

"STRAP"

- what you can learn about strategy from rap -

Pontus Wadström

INTRODUCTION: THE IDEA

THE IDEA OF THIS BOOKLET

'Strategy' is filled to brim with piffle, malarkey and nonsense. People working with what they call 'strategy' need to step up and take responsibility of what strategy actually is and is supposed to do.

Strategy is not merely 'important' in general terms. It entails asking, discussing, and hopefully, answering essential questions regarding how to become successful over time and under restraints. In most cases finding a 'right' answer is impossible in advance. You have bet on something you believe in, walk forward, evaluate carefully and adjust to the changing circumstances in your environment.

Strategy is not only for executives. How could organizations perform if the execs were the only ones striving to perform? Strategy is not only long-term. Strategy is not a contradiction to operations. Strategy is not mainly financial. In fact, strategy needs to be more down to earth, more connected to the behaviors of the people in organizations and less focused on financials, as they are actually nothing but lagging results dependent on the employees' behaviors.

Strategy is anything but static; if your strategy work and your strategic plans are not continuously reviewed and changed, you'll probably end up like the dodo, the dinosaurs or, - for that matter - two of the Googles, Apples or Amazons of the 80's and 90's, Kodak and Nokia: severely challenged and suffering. The interpretation of 'a Kodak moment', is somewhat changed since the file for bankruptcy in 2012. As noted above, time to step up.

The purpose of this booklet is to illuminate some of the critical issues managers and strategists need to address, and inform them how to address them in a proper manner. Challenges such as: How do you get competitive in today's business environment? What role does knowledge, learning and innovation play? Is planning important when we have no idea of how tomorrow looks? How can a more 'scientific' approach to decision making help? How do we ensure strategy is more hands on and actually guides the organization?

By using lyrical content from one of my favorite music genres, hip-hop, I hope to show some alternative ways of thinking about and working with such challenges; ways more suitable in today's dynamic business environment, than the ones employed.

Naturally, this project could be considered a 'ploy', as strategy giant Henry Mintzberg would put it. Nonetheless, if I in any way can offer someone a new perspective on strategy, or provide paths for future musical enjoyments, why not?

Whether you like it or not is of course up to you to decide... And as this entire booklet is built around lyrical content, I'll finish with a few words from Raury's "Peace Prevail":

*"Wonder what you're gonna call my thing
Will it be hits? Will it be whack?
Will you not get me to the all black soiree
With a dance on my grave and then pop champagne
And remember my name and the lectures I bring
And the lectures I bring"*

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THE CONCEPTS, THE TRACKS & THE ARTISTS

SELECTION OF TRACKS

In addition to being phenomenal tunes and a glimpse of a great music genre, parts of the lyrics in the tunes provide food for strategy thought, obviously. Unfortunately I had to prioritize, not all favorites made the cut. Not even all giants such as Dr. Dre, A Tribe Called Quest, Jay Z, Cypress hill or Wu Tang Clan made it. Oddly enough...

To set some kind of structure on how to present the tunes and add some layer of insight to the music as well as to strategy, the tunes are arranged in a timely manner. "Don't sweat the technique", by Eric B. & Rakim was released in June 1992 and "The Bird" by Anderson .Paak, which represents the latest release, came out in January, 2016. Thus this structure provides a way to listen to the evolution of hip-hop, as I hear it. Although I must admit that many of the tunes were released in the second half of the 90's, probably as a result of this being the time I was most active in exploring music. I'll remedy that in future listings.

Links are provided to each tune and if you - just like me - like the music referred to in this booklet, my hip-hop playlist on Spotify including these tunes and some 300 more, is open to everyone. You can find it [here](#).

PLAY & READING LIST

- ✦ [Skills and mastery: Don't sweat the technique, Eric B. and Rakim](#)
- ✦ [Worth in the knowledge economy: Dollaz + sense, Dj Quik](#)
- ✦ [Doing the job, being true: Times up, O.C.](#)
- ✦ [Competition: Survival of the fittest, Mobb deep](#)
- ✦ [Reinvent yourself: How many mics, Fugees](#)
- ✦ [Planning: Moment of truth, Gang Starr](#)
- ✦ [Things happen: Spottieottiedopalicious, Outkast](#)
- ✦ [Question `truths`: Thieves in the night, Black star](#)
- ✦ [Pros and cons of visions: Simon says, Pharao Monch](#)
- ✦ [Being and staying humble: Devil in a new dress, Kanye West](#)
- ✦ [Accept your deal and take chances: Loco-motive, Nas](#)
- ✦ [Alternative costs: How much a dollar cost, Kendrick Lamar](#)
- ✦ [Best practices?: The bird, Anderson .Paak](#)
- ✦ [About me: Strategy advisor, researcher & hip-hop fan](#)

SKILLS AND MASTERY : DONT SWEAT THE TECHNIQUE, ERIC B. & RAKIM

LYRICS :

*"I speak in discreet cause talk is cheap
Then I get deep in the beat then complete
Compose with physique never weak or obsolete
They never grow old, technique's become antique
Better than something brand new cause it's original
In a while the style, I have much more value"*

*"Classical to intelligent to be radical
Masterful never irrelevant mathematical
Here's some soothing souvenirs
For all the years you taught to sought the thoughts and ideas
It's cool when you freak to the beat
But don't sweat the technique"*

SKILLS AND MASTERY

There is little doubt that when change hits us, we need to change. It is also well established that learning is a prerequisite to change. Thus who wants to be competitive has to learn new things.

