

When Strategic Focus is Needed:

Strategy Development at Emirates IDentity Authority

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Abstract. This article presents a strategy development process followed at Emirates IDentity Authority (Emirates ID); a federal government organisation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tasked to implement the national ID program for all national and residents population. It is concluded with some lessons learned from both the previous strategy, as well as the new strategy development exercise.

Keywords: Emirates ID, Strategy Development, National ID.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Emirates IDentity Authority (Emirates ID) is a Federal Government Entity (FGE) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that has been mandated by the federal government to enroll all UAE citizens and residents into a unified population register and supply them with a value added ID Card. Emirates ID had undergone a preliminary strategy development exercise in early 2007 which resulted in clear goals designed to address the organisation's initial infrastructure, technology, and organisational requirements.

Given a foreseen shift in the 's operating model, Emirates ID's leadership team decided to undergo a second strategy development exercise in order to prepare the for the challenges that lay ahead (i.e., technological, structural, etc.), while maintaining alignment between its strategy and the UAE Federal Strategy.

2. THE APPROACH

2.1 Strategy Development Framework

The strategy development framework depicted in Figure 1 was applied in order to arrive at the new strategic direction, and to link it with the organisation's day-to-day activities.

This framework started with articulating the high level strategic direction embodied by the Vision and the Mission,

and Strategic Intents of the Federal government. This high level strategic direction was then cascaded down through the organisation in a structured manner in the form of strategic objectives, key success factors, initiatives, as well as activities for the departments and functional units. This structured framework ensured explicit linkages between every level of the strategy; from vision all the way down to activities; hence providing a coherent road map to deliver Emirates ID's mandate. This also provided clarity for staff as to how their work directly contributed to the achievement of an element of the strategy.

2.2 Project Approach

The above strategy development framework was applied through the project approach (shown below) to set the new strategic direction. The project approach consisted of the three distinct phases as shown below in Figure 2:



Figure 2: Project Approach

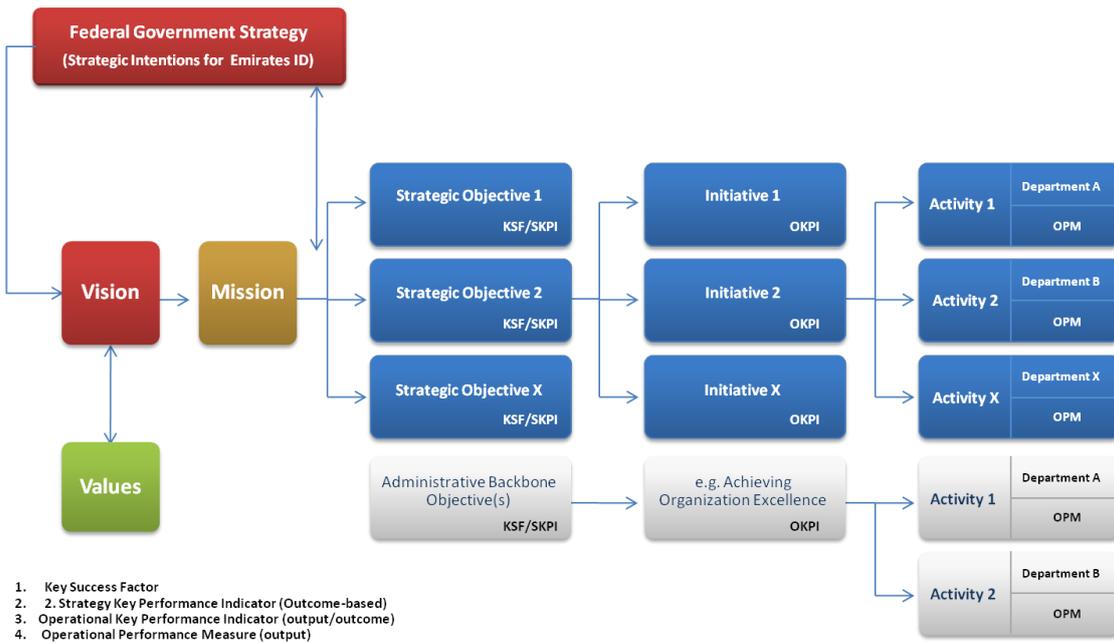


Figure 1: Strategy Development Framework

2.2.1 Diagnostics

This phase started with a thorough review of the organisation's current strategy, as well as discussions with the leadership team to understand the Strategic Intentions based on which the organisation was formed. Furthermore, the strategy development team gained insight into the leadership's vision for the organisation, on how that vision should be realised and challenges that may be faced in achieving the vision.

