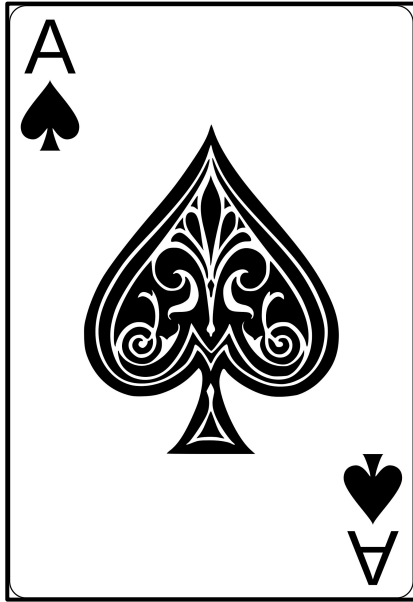


# **Strategic Thinking in Technology**

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*How I learned how to think “strategically”  
while helping my team (and the business) get  
the most out of our day-to-day work*

# Doing the most valuable work...



We found a way to cut through the noise, panic, and confusion of short-term demands and became more grounded collectively by aligning those demands to strategic goals.

For the Technology Team, “strategy” evolved from something abstract and academic to a very practical and actionable recipe for priorities

**...with the most valuable\* team**



# A (very) little bit about me

**Developer:** started out hacking large format printers, moved on to small companies and startups

**Lead Developer:** on small teams of developers for Inc Magazine and Mainspring Communications

**Manager:** small software development teams for Boston.com and Harvard Business Review

# Harvard Business Publishing

Harvard Business Publishing (HBP) was founded in 1994 as a not-for-profit, wholly-owned subsidiary of Harvard University, reporting into Harvard Business School. **Our mission is to improve the practice of management in a changing world.**

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Harvard Business Review is the leading destination for smart management thinking

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Harvard Business Review (HBR) is the leading destination for smart management thinking. Through its flagship magazine, books, and digital content and tools published on HBR.org, Harvard Business Review **provides professionals around the world with rigorous insights and best practices to help lead themselves and their organizations more effectively and to make a positive impact.**

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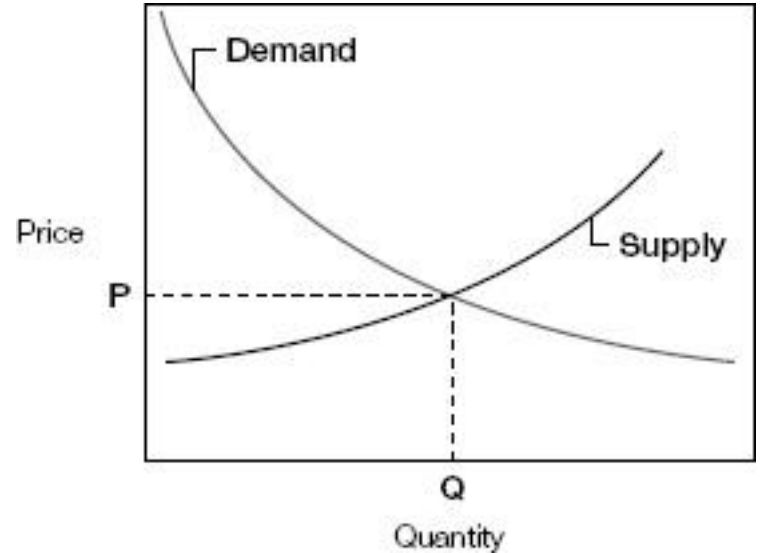
Magazine ■ Press ■ Web ■ Consumer Marketing  
Ecommerce ■ Advertising ■ Production ■ Technology

# So what is “Strategic Thinking?”

**Sounds great:** Smart people do this, right? So we should too. Thinking about strategy is something everyone should do at some point

**Looks great:** No one said “please don’t think strategically” but they probably also won’t ask what it means

**Okay, but what does it mean?**



# What it definitely isn't



**“Bigger, faster, stronger”**

Unless you're looking to compete on someone else's terms and not your own. If you're doing what someone else is already doing, then you *might* be in for a tough time (price taker vs price maker)

