

# Emergent Strategy (Expansion of the SGEP)

Roger L. Martin      Tom Gilb

2026-01-18T09:00:00Z

## ***Collected Resources for Scrum Guide Expansion Pack***

*This document is a collection of independent works. Each section retains its original license or copyright status, as indicated. Please refer to each section for specific usage rights and requirements.*

Copyright: All rights reserved. Adapted

---

Strategy is not limited by scale; if it exists, it should be clearly articulated at the corporate, business unit, or Product level and remain coherent and integrated across these levels. Crucially, strategy should distinguish between ends (quantified, Stakeholder-valued outcomes) and means (initiatives or activities).

Drawing from and adapting Roger L. Martin's work (1) and Tom Gilb's work (3-8), strategy is about making integrated, explicit choices- deciding what and what not to pursue from a well-defined, measurable winning aspiration, not just a broad mission or vision. Effective strategy answers:

- Where will we play?
- How will we win ethically (9) and sustainably, balancing a multiplicity of expectations and limits?
- What capabilities and systems must be in place?
- What else must be true for this strategy to succeed?

For situations where expertise alone is sufficient (or perhaps bordering on being sufficient), to ensure strategy is iterative, actionable, and value-focused:

- Iteratively quantify and manage Stakeholder value, multiple impacts or side effects, risks, and trade-offs:
  - Identify all critical Stakeholders (including but not limited to customers) and define their value objectives in measurable terms (e.g., ‘reduce new-user onboarding time from 5-10 to 2-4 days’).
  - Explicitly quantify trade-offs and constraints, and revisit as new information emerges.
  - Use integrative thinking to resolve tensions creatively.
- Co-create and prioritize collaboratively:

- Develop the strategy by blending top-down and bottom-up insights and lateral collaboration.
  - Use structured workshops and feedback loops to foster alignment and adaptability, and continuously reprioritize unstated work.
- Deliver value incrementally and measure results:
  - Iteratively break down strategic aspirations into small, prioritized, measurable increments.
  - Deliver value in short cycles (e.g., Sprints or weeks), measuring actual outcomes and side effects against original quantified objectives.
  - Use regular reviews to adjust informed by real-world feedback.
- Enable emergence:
  - Allow strategy to evolve in response to new data and Stakeholder (including but not limited to user) feedback, within a framework of clear, quantified objectives, measurable trends, and regular risk/benefit reassessment.
  - Make course corrections rapidly and transparently as reality unfolds.
- Ensure strategy and strategy deployment are outcome-oriented and focused (deciding what to and what not to work on). Distinguish between:
  - Strategy including the intent, rationale, goals, and anti-goals (the *what* and *why*),
  - Strategy deployment: the operationalization of the strategy, iterative sequencing or decomposition of integrated choices for the strategy, usually in small outcome-oriented slices of the *what* and *why*,
  - Outcome-oriented, focused Product Backlog Items (smaller slices for *whom*), and
  - Lists of activities or initiatives (the ‘*what we’ll do*’ or *how*).
- Avoid mistaking a collection of projects for a coherent, value-driven strategy.

For situations where expertise is valuable yet insufficient, cause and effect are only coherent in retrospect, and uncertainty needs to be embraced, Scrum Teams and Stakeholders need to:

- Embrace the messiness of less structured and emergent outcome-oriented work in a direction of travel.
- Consider that detailed, long-term plans are ineffective. Instead, organizations should focus on creating conditions where useful patterns and innovations can emerge from interactions within the system.
- Instead of trying one idea at a time and sticking to what worked before, Scrum Teams should consider several small, parallel safe-to-fail experiments at once to see what happens and learn from what emerges.
- Foster a climate for creative exploration, innovation, and evolution from the present. Create processes and environments where people can connect novel ideas, learnings, informed hunches, and learn from each other, rather than imposing uniformity or rigid KPIs.
- Response options are not restricted to:
  - Map what is already known and understand the system’s evolutionary potential before attempting change
  - Foster self-organization

- Run safe-to-fail experiments (probes)—probes should be small, parallel, and designed so that failure is survivable and informative
- Seek fresh thinking
- Try solutions for different problems for the current situation at hand
- Test educated hunches
- Observe what emerges, and amplify successful patterns while dampening or stopping those that don’t work
- Innovation is important, but proven solutions should be reused for recurring problems
- Continuously sense-make
- Perform narrative capture
- Metaphor: The role of leaders is to actively prepare and manage the soil, boundaries, and conditions (the ‘substrate’) to encourage the growth of healthy plants (emergent solutions). This includes metaphorically weeding, pruning, and shaping the environment, not just passively waiting for results.