But there's the catch: learning as such is not enough. The skills you learn must be applied. Learning is not the objective, competence is. And what then is competence? Nothing less than the ability to compete. Skills that do not bring ability to compete is thus not competence.

You compete with knowledge, you compete with skills and the greater your skills are - maybe even mastery - the greater your possibility is to compete and in the end win.

Training makes an expert. A rule of thumb is that 10 000 hours makes a practice. This is only partially true. You need 10 000 hours of deliberate practice focusing on what you do reflecting on how to excel and make those adjustments. Very few do that.

To gain 10 000 hours of deliberate training you probably need focused work 10 years. This gives that specializing is crucial to become a master. Very few stay in the same line of work that long, even fewer reflect over their work focused and continuously. Those who do, naturally gain a competitive edge.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Eric B. & Rakim is by many considered the top DJ/MC-duo of hip-hops golden years in the late '80s, partly due to Rakim's flow and rhyming that was groundbreaking and partly due to Eric's heavy samples. "Don't sweat the technique" comes from the album with the same name released on MCA in '92. The lyrics are actually about not trying to imitate, or dis, Rakim's rapping skills, simply because he's the greatest.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Spend time on your craft, cultivate it. If you find something you like to do: stay, do it, learn it, master it.
- ★ Reflect consciously and continuously on how you can improve your game.
- ★ Be humble about your alleged "Guru-status", someone else is almost always more skilled than you.
- ★ Don't try to, or even believe you can, acquire mastery in an endless set of fields. Its OK to be generalist.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Bandura (1977) *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall
- ★ Ericsson, Prietula & Cokely (2007) *The Making of an Expert*. *Harvard Business Review*
- ★ Prahalad & Hamel (1990) *The Core Competence of the Corporation*. *Harvard Business Review*

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ ["Don't sweat the technique" on Spotify](#)
- ★ ["Don't sweat the technique" on Youtube](#)

WORTH IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY : DOLLAZ + SENSE, DJ QUIK

LYRICS : "Now let's get down to business"
...
"You need to quit bangin' under false pretense
'Cause if don't make dollars, it don't make sense"

WORTH IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

In May 2018 Netflix surpassed Disney as the highest valued media company in the world. Apple, Google and Amazon are often portrayed as the most valuable companies in the world. Why? Often accredited their incredible amount of information. But is information worth anything, really?

We generally say that we are now in a knowledge economy, as opposed to an information economy. A major difference between the two is that in the information economy, information as such has a worth; it might help you gain a competitive advantage. In the knowledge economy, everybody has access to "too much" information, and it is the ability to transform information to knowledge and actions that create competitiveness is the real deal.

And thus I get concerned when companies like Twitter or Facebook are highly valued. Yes, they 'own' a lot of information, even information on potential customers for different companies. But where is the transformation from information, to intelligence (information you can act upon), to knowledge, to competence (the ability to compete)? I don't see it and from what I know, neither Facebook nor Twitter is making any money so far: So where is the actual value? To recite DJ Quik: If it don't make money, it don't make sense.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

DJ Quik allegedly took his name because he was able to produce records quickly. Coming from Compton he got involved in a number of disputes with other Compton rappers e.g. MC Eiht. "Dollaz + Sense" appears on the album "Safe + Sound" released on Profile in '94 and has that distinct west coast sound of the mid '90s, so many of us like. In addition to rap himself, DJ Quik has produced for artist like Janet Jackson, Kurupt and Jay Z.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Spend time on reversed engineering trying to understand what of you information that can be transformed into knowledge, skills and competitiveness.
- ★ Make a quick business case assessment on the information you're managing. What does it cost to manage it? What are the benefits? Is it worth to keep?
- ★ Don't collect vast amounts of data you might need, because it's 'so interesting'.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ D'aveni, Dagnino & Smith (2010) The Age of Temporary Advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*
- ★ Orell & Sedlacek (2013) *Bescheidenheit*. Carl Hanser
- ★ Schwab (2016) The Forth Industrial Revolution. *World Economic Forum*

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ ["Dollaz + Sense" on Spotify](#)
- ★ ["Dollaz + Sense" on Youtube](#)

DOING THE JOB, BEING TRUE : TIMES UP, O.C.

