Strategic Planning For Individuals:

A Proposed Framework and Method

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We have all been there sometime as a student trying to decide what is the best course of action to go forward in our life as graduation from college (or high school) approaches. Individuals and organizations are alike in many ways. Each has competitors and each should plan for the future. Every individual and organization faces some external opportunities and threats, some internal strengths and weaknesses, and reaches pivotal forks in the road. Both individuals and organizations establish objectives and allocate resources. These and other similarities make it possible for individuals to use many strategic-management concepts and tools that businesses actually use. As a person nears completion of a college degree and begins interviewing for jobs, strategic planning can be particularly important.

Strategy analysis and choice seek to determine alternative courses of action that could best enable an individual to achieve their vision, mission, and objectives. A person's strategies, objectives, vision, and mission, coupled with their key external and internal (personal) factors, provide a basis for generating and evaluating feasible alternative strategies. This systematic approach is the best way to avoid a crisis. Rudin's Law states, "When a crisis forces choosing among alternatives, most people choose the worst possible one."

Two early articles published in SAM Advanced Management Journal hinted at the need for individuals to engage in formal, carefully thought-out strategic planning as it relates to their life and career. Avedisian (1984) explained that it is never too early to start personal planning; such planning should be done on an ongoing basis, and plans should be revisited for necessary modifications following any major life events. Klumph (1984) argued that career development requires planning and pointed out the fact that many people will go to great lengths planning a vacation, but will spend no time planning their vocation. "Planning takes time, and the results achieved by planning, revising, and updating career plans are directly proportional to the amount of time spent on them" (Klumph, 1984, p. 42). Following these two articles, executive coaching began to emerge, and by 2004, was a common practice constituting over $1 billion (Sherman & Freas, 2004). More recently, an SAM article by Sherman (2007) discussed executive coaching in which employees can more effectively manage their own careers by carefully developing a strategic plan or personal strategy for their own career. The present paper draws from the management literature to provide a guide for students (regardless of their major) to effectively manage their post-graduation professional lives. Specifically, the present paper focuses on strategic management and the process of strategic planning. Drawing from a well-established, widely accepted model of corporate strategic management, a "personal strategic planning model" is developed and presented. The model herein has the potential to make several important contributions to management education. First, the "personal strategic planning model" can be used by management educators to foster student interest in and involvement with the key integrative element of business curricula—the strategic-management process. Second, the model presented can be used by students as they face the difficult uncertainties that come with near and post-graduation decisions. As such, the

present paper can be used by faculty and staff to better facilitate their efforts in mentoring students. Perhaps most importantly, from a management education perspective, at least, the novel and engaging personal strategic plan presented herein serves as a means by which management educators can better bridge the gap between management theory and practice. Business schools have long been the focus of attacks regarding the lack of practical skills and real-world understanding among business student graduates. The present paper seeks to bring perhaps the most fundamental/core integrative component of business curricula—namely, strategic management—to life for students. Indeed, it is not by chance that strategic management is the capstone course in many business schools. The unique integrative nature of strategic planning is one that requires consideration of how all business functions operate together to foster organizational (or personal) success. The personal strategic management plan provided herein offers students an experience to joyfully and thoughtfully engage with the strategic planning process firsthand in their own personal lives as they begin developing their personal strategic plan for life post-graduation.

The most widely accepted, comprehensive model used for corporate strategic planning includes three major steps: (1) formulating strategies, (2) implementing strategies, and (3) evaluating strategies (David, 1989). As discussed below, following through with the strategic planning framework requires that individuals answer key questions about their personal and professional lives, including for example, "Where am I now?" "Where do I want to go?" and "How can I get to where I want to go?" Next, we present several key terms that need to be defined before presenting the proposed framework for individual strategic planning.

Key Terms in Strategic Management

Before we present a proposed framework for individual strategic planning and a method to accomplish this task, we define several key terms as given below:

Vision and Mission Statements

A personal vision statement should answer the question "What do I want to become professionally and personally in three to five years?" Developing a vision statement is often considered the first step in strategic planning, preceding even development of a mission statement. In addition to a written vision statement, individuals should put into writing a mission statement that answers the question "What do I want to accomplish professionally and personally in the next one to three years?" Developing vision and mission statements compels individuals to think about the nature and scope of their skills and abilities and to assess the potential attractiveness of future job opportunities and activities. These statements broadly chart the future direction of a person's life and serve as a motivating force and constant reminder of why the individual continuously works hard.