Generally, extrinsic motivation rewards should be avoided due to the ‘cobra effect’ (10) unless they are coherent with Beyond Budgeting. Equally, individual or team performance should be uncoupled from results as results might have been delivered, but in what way were they delivered, with what side effects, and what impact did delivery have on team morale, etc?

Nevertheless:

- There is disagreement in peer-reviewed papers (11-14) and a foundational non-peer-reviewed paper (15) on whether quantifying Stakeholder expectations, Stakeholder limits, or goals is helpful or unhelpful and whether it reduces intrinsic motivation.
- Consider the context. Also, consider whether quantification supports autonomy and meaning or imposes controlling constraints.
- For now, this document prefers to err on the side of clarification and shared understanding of an idea, quantifying Stakeholder expectations, Stakeholder limits, and the direction of travel, supported by high-quality and accurate storytelling narratives (more stories like this, fewer stories like that).

An Emergent Strategy is supported by an emergent outcome-oriented roadmap, which can range from the Sprint Goal to the Product Vision and beyond. Emergent Strategy Deployment (16-19) should not be confused with Emergent Strategy. Vector change models (30-35, 54), Product Operating Models (20-26), scaling and descaling models (27-40), and emergent goal-oriented models (16-19, 41-50) can be highly beneficial for Emergent Strategy Deployment. Err on the side of models coherent with vector-change, e.g., direction of travel over fixed goals.

Emergent strategy deployment involves allowing plans and actions to develop naturally as the Scrum Team and Stakeholders respond to real-world changes. Instead of following a fixed path, they pay attention to what is happening around them and make adjustments as they go. Over time, the steps taken form a pattern that becomes the actual strategy, even if it differs from what was initially intended.

## Attribution for the Scrum Guide Expansion Pack Collection

This collection was written and compiled by *Ralph Jocham, John Coleman, and Jeff Sutherland*. Each section is individually attributed above and retains its original license. The collection as a whole is for informational purposes; please respect the license terms of each section.

## References

1. Martin, R.L. (2022) *A new way to think your guide to Superior Management Effectiveness*. Boston, MA, MA, USA: Harvard Business Review Press.
2. Gilb, T. & Graham, D. (1993) *Software Inspection*. Harlow: Addison-Wesley.
3. Gilb, T. (1988) 'Deeper perspectives on evolutionary delivery, in *Principles of Software Engineering Management*. Wokingham: Addison-Wesley, pp. [chapter 15]. Also available at: <https://bit.ly/TomGilbEvo>.
4. Gilb, Tom & Maier, Mark. (2005). *Managing Priorities: A Key to Systematic Decision Making*. INCOSE International Symposium. 15. 10.1002/j.2334-5837.2005.tb00782.x. Also available at: <https://bit.ly/TomGilbPriorities>.
5. Gilb, T. (1988) 'Deeper perspectives on evolutionary delivery', in *Principles of Software Engineering Management*. Wokingham: Addison-Wesley, pp. [chapter 15].
6. Gilb, T. (2005) *Competitive Engineering: A Handbook for Systems Engineering, Requirements Engineering, and Software Engineering Using Planguage*. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann. Also available at: <https://bit.ly/TomGilbCompEng>.
7. Gilb, T. (2009) 'Agile specification quality control: Shifting emphasis from cleanup to sampling defects', *Testing Experience*, March. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294196272\\_Agile\\_specification\\_quality\\_control](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294196272_Agile_specification_quality_control) [Accessed: 17 May 2025].
8. Gilb, T. & Gilb, K. (1989) 'The McDonnell-Douglas case study of SQC and engineering improvement: Case DAC Inspection 1988–89'. Available at: <https://bit.ly/TomGilbMcDonnell-Douglas> [Accessed: 17 May 2025].
9. Blackburn, S. (2003) *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Frey, B.S. and Jegen, R. (2001) 'Motivation crowding theory', *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 15(5), pp. 589–611.
11. Cameron, J., Banko, K.M. and Pierce, W.D. (2001) 'Pervasive negative effects of rewards on intrinsic motivation: The myth continues', *The Behavior Analyst*, 24(1), pp. 1–44.
12. Deci, E.L., Koestner, R. and Ryan, R.M. (1999) 'A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation', *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(6), pp. 627–668.
13. Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L. (2000) 'Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), pp. 54–67.
14. Sandel, M.J. (2012) *What money can't buy: The moral limits of markets*. London:

*Allen Lane.*

15. Kohn, A. (1993) 'Why incentive plans cannot work', *Harvard Business Review*, 71(5), pp. 54–63.
16. Scotland, K. (2023) *Why strategy deployment? Here are three great reasons*, AvailAgility. At: <https://availagility.co.uk/2023/02/16/why-strategy-deployment-here-are-three-great-reasons/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).
17. Scotland, K. (2019) *Deploying strategies as choices*, AvailAgility. At: <https://availagility.co.uk/2019/02/08/deploying-strategies-as-choices/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).
18. Scotland, K. (2017) *Strategy deployment and playing to win*, AvailAgility. At: <https://availagility.co.uk/2017/07/14/strategy-deployment-and-playing-to-win/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).
19. Scotland, K. (2017) *A strategy deployment cadence*, AvailAgility. At: <https://availagility.co.uk/2017/09/06/a-strategy-deployment-cadence/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).
20. Cagan, M. (2024) *Transformed: Moving to the Product Operating Model*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
21. Cagan, M. (2025) 'The Product Operating Model', Silicon Valley Product Group, 17 March. Available at: <https://www.svpvg.com/the-product-operating-model/> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
22. Cagan, M. (n.d.) 'The Product Operating Model: An Introduction', Silicon Valley Product Group. Available at: <https://www.svpvg.com/the-product-operating-model-an-introduction/> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)
23. Scrum.org (2025) 'The Agile Product Operating Model', Scrum.org, 1 May. Available at: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/agile-product-operating-model> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
24. Scrum.org (2025) 'Agile Product Operating Model State of Play - Part 1 - Fundamentals', Scrum.org, 12 May. Available at: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/blog/agile-product-operating-model-state-of-play-part-1-fundamentals> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
25. Scrum.org (2024) 'Project to Product and the Agile Product Operating Model', Scrum.org, 7 November. Available at: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/blog/project-product-and-agile-product-operating-model> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
26. Scrum.org (2024) *Moving to an Agile Product Operating Model* [PDF]. Available at: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/moving-agile-product-operating-model-evidence-based-approach-delivering-products-digital-age> or <https://bit.ly/SDOAPOM>. (Accessed: 8 June 2025)
27. Kniberg, H. and Ivarsson, A. (2012) *Scaling at Spotify*, Crisp. At: <https://blog.crisp.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/SpotifyScaling.pdf> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
28. Ambler, S.W. and Lines, M. (2023) *Disciplined Agile® Toolkit - Project Management Institute, PMI*. At: <https://www.pmi.org/discrimined-agile/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
29. Leffingwell, D. and Knaster, R. (2023) *Safe 6.0 framework, Scaled Agile Framework*. At: <https://www.scaledagileframework.com/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
30. Sutherland, J. (2021) *Scrum@Scale - the scaling framework created by dr. Jeff*