LYRICS :

*"My album will manifest many things that I saw did or heard about
All told first hand, never word of mouth
Speakin' in tongues about what you did but you never done it
Admit you bit it 'cause the next man gained platinum behind it
I find it ironic, so I researched and analyzed
Most write about stuff they fantasized"*

*"It's the same old, same old just strain it from the anal
The content is not complex or vexed
So why you pushing it? Why you lying for?
Your persona's drama that you acquired in high school in acting class
Your whole aura is plexiglas
For those who pose lyrical, but really aint true, I feel
Their time's limited and hardrocks too"*

DOING THE JOB, BEING TRUE

Many organizations - for logical reasons - depict themselves as having qualities that are valued by customers or investors (e.g. sustainable, tailor made, profitable). Naturally we all want to look good. The whole idea behind marketing and brands is to provide an as good picture as possible. So why shouldn't we?

However, if organizations take a little to big bite and say they are, or do, something that is not untrue perhaps, but borderline true, they will be exposed. In a society where we constantly tell our friends and family how we perceive a product or service, not being completely transparent is a stupid policy. The 'cryptonite blogstorm' will catch up.

So organizations should do the job they say they do, and do it properly. This has several advantages. First, you'll can focus on doing less. This leads a clearer direction for the organization. Second, by focusing you'll get specialized and you'll be more competitive. Third, (but maybe this is just me) you'll be able to look yourself in the mirror and be proud that you're doing a proper job. Personally I truly believe that the real strength of a brand comes from the core of the organization, not marketing campaigns and PR.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

O.C. is the initials of Brooklyn native rapper Omar Credle who was also member of the hip-hop collective D.I.T.C featuring many underground artists after its forming in the '90s. "Times up", was originally made for Pharao Monch (another artist in this booklet), but was released by Wild Pitch records on O.C.'s album "Word...Life" in '94. In my opinion, "Times up" one of the greatest hip-hop lyrics of all time.

DO'S & DON'TS

- * Set a proper strategy. Decide where you want to position yourself. Price fighter? Challenger? Premium? And do everything in line with that. Focus.
- * Consider how you can build your brand (externally) by investing in the organization internally (e.g. employees) and make you employees true ambassadors.
- * Naturally there are differences in branches of industry, but generally be less campaign-oriented.
- * Goes without saying, but anyway: don't lie to existing or presumptive customers if you want to stay in the business for the long-term.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- * Daniels (2006) *Performance Management*. PM Publications
- * Krüger (1996) *Implementation*. *CEMS Business Review*
- * Vesa & Vaara (2014) *Strategic Ethnography 2.0*. *Strategic Organization*

LISTEN AND LOOK

- * ["Times up" on Spotify](#)
- * ["Times up" on Youtube](#)

COMPETITION : SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST, MOBB DEEP

LYRICS :

*“There's a war goin' on outside no man is safe from
You could run, but you can't hide forever
From these streets that we done took
You walkin' with your head down, scared to look
You shook, 'cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks
They never around when the beef cooks in my part of town
It's similar to Vietnam”*

*“That I can't say so it's left a untold fact
Until my death, my goal's to stay alive
Survival of the fit, only the strong survive
We livin' this 'til the day that we die
Survival of the fit, only the strong survive”*

COMPETITION

In strategy literature there's a history of relating to war. 'Strategos', the origin of the word strategy, means something like winning the war. Naturally in markets - that are well defined, mature and not growing - for someone to win, someone else has to lose. This is traditional economics, which is one side of strategy research's foundation.

However, the last somewhat 20 years, this very idea has been difficult to apply in reality. How do you define your market? Take communication services. Is it telecom or IT, or both? Who are AT&T, Deutsche Telekom or Telias competitors? Each other, Skype, Google's balloons? This has led to joint ventures and alliances between traditional cut throat competitors and words like co-opetion, where you cooperate with your competitors.

Traditional borders between branches of industry are blurry nowadays. Building on the war-analogy: how do you win a war without knowing who your competitors or allies are? You may not even know what war you are in?

In military strategy the term 'fog of war' is used. This means you don't know very much. The equivalent in strategy could be the 'fog of the future'. Similarly, we don't know much; so stop planning, start doing and evaluate.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Mobb deep, made up by rappers Havoc and Prodigy, was originally called Poethic Prophets. Mobb Deep's prime characteristic, which also made their name, was their almost brutal portraits of the struggles of life in the streets. "Survival of the fittest" was featured on the album "The Infamous", both considered corner stones in hard core-rap. It was released on RCA in '95 and has sold more than 500 000 copies.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Define competition in broader sense (e.g. who could potential customers give their money to instead of you?)
- ★ Try to find ways of expanding you market, not your share of a given market. The potential of the former is greater, but could also come with higher risk. Assess this.
- ★ Don't assume someone has to lose for you to win. Try to find clever solutions between traditional branches of industry with different partners. Maybe you can all win?

