

## **Strategic planning**

### **Vision – the desired future that we want to ‘see’**

Vision provides purpose, without which life would be pointless. Strong visions can change the world. Lack of shared vision can be a source of division. All organisations grow from a seed of vision.

### **Mission (or Purpose) – what does the organisation exist to do?**

Expresses the purpose of the organisation in a distilled, clear way. Spells out limits, and makes priority-setting easier. All interested parties can work out what the organisation does.

### **Values – the underlying beliefs that hold us together**

The people that we want to be, and the characteristics that we will hold on to, come what may

### **Strategic planning – how we are going to fulfil our mission and bring our vision about**

The classic model of strategic planning is sometimes called the “Design” or “Planning” model. It divides strategic planning into two separate stages - planning and implementation.

#### Planning

1. “Where are we now?” - contextual analysis (SWOT/PEST)
2. “Where do we want to go?” - objectives based on the above analysis, including the vision and mission statements
3. “How will we get there?” - detailed planning on how to reach these objectives

#### Implementation

1. Allocate people, money, time and other resources to the different elements of the plan
2. Decide who will manage what
3. Get on with it
4. Monitor the results and processes, and make adjustments accordingly

There are several weaknesses to this method. It assumes that we have a good understanding of the context, our current organisational situation, the appropriateness of the place we want to get to, and our ability to get there. It requires mid-course corrections in order to take account of surprises, changes and disappointments on the journey.. Even over a shorter period, it has its drawbacks, as it can be insufficiently flexible to cope with the breadth and diversity of opportunities that might emerge.

Before identifying other approaches to strategic planning, we should consider what the purpose of the exercise is. Strategic planning is about a combination of setting direction (usually through vision, mission and values). But it is also (and, I believe, more importantly) about creating some kind of coherence across a large, diverse, and energetic group of people within an organisation. The question is, how do we create some kind of common coherence and direction, so that the herd appears largely to be heading in the same direction?

Alternatives to the traditional Design/Planning approach to strategic planning include:

1. The Excellence / Quality school – based on Total Quality Management techniques, this approach uses models of excellence (of which several have been developed for the voluntary sector). It is based on theories developed to explain why certain organisations seem to be more effective than others.
2. Resource-based / human resource approaches – this method looks at what an organisation is currently good at (its 'core competencies') and works to enhance these strengths and reinforce our successes, rather than trying to mitigate our weaknesses.
3. Scenario planning – this approach tries to identify various different alternative futures, and asks what an organisation would do if each of the alternatives happened. By looking for commonalities across the responses, and making these the strategic priorities, an attempt is made to 'future-proof' an organisation.
4. The Positioning school – what does the market want? This requires a strategic marketing approach, placing heavy emphasis on identifying our 'customers' (those whom we are here to serve) and responding to what they need.
5. The Learning school – this approach assumes that the future is unpredictable and essentially unknowable, and builds experimentation and openness into the fabric of an organisation. It requires considerable flexibility to allow an organisation to respond to new opportunities and to close down unproductive ones.

“You don't make strategy by some kind of Moses-like process where you walk down from the mountain and present the tablets, with everyone else running around to implement it – you make a strategy by trying something, and testing it, and changing it” (Henry Mintzberg)

The list above moves along a continuum, from a more internal focus to a more external focus. None of the above are mutually exclusive, but they do have different emphases and it would be difficult to incorporate more than 2-3 into a single plan.