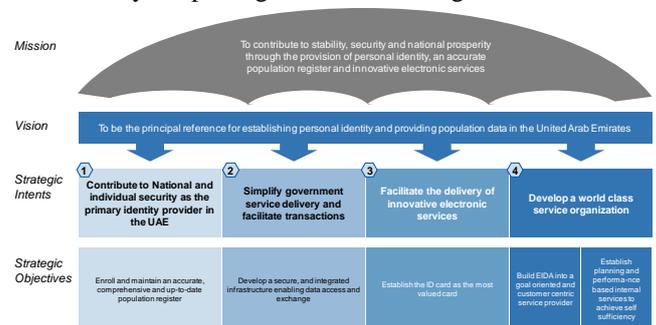
An important element of this phase was to articulate the current, and foreseen, operating model in order to better understand the dynamics of the interaction between the services and the customers. An external assessment (i.e. benchmarking) was done in order to compare existing services with those of similar international organisations; considered to be pioneers in the issuance of value added ID cards. This exercise helped the project team envision the potential evolution of the ID card and associated e-Services value chains, so as to better understand and account for future direction in the next phase of the project.

Next, an intense internal assessment was conducted. This assessment entailed studying organisational enablers (i.e. people, processes, technologies, etc.) to understand their readiness to support a change in strategic direction. Having conducted both an external and an internal assessment, the strategy development team was now able to develop a SWOT analysis that was used at a later stage in

the Development phase to leverage both in developing the Strategic Objectives, as well as in the definition of initiatives needed to achieve the Strategic Objectives.

2.2.2 Development

Using the output from the first phase (Diagnostics) coupled with the Strategic Intentions of the Federal Government; the strategy development team worked in close collaboration with leadership team to develop the high level strategic direction for the organisation consisting of its Mission, Vision, Strategic Intentions and Strategic Objectives. The result was four Strategic Intentions that were cascaded into five distinct Strategic Objectives cumulatively capturing the entire organisation, while



maintaining alignment with the UAE government's intentions for the organisation.

Figure 3: Emirates ID's Strategic Direction

For every Strategic Objective, a series of measurable Key Success Factors (KSFs) – strategic enablers - were identified in order to guide progress towards achieving the respective Strategic Objective to which they belong. In total, sixteen KSFs were established and assigned Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which would measure the progress in achieving each KSF; hence, the overall Strategic Objective to which it belongs.

Strategic Intention	Strategic Objectives	Key Success Factors	Strategic KPIs
Contribute to National and individual security as the primary identity provider in the UAE	Enroll and maintain an accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date population register	■ Accessibility to enrollment services	■ Daily enrollment
		■ Ability to manage flow	■ Daily enrollment as a % of maximum capacity (i.e. utilization)
		■ Accuracy of data	■ % of target population enrolled
			■ % of total population enrolled

Figure 4: Sample KSFs and Related KPIs

Next, taking into account the gaps identified (during the Diagnostics phase), the shift in operating model requirements, as well as the KSFs; twenty distinct initiatives were identified which would cumulatively address all organisational gaps and operating model requirements, with the aim of ultimately delivering all of the Strategic Objectives.

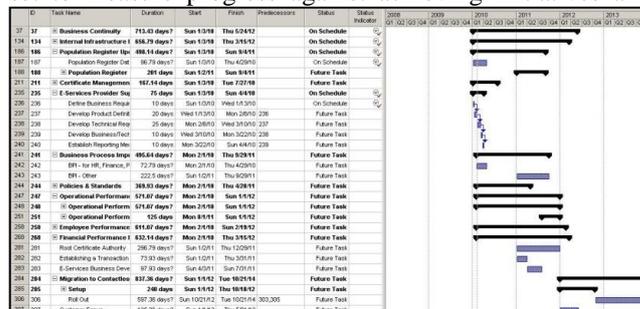
This structured strategy development process ensured that all proposed initiatives were linked to potential gaps and KSFs, which were in turn linked to Strategic Objectives.