External Opportunities and Threats

External opportunities and external threats refer to economic, social, cultural, demographic, environmental, political, legal, governmental, technological, and competitive trends and events that could significantly benefit or harm the person in the future. Opportunities and threats are beyond the control of the individual—thus, the word external. A basic tenet of strategic planning is that individuals need to formulate strategies to take advantage of external opportunities and avoid or reduce the impact of external threats. For this reason, identifying, monitoring, and evaluating external opportunities and threats are essential for success.

Internal Strengths and Weaknesses

Internal strengths and internal weaknesses refer to an individual's skills, training, and abilities that are performed especially well or poorly. Individuals strive to pursue strategies that capitalize on internal strengths and eliminate internal weaknesses. Strengths and weaknesses can be determined relative to other persons. Relative deficiency or superiority is important information. Also, strengths and weaknesses can be determined by elements of being rather than performance. For example, a strength may involve ownership of certain assets, or a weakness could relate to not owning a car or residence. Both internal (personal) and external factors should be stated as specifically as possible, using numbers, percentages, dollars, and ratios, as well as comparisons over time progressing toward personal objectives in life.

Objectives

Objectives can be defined as specific results that an individual seeks to achieve in pursuing its basic mission. Long-term means more than one year. Objectives are essential for achieving a vision and mission because they provide direction, aid in evaluating progress, reveal priorities, focus coordination, and provide a basis for effective planning, organizing, and controlling activities. Short-term objectives are milestones that individuals must

Table 1. Three-Phase Strategic-Planning Framework For Individuals

Phase 1: Formulate Strategies
Put into writing a clear vision and mission statement.
Perform external and personal assessments to identify key opportunities/threats and strengths/weaknesses respectively.
Put into writing personal and professional long-term (> one year) objectives.
Perform a strength-weakness-opportunity-threat (SWOT) analysis to match key external with personal factors in order to identify feasible alternative strategies.
Perform QSPM analysis to determine the relative attractiveness of alternative strategies and select specific strategies to pursue.
Phase 2: Implement Strategies
Put into writing annual objectives.
Put into writing policies.
Allocate resources.
Phase 3: Evaluate Strategies
Monitor achievements and progress toward stated objectives.
Take corrective actions as needed to redirect or refocus efforts.

Source: Based on the David and David (2016) strategic-management model (p. 14).

achieve to reach long-term objectives. Objectives provide the basis for allocating resources. Objectives should be challenging, measurable, consistent, reasonable, and clear.

Strategies and Policies

Strategies are the means by which short-term objectives will be achieved. Strategies are potential actions that require a person to make life-impacting decisions and commit personal resources. Policies are the means by which annual objectives will be achieved. Policies include guidelines, rules, and procedures established to support efforts to achieve stated objectives. Policies are guides to decision making, and they address repetitive or recurring situations. Policies are especially important in strategy implementation because they guide a person's behavior. Policies allow consistency and coordination.

Proposed Strategic Planning Model for Individuals

Using the terms defined and described above, we propose a framework (shown in Table 1) for individual strategic planning based on and developed from a widely accepted, comprehensive model used for corporate strategic planning (David, 1986; David & David, 2016). As shown in the framework, the three basic parts or phases of effective strategic planning include: strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. This model represents a clear and practical approach for formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies. Following through with the framework will enable an individual to answer the following key questions about their life: Where am I now? Where do I want to go? How can I get to where I want to go?

The strategic-management process is dynamic and continuous. A change in any one of the major components in the model can necessitate a change in any or all of the other components. Therefore, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation activities should be performed on a continual basis, not just at the end of the year or semiannually. The strategic-management process never really ends. Greater formality in applying the strategic-management process is usually positively associated with organizational (individual) success (Miller & Cardinal, 1994; Peel & Bridge, 1998; Schwenk & Schrader, 1993; Smith, 1998).

Unless a desperate situation confronts the individual, alternative strategies will likely represent incremental steps that move the person from their present position to a desired future position. Alternative strategies do not come out of the wild blue yonder; they are derived from the person's vision, mission, objectives, and external and internal assessment. Next, we detail how the widely recognized corporate strategic-management model can be effectively applied and used by individuals to guide their personal and professional decision-making. Although previous research has suggested how the SWOT analysis could be applied to individuals (Helms et al., 2010), our research is the first

to demonstrate how the complete corporate strategic-management model can be applied to individuals.

