

# Building an Effective Technical Strategy

**Sarah Wells**



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# What makes a good strategy?



"Has every chance of becoming a business classic"  
*Management Today*

RICHARD RUMELT

**GOOD  
STRATEGY**  
**BAD  
STRATEGY**

The Difference and Why It Matters



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# The kernel of a strategy has three elements



Machine  
learning?

AI to find the  
story faster?

Remote working  
becomes table stakes?

New abstractions and  
platforms on top of  
kubernetes?

"Hey Alexa, read me the  
headlines"?

What does 2023 look like?

# 1. A diagnosis

Of the challenge being faced



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**Build an organisation  
where we can move  
fast without having to  
stop and do it  
properly later**

# What is going on here?



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# 2. Guiding policies

## How to tackle the challenge



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**Attract and  
keep the  
best people**

**Be truly  
cloud  
native**

**Optimise  
for flow**

**Buy over  
build**

**Be clear**

**Focus on  
business  
capabilities**

**Make sure  
everything  
is owned**

**Standardise  
the stuff  
that isn't  
interesting**

**Keep  
learning**

**Keep teams  
together  
and move  
the work**

# Cloud-only 2020

**Mark Barnes**

**<https://medium.com/ft-product-technology/making-the-case-for-cloud-only-92f382ff8dd9>**



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# No next Next

**Anna Shipman**

**<https://medium.com/ft-product-technology/no-next-next-42c71541ebcc>**



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# Get off the monolith



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# 3. Actions to get you there

## Coherent and feasible



# Make it easier to do the right thing

We waste a lot of time  
asking questions

Make it easy to find all the  
information

- In a documentation hub
- in context in single  
system view
- in slack

Many channels, one  
message

# Improve our business capability view

Monitor all business  
capabilities

Target: we can measure our  
true availability

And we can automate  
escalation to delivery teams  
directly when there are real  
issues



# What, Why, and How



# Coming up with your strategy



**You need a strategy for your  
part of the organisation**



**Avoid the “Air Sandwich”**

**Filled with misunderstandings, confusion  
and misalignment**

**The New How: Creating Business Solutions through  
Collaborative Strategy, Nilofer Merchant**



# Look at the context



# Look at what's changing



# Don't be afraid of being boring

Will Larson

<https://lethain.com/good-engineering-strategy-is-boring/>



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**Camille Fournier**

@skamille



I kind of think writing about engineering strategy is hard because good strategy is pretty boring, and it's kind of boring to write about. Also I think when people hear "strategy" they think "innovation"

6:14 PM · Nov 17, 2020



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**Wait**



# Design docs are a good place to start

- Write five
- Look for things that keep coming up

**Will Larson**

<https://staffeng.com/guides/engineering-strategy/>



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**Write it down in different  
ways**



**Write code  
you can fix at 3am**

<https://www.ft.com/tech-principles>

# Implementing





**You just spent weeks writing it, to most people this is new**





# Talk about it

## In lots of different ways





**Transmitted -> Received -> Understood ->  
Agreed -> Converted to useful action**

**Alia Rose Connor, quoted by Jason Yip  
<https://jchyip.medium.com/why-aligned-autonomy-is-an-ongoing-struggle-efa62e272d5d>**



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**“If they’re not complaining that you’re communicating too much, you probably haven’t communicated it enough”**

**Jason Yip - <https://jchyip.medium.com/why-aligned-autonomy-is-an-ongoing-struggle-efa62e272d5d>**



# Using OKRs

## Or equivalent

<https://www.whatmatters.com/faqs/okr-meaning-definition-example>



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**Find the places where  
strategies conflict**

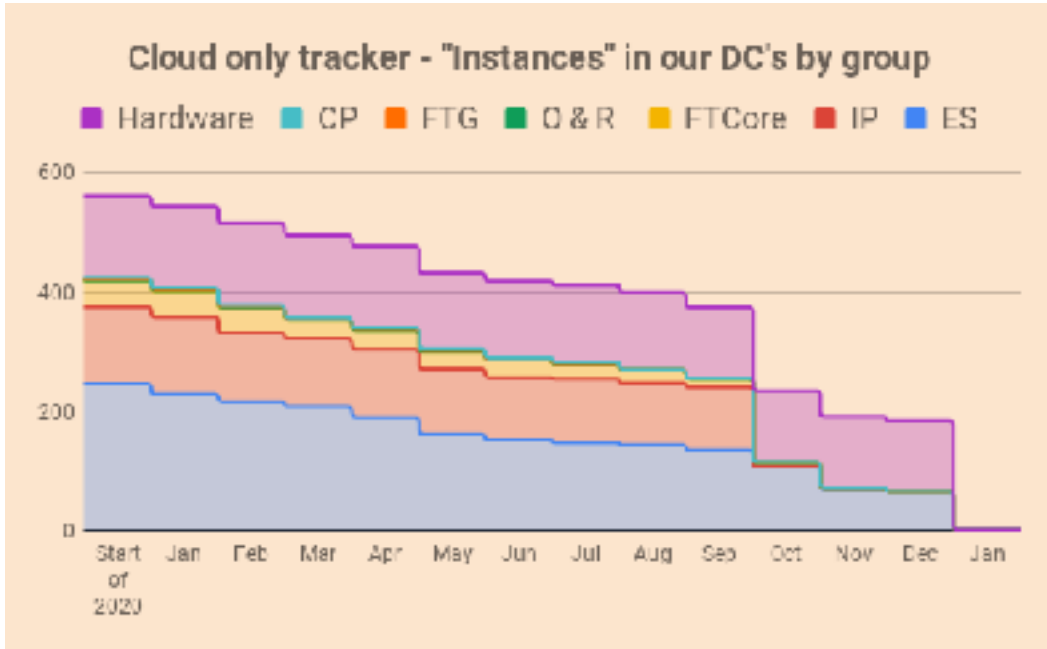


# Tracking progress



**How will you know if it is  
successful?**





## Cloud-only 2020



# Adapting to change





# Nailing the switch



# Key points



- **You need a strategy because it helps you make decisions**



- **You need a strategy because it helps you make decisions**
- **It isn't done when you've written it**



- **You need a strategy because it helps you make decisions**
- **It isn't done when you've written it**
- **There is value in alignment AND in surfacing conflict**



**Will Larson**

<https://lethain.com/eng-strategies/>

**Anna Shipman**

<https://www.annashipman.co.uk/jfdi/tech-strategy-process.html>



**Thank you!**



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