Strategic Objective	Enroll and maintain an accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date population register	
Key Success Factor / SKPI	Gaps	Initiatives / Sub Initiatives
■ Accessibility to enrollment services - Daily enrollment applications / issuance	■ Lack of defined plan outlining population forecasts for enrollment by area by time	■ Enrollment and Renewal Planning - Access Channel Enhancement: Establish additional enrollment channels to enable more rapid enrollment - Enrollment Incentivization Plan: Develop and execute a marketing plan designed to attract and enroll a consistent flow of enrollees
■ Ability to manage flow - Daily enrollment / issuances as a % of capacity - % of target population enrolled	■ Outdated plan for ensuring consistent flow of population into registration centers will prevent ability to enroll expected daily volume in the future ■ Understaffing in registration centers ■ Software and hardware limitations will constrain capabilities to cross check expected future volumes with MCI database	■ Staffing Ramp up: Deploy a clear plan for recruiting, hiring and retaining front and back end staff need to support future enrollment targets ■ Core Enrollment System Upgrades: Carry out necessary software and hardware upgrades required to expand daily enrollment capacity ■ Enrollment Support System Upgrades: Update support system required to expand daily enrollment capacity - i.e. online/offline registration, etc.
■ Accuracy of data - % of registered customers updating status	■ Lack of integration mechanisms and automated processes to permit continuous updating of the population register - either by government entities, or the general population	■ Population Register Accuracy: Implementing a plan for managing automated and user drive updates and implement integration layer to allow for secure update/query access

Figure 5: Linking Strategic Objectives, KSFs, Gaps, and Initiatives

2.2.2 Implementation Planning

In this phase of the project, high level activities (with a strong focus on detailed activities for Information and Communications Technologies), planned timelines, estimated budgets, and accountabilities were detailed out for each initiatives. Furthermore, KPIs were designed and set to measure progress against achieving initiatives and



associated activities. This exercise resulted in an elaborate four-year work plan linking day-to-day activities within departments and functional units to the overall strategy.

Figure 6: Work Plan Illustration

As another critical aspect of implementation planning, an initiative management training program was developed with the aim of instilling a common approach, methodology, and reporting processes, to be followed during strategy execution.

3. THE RESULT

This project represented application of a structured strategy development process introducing the element of measurability (through linked KPIs) at every level of the strategy. Moreover, clear linkages between all levels of the strategy were established; from Mission/Vision to Strategic Intents to Strategic Objectives, to Key Success Factors, to Initiatives, and finally, to day-to-day activities (where appropriate) in the organisation. This ensured that the services of every department were accounted for within the strategy; resulting in awareness of how each department is contributing to the realisation of the strategy, and how its performance in doing so would be measured.

Another key outcome of this project was the prioritisation of organisation's technological needs. In doing so, Emirates ID was able to sequence the rollout of the technologies that will serve as building blocks in fulfilling its aim of facilitating the delivery of innovative electronic services.

Finally, this project resulted in the commitment and buy-in from the leadership team, as well as the wider organisation, on the new strategy for EMIRATES ID – which is a 'must have' for any winning strategy.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

4. LESSONS LEARNT

4.1 Lessons Learnt from Previous Strategy

Although Emirates ID's previous strategy addressed its initial infrastructure and organisational needs, it did not have as clear linkages between every level of the strategy. This resulted in a sense of 'vagueness' - leaving many in the organisation with no clear link between the strategic direction and their day-to-day activities.

Moreover, the previous strategy included too many un-prioritised initiatives causing an over stretching of organisational resources during execution. This resulted in implementation delays and in some even cases even cancellation.

Finally, the previous strategy did not clearly articulate specific execution and reporting mechanisms needed to ensure efficient implementation. This led to a lack of regular information sharing and in turn the inability for management to make proactive decisions.

4.2 Lessons Learnt from current Strategy Project

A key recipe for the success of this project was the power of a structured process guiding the development of the strategy – ensuring measurement at every step, and linking all the different steps together, while also accounting for the organisation in its entirety.

Another key contributing factor to the success of this project was the continuous involvement and contribution of key internal stakeholders across multiple levels of the organisation. This ensured a swift buy-in process and solid commitment to the new strategy.

The final factor contributing to the success of this project was a detailed and accurate work plan which brought the strategy 'to life' by providing a mechanism that linked the strategy to the day-to-day activities of every department within the organisation. This was reinforced with a comprehensive initiative management training program aimed at aligning all initiative managers to a common approach to initiative execution, as well as common reporting timelines and mechanisms that needed to be adhered to on an ongoing basis.

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