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Brandenburger & Nalebuff (1997) *Co-opetition*. Profile Books
- ★ D'Aveni (1994) *Hypercompetition*. Free Press
- ★ Porter (1980) *Competitive Strategy*. Free Press
- ★ Sun Tzu & Cleary (2005) *The Art of War*. Shambhala Publications

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“Survival of the fittest” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“Survival of the fittest” on Youtube](#)

REINVENT YOURSELF : HOW MANY MICS, FUGEES

LYRICS :

“Seasons change, mad things rearrange
But it all stays the same like the love doctor Strange
I'm tame like the rapper,
Get red like a snapper when they do that
Got your whole block saying "True dat"
If only they knew that,
It was you who was irregular,
Sold your soul for some secular”

“Muzak that's wack,
Plus you use that loop over and over
Claiming that you got a new style
Your attempts are futile, ooh child
Your puerile,
Brain waves are sterile
You can't create, you just wait to take, my tape's”

REINVENT YOURSELF

I think I hear “everything changes so fast nowadays” at least once a week. Things change, all the time and we have change too, all the time. So? Things also stay exactly the same from other perspectives and I doubt we're the first generation to feel that change is overwhelming.

Previous waves of the industrial revolutions have also brought major changes for organizations: electricity, organization of work, stocks, internet etc. So I guess it's safe to say, we've been here before. It's probably safe also to say that who tackles these challenges of change are better suited to survive. So how do you do that?

Change is generally considered difficult. That needs nuancing. It is exacting and demanding. It is a full contact sport. You manage change by walking around - a lot. But it is not complex per se. The complexity depends on the change at hand.

So what organizations need to do is to build in change of themselves in every process. Organizations need to be designed around one critical issue: how do we ensure that we continuously reinvent who we are and what we do? That is a complex challenge that needs due consideration across the entire organization. I believe it has to start in the strategy process.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Fugees' monster hit “Ready or not” , built on the Delfonics hit from '69, is probably the most known tune from Fugees' first and only studio album “The Score” released on Columbia in '96. The album sold multi-platinum and is one of the most sold hip-hop albums of all times. It was awarded with two Grammys. One for best rap album and one for best vocal performance in R&B by a Duo or group (the cover of Roberta Flack's 'Killing me Softly'). In my opinion, “How many mics” is the strongest track on the album.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Challenge your assumptions of how things work: the logic of your business, the processes, the products, the competence you have etc. and do it often and deliberately.
- ★ Design all processes, especially strategy formulation and strategy realization, around how you can change the organization more and faster without losing grip of the present.
- ★ Don't assume your doing the right thing in the right manner. Always believe there is potential to improve. There generally is.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Birkinshaw (2010) *Reinventing Management*. John Wiley
- ★ Crossan & Apayadin (2010) A multi-dimensional framework of organizational innovation. *Journal of Management Studies*
- ★ Schumpeter (1942) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Harper & Bro's

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“How many mics” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“How many mics” on Youtube](#)

PLANNING : MOMENT OF TRUTH, GANG STARR

LYRICS :

“They say it's lonely at the top in whatever you do
You always gotta watch motherfuckers around you
Nobody's invincible, no plan is foolproof
We all must meet our moment of truth”

“Actions are reactions, don't be quick to judge
You may not know the hardships people don't speak up
It's best to step back, and observe with couth
For we all must meet our moment of truth”

PLANNING

Strategy theory, focusing on organizations, primarily grew up during the '50s and '60s. During this time the entire western world (where most - if not all - literature was produced) every family bought their first radio, TV, refrigerator, car, etc. Almost every branch of industry and geographic market was booming. The more you produced, the more you sold. Strategy was almost a matter of optimization and optimization demands planning, almost programming. So planning was *the* key success factor.

Today we have an entirely different situation. You don't sell more, because you produce more. Almost every market is matured and stable, or even declining. Individually we all know that things change and that tomorrow might be very different from today.

This notion is not recognized by organizations in terms of how they work. Many are still trying to optimize by planning. How do you optimize for tomorrow, if you don't know what tomorrow looks like? In more turbulent environments the value of planning is limited and thus organizations have to find ways plan less. Planning is not useless, you think things through. But 'strategic' plans' role as the guiding star of organizations is questioned.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