Phase 1: Strategy Formulation

As revealed in Table 1, strategic planning consists of three phases: strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. Strategy formulation includes developing a vision and a mission, identifying an organization's external opportunities and threats, determining internal strengths and weaknesses, establishing long-term objectives, generating alternative strategies, and choosing particular strategies to pursue. To begin, individuals must first identify their existing vision and mission. Specifically, a person's present situation and condition may preclude certain strategies and may even dictate a particular course of action. Thus, it is logical and necessary that individuals first design or put in writing their vision and mission before establishing objectives and developing strategies. Four example possible vision statements for business students nearing graduation with a BBA or MBA Degree are as follows:

- To reach mid-management levels of authority and responsibility with a large manufacturing firm.
- To own and successfully operate a growing small business in the food service industry.
- To become a licensed certified public accountant working for a large accounting firm.
- To achieve numerous salesperson accolades working for a large pharmaceutical firm.

In developing a personal mission statement, it may be helpful to reflect on what one enjoys most in life, as research has shown that individuals who enjoy their jobs also perform better in their jobs. An individual's mission may include, for example, "working in team/group settings," "working in individual settings," "positively contributing to society through helping those in need," or "working with numbers or quantitative tasks." Both the vision and mission statement for individuals are generally less than one sentence in length, with the primary difference being the three-to-five-year versus one-to-three-year time horizon. Several example personal mission statements are given below:

- To graduate summa cum laude and obtain an entry-level position in marketing with a large consumer products company.
- To win the conference singles championship in tennis, graduate with honors in finance, and become a certified financial planner with a mutual funds corporation.
- To obtain a BBA degree majoring in management and upon graduation to garner a leadership position with a nonprofit, charitable organization that positively contributes to society through helping those in need.

Strategy-formulation issues include such activities as deciding what new endeavors to pursue, what endeavors to abandon, what new courses/classes to take, what companies to interview with, and what graduate schools, if any, to apply to.

The SWOT Matrix. To effectively formulate individual strategies, one needs to first construct a SWOT Matrix, which requires the completion of an input stage, as discussed next. Four basic steps are involved regarding the input stage of the strategic-planning process: (1) identify and list key external opportunities, (2) identify and list key external threats, (3) identify and list key personal strengths, and (4) identify and list key personal weaknesses.

In doing strategic planning, an individual should first determine what they consider to be their major external opportunities, external threats, personal strengths, and personal weaknesses. A weakness, for example, may be a low grade point average whereas a key strength may be three years of work experience. An external opportunity may be that one's university offers a graduate program that interests them, whereas an external threat may be that interest rates are rising precluding getting a loan. Other opportunities could relate to vocational training opportunities or the prevalence of mentors and role models (Futagami & Helms, 2017).

Strategy is sometimes defined as the match a person (or firm) makes between its internal resources and skills and the opportunities and risks created by its external factors (Grant, 1991). Matching external and internal key factors is the essential for effectively generating feasible alternative strategies. For example, a person with excess working capital (an internal strength) could take advantage of the cell phone industry's 20% annual growth rate (an external opportunity) by pursuing a career with Verizon. This example portrays simple one-to-one matching. In most situations, external and internal relationships are more complex, and the matching requires multiple alignments for each strategy generated. Successful matching of key external and internal factors depends on those underlying key factors being specific and actionable to the extent possible.

Table 2. Matching Key External and Internal Factors to Formulate Alternative Strategies

Key Internal Factor		Key External Factor		Resultant Strategy
No student loans (an internal strength)	+	Annual growth of 20% in the cellphone industry (an external opportunity)	=	Interview with Verizon.
Burdened by student loans (an internal weakness)	+	Parents own and operate a medium-sized business (an external opportunity)	=	Interview with parents' company.
Strong technical MIS expertise (an internal strength)	+	Robotics is replacing many employees in workforce (an external threat)	=	Take certification classes in robotics.
Have not traveled outside the state (an internal weakness)	+	Companies have vacated local areas (an external threat)	=	Select three favored cities outside the state and launch a mail campaign with resume attached.

Once key external and personal factors are determined as described in the input stage above, the individual needs to match those factors by recording in the appropriate cell of the SWOT Matrix alternative strategies or actions that would allow the individual to capitalize on their strengths, overcome their weaknesses, take advantage of their external opportunities, and minimize the impact of external threats facing the individual in the future.