# Maybe this is it? Let's keep trying...

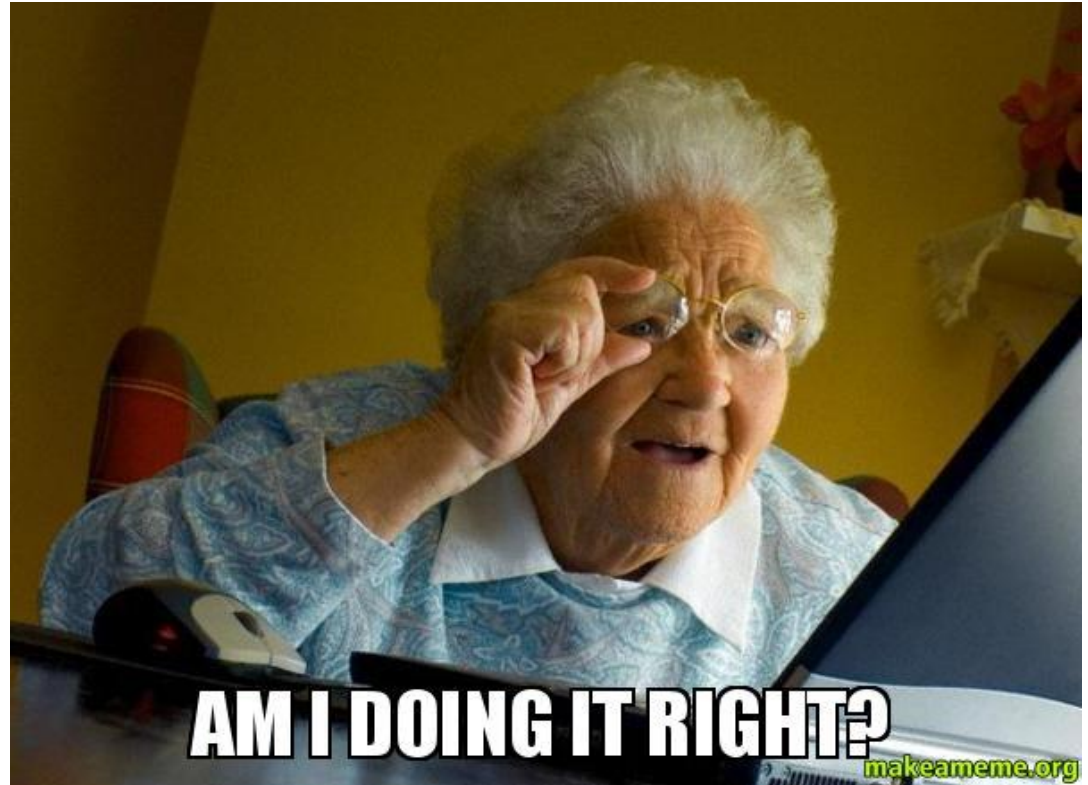
Better code?

Lower costs? Open source?

Mobile? Responsive? App?

Slicker features?

Working more closely with  
internal stakeholders (Editorial,  
Marketing, IT, and Advertising  
Sales)?

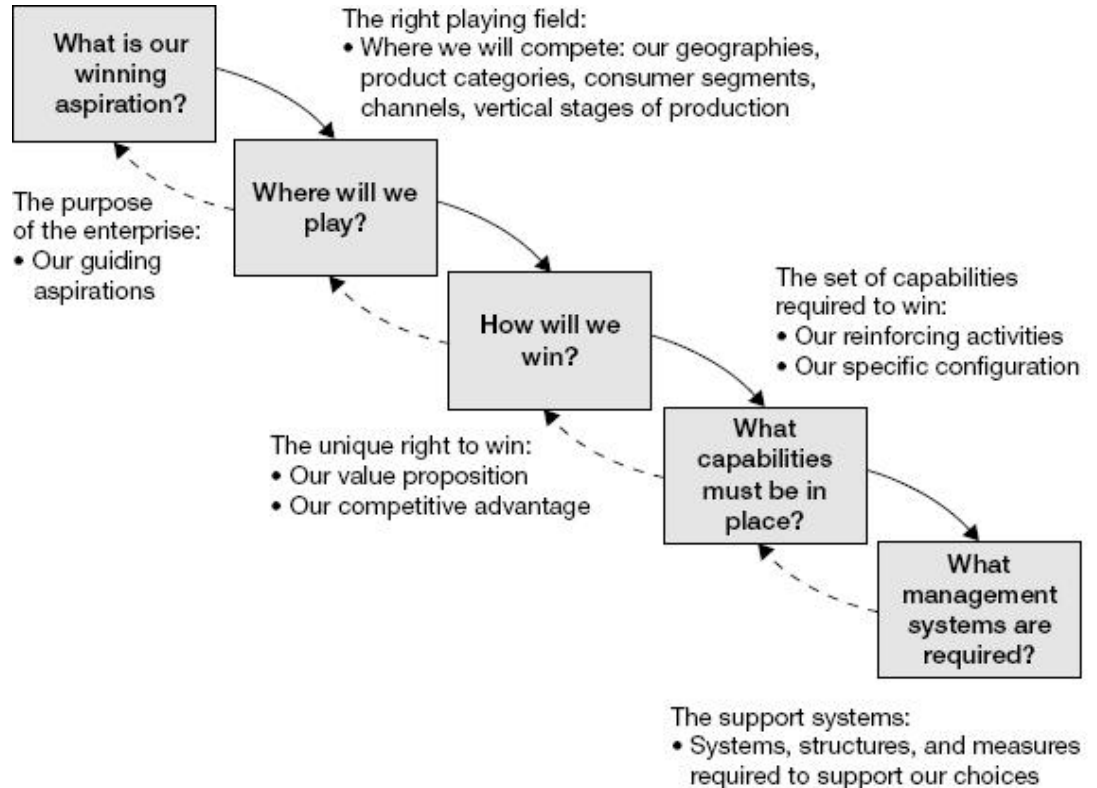




# Enter “Play to Win”

A framework that balances a business’ desire and capability against the “Economic Pressures” in which they operate.