A true proof of synergies, the duo Gang Starr (DJ Premier and Guru) proves that the sum of the individual parts sometimes equal more when combined. Gang Starr are highly accredited and have been featured in movies (Mo' better blues) and video games (GTA). “Moment of Truth” was released on the album with the same name by Virgin in '98. Gang Starr's music pioneered the New York hard core hip-hop scene, although Guru was from Boston and Premier from Houston. Guru tragically died of cancer in 2010.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Focus your organization's planning efforts on creating and spreading knowledge on how you become successful in the short and the long run.
- ★ The outcome of planning can be a common understanding of a way forward, a common language about how you get successful. That's strategy.
- ★ Don't make activity lists when you plan strategically. Let your review process generate activities continuously, as a result of what you've done good or bad.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Armstrong (1982) The Value of Formal Strategic Planning for Strategic Decisions. *Strategic Management Journal*
- ★ Hayes (1985) Strategic Planning: Forward in Reverse? *Harvard Business Review*
- ★ Mintzberg (1994) *Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. Free Press

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“Moment of truth” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“Moment of truth” on Youtube](#)

THINGS HAPPEN : SPOTTIEOTTIEDOPALICIOUS, OUTKAST

LYRICS :

“Funny how shit come together sometimes (ya dig)
One moment you frequent the booty clubs and
The next four years you & somebody's daughter
Raisin' y'all own young'n now that's a beautiful thang
That's if you're on top of your game
And man enough to handle real life situations (that is)”

THINGS HAPPEN

In general, organizations spend vast amounts of time and resources to decide what to do: planning. But things that are more important happen and we have to address them instead. It's difficult - if not possible - to plan when a certain opportunity should arise, so that you can grab it. Things happen.

Too rigorous planning leads to an inability to grab opportunities for several reasons. First, because we focus on delivering what we have decided upon. Second, because we are not trained, or used to find opportunities, we are trained to deliver what is asked for. This is a major difference between incumbents and entrepreneurs; they are wired differently.

As always, one way is not superior to the other. On the contrary organizations that can learn to both stick to knitting and strike a new path at different times, in different ways have good chances of being successful over time.

So what organizations can do is to plan with a little slack and as opportunities rise there is room to grab them. This demands organizational and maintenance costs that directly effect the organization's financial results short term. That's never fun. But that has to be weighed against the risk of not being able to grab opportunities.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Arguably the leaders of the dirty south, Atlanta originated rap duo Outkast is one of the most successful hip-hop groups of all times with six Grammys and over 25 million records sold. “SpottieOttieDopalicious” was featured on “Aquemini” their third album, released on LaFace in '98. “Aquemini” was considered as number 500 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of the best albums of all times in 2003. On this tune the soulful sound of the dirty south, in my opinion, is nothing less than magic.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Find ways to plan for the unplanned. Build in slack in the organization. Not too much and not too little.
- ★ Decide how much you are willing to invest in unplanned slack and set a budget for it. Use it. Who knows what it may bring.
- ★ Don't plan all your activities in advance. Half of them will never be performed. Evaluate your performance and generate actions based on what you have achieved, or not achieved.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Mintzberg & Waters (1985) Of Strategy: Deliberate and Emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*
- ★ Simon (1957) *Models of Man*. Wiley
- ★ Gunther-McGrath & MacMillan (2000) *The Entrepreneurial Mindset*. HBR Press

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“SpottieOttieDopalicious” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“SpottieOttieDopalicious” on Youtube](#)

QUESTION 'TRUTHS' : THIEVES IN THE NIGHT, BLACK STAR

LYRICS :

"Yo, I'm sure that everybody out listening agree
That everything you see ain't really how it be
More than usually, speaking loudly
Saying nothing, you confusing me, you losing
me"

"Your game is twisted, want me enlisted in your usury
Foolishly, most men join the ranks cluelessly
Buffoonishly accept the deception, believe the perception
Reflection rarely seen across the surface of the looking glass"

QUESTION 'TRUTHS'

The human brain is wired to reinforce the existing. Evolution has created an extremely efficient brain. We only have to think new, when put in new situations. The rest of the time we can focus on other things: mating, finding food or shelter and what not. This helped us tremendously during evolution, but it brings limitations in today's society.

One such major limitation to organizations is bias. We tend to see things that reinforce our existing position and we tend to miss things that oppose our own position. Simply put, when you're expecting you see babies and strollers everywhere and just can't believe how many newborns there are. Looking at it more properly, you're probably surrounded by a more or less equal amount of babies all the time, you just register other things depending on your position.

In organizations, people make decisions on such hunches every day. That is no good way of conducting business. It may lead to real negative consequences. Thus organizations must find ways to encourage employees to question assumptions and so called 'truths'. That takes a lot of courage from management, but not doing so is a risk that is not worth taking.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