- Sutherland, Scrum@Scale Framework. At: <https://www.scrumatscale.com/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).*
31. Skelton, M. and Pais, M. (2023) *Team topologies, Team Topologies*. At: <https://teamtopologies.com/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
  32. Appelo, J. (2023) *Versatile Organization Design, unFIX*. At: <https://unfix.com/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
  33. Merel, P. (2023) *Xscale Alliance, XSCALE Alliance*. At: <https://xscalealliance.org/#manifesto> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
  34. Schwaber, K. et al. (2021) *Online nexus guide, Scrum.org*. At: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/online-nexus-guide> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
  35. Quartel, R. et al. (2024) *FaST guide, Fluid Scaling Technology*. At: <https://www.fastagile.io/> (Accessed: December 6, 2023).
  36. Ramos, C. and Pavlichenko, I. (2023) *Creating agile organizations, Creating Agile Organizations*. At: <https://creatingagileorganizations.com/> (Accessed: April 15, 2023).
  37. Larman, C. & Vodde, B. (2025) *LeSS (Large-Scale Scrum) Framework*. Available at: <https://less.works/less/framework> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)
  38. Flight Levels GmbH (2025) *Flight Levels Framework*. Available at: <https://www.flightlevels.io/what-is-flight-levels/> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
  39. Krivitsky, A. and Flemm, R. (2022) *Org topologies, Org Topologies*. At: <https://www.orgtopologies.com/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).
  40. Singh, P. (2023) *Scaling Simplified: A Practitioner's Guide to Scaling Flow*. Florida: Self-published. Available at: <https://leanpub.com/scalingsimplified> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)
  41. Scotland, K. (2022) *The ultimate X-matrix for your agile transformation is here, AvailAgility*. At: <https://availability.co.uk/2022/11/03/the-ultimate-x-matrix-for-your-agile-transformation-is-here/> (Accessed: April 5, 2023).
  42. Krebs, J. (2023) *Agile kata pro, Agile Kata Pro*. At: <https://agilekata.pro/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).
  43. Doerr, J. (2023) *OKRs 101, What Matters*. At: <https://www.whatmatters.com/get-started/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).
  44. Wodtke, C. (2021) *Radical focus achieving your most important goals with objectives and key results*-. Palo Alto, CA: Cucina Media.
  45. Gothelf, J. & Seiden, J. (2024) *Who Does What By How Much?: A Practical Guide to Customer-Centric OKRs*. New York: Sense & Respond Press.
  46. Appelo, J. (2023) *Sometimes, you \*don't\* want focus, unFIX*. At: <https://unfix.com/blog/sometimes-you-dont-want-focus> (Accessed: 14 January 2024).
  47. Appelo, J. (2023) *Bets and objectives, unFIX*. At: <https://unfix.com/bets-and-objectives> (Accessed: 14 January 2024).
  48. McChesney, C. (2023) *The 4 disciplines of execution (new), FranklinCovey*. At: <https://www.franklincovey.com/the-4-disciplines/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).
  49. Scrum.org (2024) *Evidence-Based Management (EBM) Framework*, Scrum.org. Available at: <https://www.scrum.org/resources/evidence-based-management>. (Accessed: 8 June 2025).
  50. Burrows, M. (2023) *Home: Agendashift™, Agendashift*. At: <https://www.agendashift.com/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).

51. Cynefin.io, V. (2022) *Cynefin wiki*, Cynefin.io. Cynefin.io. At: <https://cynefin.io/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).
52. Rancati, A. and Snowden, D. (2021) *Managing complexity (and chaos) in a crisis - a field guide for decision makers inspired by the Cynefin framework*. Luxembourg, Belgium: Publications Office of the European Union.
53. Snowden, D. et al. (2022) *Cynefin® weaving sense-making into the fabric of our world*. 2nd edn. Edited by R. Greenberg and B. Bertsch. Singapore, Singapore: Cognitive Edge - The Cynefin Co.
54. Snowden, D. (2023) *Cynefin St David's 2023 1 of 2*, Cynefin Co. <https://thecynefin.co/cynefin-st-davids-2023-1-of-2/> (Accessed: April 20, 2023).
55. Snowden, D. (2023) *Managing for emergence through abduction*, The Cynefin Co. At: <https://thecynefin.co/managing-for-emergence/> (Accessed: June 24, 2023).
56. Snowden, D. and Smith, N. (2023) *Leadership discussion: Dave and Natalie - the Cynefin co*, YouTube. At: <https://youtu.be/WcPZ8ybDF0w> (Accessed: April 7, 2023).