

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES IN BALANCED SCORECARD

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Introduction/background: The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) uses strategic initiatives as the primary means of implementing the strategy and achieving the strategic objectives. Although initiatives are crucial to implementing the strategy, the academic literature on them is scarce. Most BSC publications deal with strategic goals, metrics and indicators (including KPIs - key performance indicators). There is variety of methods to identify and evaluate strategic initiatives depending on the type of organisation, its size and other situational features.

Aim of the paper: The aim of the paper is to present the essence and a role of strategic initiatives in implementing organisation strategy. Moreover, different practical approaches are presented and discussed on the basis of the selected cases. Based on the cases described, a general typology of strategic initiatives was proposed.

Materials and methods: In the paper, the critical literature review is used to determine the theoretical understanding of strategic initiatives supporting strategic management process using BSC. Case studies of four selected organisations are used to present the practical aspects of strategic initiative.

Results and conclusions: As a result, the paper shows the links between BSC strategic initiatives and project management. Different types of strategic initiatives and three levels of strategic initiatives in organisations were identified and discussed. The proposed typology allows us to reflect on strategic initiatives from a broader perspective.

Keywords: project management, Balanced Scorecard, strategy implementation, strategic initiatives.

1. Introduction - the role of initiatives in balanced scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a comprehensive method of strategic management now 30 years old (Tawse, Tabesh, 2022), which is an opportunity to summarise and evaluate the effects of this method. It is a fact that academic interest in BSC topics has declined in recent years - the highest number of academic publications on the topic was in 2015 (see fig. 1). A. Tawse and P. Tabesh state, citing research by Bain&Company (Rigby, Bilodeau, 2018), that the largest number of companies used BSCs in 2008 (53% of companies worldwide) and that the current trend of using the method is declining. However, the impact of the BSC on

contemporary strategic management is difficult to overestimate. For many years we have been trying to measure the intangible elements of an organisation (organisational culture, knowledge management system, employee qualifications) and how tangible value is created from them. This area of corporate value management has not changed and certainly will not change in the future (Gierszewska, 2019).

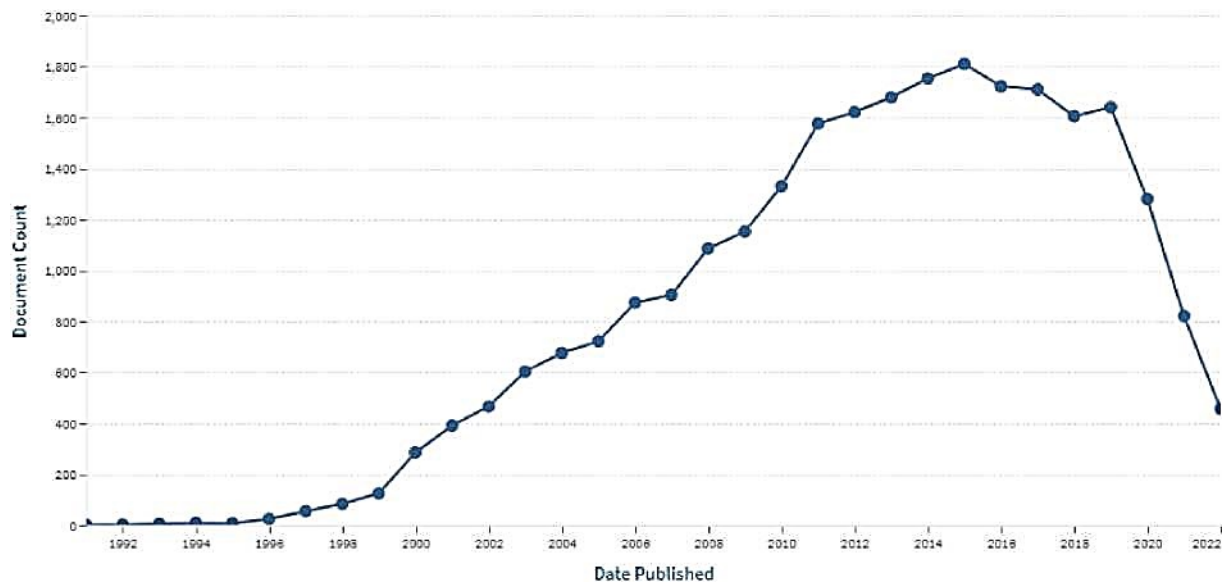


Figure 1. Number of scholarly works "Balanced scorecard" in period 1990-2022.

Source: www.lens.org, access: December 2022.