In performing SWOT analysis, individuals should be sure to use the appropriate matching notation in the strategy cells of the SWOT Matrix.

Although heretofore used almost exclusively in a business setting, performing SWOT analysis is an important matching tool that can help students nearing graduation develop four types of strategies: SO (strengths-opportunities) strategies, WO (weaknesses-opportunities) strategies, ST (strengths-threats) strategies, and WT (weaknesses-threats) strategies (Helms & Nixon, 2010; Weihrich, 1982). Matching key external and personal factors is the most difficult part of developing a SWOT Matrix, as it requires good judgment—and there is no one best set of matches. Note in Table 2 that the first, second, third, and fourth strategies are SO, WO, ST, and WT strategies, respectively.

SO strategies use a firm's internal strengths to take advantage of external opportunities. All individuals would like to be in a position where internal strengths can be used to take advantage of external trends and events. People generally will pursue WO, ST, or WT strategies to get into a situation where they can apply SO strategies. When a person has major weaknesses, they should strive to overcome them and convert them into strengths. When a person faces major threats, they should seek to avoid them to concentrate on opportunities.

WO strategies aim at improving internal weaknesses by taking advantage of external opportunities. Sometimes key external opportunities exist, but an individual has internal weaknesses that may prevent them from exploiting those opportunities. For example, one possible WO strategy would be to take two classes aimed at obtaining Six Sigma certification in production/operations. This strategy would help improve on a person's lack of manufacturing experience and yet take advantage of the external opportunity that new manufacturing plants are being built in the United States.

ST strategies use an individual's strengths to avoid or reduce the impact of external threats. This does not mean that a person should always meet threats in the external environment head-on. An example ST strategy may occur when an individual decides to attend an MBA Program that offers a health care management track or curriculum. This strategy would capitalize on the person being a nurse but lacking any managerial experience.

WT strategies are defensive tactics directed at reducing internal weakness and avoiding external threats. A student faced with numerous external threats and internal weaknesses may indeed be in a precarious position. An example WT strategy could be for an individual to take additional accounting classes before sitting to take the CPA exam. This strategy would improve upon the person's weakness in advanced accounting topics while helping the person overcome the external threat of the CPA exam being very rigorous.

A SWOT Matrix is oftentimes composed of nine cells

as shown in Table 2. As shown, there are four key factor cells, four strategy cells, and one cell always left blank (the upper-left cell). The four strategy cells, labeled SO, WO, ST, and WT, are developed after completing four key factor cells, labeled S, W, O, and T. The process of constructing a SWOT Matrix can be summarized in four steps, as follows:

1. Match internal strengths with external opportunities, and record the resultant SO strategies in the appropriate cell.
2. Match internal weaknesses with external opportunities, and record the resultant WO strategies.
3. Match internal strengths with external threats, and record the resultant ST strategies.
4. Match internal weaknesses with external threats, and record the resultant WT strategies.

Table 3 provides a hypothetical SWOT Matrix for a college business administration student formulating individual strategies. Notice the (S1, S2, O1) type notation at the end of each alternative strategy; always include this notation to reveal the basis/rationale for the respective strategy in terms of effectively matching external with internal factors. Matching is a key to formulating strategies effectively for both organizations and individuals.

Table 3. Applying SWOT Analysis in an Individual Setting

Leave Blank	**Strengths – S** 1. GPA in Finance is 3.8 2. My parents will pay for my college education 3. Strong communication skills 4. Motivated 5. Good team player 6. No student loans 7. Strong expertise in SPSS 8. Yes, I am mobile	**Weaknesses – W** 1. No work experience 2. No foreign language skills 3. Degree in construction from two-year community college 4. Not certified to do anything 5. Weak writing skills
Opportunities – O 1. Demand for MBAs growing 5% 2. Health care and biotechnology industries growing 10% 3. U.S. GDP growing 1% 4. Online job searching is becoming easier 5. Online graduate degrees are readily available 6. The banking industry is growing 8%	**SO Strategies** 1. Go to graduate school (S1, S2, O1) 2. Work full-time for a bank (S1, S3, S4, S5, O6) 3. Apply to work for national hospital system (S1, S7, S8, O2)	**WO Strategies** 1. Work full-time while going to grad school part-time (W1, O1) 2. Enroll in an online graduate degree program, while working part-time in the healthcare industry (W1, O2, O5)
Threats – T 1. Overabundance of students receiving BBA college degrees 2. Entry-level wages/salaries are very low 3. Political unrest in the Far East and Middle East 4. My university has weak placement operations 5. Some cities and states losing in population growth 6. Minorities and women may have edge over me in being hired simply due to EEOC	**ST Strategies** 1. Seek services of a national employment agency (S7, T4) 2. Aggressively seek outstanding references and put them on my resume (S3, T4)	**WT Strategies** 1. Enroll in an MBA Program (S1, T1) 2. Start my own construction business (W3, T2)