HBRG underwent a group wide exercise applying this framework to what we do broadly and specifically within each of our teams



# What do we want to be?

## We aspire to be:

Drivers and contributors to the  
Group strategy

Recognized leaders in our field

Experts in (geographically)  
diverse teams

# Where we will “play”?

## We will focus on:

Strategic work that’s clearly customer focused and created collaboratively

Cross platform, cross channel applications and systems

Scale capacity with remote teams



# How we will win?

Using technologies that scale

Providing the “*best*” to customers,  
“*good enough*” to internal users

Clearly define and refine  
development processes and  
documentation



# Capabilities

We need to have:

Talented people doing the right work

“Radar” mentality that’s in tune with customer demand and those opportunities for our team

Documentation and processes that support teamwork

# Management Systems

We'll know we're on the right track if:

Engaged and effective teams, with everyone contributing

Growth in revenue and profit

“High Fidelity” work with design and other outside teams



# Assumptions

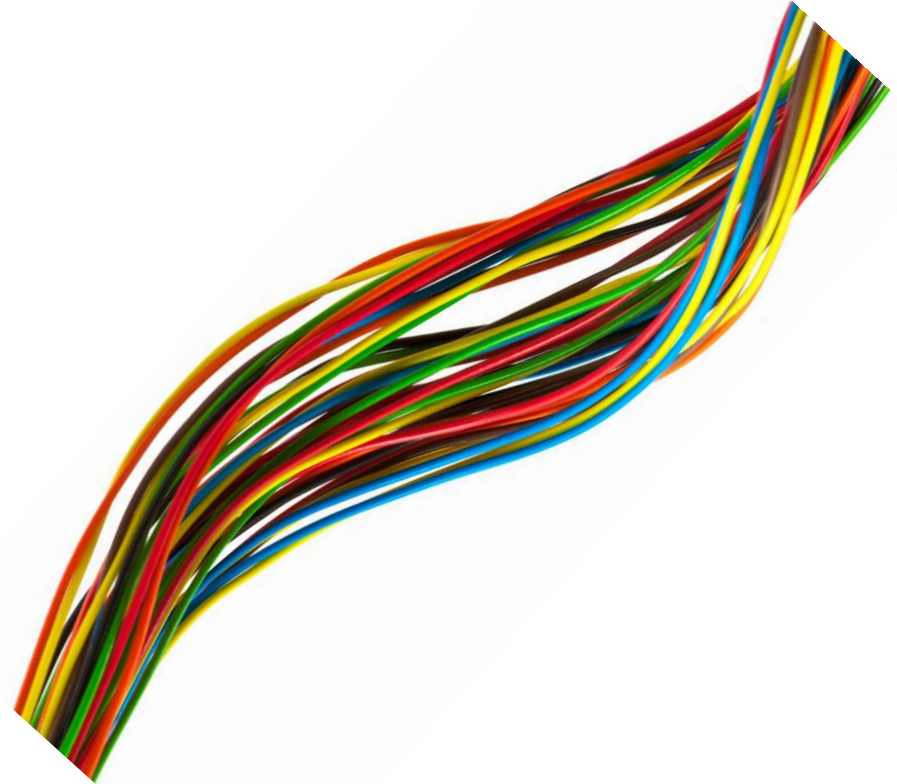
## What must be true?

Coordination with clear priorities

Paying customer is the clear priority,  
internal work must come second

Talent working in “**Split Flows**”

Strong Enterprise IT support



# What will we stop doing?

“**Twisted Flows**”, assuming our workload will find a natural balance between:

- short term, high interrupt
- long term, high quality

Remain one step away from our customers





*And then this happened:*

**REDESIGN**

# Redesign = BIG + (inflection point)



## Everyone was involved:

Every team within HBRG was actively involved. We needed a totally reimagined HBR site and experience

**It was imbued with a spirit of overall change:** We knew that we needed to change how we worked, not just what our readers experienced

# An opportunity to make **BIG** changes



## **To change how we all worked:**

We didn't really have a firm "process" for discerning the most valuable work. Ticketing systems made us order takers

## **To change the tools we work**

**with:** an older set of toolsets had stagnated under our feet. It was working, sure, but we were skeptical if we could adapt to a flexible set of requirements

# Where are we today?

**Process:** Many iterations in with lots and lots of experiments. Started with Scrum, tried “Scrumban”, now more like Kanban++?

**Tools:** More frequently trying out new tools, from an expanded suite of AWS services to using React on the frontend

**Team:** We still have a long way to go on documentation, but our development processes have led to very smooth engagements with outside teams



# Strategic Thinking is working for us

It's the best way we've found to clearly and consistently recognize the most **valuable** work for both us and the business



“You’ve got to think about **big things** while you’re doing **small things**, so that all the small things go in the right direction”

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- *Alvin Toffler*

# Thanks!

**Kevin Newman**

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