In '98 Mos Def and Talib Kweli released their only joint album "Mos Def and Talib Kweli are Black Star" on EMI. Individually they both enjoyed greater commercial success, but the album was acclaimed by critics. "Thieves in the night" was inspired by Toni Morrison's "The Bluest eye" that also discusses how people get blinded by the illusions and don't question accepted 'truths'. Parts lyrics are basically Toni's words with street twist, truly beautifully done.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Don't accept irrationally held half-truths or nonsense about the state of things. Question why, again and again and again.
- ★ Ask for data - proper data - that proves this so called 'truth'. Ask for proper analysis before making big decisions based on 'understood' conventions.
- ★ We all fall in love with our ideas, design the decision-making processes so that it entails proper analysis of all big decisions. Don't settle for 'half-good'.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Kahneman (2012) *Thinking fast and slow*. Penguin
- ★ Ohmae (1982) *The Mind of the Strategist*. McGraw-Hill
- ★ Pfeffer & Sutton (2006) *Hard facts, half truths and total nonsense*. HBR Press
- ★ Shoemaker (1993) Strategic Decisions in Organizations. *Journal of Management*

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ ["Thieves in the night" on Spotify](#)
- ★ ["Thieves in the night" on Youtube](#)

PROS AND CONS OF VISIONS : SIMON SAYS, PHARAO MONCH

LYRICS : “You all up in the Range and shit, inebriated
Strayed from your original plan, you deviated
I alleviated the pain with long-term goals
Took my underground loot, without the gold
You sold platinum round the world, I sold wood in the hood
But when I'm in the street and shit it's all good”

PROS AND CONS OF VISIONS

There is a general opinion that organizations need a vision. This is of course true in some sense. However, organizations rarely consider properly what the vision is for. Is the purpose setting a direction, than the vision has to point to a direction. Is the purpose creating a sense of belonging, then that's what it should be used for.

Many visions unfortunately do neither of these. They contain a couple of words that sound nice, and that someone think is important like 'engagement' or 'sustainability'. Often the words are then put in a sentence that makes no sense. It does not provide direction, as it doesn't justify choices, and it does create a sense of belonging, because the words are used by every organization and therefore empty. Basically it's platitudes.

For a vision to both point to a direction and create a sense of belonging it should contain two things, impossible to set in one sentence. The first is a clear description of what the organization should look like in the future, including a long term goal. The second is a purpose why the organization exists. One of these may also include the values (if you believe those have a purpose). By doing so the vision can actually do some good, not just confusing the people it is supposed to rally.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Pharaoe Monch is known for his complex lyrics and rhymes and is often considered as underground raps most prominent lyricist. His rapping clearly has with similarities to jazz and is sometimes compared to John Coltrane's style. “Simon says” is a good proof of this and is probably one of his largest hit. It was featured on the album “Internal Affairs” released in '99 on Rawkus.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Decide if you need a vision at all.
- ★ Define the purpose and benefits of a vision in your company. Build the vision around this purpose.
- ★ Make sure your vision provides both a sense of direction and sense of belonging, if you decide you want and need a vision.
- ★ Don't set a vision because others do, or use the exact same words others do. It doesn't feel very genuine and therefore loses it's purpose.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Collins & Porras (1996) Building your companies vision. *Harvard Business Review*
- ★ Gerstner (2011) *Who says elephants can't dance?* Harper Collins
- ★ Locke & Latham (1984) *Goal Setting*. Prentice-Hall

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“Simon says” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“Simon says” on Youtube](#)

BEING AND STAYING HUMBLE : DEVIL IN A NEW DRESS, KANYE WEST

LYRICS : *“How she gon’ wake up and not love me anymore?
I thought I was the asshole, I guess it’s rubbing of
Hood phenomenon, the Lebron of rhyme
Hard to be humble when you stuntin’ on a jumbotron
I’m looking at her like “this what you really wanted, huh?”
What we argue anyway, oh I forgot its summertime”*

BEING AND STAYING HUMBLE

The history is filled with giants who completely dominated their market one year and were fighting for survival another. One major reason for their decline, and to some extent failure, is spelled hubris.

Of course you can argue that many of them were subjected to disruptive innovation. I will hold my position, stating that hubris was the reason they didn’t see the disruptions coming. If your a market or product leader you have the resources to stay on top of your game and not get surprised.

Being successful creates a sense of invulnerability and in organizations this breeds a culture of being part a winning team - a team that does not loose. This is of course an extremely strong asset when used correctly. It gets easier to attract the brightest minds, negotiating with suppliers etc. Everybody wants to be on a winning team.

