

Put Visioning into Your Planning

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In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll wrote, "You'll eventually get somewhere, but whether it's where you want to go is another matter."

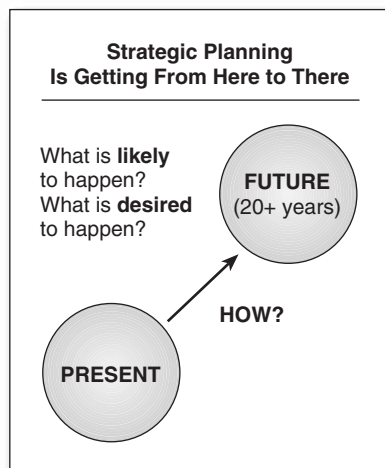
Alice's trek through Wonderland is not unlike the journey that many organizations find themselves on today. Like Alice, today's organizations operate in an environment of uncertainty. Increasingly, they are finding their way, thanks, in large part, to a management technique called strategic planning.

Strategic planning is a process that enables an organization to get from where it is today to where it wants to be in the future. How do we get from the present to the desired future?

The strategic planning process focuses on five key questions: (1) where have you been; (2) where are you now; (3) where do you want to go; (4) how will you get there; and (5) how will you know when you are there.

The result is a simple but powerful process that honors the past, assesses the present, and stimulates our minds to describe our desired future.

Strategic planning is different from the traditional planning organizations do annually. Traditional planning occurs for one year at a time. Strategic planning encompasses – but goes well beyond – the next year of activity. Some strategic plans are developed as far ahead as 20 years. Probably the most important difference between strategic planning and traditional planning is that strategic planning is oriented to the future. Plans are based on a vision of the future rather than on current problems or needs. It looks through the present to the future.



The Strategic Planning Process

Vision Statement: The first step in a strategic planning process is the creation of a vision statement – a description of what the organization would ideally look like in 5, 10, or even 20 years from now. The objective is to look far beyond the problems of today and to visualize the organization under the very best of conditions.

Good visions:

- describe how your organization serves its members, its community, and the world
- are inspiring, compelling, and bold; they raise expectations and actions to achieve a higher purpose
- embody your deepest values and give your members courage to express those values in their organization
- are strategic, distinguishing your particular organization from all other organizations
- use vivid language, word pictures, and metaphors to communicate enthusiasm and excitement
- are specific, concise, and brief

Creating a strategic vision for an organization is a powerful mechanism for empowering members. If there is a common vision – a strategic vision – that is shared and supported by the entire organization, each person will contribute his or her part to create the organization's purpose. This will result in a powerful organization for the future. If the vision is not shared and supported, the result will be a chaotic collision of members competing with one another, resulting in dissonance among the members.

SWOT Analysis: The second step in the strategic planning process is to do an analysis of the organizations' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis). To do a SWOT analysis, an organization must first identify its strengths and weaknesses by asking two questions: (1) what is it we do really well; and (2) what is it we have problems with.

After doing an internal assessment, scan the environment for threats to the organization. Once threats are identified, they can be viewed as opportunities to be capitalized on to make the organization stronger and more viable.

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Mission: The mission statement describes what the organization is in business to do. Usually limited to just a few words, the mission statement defines the purpose of the organization, establishes the scope of the organization's activities, and provides overall direction for the organization.

Goals and Objectives: The SWOT analysis will identify several critical issues for the organization to consider. These will suggest a number of goals or general directions the organization wants to take in the intermediate to long-term future.

Each goal, in turn, suggests a number of objectives describing what specifically is to be accomplished by what date. Goals are usually thought of as three to five years down the road, and objectives are targets for the current year.

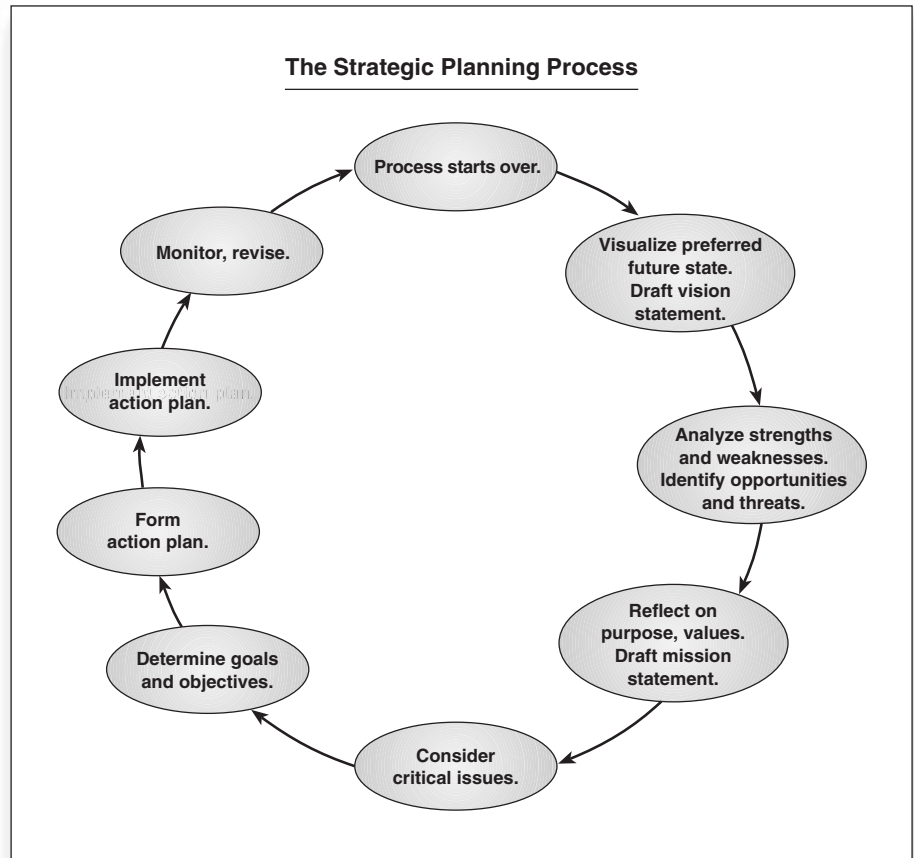
Action Plan: At the heart of the strategic planning process is the formulation of actions to achieve the desired objectives. The first-year action plan is composed of all those actions scheduled for the year immediately following the planning period.

Implementation: All the planning in the world won't accomplish anything unless you implement the action plan. In other words, the plan designates who will do the tasks to meet the objectives and when they will be accomplished.

Evaluation: No process is complete without evaluating the outcome, revising the plan, and starting the process all over again.

Strategic planning is an ongoing process. An organization must constantly review its vision and mission statements while developing goals, objectives, and actions to help the organization reach its desired future.

We live in extraordinary times, times of tremendous challenges and great opportunities. Never has there been a greater need to plan for the future.



The strategic visioning process focuses and channels the energy, creativity, and ideas of members into a powerful strategic vision and action plan. A vision is a powerful tool for an organization because a vision: (1) comes from the heart; (2) expresses the deepest values of its members; (3) describes what the organization offers to each member, to its community, and to the world; (4) leaps over present constraints to a desired future; and (5) provides meaning to the organization by describing who the members are and what they want to become. A vision statement is a personal portrayal of the organization's desired future.

The concept of the strategic visioning process can best be summed up by the words of William Jennings Bryan:

Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved.