term strategic thinking. This will allow for short-term, tactical decisions and reactions to immediate changes in the business environment that are aligned with a company's long-term vision. Forward-looking plans will be realized only when momentum has built up through tactical decisions, and the CSO needs to understand the short-term steps needed to achieve the longer-term vision.
	Fluent in technology advances. The CSO must have a finger on the pulse of digital advances that will affect their organizations and understand the importance of digital on the organization's productivity, connectivity and competitiveness. A close working relationship with the CIO/CDO is helpful here.	Today, technology has the power to radically disrupt the way an organization operates – so the digital strategy is crucial to the broader company strategy. Disruption is happening regardless of whether a company moves forward or sticks its head in the sand.



Conclusion

The staggering pace of change in today's business landscape comes with massive disruption for many industries, increasing the strategic complexity for companies as they try to stay relevant.

Consumer demands have increased, with calls for improved personalization, social advocacy and environmental responsibility. Global shifts have meant bigger players are competing on an international stage, drawing efficiencies through M&A activities around the world.

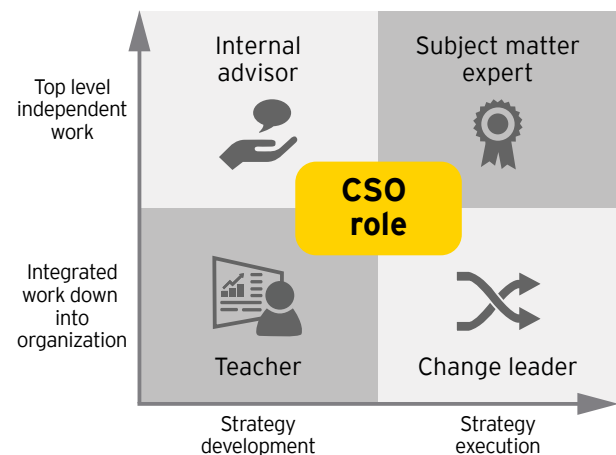
Alongside all of this change, rapid advances in digital technology have upended some industries entirely, causing business models to change and industries to converge. Digital change will only continue to speed up, with greater change still to come with advancements in artificial intelligence. Operating in this increasing complex and changing environment has made an organization's strategy more important than ever.

To meet this increased demand for an adaptable and coherent strategy, organizations must have a senior leader who's focused on strategic direction: the CSO. This role is crucial for companies today, and business leaders must be selective in who they choose for the position. The CSO will play a central role in how the company understands the changing business landscape, assess what's important to know internally and externally and what's just external noise, and steer the company in the right future direction in the short and long term. For smaller organizations that don't have a CSO, the CEO would be responsible for those complexities.

While the executive team faces increased pressure from investors, consumers and governments, it's up to the CSO to think about the organization's long-term focus and rally the rest of the company around it. With such a broad task, the CSO must wear multiple hats, not only being plugged into and curious about the

state of the world, but also being able to think innovatively and translate relevant information, insights and ideas to the rest of the executive team.

Strong role definition is critical to the CSO's success, with a "right sized" role for the organization and industry, and a defined working relationship with the rest of the executive team. The decision of whether the CSO will play a more independent or integrated role in the business, and whether it will be more in strategy formulation or implementation, are considerations that will require some thought by the executive team in terms of what makes sense in the organization's unique context. Once these are defined, the greater the likelihood the CSO will succeed.



Being the person accountable for strategy in an organization, the CSO must take a holistic, end-to-end approach in looking at strategy. EY's strategy development and execution framework offers CSOs a blueprint of all the elements of formulation and execution of strategy.

A CSO with an intimate understanding of the dimensions of the strategic framework will enable prioritization of the areas that matter most for the organization while avoiding the possibility of blind spots in devising organizational strategy. Ultimately, this understanding will position the CSO to successfully tackle the challenges of this increasingly complex world.

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