

# Strategy and Complexity

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## Abstract

*Strategy is often confused with planning. The many definitions and delineations of strategy, which highlight one or more aspects of strategy, while ignoring the others, have led to a state of confusion as to what strategy really is. This is evident in the content-analysis of the vision, mission and value statements of a number of companies. Not only were the analysed company- - specific statements vague and general, they were also unrelated to one another. Specifically, the espoused values were generic and terminal in nature and unrelated to the tasks and goals at hand. To avoid the confusion in the minds of practitioners, and as reflected in the literature itself, a Strategy Quadrant (content), consisting of Stand, Standing, Shared values and Steps is proposed.*

*The process of developing the 4Ss of strategy is delineated in terms of Mintzberg's "think/see/do first" processes (Strategy Triangle). The context of context of strategy is defined in terms of stability and complexity (Strategy Duality).*

*It is argued that, in complex and unstable contexts, the traditional mode of "think-first" deliberate strategies which set "thinking" apart from "doing" is becoming increasingly ineffective. The unpredictability of complex contexts, in which we operate, leave us with no choice but to be markedly adaptive rather than attempt to be overly prepared. Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) are the order of the day, and the organization's Standing (desired future state) and Steps have to emerge in action, rather than be pre-determined, in the development of strategy. However, this emergence of strategy, ought to be predicated on a Stand (strategic perspective or position), and a set of Shared values, without which emergent strategies may well lead to chaos. The principal role of the leader in a CAS is not to increasingly exercise tighter controls and formalize action, but*

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*conversely, to set in motion a complex responsive system, in which the agile organization can swiftly adapt to emerging, rather than pre-determined, situations and yet make the most of them.*

**Key Words** : *Strategy content, process and context, complexity, Complex Adaptive Systems and uncertainty.*