To the extent possible, both the internal (personal) and external factors in a SWOT Matrix, and the SO, ST, WO, and WT strategies themselves, should be stated in quantitative terms. This is important. Vagueness is disastrous in strategic planning both for firms and people. Strategies and the underlying key external and internal factors should be stated in a specific and actionable manner. Also in performing SWOT analysis, it is important to include the "S1, O2" type notation after each strategy in a SWOT Matrix. This notation reveals the rationale for each alternative strategy. Strategies do not appear out of the blue. This notation reveals the internal and external factors that were matched to formulate desirable strategies.

The purpose of SWOT analysis is to generate feasible alternative strategies, not to select or determine which strategies are best for the individual (Taylor, 2016). Thus, not all of the strategies developed in the SWOT Matrix will be selected or executed.

Limitations of SWOT analysis. Although the SWOT Matrix is widely used in strategic planning, the analysis does have some limitations (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2006). First, SWOT does not show how to achieve a competitive advantage, so it must not be an end in itself. The matrix should be the starting point for a discussion on how proposed strategies for an individual could be implemented as well as cost/benefit considerations. Second, SWOT is a static assessment (or snapshot) in time. A SWOT Matrix can be like studying a single frame of a motion picture where you see the lead characters and the setting but have no clue as to the plot. As circumstances, capabilities, threats, and strategies change, the dynamics of a competitive environment may not be revealed in a single matrix. Third, SWOT analysis may lead an individual to overemphasize a single internal or external factor in formulating strategies (Nordmeyer, 2016). There are interrelationships among the key internal and external factors that SWOT does not reveal that may be important in devising strategies. Fourth, there are no weights, ratings, or numbers in a SWOT analysis (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Finally, the relative attractiveness of alternative strategies is not provided (Helms & Nixon, 2010), but this last limitation can be overcome by employing a quantitative strategic planning matrix (QSPM) analysis.

Perform QSPM analysis. Other than ranking strategies to achieve the prioritized list, there is only one analytical technique, QSPM analysis, in the literature designed to determine the relative attractiveness of feasible alternative actions. Although heretofore used almost exclusively in a business setting, QSPM analysis can be used by individuals to objectively determine which alternative strategies are best (Gib & Margulies, 1991; David, 1986). The QSPM uses input from Stage 1 analyses and matching results from Stage 2 analyses to decide objectively among alternative strategies.

The QSPM is a tool that allows strategists to evaluate alternative strategies objectively, based on previously identified external and internal key success factors (David et al., 2016). Like other strategy-formulation analytical tools, the QSPM requires assignment of ratings (called attractiveness scores), but making "small" rating decisions enables strategists to make effective "big" decisions, such as which country to spend a billion dollars in to sell a product.

The basic format of the QSPM is illustrated in Table 4. Note that the left column of a QSPM consists of key external and internal factors (from Stage 1), and the top row consists of feasible alternative strategies (from Stage 2). Specifically, the left column of a QSPM consists of information obtained directly from the individual's external and internal assessment.

The top row of a QSPM consists of alternative strategies derived from the SWOT Matrix. Not every strategy suggested by the SWOT has to be evaluated in a QSPM. Persons should compare several viable alternative strategies in a QSPM and be sure that strategies are stated in specific terms. Conceptually, the QSPM determines the relative attractiveness of various strategies based on the extent that key external and internal factors are capitalized on or improved. The relative attractiveness of each strategy is computed by determining the cumulative impact of each external and internal factor.

A QSPM for an individual is provided in Table 4. This example illustrates all the components of the QSPM: strategic alternatives, key factors, attractiveness scores (AS), and total attractiveness scores (TAS). The two new terms just introduced—attractiveness scores and total attractiveness scores—are defined and explained as the four steps required to develop a QSPM are discussed:

Step 1: Make a list of the firm's key external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses in the left column of the QSPM. This information should be taken directly from the SWOT Matrix analysis.