But it also has obvious downsides. The better we do, the worse of we are. A strong culture of winning creates blind folds to mistakes and new ideas, and sets organizational rigidity. We’ve been profitable for 100 years, we don’t need to change. The most tangible way of overcoming this is to build a strategy process where you always dive deep into how you can, and will, question yourselves to improve yourselves.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

In my opinion, Kanye is one of the true rap-equilibrists, mixing street talk with eloquence and a lot humor actually: *“I ordered you jerk, you said you are what you eat”*. With a mother being English professor I guess it’s no wonder. “Devil in new dress” is a track on “My Dark Twisted Fantasy” released on Roc-A-Fella in 2010. Kanye is one of the world’s most sold artists and has won 21 Grammys. Three of his albums was listed on Rolling Stone magazine’s best 500 albums of all times. Needless to say more, I guess.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Always actively and continuously ask others, unbiased individuals e.g. customers, how you can improve yourselves.
- ★ Likeability can be a true asset for organizations. Humility is a generally considered as likeable characteristic.
- ★ Don’t take upcoming competition lightly. All giants were one time small companies that large incumbents underestimated. Otherwise they would have been acquired.
- ★ Don’t ever believe you are indispensable. You’re not.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Christensen (1997) *The Innovator's Dilemma*. HBR Press
- ★ Collins (2009) *How the Mighty fall*. Random House
- ★ Imai (1986) *Gemba Kaizen*. McGraw-Hill

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“Devil in a new dress” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“Devil in a new dress” on Youtube](#)

ACCEPT THE STATE AND TAKE CHANCES: LOCO-MOTIVE, NAS

LYRICS : “Yo, yo, I live it and I speak it, my religion is reefer
Big money and the most uninhibited freak to sleep with
My visions are realistic, nothing is figurative
They asking how he disappear and reappear back on top
Saying Nas must have naked pictures of God or something”

“To keep winning is my way like Francis
As long as I'm breathing, I'll take chances
A soldier coming home, twenty years old with no legs
Sayin' there's no sense to cry and complain, just go 'head
So much to write and say, yo I don't know where to start
So I'll begin with the basics and flow from the heart”

ACCEPT THE STATE AND TAKE CHANCES

To many organizations the state of affairs is as they are. The market is fairly set, the competitors are fairly equal and the pace of change is too high to keep up with. Yet massive resources are invested in trying to change this. Is it actually possible to change the market? Some seem to believe so, or are just so eager and stubborn that they don't see things clearly.

Individuals have some kind of genetic predisposition e.g. probability of being tall. It goes without saying that a tall person is more likely to be successful at basketball than a really short one. There are always exceptions of course, but they are precisely that: exceptions.

In organizations there is no such genetic component, but there is culture and legacy, and they might hinder just as much as genetics. Organizations would benefit from accepting their state, work hard and make changes to improve that position, not building castles in the sky.

As the serenity prayer goes: ‘God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.’ If organizations were to live by this advice they'd probably be more successful. Does it mean give? Absolutely not. But focusing on changing what you can change, you'll be more successful in disrupting the state.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Nas, one the truly greats, has eight consecutive platinum records and over 25 millions copies sold world wide. “Loco-motive” is featured on Nas' eleventh album “Life is Good” released on Def Jam 2010. Nas is almost always ranked as one of the greatest hip-hop artist of all times, regardless of who is doing the ranking. I couldn't agree more. Although nominated 13 times, he has not yet won a Grammy - sadly.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Take a proper look at yourself and try to really unveil the basis of your success so far. What is the core?
- ★ Accept that there are limitations to what you can achieve and build around that. It does not mean you should give up your dream.
- ★ Don't overlook your limitations, that will only make it harder to succeed.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Baer, Wolf & Risley (1968) Some Current Dimensions of Applied Behavior Analysis. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*
- ★ Moxley (2004) Pragmatic Selectionism. *The Behavior Analyst Today*
- ★ Skinner (1953) *Science and Human Behavior*. Macmillan

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“Loco-motive” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“Loco-motive” on Youtube](#)

ALTERNATIVE COSTS : HOW MUCH A DOLLAR COST, KENDRICK LAMAR

LYRICS : “How much a dollar really cost?
The question is detrimental, paralyzin' my thoughts
Parasites in my stomach keep me with a gut feeling, y'all
Gotta see how I'm chillin' once I park this luxury car”

ALTERNATIVE COSTS (OR OPPORTUNITY COSTS)

One of the first things I learned in finance class some 20 years ago was: there is no objective value of anything. Something's worth is determined by what someone is prepared to pay. Not more, not less.

That is basically true, but acquiring something often comes with a price. We buy something from our suppliers, or we invest in people to acquire knowledge that will hopefully lead to a greater competitiveness.

When making a decision whether to invest or not, this price tag is often perceived as stand alone. In practice an investment is everything but stand alone. Every resource, whether e.g. time or money, could be spent on something else. And this something else could have a greater kick back for the organization.

Many organizations could benefit from viewing investments from such a perspective. This balance becomes particularly clear when looking at 'high risk' innovation projects from a strategic point of view. What does it cost to manage an innovation portfolio and the failures this encompasses? What does it cost in the long run not to invest in them? These are two difficult questions many organizations' strategists should address now and proper.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Kendrick Lamar is likely one of the most influential contemporary rappers. In 2015 the album “To pimp a butterfly” was released on Top Dawg and received astonishing acclaim. It was nominated for eleven Grammys (more than any rapper before) and was instantly considered a classic. “How much a dollar cost” on this album is allegedly one of Barack Obama's favorite songs and has been subject to debate on social issues, academic research and covers from symphony orchestras and jazz bands (as one of the links).

