

## Strategic Planning Does Not Have to be Boring!

# Visual Experiential Strategic Planning: Rethinking How We Shape the Future

In a world defined by complexity, constant change, and information overload, traditional strategic planning—centered around lengthy slide decks, dense documents, and marathon meetings—no longer works. To unlock alignment, creativity, and action across teams, a new approach is gaining traction: **Visual Experiential Strategic Planning**.

This method brings strategy to life by blending **visual thinking**, **interactive group processes**, and **real-time co-creation**, transforming planning sessions into energizing, inclusive experiences that people remember—and act on.

### What Is Visual Experiential Strategic Planning?

**Visual experiential strategic planning** is an approach that:

- Uses **visual tools** (canvases, maps, diagrams, digital whiteboards)
- Involves **interactive facilitation** (group exercises, storyboarding, journey mapping)
- Anchors in **experiential learning** (people learn through doing, reflecting, sharing)

The result? Strategy becomes something people **build together**, not something handed down. It becomes **visually tangible, emotionally engaging, and behaviorally sticky**.

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### Why Visual? Because Strategy Needs to Be Seen

Research from cognitive science tells us that:

- **65% of people are visual learners**
- The brain processes visuals **60,000x faster** than text
- Visuals improve memory, focus, and problem-solving

By making abstract goals visible—through vision boards, timelines, stakeholder maps, or Venn diagrams—teams can **literally see what they're aiming for**, spot gaps, and stay aligned.



## Why Experiential? Because Learning Through Doing Builds Ownership

Traditional planning often leaves participants feeling like bystanders. Experiential methods invite people to:

- **Interact with content physically or digitally** (sticky notes, sketching, voting)
- **Tell stories and reflect** (What’s working? What’s not? What’s possible?)
- **Solve problems in real-time** through scenario planning or journey mapping

Experiential activities foster **psychological safety**, spark **lateral thinking**, and build **shared memory**—key ingredients for strategic follow-through.

Here is a simple exercise to apply for your next strategic thinking session:



**This image is a visual brain teaser designed to trick the brain into missing repetition.**

Each phrase contains a **duplicate word** that many people overlook at first glance. This happens because our brains are wired to process familiar patterns quickly—often at the expense of accuracy.

**In the same way, we may overlook key strategic opportunities**—whether it’s a hidden inefficiency, an unspoken assumption, or a potential breakthrough—simply because we’re too close to the pattern or too accustomed to “how things have always been done.”

**Lesson:** Just as we must slow down to see the extra word, we must pause and look differently at our work to spot what truly matters.

## Tools and Techniques



Here are a few of the most used tools in our visual experiential strategic planning:

Tool	Purpose
<b>Business Model Canvas</b>	Visualize business structure and value creation
<b>Value Proposition Canvas</b>	Align products/services with customer needs
<b>Scenario Planning Maps</b>	Prepare for multiple futures
<b>Customer Journey Maps</b>	Understand end-user experience
<b>Vision Boards</b>	Inspire and anchor strategic aspiration
<b>Dot Voting &amp; Affinity Clustering</b>	Rapid group prioritization
<b>Fist to Five</b>	Gauge alignment and buy-in quickly with a show of hands
<b>Published Works</b>	We used the best practices from the books <i>Good Strategy, Bad Strategy</i> (Rumelt, R. P. (2011). <i>Good strategy, bad strategy: The difference and why it matters</i> . Crown Business), and <i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i> (Kahneman, D. (2011). <i>Thinking, fast and slow</i> . Farrar, Straus and Giroux) to provide strategic thinking guidance.

### The Strategic Edge: Benefits of This Approach

- Clarity - Visual tools cut through jargon and make complexity manageable.
- Engagement - People engage more when they can see their fingerprints on the final strategy.
- Alignment - Visual maps create a shared “source of truth” teams can return to.
- Action - By building the strategy together, teams are more motivated to follow through.

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### Who Is It For?

Visual experiential strategic planning is especially effective for:

- **Nonprofit organizations** aligning mission and action
- **Public agencies** building collaborative visions across stakeholders
- **Corporate teams** seeking innovation, clarity, or culture change
- **Startups and founders** building from purpose
- **Educational institutions** seeking strategic direction with stakeholder input



## A Real-Life Example

At a recent retreat for a non-profit organization, participants a **visual strategy map** to sort their goals into categories, used **dot voting** to prioritize actions, and story-mapped their future vision from the resident's point of view. Not only did they leave with a shared roadmap—they left feeling **energized, aligned, and proud**.

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## Closing Thoughts

Visual experiential strategic planning is not just a technique—it's a **mindset shift**. It's about **co-creating the future**, not prescribing it. It's about **showing**, not just telling. And most of all, it's about creating a **shared experience** that transforms strategy from words on a page into meaningful, lasting action.



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