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WHY STRATEGY IS NOT A SCIENCE

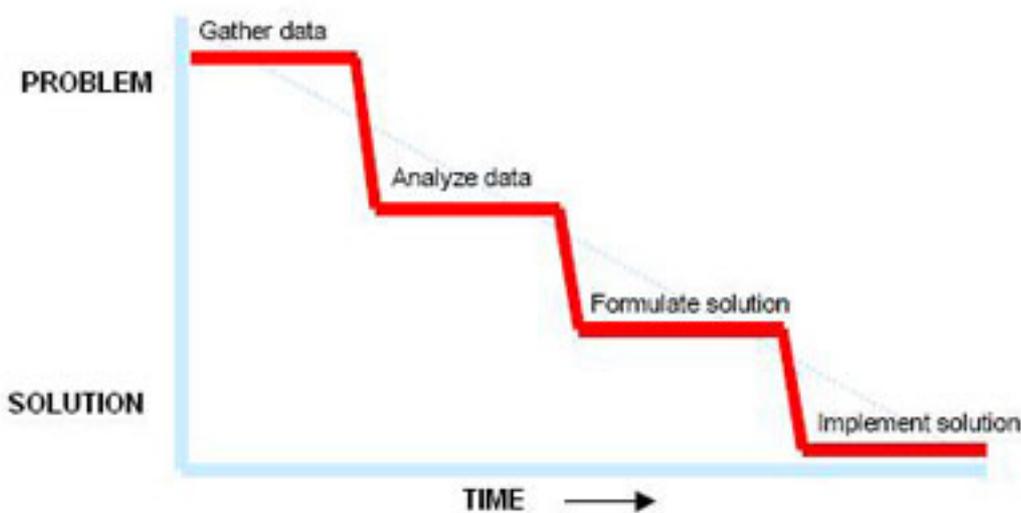
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Why strategy is not a science

Henry Ford sold the Model T in 'Any colour you like as long as it's black', with the slogan 'It gets you there and it brings you back.' He sold 15 million. This was in a market devoid of choice – where marketing could be treated as science – price and sales marching in unison. In a competitive market, however, strategy follows the principles of design, not science.

Design solutions are about 'invented choice', unlike science which is about 'discovered truth'. The former deals with designing what does not yet exist, while scientists explain what is. Design will always be about speculation. There is no one right way to design a marketing strategy, even though it is executed in a world where the gravitational constant equals 9.8 metres per second squared – every day of the week.

Finding the square root of 1750 is quite difficult without a calculator, but you can solve it. There is a specific answer. These types of problems are referred to as 'tame' problems, even though solving them can be complex. The traditional pattern of thinking that we tend to follow with tame problems gives us what the software industry has dubbed a Waterfall Model:





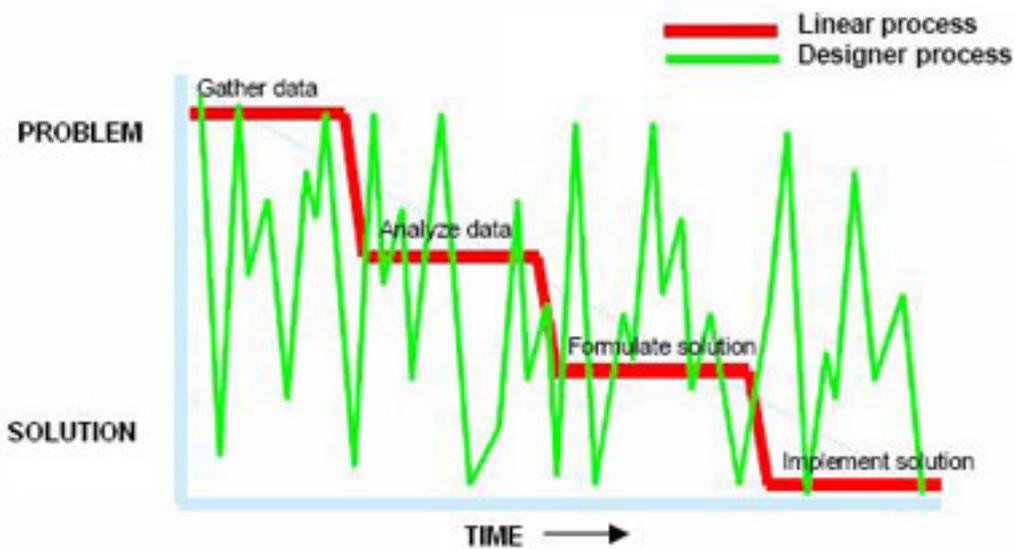
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From Conklin J

Using the Waterfall approach is a linear method – although a useful template to employ for the presentation of your ‘story’ – it does not suit strategy construction. Strategy despises this linear approach

In a study done at the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation, a group of designers (of integrated circuits) was asked to solve a complex elevator problem. Suffice to say – the Waterfall did not feature at all in the process – these designers began early on with possible solutions, and the step of understanding the problem persisted close to the very end.



From Conklin J

Being 'all over the place', is not a sign of defective thinking, but rather the core of a creative problem-solving process. These types of complex problems (which are the opposite of 'tame'), are referred to as 'wicked'. This term was coined by Horst Rittel, who proposed a number of characteristics for these problems, such as having no 'stopping rule': The problem-solving process ends when you run out of resources, such as time, money or energy – not when the 'right' answer emerges.

So, here are some handy tips for constructing marketing strategies:

1. There is no right answer, although some are more elegant than others.
2. You actually have to develop a solution to understand the problem.
3. Every strategy is essentially unique (so if you took a year to do the first one, rather get someone else to help you, you are probably more skilled at other things).
4. The market is dynamic: you, as well as your competitors, are disturbing the market. Things change. Understanding and responding becomes more important than being correct.
5. Father Christmas and 'having all the data' are what children believe in. The best way to complete a strategy is to decide on your completion date. The only person who had all the data took six days to build the earth, and – as I am not perfect in every sense – what better example could you follow?

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About the author

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