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Set a budget for 'skunk work', making sure you invest in things that might lead to new great things.
- ★ Failing is imperative to innovation and learning. Foster and encourage failing. Build a process for learning from failure.
- ★ Don't underestimate the alternative cost to reinventing yourself. Not evolving may be much more expensive in the long run.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Buchanan (1969) *Cost and Choice*. University of Chicago Press
- ★ Ma (2002) Competitive Advantage: What Luck Got to do with it? *Management Decision*
- ★ Eisenhart & Zbaracki (1992) Strategic Decision Making. *Strategic Management Journal*

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“How much a dollar cost” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“How much a dollar cost” on Youtube](#)

BEST PRACTICES? : THE BIRD, ANDERSON .PAAK

LYRICS : “Couldn't fake it if I wanted to
I had to wake up just to make it through
I got my patience and I'm making do
I learned my lessons from the ancient roots
I choose to follow what the greatest do”

BEST PRACTICES?

Over years, as organizations evolve, they develop ways of functioning. Ways that are proven superior to others are sometimes called best practice. Not seldom practices spread beyond the organization and becomes truly ‘best’ practice for a certain e.g. business. So far, so good.

The problem with best practices is that practices are never only practices. The need for practices to be aligned with strategy, structure, competence, culture and systems to name a few things is imperative. Best practices can impossibly encompass all those aspects of all organizations. ‘Best’ does not come in a one-size fits all.

Thus best practices, in addition to being valuable, also have limitations. First, the competence and systems of your organization need to be suited for the best practice. That’s not a given and adjustments might cost more than the possible benefits of the best practice. Second, if you’re doing things exactly like everybody else, how do you gain superior quality? So if quality is your competitive edge, external best practices might not be the way to be prosperous. Unfortunately, best practices are common in most businesses where quality is important. Third, by following others, you will never be the first and best practices is following someone else.

So, organizations do well in handling best practices with an amount of care.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TUNE & ARTIST

Anderson .Paak started drumming in church at a young age, and has also served as a drummer on American Idol before getting his commercial break. He performed drums on Dr. Dre’s album “Compton”. The Bird mixes music styles (in this case hip-hop and soul) that has become a trademark for .Paak. The song was featured on his second album “Malibu”, released on Empire in 2016. In spring 2018 .Paaks single “Til its over” was featured in Spike Jonze’s Apple commercial.

DO'S & DON'TS

- ★ Set and measure a lowest accepted standard in your processes and manage by exception from this standard - reactively.
- ★ Consider best practices as qualifiers not bid-winners.
- ★ Consider best practices as ‘good’ practices that your organization need to develop considerably.
- ★ Make sure your work with best practices contribute to your competitive advantage. Otherwise find other ways of improving your ways of working.

TO DIG DEEPER..

- ★ Hammer (1990) Reengineering work. *Harvard Business Review*
- ★ Keen (1997) *The Process Edge*. HBS Press
- ★ Womack & Jones (2007) *The machine that changed the world*. Simon Schuster

LISTEN AND LOOK

- ★ [“The Bird” on Spotify](#)
- ★ [“The Bird” on Spotify](#)

ABOUT ME : STRATEGY ADVISOR, RESEARCHER & HIP-HOP FAN

Besides spending a lot of my leisure time with music - obviously, I divide my working hours between practice and academia. I'd say 70/30 in favor of practice. I enjoy the combination. I believe the academic world keeps my mind sharp and my knowledge at the forefront. It provides time to think properly about the stuff I want, or need, to know more about. On the other hand not testing new ideas in practice, feels largely disconnected. I believe that my practical work, above keeping my research relevant, helps me to sustain a bodily tempo in terms of delivering.

My practice involves acting as an independent advisor and trainer in the art and science of strategy and behavioral change. I help employees and managers, from the floor to the board room, to improve their capabilities in setting proper strategic objectives and achieving them. I do so in private companies, publicly listed companies, municipalities, governmental bodies, NGOs and start-ups. As to the academician in me: when I'm not working practically, I study the actual strategy work organizations perform. My scientific domicile is KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Department of Industrial Economics and Management in Stockholm, Sweden.

I am particularly interested in how organizations strategize to balance delivering today with creating their future. One way organizations can pursue this challenge is described in my first book "*Strategy is a verb*". Since I'm partly academic my second book "*Strategy*" is a text-book, with a fairly comprehensive review of the classics in strategy literature, with a contemporary twist. I also have a number of up-coming books and of course more 'management-music mash-ups', such as this one. So if you liked this one, stay tuned for more.

To connect, drop me a line at pontus@pontuswadstrom.com, or give me call at +46-760-550010. Of course you can also visit: pontuswadstrom.com