According to a study by I. Penc-Pietrzak conducted in 2010, BSC is used by approximately one third of large Polish enterprises. Of the 100 companies surveyed, 35 use the BSC (Penc-Pietrzak, 2012). The strategic scorecard has gained popularity due to its simplicity and adaptability for different organisations. The central role of the BSC is vision and strategy, which influences the strategic objectives in four perspectives: Financial, Internal Business Processes, Learning and Growth, and Customer. In each perspective, strategic objectives are defined through four interrelated key elements:

1. Objectives.
2. Measures.
3. Targets.
4. Initiatives (Kaplan, Norton, 1996, p. 8).

Initiatives can be understood as actions taken to achieve intended goals. The idea behind the BSC concept is that strategic objectives are first formulated, then measures of the objectives and target values for these measures are defined. Initiatives are formulated when those implementing the strategy are aware of what actions need to be taken to achieve the intended objectives. Therefore, it is possible that the precise definition of initiatives, understood as concrete projects, takes place outside the strategy (strategic plan) document itself. This is certainly an underestimated feature of the BSC in that it transfers the responsibility for implementing the strategy to the employees. In his lecture at the 2006 honorary doctorate award

ceremony at the University of Łódź, R. Kaplan emphasised that employee participation in strategy implementation was an unexpected and even unintended effect of BSC implementations. On the basis of interviews with managers of organisations that had implemented the BSC, an attempt was made to identify the most significant positive effects of the application of this method, expecting that the most important effect of the implementation would be an increase in the role of measurable strategic goals and the possibility of management by measures. However, the most important positive effect in the opinion of the managers surveyed was an increase in the involvement of employees, who identified strategic initiatives themselves.

The strategy of an organisation prepared according to the BSC is presented in the form of a strategy map, which shows the relationships between the four perspectives. The authors point out, however, that to the strategy map we add quantification, the definition of a time perspective and the selection of initiatives. Initiatives are selected strategic investments and a programme of action that enable the organisation to achieve the desired results within the set timeframe. Initiatives can be linked to perspectives and have a budget. In the practical examples presented, initiatives in the organisation are defined to support processes and develop intangible assets. Strategy explains and provides funding for initiatives (Norton, Kaplan, 2004).

In large organisations, there is a need to cascade the objectives described in the BSC - either the divisional branches of the corporation (Strategy Business Units - SBUs) or the support divisions (e.g. finance, HR, etc.) have their own scorecard. Analogously, SBUs and divisions or departments of the corporation may have separate initiative plans and their budget (Norton, Kaplan, 2006).

The creators of the BSC concept R. Kaplan and D. Norton point out that the identification of initiatives in organisations is a creative process and therefore difficult to structure, however, practice points to three ways to formulate initiatives:

1. The “missing measurement” programme.
2. Continuous improvement programmes linked to rate-of-change metrics.
3. Strategic initiatives linked to radical improvement in key performance drivers.

The “missing measurement” programme consists of supporting projects that aim to create opportunities to measure indicators identified in the BSC but which are difficult or impossible to measure, e.g. customer satisfaction, service quality, employee satisfaction. Continuous improvement programmes linked to rate-of-change metrics are used in organisations applying process improvement methods specific to Total Quality Management. The use of typical process quality metrics (such as e.g. PPM - Parts Per Million Defectives, percentage of missed orders, downtime, etc.) implies actions to improve their value. Strategic initiatives linked to radical improvement in key performance drivers tell us about situations in which we apply a completely new solution, e.g. a new computer system, a new process line, etc., in order to improve their value. So this is the application of an organisational innovation usually associated with a significant investment. (Kaplan, Norton, 1996).

L. Quezada et al. in his paper (2022) propose the DEMATEL method for prioritising strategic projects when applying the BSC. This is probably the only method that has not yet been applied in practice that supports the selection of projects based on criteria derived from the strategic objectives of the BSC. In contrast, Eilat et al. (2008) applied the BSC to the evaluation of R&D projects in organisations, while Milis and Mercken (2004) applied it to the evaluation of ICT projects. What these approaches have in common is the subordination of projects and their results to the organisation's strategy as described through the BSC objectives, regardless of the methodology used to value the projects.

The balanced scorecard originated as a tool for business, but recent years have shown the usefulness of this method in the public sector. This applies not only to the use of measurable strategic objectives in the four perspectives but to a large extent to the use of strategic initiatives for strategy implementation. Bracci et al. (2017) conducted an analysis of the use of performance measures in two Italian public service organisations. Although the cases described illustrate the difficulties and problems of BSC implementation, high expectations were attached to the emergence of new initiatives. Initiatives in the public sector can involve stakeholder resources - using collaboration in projects for the public good is the greatest success of public management.