Step 2: From the SWOT Matrix, identify alternative strategies you should consider implementing.

Record these strategies in the top row of the QSPM. Group the strategies. Any number may be included but 10 or less is recommended.

Step 3: Determine the attractiveness scores (AS), defined as numerical values that indicate the relative attractiveness of each strategy considering a single external or internal factor. Attractiveness scores (AS) are determined by examining each key external or internal factor, one at a time, and asking the question, "Does this factor affect the choice of strategies being made?" If the answer to this question is yes, then the strategies should be compared relative to that key factor. Specifically, AS should be assigned to each strategy to indicate the relative attractiveness of one strategy over others, considering the particular factor. The range for AS is 1 = not attractive, 2 = somewhat attractive, 3 = reasonably attractive, and 4 = highly attractive. By "attractive," we mean the extent that one strategy, compared to others, enables the person to either capitalize on the strength, improve on the weakness, exploit the opportunity, or avoid the threat. Work row by row in developing a QSPM. If the answer to the previous question is no, indicating that the respective key factor has no effect on the specific choice being made, then do not assign AS to the strategies in that set. Use a dash to indicate that the key factor does not affect the choice being made. Note: If you assign an AS score to one strategy, then assign an AS score(s) to the other; in other words, if one strategy receives a dash, then all others must receive a dash in a given row.

Step 4: Compute the total attractiveness score. Add AS in each strategy column of the QSPM. The total attractiveness scores (TAS) reveal which strategy is most attractive in each set of alternatives. Higher scores indicate more attractive strategies, considering all the relevant external and internal factors that could affect the strategic decisions. The magnitude of the difference between the TAS in a given set of strategic alternatives indicates the relative desirability of one strategy over another.

In Table 4, the relative attractiveness of two alternative strategies is determined: (1) Attend graduate school or (2) Accept a local full-time job offer. This is a key decision faced by thousands of college graduates annually. As revealed by the TAS of 51 versus 39, the analysis indicates the particular individual should go to graduate school rather than begin full-time work at a bank. Note the use of dashes to indicate which factors do not affect the strategy choice being considered. If a particular factor affects one strategy, but not the other, it affects the choice being made, so AS should be recorded for both strategies. Individuals should never rate one strategy without also rating the other. It is best to prepare a QSPM by working row by row and letting the AS scores range from 1 to "the number of strategies being evaluated." Doing so assures that individuals have a different AS score for each strategy. As illustrated in Table 4 by the lack of consecutive 1s, 2s, 3s, or 4s across any rows, individuals should never assign the same AS score across a row in a QSPM. These are all important guidelines to follow in developing a QSPM.

Positive features and limitations of the QSPM. A positive feature of the QSPM is that there is no limit to the number of strategies that can be examined at once using the QSPM. Another positive feature is that the QSPM requires individuals to integrate pertinent external and internal factors into the decision-making process, thus making it less likely that key factors will be overlooked or weighted inappropriately. It draws attention to important relationships that affect strategy decisions. Although developing a QSPM requires attractiveness scores decisions, those small decisions enhance the probability that the final strategic decisions will be best for the organization.

The QSPM has two limitations whether used in a business or, as we propose, an individual setting. First, it always requires informed judgments regarding AS, but quantification is helpful throughout the strategic-planning process to minimize halo error and various biases. Attractiveness scores are not mere guesses. Be reminded that a 4 is 33% more important than a 3; making good small decisions is important for making good big decisions, such as deciding among various strategies to implement. Second, a limitation of the QSPM is that its effectiveness depends on the quality of the prerequisite information and matching analyses on it is based on.

Phase 2: Strategy Implementation

The next major step or phase in the strategic planning model is strategy implementation, which includes establishing annual (short-term) objectives, devising policies, motivating oneself, and allocating resources so that formulated strategies can be executed. Establishing annual objectives, devising policies, and allocating resources are central strategy-implementation activities for both firms and

