McKinsey 7S framework

How do you go about analyzing how well your organization is positioned to achieve its intended objective? This is a question that has been asked for many years, and there are many different answers. Some approaches look at internal factors, others look at external ones, some combine these perspectives, and others look for congruence between various aspects of the organization being studied. Ultimately, the issue comes down to which factors to study.

While some models of organizational effectiveness go in and out of fashion, one that has persisted is the McKinsey 7S framework. Developed in the early 1980s by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, two consultants working at the McKinsey & Company consulting firm, the basic premise of the model is that there are seven internal aspects of an organization that need to be aligned if it is to be successful.

The 7S model can be used in a wide variety of situations where an alignment perspective is useful, for example to help you:

- Improve the performance of a company.
- Examine the likely effects of future changes within a company.
- Align departments and processes during a merger or acquisition.
- Determine how best to implement a proposed strategy.

The McKinsey 7S model can be applied to elements of a team or a project as well. The alignment issues apply, regardless of how you decide to define the scope of the areas you study.

The Seven Elements

The McKinsey 7S model involves seven interdependent factors which are categorized as either "hard" or "soft" elements:

Hard Elements	Soft Elements
Strategy	Shared Values
Structure	Skills
Systems	Style
	Staff

"Hard" elements are easier to define or identify and management can directly influence them: These are strategy statements; organization charts and reporting lines; and formal processes and IT systems.

"Soft" elements, on the other hand, can be more difficult to describe, and are less tangible and more influenced by culture. However, these soft elements are as important as the hard elements if the organization is going to be successful.

The way the model is presented in Figure 1 below depicts the interdependency of the elements and indicates how a change in one affects all the others.

Figure 1: The McKinsey 7S Model
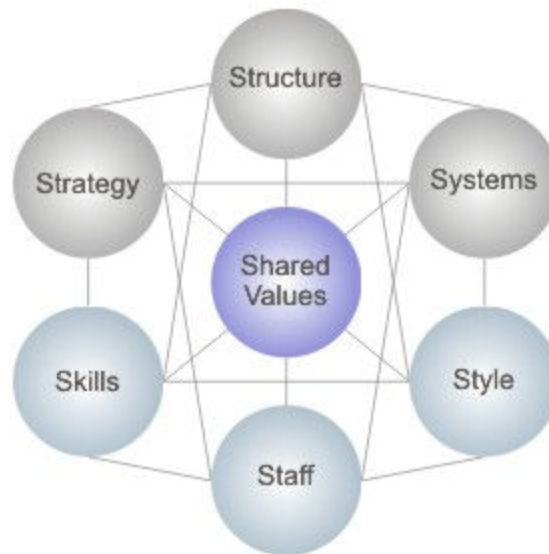
Let's look at each of the elements specifically:

- **Strategy:** the plan devised to maintain and build competitive advantage over the competition.
- **Structure:** the way the organization is structured and who reports to whom.
- **Systems:** the daily activities and procedures that staff members engage in to get the job done.
- **Shared Values:** called "superordinate goals" when the model was first developed, these are the core values of the company that are evidenced in the corporate culture and the general work ethic.
- **Style:** the style of leadership adopted.
- **Staff:** the employees and their general capabilities.
- **Skills:** the actual skills and competencies of the employees working for the company.

Placing Shared Values in the middle of the model emphasizes that these values are central to the development of all the other critical elements. The company's structure, strategy, systems, style, staff and skills all stem from why the organization was originally created, and what it stands for. The original vision of the company was formed from the values of the creators. As the values change, so do all the other elements.