Managing With Clarity

Plans, Hopes, Dreams framework

Some organizations are better served by a lighter strategic planning approach that is reflective of what is actually known rather than projecting false precision. When an organization is early-stage, operating in rapidly changing environments, or facing significant uncertainty, this framework can be useful:

- **Plans** are what the organization intends to accomplish in the near term, often over the next three to nine months. These are concrete, actionable, and measurable. *What are we going to accomplish, by when, who will do it, and how?*

- **Hopes** are outcomes the organization would like to see occur. They are revisited regularly (perhaps monthly) but are not assigned specific metrics or accountability. *What are we hoping might happen? Are there things we can do to nudge things in that direction or be prepared in case good things happen?*

- **Dreams** are longer-term aspirations that may be vague or speculative. They are documented and kept in view (potentially reviewed quarterly) without pressure to act on them immediately. *What are our big dreams? What would amazing, transformational success look like? What inspirations guide us?*

This framework lowers the barrier to strategic thinking and encourages honesty about what is known and what is not. It allows leaders to be intentional without overcommitting and to remain open to learning. Over time, the categories will likely shift - hopes can become concrete enough to turn into plans, dreams move within reach and become hopes. The framework stays the same as the organization moves through it.

For many organizations, plans / hopes / dreams is the right starting framework for sufficient clarity until the time comes when it makes sense to create the first three-year and one-year strategic plans.