2. Method

The paper uses a multiple case-study method to identify universal characteristics of strategic initiatives. Organisations that use or have used a BSC and describe their strategic initiatives in publicly available documents were selected for analysis. The main method of gathering information for the case studies was a web search, which also included publications available in the Quest database. Only documents in English were searched. It was assumed that the time range of available documents should not be earlier than 2010. The description of the structure of each case included the following:

1. Characteristics of the organisation.
2. Strategy and its components (strategic plan, mission, vision, strategic objectives).
3. Characteristics of strategic initiatives.

Organisations about which the above information was available and which met the diversity criteria were selected for the study. Cases confirming general observations, which more broadly can be regarded as cases confirming the theory (Yin, 2009), were selected for the study. The application of the diversity criterion consisted of selecting organisations from the business sector and the public sector, as well as geographical diversity. The identification of qualitative variables present in the cases allowed the creation of a typology of strategic initiatives. The main intention of the typology created was to be as universal as possible in understanding

strategic initiatives, so organisations of different sizes, representing different sectors and different countries were deliberately selected.

3. Results - described cases

3.1. ABB Ltd.

ABB is a multinational corporation operating in 66 countries in the power, electrical, robotics, automation and transportation business markets. The company was one of the first to apply the BSC method at the end of the 20th century (Ewing, Lundahl, 1996). The essence of the system introduced was to define a strategy for each strategic business unit (SBU) using the BSC. After 2010, targets and measures as well as initiatives were defined for each concern company, as shown in Table 1. At the concern level, the focus was on aggregating the achieved targets, leaving the companies free to pursue strategic initiatives.

Table 1.
Initiatives for the selected SBU of ABB concern

| Perspective | Initiatives |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Financial perspective | <i>There were no initiatives for financial perspective</i> |
| Customer perspective | 1. Relationship marketing 2. Rewards for customer account sales |
| Internal processes perspective | 1. Industry exhibit 2. JIT project |
| Learning and growth perspective | 1. Development programme 2. Employee programme 3. Management development 4. Employee bonus plan |

Source: own compilation based on Kullven, 2010.

ABB is currently formulating strategic initiatives in the area of sustainable development relating to the following topics:

1. Enabling a low-carbon society.
2. Preserving resources.
3. Promoting social progress.
4. Integrity and transparency (ABB, 2021).

3.2. Pikeville Lighting

The Pikeville Lightning (PL) organisation is a minor league baseball team based in Pikeville, Ohio, and plays in the Central Division of the Eastern League. Minor league in American Baseball Association "farming-system" exists in obscure towns training players for the major leagues. PL is also an affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates since the 1976, and plays in Waterfall Stadium, built in 2006 near Cleveland. Greg Storm, PL owner, has often been quoted

as saying, "I don't own a baseball team; I sell hot dogs!" which is the essence of minor league strategy: offering the sports experience for families and companies. The main strategic initiatives of PL concern two areas: Panel A - Game Day Events for All and Panel B - Special Request Game Day Experiences.

There are the following initiatives in Panel A - Game Day Events for All:

1. Post-game fireworks and concert.
2. Kids Happy Hour - free hour in FunZone for kids only.
3. Surprise Major League visitor from the past.
4. Meet-the-players night.
5. Become a general manager for the weekend.
6. Road trip give-away - travel with the team to a road game.
7. Win a one-hour shopping spree in the Lightning Shop.
8. All-star kid of the game - one child selected before each game based upon pre-entry.
9. The Magical Family - one family selected to sit with the team.
10. Mascot encounter - sit with the 'Lightning Bolt' team mascot.

In Panel B (Special Request Game Day Experiences) there are the following initiatives:

1. Birthday party - food, swimming, FunZone games and special VIP treatment.
2. Ceremonial first pitch - includes cap, autographed baseball, and team picture with you.
3. Corporate outings and parties.
4. Buy-a-box: Rent the owners' box for a night for your event.

Every activity has its own pricing list, however some activities are free of charge. Most of initiatives were developed by team members (Canace, Juras, 2012).

