Microspeak: Placemat

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A placemat is a small cloth placed at a dining table which sits beneath a table setting. But at Microsoft, a placemat is something different.

A *placemat* is a document that lays out various important criteria or issues in a visually-pleasing manner. It gets its name from the placemat template that goes at the dining table with outlines for where the dinner plate goes, where the water glass goes, where the different forks go, and so on.

A strategic placemat might look like this:

Mission
Improve customer satisfaction and accelerate engagement through a streamlined experience that offers best-of-breed services throughout the entire product lifecycle.

Vision
To make people more productive at work, at home, or on the go by delivering a world-class experience that removes all stumbling blocks to success.

Objectives
• Increase customer satisfaction and usage.
• Learn from our customers' usage patterns.
• Reduce support incidents.

Success Factors

Trust and Reliability
Run a trusted and reliable world-class service at global scale.

Engaging Content
Create and publish easily-discoverable, timely, relevant, and high-quality content solutions which address our customers' needs.

Support
Implement an innovative, modern, and seamless support experience, offering just-in-time suggestions for commonly-observed problems.

In practice, there are a lot more boxes on the placemat, with additional columns for things like *Initiatives* and *Metrics for Success*, but I got tired of making up generic-sounding text.

Another kind of placemat is a lower-level feature placemat, with a box for each feature under development.

Gadgets Team
Widgets
Add widgets to all gadgets.

Doodad deprecation
Convert existing doodads to widgets where possible. Investigate alternatives for remaining doodads.

Services Team
Capacity
Improve efficiency so we can reduce size of server pool.
Maintenance
Shorten maintenance window to reduce system downtime.
Reliability
Investigate and address top 5 reliability issues identified by telemetry.

The placemat serves as an agenda for the *placemat review* meeting, where representatives from teams that have boxes on the placemat report on the status of their work. These placemat reviews tend to be convened by senior executives, so preparing for the placemat review is an important and somewhat stressful activity.

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