Table 4. Applying QSPM Analysis in an Individual Setting

	Strategies	
	1 Go to graduate school	2 Work full-time for a bank
	AS Score	AS Score
Opportunities		
1. Demand for MBAs growing 5%	4	2
2. Health care and biotechnology industries growing 10%	4	1
3. U.S. GDP growing 1%	-	-
4. Online job searching is becoming easier	2	4
5. Online graduate degrees are readily available	4	2
6. The banking industry is growing 8%	2	4
Threats		
1. Overabundance of students receiving BBA college degrees	4	1
2. Entry-level wages are very low	4	2
3. Political unrest in the Far East and Middle East	-	-
4. My university has weak placement operations	-	-
5. Some cities and states losing in population growth	-	-
6. Minorities and women may have edge over me in being hired simply due to EEOC	-	-
Strengths		
1. GPA in finance is 3.8	4	3
2. My parents will pay for my college education	4	1
3. Strong communication skills	3	4
4. Motivated	-	-
5. Good team player	-	-
6. No student loans	4	2
7. Strong expertise in SPSS	4	3
8. Yes, I am mobile	3	4
Weaknesses		
1. No work experience	1	4
2. No foreign language skills	-	-
3. Degree in construction from two-year community college	-	-
4. Not certified to do anything	4	2
5. Weak writing skills	-	-
Total attractiveness scores	**51**	**39**

individuals. The strategic-management process does not end with deciding what strategy or strategies to pursue. There must be a translation of strategic thought into action. Successful strategy formulation does not guarantee successful strategy implementation; strategies formulated but not implemented serve no useful purpose. Strategy implementation often is called the "action stage" of strategic planning.

Often considered to be the most difficult phase in strategic management, strategy implementation requires personal discipline, commitment, and sacrifice. It is always more difficult to do something (strategy implementation) than to say you are going to do it (strategy formulation). Successful strategy implementation is more an art than a science.

Although inextricably linked, strategy implementation is fundamentally different from strategy formulation. In a single word, strategy implementation means change. It is widely agreed that the real work begins after strategies are formulated. Successful strategy implementation requires discipline, organization, motivation, determination, and hard work. The challenge of implementation is to stimulate oneself to work with pride and enthusiasm toward achieving one's personal vision and mission. In fact, utilizing the strategic-planning process and method described herein will enable an individual to better capitalize on the concepts, tools, and techniques that embody the functional business areas of management, marketing, finance, accounting, and MIS.

Strategy-formulation concepts and tools do not differ greatly for individuals or even for small, large, for-profit, or nonprofit organizations. However, strategy implementation varies substantially across individuals

(and firms). Implementing strategies requires such actions as purchasing a vehicle, getting a bank loan, taking a certification class, moving (to another city, state, or even country), selling some assets, networking more aggressively, or purchasing a new wardrobe.
Annual objectives are desired milestones one needs to achieve to ensure successful strategy implementation. Annual objectives are essential for strategy implementation for four primary reasons: They represent the basis for allocating resources; they enable effective monitoring of progress toward achieving long-term objectives; they establish priorities; and they are essential for keeping a strategic plan on track.
Considerable time and effort should be devoted to ensuring that annual objectives are well-conceived, consistent with long-term objectives, and supportive of strategies to be implemented. Annual objectives should be supported by clearly stated policies. Policies refer to specific guidelines, methods, procedures, rules, forms, and practices established to support and encourage work toward stated goals. On a day-to-day basis, policies are needed to make a strategy work. Policies facilitate solving recurring problems and guide the implementation of strategy.
Strategic management itself is sometimes referred to as a "resource allocation process." For persons who do no strategic planning, resource allocation is often based on hunches, emotion, or even guesswork, rather than being based on clear analysis and thought. Individuals should be wary of a number of factors that commonly prohibit effective resource allocation, including an overprotection of resources, too great an emphasis on short-run financial criteria, vague strategy targets, a reluctance to take risks, and a lack of sufficient knowledge (Sherman, 2007).