3.3. CRU

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is the independent regulator of the Irish energy market. In practice, this means accountability to the Single Electricity Market Committee (SEMC), a body made up of independent subject matter experts. The CRU's mission is to protect the public interest in Water, Energy and Energy Safety. The work of the CRU impacts every Irish home and business, by ensuring safe, secure and sustainable energy and water supplies at a reasonable cost. The CRU uses the BSC to determine its strategy and annual reports also follow the structure of the BSC. The CRU's Strategic Plan for the period 2022-24 outlines the Commission's Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Priorities. The Commission will also be guided by Government Policy objectives and international commitments such as renewable energy targets. The CRU Strategic Plan for the years does not articulate strategic initiatives - the main outcome the operator wants is for energy and water users in Ireland to initiate action. Therefore, in CRU's impact strategy, initiatives are replaced by incentives and actions to promote incentives. Primarily, energy and water efficiency projects. Rewards for energy-saving measures can be worth up to EUR 3 million for institutional customers. CRU can also impose penalties of up to EUR 1 million for failing to meet energy-saving obligations.

CRU has defined a mission, vision and values in its strategic plan for 2022-24. The strategic objectives and their measures are formulated in four thematic areas:

1. Ensure security of supply.
2. Drive a Low Carbon Future.
3. Empower and protect customers
4. Enable our people and organisational capacity (CRU, 2022).

3.4. University of Warsaw

The University of Warsaw (UW) is a public university with more than 200 years of tradition, with the status of a research university. The University has formulated its strategy, which includes a mission statement. The University formulated its mission and strategy in 2002, updated in 2008. The strategy also includes activities that have the character of initiatives, such as major investments. In addition to the strategy, strategic initiatives have been formulated, which consist of 6 strategic programmes with the following objectives:

- strengthening the UW's position as the best research centre in Poland,
- maintain a high ranking among Central European universities and join the continent's top universities,
- international recognition,
- strong impact on the environment, in particular by addressing socially relevant research topics.

The university's strategic initiatives are:

1. 4EU+ Alliance - a programme implemented since 2016 in cooperation with 6 other European universities, consisting of cooperation in four areas (flagships): (1) Health and demographic change in the urban environment, (2) Europeanness: multilingualism, diversity, citizenship, (3) Data - Models - Transformations, (4) Environmental change. More than 100 research projects have been carried out within the Alliance.
2. Excellence initiative - research university - the status of a research university has been granted to 10 units in Poland, which receive an increased subsidy of 10%. In the case of the UW, this is approximately PLN 70 million per year. Five priority research areas have been identified (Research for the Earth, At the Core of the Micro and Macro Worlds, The Petabyte Challenge, Expanding the Frontiers of the Humanities, In Search of Regional Solutions to Global Challenges) and 70 specific activities have been identified.
3. The multi-year programme "University of Warsaw 2016-2025" - an investment programme comprising 18 major investments to increase the UW's capacity. The budget for this programme is PLN 970 million.

4. Programme of integrated actions for the development of the UW (2018-2022) - the programme supports, among others, new fields of study, scholarships, training, summer schools, as well as the development of the university's IT systems. The programme is financed by the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development under the European Social Fund and has a budget of PLN 39 million.
5. International research programs - participation in European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) projects: EIT Food, EIT Climate and EIT Raw Materials. This initiative also includes research activities within international research agendas: Centre for Quantum Optical Technologies (QOT) in collaboration with the University of Oxford, and Regenerative Mechanism for Health (ReMedy) in collaboration with the Medical University of Gottingen.
6. Federalisation with the Warsaw Medical University - joint activities with a federated university as part of the agreement signed in 2018.

Although the UW does not use the BSC as a strategic management tool, strategic initiatives are organised as per the principles of this method. Long-term programmes financed mainly from external sources include projects whose identification and implementation has a shorter time horizon.

4. Discussion

A summary and the most relevant characteristics of the cases analysed are given in Table 2. Two organisations (ABB Ltd and Pikesville Lighting) are business organisations and the other two are public organisations.

The main variation in the initiatives presented in the cases described in the paper is due to two variables:

- the extent of external (public) support - the extent to which public support was used to implement the Projects,
- the extent of collaboration with stakeholders - as part of their initiatives, organisations can carry them out on their own (with a small number of stakeholders) or collaborate with stakeholders.

Table 2.*Characteristics of the cases analysed*

| Case features | ABB Ltd | Pikesville Lighting | Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) | University of Warsaw |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Headquarters/area of operation | Zurich, Switzerland/world | Pikesville/Ohio USA | Dublin/Ireland | Warsaw/Poland |
| Employment | 110 000 | No data available ¹ | 120 | 7 678 |
| Strategy | Sustainability in global markets. | Transforming games into an affordable family experience with much more entertainment offered than just the game. | Regulating energy and water for a changing climate. Mission, vision and values. Strategic objectives in 4 areas. | Development Strategy including the university's mission, priorities, specific objectives and investment plans. |
| Strategic initiatives | Strategic initiatives in the 4 areas of sustainable development. Initiatives and programmes at SBU level. | 14 initiatives targeting individual and business customers. | Initiatives related to incentives for energy and water users to undertake Energy Saving Projects. | The University is implementing 6 strategic programmes funded from various external sources. |

¹ Based on the data in the case report, it can be presumed that the Pikesville Lighting team comprised no more than 100 employees.

