

# Perspectives on Strategic Planning

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(Download at <http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/schloss.pdf>)

Strategic Planning has become essential in our times of rapid and uncertain change. However, there are some steps that need to be done first and there are different types of strategic plans. And of course, you need a mechanism to implement the strategic plan. These topics outlined below are part of a presentation to strategic planning course at the University of Arizona taught by Professor Ernie Schloss.

## **Normal Planning vs Strategic Planning**

Some planning is so natural or common that we don't think of it as planning. For example, in teaching a course you normally plan out at least the lecture titles, or, in organizing a project you develop milestones, and you build in some type of measuring process. Therefore we should be accustomed to processes that involve some degree of initial thinking, evaluating alternatives, selecting what seems like the best approach, and doing it. So, we probably all have some experience in planning.

The planning process gets a little more complicated when you actually try to do strategic planning, or at least to do it well. For example, you need to:

- Know what you want to do in a general way
- Understand how changes are occurring in the external world for some period into the future
- Know your own strengths and some of the major challenges that have to be addressed
- Know how to identify the opportunities and danger spots; and how to tell them apart
- Be clear on your assumptions, things that are near certainties and some major uncertainties
- Be able to integrate all this into a brief, clear, understandable statement that informs you and an others on what you plan to achieve and add a few guidelines that will make you successful.

You do not want your plan to be a book but only a page or two. The more detail you have the less it will seem strategic and the more people will avoid reading it.

## **Two Types of Strategic Plans – Both Are Commonly Used**

1. One that focuses on strategic directions, looks at the big pictures, and is used as a guide
2. One that has goals, objectives, targets, strategies to achieve the targets, and ways of measuring progress

## **We are Living in a Relatively Unique Period**

1. Several driving forces of change indicate lots of important changes are underway and that they will have significant changes on all of us – and several are coming at about the same time.
2. Fundamental change is occurring, some through slow but continuous changes, and others through paradigm shifts that in effect change the way we do business
3. Examples in education: major changes in the way learning is accomplished, curriculum offerings, and how mastery of the subject is determined.
4. Tried and true procedures of the past may not work in the future

## **Understanding the Future: The Basic Underpinnings of Preparing a Strategic Plan**

- Understanding where we are today
- Having an idea of where we want to go
- Understanding relevant driving forces and paradigm shifts
- Identifying uncertainties and assumptions
- Recognizing your areas of ignorance (know what you don't know)
- Developing several scenarios for better understanding of what is possible
- Revising the idea of where you want to go and how to get there

## Some Advice From Others

- Institute for the Future (Futures Organization)  
*Foresight to Insight to Action (environmental scan, analysis, strategic plan)*
- Peter Drucker (Management Icon)  
*Enshrine the institutional values*  
*Articulate a vision*  
*Set the strategic path to that vision*  
*Demand performance*  
*Empower the people (and get out of their way)*  
*Say thank you*
- Maree Conway (Australian Futurist)  
*Do strategic thinking before you do strategic planning*
- Marlys Witte (University of Arizona College of Medicine)  
*Understand ignorance – answer these questions early in the process*  
*What do you know and what don't you know know?*  
*What are the things you don't know that you don't know?*  
*What do you think you know but you really don't know?*  
*What is too painful to know and therefore you don't know?*

## A Model Approach to Developing a Strategic Plan

1. Draft a mission, vision, values, and some principles you might follow
2. Complete an environmental scan and an internal assessment
3. Define guiding principles (e.g, follow best practices, focus on both efficiency and effectiveness)
4. Treat the plan as a high-level road map, with general directions and interstate travel. Then adapt as conditions occur – detours, weather, sickness.
5. Draft the plan and then repeat all these steps and re-draft the plan

## Special Techniques When Dealing with Uncertainty and Change

1. Use scenarios to better understand options under a variety of conditions
2. Recognize the need to know the techniques of futures studies, behavioral change, and communication

## Case Histories or Examples of Plans and Related Studies

### Materials Used for Update of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan

[Environmental Scans and Driving Forces of Change](#)

[Higher Education Scenarios](#)

[Arizona-Specific Futures Studies](#)

### Examples of Public Health Oriented Strategic Plans

Sweden contribution to the global fight against infectious diseases

<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/05/18/74/60f9c76a.pdf>

US Health and Human Services - <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hhsplan/2007/>