Phase 3: Strategy Evaluation

Strategy evaluation is the final phase in strategic management. All strategies are subject to future modification because external and internal factors constantly change. Three fundamental strategy-evaluation activities are (1) reviewing external and internal factors that are the bases for current strategies, (2) measuring performance regarding progress being made towards achieving your stated vision and mission, and (3) taking corrective actions. Strategy evaluation is needed because success today is no guarantee of success tomorrow. Success always creates new and different problems; complacency too often yields demise.
Even the best formulated and implemented strategies become obsolete as a person's external opportunities and threats and personal strengths and weaknesses change. It is essential, therefore, that individuals systematically review, evaluate, and control the execution of strategies. Timely evaluations can alert an individual to problems or potential problems before a situation becomes critical. Effective strategy evaluation includes three basic activities: Examine the underlying bases of one's strategy; compare expected results with actual results; and take corrective actions to ensure that performance conforms to plans.
Evaluating strategies on a continuous rather than on a periodic basis allows benchmarks of progress to be established and more effectively monitored. Some strategies take years to implement; consequently, associated results may not become apparent for years. Successful strategies combine patience with a willingness to promptly take corrective actions when necessary. There always comes a time when corrective actions are needed. Some key questions to address in evaluating strategies are as follows: Are my personal strengths still strengths? Have I added other internal strengths? If so, what are they? Are my personal weaknesses still weaknesses? Do we now have other personal weaknesses? If so, what are they? Are the external opportunities I face still opportunities? Are there now other external opportunities? If so, what are they? Are the external threats I face still threats? Are there now other external threats? If so, what are they?
In evaluating strategies, a person needs to compare expected results to actual results, investigating deviations from plans and examining progress being made toward meeting stated objectives. Both long-term and annual objectives are commonly used in this process. Criteria for evaluating strategies should be measurable and easily verifiable. Criteria that predict results may be more important than those that reveal what has already happened.
The final strategy-evaluation activity, taking corrective actions, requires making changes to assure the individual stays on track to achieve their vision and mission. Effective strategy evaluation enables the person to capitalize on personal strengths as they develop, to exploit external opportunities as they emerge, to recognize and defend against threats, and to continually improve on personal weaknesses.
Individuals should take the time to formulate, implement, and then evaluate strategies deliberately and systematically. Strategy evaluation enables an individual to move forward with purpose and

direction, shaping their own future rather than allowing their future to be constantly shaped by remote forces.

Discussion

All individuals have a strategy, even if it is informal, unstructured, and sporadic. All organizations are heading somewhere, but unfortunately, some organizations do not know where they are going. The old saying "if you do not know where you are going, then any road will lead you there" accents the need for organizations to use strategic-management concepts and techniques.

Individuals should take a proactive rather than a reactive approach in life, and they should strive to influence, anticipate, and initiate rather than just respond to events. The strategic-management process embodies this approach to decision making. It represents a logical, systematic, and objective approach for determining a person's current and future behavior. The stakes are generally too high for anyone to use intuition alone in choosing among alternative courses of action. Successful individuals take the time to consciously think about their situation and what they want to be as a person—and then implement programs, actions, and policies to get from where they are to where they want to be in a reasonable period of time.

This paper has provided and described and recommended a model for effective strategic planning at the individual level. Beyond the overall model, the strategy formulation phase is broken down into a three-stage framework where Stage 1, the input stage, entails preparing a vision and mission statement and doing research to gather and assimilate basic external and internal input information needed to formulate strategies (Sherman, 2007). Stage 2, the matching stage, involves development of a SWOT Matrix that focuses on generating feasible alternative strategies by aligning key external and internal factors. This paper reveals how SWOT analysis can help individuals make strategic decisions. Stage 3, the decision stage, involves development of a QSPM that uses input information from Stage 1 to objectively evaluate feasible alternative strategies identified in Stage 2. Applied for the first time in an individual setting, QSPM analysis reveals the relative attractiveness of alternative strategies and, thus, provides an objective basis for selecting specific strategies.

Without objective information and analysis, as provided in the three-stage framework, personal biases, politics, prejudices, emotions, personalities, and halo error (the tendency to put too much weight on a single factor) oftentimes play a dominant role in an individual deciding on the best course of action for their future work and personal endeavors. Overreliance on subjectivity undermines planning effectiveness. Thus, an objective approach is essential for achieving maximum effectiveness in strategic planning both for individuals and organizations. It is a known and accepted fact that people and organizations that plan ahead are much more likely to become what they want to become than those that do not plan at all. This article describes a process and method for helping assure that an individual is both effective and efficient in formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies aimed at allowing them to achieve their stated vision and mission.

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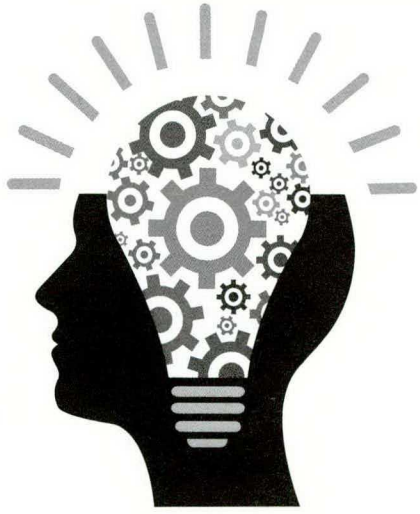

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