Source: own study.

A typology of strategic initiatives using the above variables is presented in Table 3. There are four models of initiative implementation: autarkic, isolated, influencer model and transparent model.

Table 3.*Typology of strategic initiatives*

| | | Scope of public support for strategic initiatives | |
|----------------------------------|--------|---|--|
| | | low | high |
| Scope of stakeholder cooperation | narrow | A - autarkic model Examples: ABB, Pikesville Lighting | B - isolated model <i>No examples</i> |
| | wide | C - influencer model Example: CRU | D - transparent model Example: University of Warsaw |

Source: own study.

The strategic initiatives presented in the examples are also differentiated according to the initiators of the projects. We can distinguish a "top-down" approach in which initiatives are part of the strategy - even if they are proposed by lower levels, the decision to launch and fund them lies with the central authorities. Such a situation can be observed at the University of Warsaw, where each initiative is a programme within which projects can be initiated and implemented. The second situation, which we can call the 'bottom-up' approach, consists in setting strategic goals and expected values for the measures of these goals in the strategy. However, we expect the proposal of activities/projects to come from the lower levels of the organisation. In the cases of ABB, Pikesville Lighting and CRU we are dealing with this approach. The specific case here is CRU, where initiatives are understood to be the activities of the energy and water market players in Ireland.

A separate issue is the theme of strategic initiatives: in the case of business organisations, initiatives concern opportunities to increase competitive advantage. The ABB example shows that the last decades have been an evolution: from strictly business programmes and projects at the end of the 20th century, to environmental sustainability initiatives. Obviously, we can observe a link between the initiatives and the core business of the organisation. In the case of the UW, the outcome of most initiatives is research projects; this is the naturalized task of a research university. In second place are investments to support scientific and teaching activities at the university. According to the essence of the BSC, **investments should always appear as initiatives and not as strategic goals**. This is due to the nature of the objectives appearing in the BSC, which relate to efficiency and not to the future state itself. Investments, i.e. the purchase or production of fixed assets, are a means to achieve the strategic objective and not the strategic objective. The UW example shows that some investments have been left within the strategic plan, this may be due to a misunderstanding of the nature of strategic management by the stakeholders involved in the preparation of the strategy. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that UW does not make full use of the BSC methodology for strategic management. It was chosen as a case in this paper because it is a good example of organising initiatives, in line with the essence of the BSC.

In the examples presented, only in one case (ABB) is there a link between initiatives and BSC perspectives. In the theory and strategy maps described in the literature, this link is more often observable. It is difficult to conclude that this means that the link is only present for business. Certainly, strategic initiatives can be logically organised thematically according to BSC perspectives, with the financial perspective being somewhat challenging. In the business sector, the financial perspective is the ultimate outcome, which means that any initiative that improves the competitiveness of the business relates to the financial perspective. Perhaps for these reasons, in the case of ABB, the identification of initiatives for the financial perspective was abandoned. One could, of course, imagine an initiative for the financial perspective that would correspond to the 'missing metrics' approach described by Norton and Kaplan (1996), which would be the creation or improvement of a corporate financial management system.

5. Conclusions

The role of strategic initiatives is underestimated in the management practice of organisations applying the BSC. The analyses carried out allow the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. Strategic initiatives are a fundamental type of organisational activity outside of operations. Referring to the concept of ambidexterity, which distinguishes between exploitation (operational activity) and exploration (search for new opportunities,

improvement), strategic initiatives are precisely a type of exploration providing new opportunities for action in the future.

2. The basic form of strategic initiative is the project. In very large organisations, projects are organised into programmes. Strategic initiative projects can have a variety of themes: investment projects, improvement projects or marketing campaigns.
3. As initiatives take the form of Projects, the effectiveness of their implementation depends on the level of project maturity in the organisation. In organisations with a high level of project maturity, the efficiency and effectiveness of initiating, executing and implementing the outcomes of projects is significantly higher.
4. The presented typology of Strategic Initiatives refers to a holistic approach to the undertaking and implementation of Strategic Initiatives in organisations that apply the BSC but also those that do not apply the BSC but formulate Strategic Initiatives in the form of programmes to support specific themes in the organisation. The typology presented is not intended to position individual projects within the organisation, although it may assist in understanding the opportunities offered by strategic initiatives to the organisation.

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