UCLA School of Public Health - <http://www.ph.ucla.edu/pdfs/SPHStrategicPlan.pdf>

### Examples of Higher Education Strategic Plans (focus on Arizona)

[UA Strategic Plan 2010-2014 - September 2009 \(48 pages\)](#)

[ASU: New American University – July 2002](#)

[ASU: ASU Five-Year Strategic Plan – January 2009 23 pages\)](#)

[ABOR Long-term Strategic Plan 2008-2020- Spring 2009 \(39 pages\)](#)

[CALs Strategic Plan 2010-2020 – October 2009 \(1 page\)](#)

## The Planning Context

1. Why have a strategic plan
  - It is important to know why you are developing a plan
  - Know the difference of a strategic plan vs a tactical (operational) plan
  - Need a general sense of where you are heading
  - Need to have a sense of the future and the relevant issues
  - Cannot predict the future but you can anticipate it
  - Context for making today's decisions as they all take place in the future
  - Defining the table of contents for a strategic plan - options exist
2. Getting a sense of the future
  - There are lots of ways and should not take a simplistic approach
  - Foresight to Insight to Action approach (IFTF)
  - The role of driving forces of change and paradigm shifts
  - Examples of paradigm shifts
  - The role of scenarios and how to build them
  - Recycle old ideas under new circumstances
  - Adapt to change, innovate, feel free to get a little wild in your ideas
3. Developing a strategic plan
  - Defining terms: long range, strategic, strategy, strategic direction, goal, objective, metric, tactical, environmental scan
  - First step - strategic thinking before strategic planning
  - Choose the general approach (may or may not have tactical plan)
  - Detailed goals and targets had a use (use when no tactical plan)
  - Make the overall context to be about the future rather than the past
  - Communicate widely with affected parties (before, during, and after) and read widely
  - Combine realism with stretching the possibilities
  - Defining the few key issues and sticking with them where possible
  - Dealing with dilemmas (where no good answer exists)
4. Dealing with required formats from higher levels in organization
  - The plan should serve as a guide, or framework, or roadmap, not detail, but this is often a problem when specific formats are required
  - Make two plans, one that works for you and one you submit. They must be consistent in content, only the format changes
5. Implementing a strategic plan
  - Audience and authority (who is the plan directed to and who releases the plan)
  - Communicate and involve those that will implement the plan (or kill it)
  - Follow the plan or change it if conditions change unexpectedly
  - Tactical plan to translate strategic plan to action items
  - Manage change when necessary (this is often overlooked and is very important)

## Conclusions

1. Read widely and prepare for change
2. Plan for the future by thinking a VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous). Respond to this world by using FAIR approach (Flexible, Agile, Innovative, and Responsive).
3. Recognize strategic planning is the vehicle to navigate the institutional future, but there are different formats for a strategic plan and they need to be short and truly strategic to be effective.

### **Take a Short Course on Anticipating the Future**

This is the “short” version on how to “anticipate the future” but more details are available. You can search the site from the home page (cals.arizona.edu/futures).

<http://cals.arizona.edu/futures/shortcourse/index.html>

### **Books for Further Reading**

Barker, Joel. 1993. Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future. 240 p. A great little book with lots of examples of paradigm shifts.

Johansen, Bob. 2007. Get There Early: Sensing the Future to Compete in the Present. 258 p. Examples of the Institute for the Future process of Foresight to Insight to Action.

Taleb, Nassim. 2007. The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable. 366 p. The appearance of highly improbable events and the non-appearance of a highly probable event.

Tapscott, Don. 2009. Grown Up Digital. 368 p. Discussion of the “net” generation, transforming institutions, and transforming society.

### **Some Questions**

What would you do in each of the following circumstances:

1. Your boss is following the instructions from her/his boss on developing a strategic plan. From your experience you know the plan has a low probability of being successful.
2. You are 1 year into your 5 year strategic plan and there is a financial disruption like the one we had over the last 2 years.
3. Your organization is developing a strategic plan but has not done an environmental scan. Everyone on the board of directors agrees they are doing it the right way because they all have experience at planning.
4. You have been tasked to develop a strategic plan for your organization. What are the first three things you would do?

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