



Strategic Planning for Leaders

The Academy Of Women's Leadership / Courageous Leadership

The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do. Professor Michael Porter

I have a vivid picture of Roy Hodgson the former England football manager in my mind. He is sitting slumped in his chair at the side of the pitch watching England take a battering at the hands of Iceland. Dejected, forlorn and without hope, he says nothing, he does nothing, just watches the nightmare unfold, as the nations team tumbles into humiliation at the hands of novices. He is dismissed from his post with the media shouting loudly that he simply did not have a plan, no strategy in place to deal with the situation on the field. He just sent the team out doing what they always did and hoped it would be enough. It wasn't.

Roy was and still is a good leader. He has enjoyed success in many situations where others would have struggled, but he did not have a strategy to take the national side past the level they had reached previously, and those in his leadership team around him were not able to bring any positive influence to bear so that the outcome could be different. Without an effective strategy, shipwreck occurred and all was lost.

Effective leaders are masters of strategy, it's not that they have left the operational aspects of the organisation behind, but they have developed insight and skill in understanding the frameworks and nuances of strategic planning and execution. Davies and Ellison (1999) suggest that organisations should engage in three types (or levels) of planning activity and integrate them into a cyclical process through which they can manage their strategic development over time. This model has been updated by Davies (2006) as follows,

Short term:

This refers to one or two-year planning and the creation of operational development plans.

These short-term plans need to be focused on practical and achievable areas of organisational improvement, and need to be driven by specific operational development teams.

Medium term:

This refers to strategic analysis used to create a strategic intent for the less predictable areas of medium-term planning. It also refers to traditional planning processes to produce strategic plans for definable and predictable areas of development. Medium term plans are best put together, monitored and reviewed by a standing group that meets regularly to manage the various strands of the organisations strategic plan.

Long term:

This refers to futures thinking to identify longer-term fundamental shifts in the environment and provide a futures perspective. In larger organisations, this process may be promoted by 'research and development groups', set up as task-and-finish groups.

A strategically-focused organisation is one that is effective in the short- term but has a clear framework and processes to translate core moral purpose and vision into excellent provision that is challenging and sustainable in the medium to long term, Bennet (2000).

Organisation leaders do not need to devise new frameworks for strategic planning, this area is well researched and readily available, and we need to be courageous and forward thinking to employ strategic models, even though we may be in the midst of firefighting within the community.

Strategic organisation leaders rise above the managerial daily organisation life and view the organisation and its future from a different perspective. Using a framework, organisation

leaders can plan and implement strategy to secure improvement, build capacity and enter into new territory. The following is adapted from a framework by Davies (2008).

Stage one: Generate intents

Generate a list of three to five strategic intents. These are intended to be significant changes and challenges that fundamentally move the organisation forwards.

For instance:

- Moving the entire organisation in a new direction across all aspects of the business.
- Cementing a new initiative at the heart of the organisation ethos

Leaders, you must state your purpose, sum this up in keywords to guide day to day operations and as the foundation for future decision making.

- What is our core business in relation to this intent?
- What are we trying to accomplish and for whom?
- What is our reason for existing?

Visualise the future... be courageous and think big!

To write a statement of intent for each area answer this question, 'What will this area of organisation look like in 5 – 10 years from now?'

Whatever you visualise *should inspire you and others.*

Stage two: Capability/capacity-building

For each intent (separately), list the early capabilities/capacities to be built in order to move towards achieving the intent. Each intent will then be taken separately to be developed (perhaps by different groups of staff and other stakeholders).

Leaders, here you lead the analysis that helps the organisation look critically at itself. Tools to help you? the good old SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) or my favourite, MIC,

- What should we keep doing? Maintain
- What should we tweak? Improve
- What should we overhaul or start again? Change

Leaders, there had been *no doing* as yet! You are leading the leadership thinking across the community, facilitating focused dialogue with staff and stakeholders.

Neglect this collaborative thinking stage at your peril. Profiling will play a role here too. Find out about your staff afresh, find out about your clients afresh, what are their needs? wants? training requirements? levels of morale and issues therein? Do this for each of your strategic intents.

Stage three: Strategic processes to build intent

Take each capability/capacity to be built at stage two separately and set out the strategic processes which will be required to build it. In each case this will involve the strategic processes of conceptualising; engaging; articulating.

Now, the leadership team get writing, still *no doing* as yet. Don't be hasty, the pre-work is the equivalent of digging a deep foundation for future success.

Conceptualizing: what could this look like for the organisation and for the staff involved?

What can you as leaders see that others cannot?

Engaging: facilitation of the conversations, motivating others and encouraging participation in the wider dialogue

Articulation: orally with staff, in writing to staff, laying down the structures of the strategy.

Leaders, set objectives that give action to the statements of intent and contain the goals to be achieved. Effective goals set out clearly in relation to performance,

- How much
- What kind
- By when
- By whom

Assess your resources, assess your need for and then secure support.

Make sure your goals and objectives build upon your strengths, shore up your weaknesses, capitalize on your opportunities and recognise your threats.

Stage four: Implementation

What is the next step? Take decisions about implementation (or not)

Is the organisation ready to?

- move to phased implementation?
- move to full implementation?
- abandon the ideas as non-feasible or no longer appropriate?

Or does the organisation:

- require further development and capacity/capability building in this area?

Now and only now should you start the doing!

Coaching

All good leaders recognise the power and value of coaching within the organisation. There is no way I can teach you how to coach in a document! It took me years learn, practice and make coaching a part of my leadership style. However, let me give you some questions you can use when coaching a colleague in the workplace

Stage 1: where are you now?

- ✓ What's going well /not so well?
- ✓ What keeps you from moving forward?
- ✓ What strengths can you build on?
- ✓ What might you be overlooking?
- ✓ What do you think is really going on?
- ✓ What do you want to change?

Stage 2: where would you like to be?

- ✓ What would it look like if everything was going just right?
- ✓ How would you like things to be?
- ✓ How do you think others see the situation?
- ✓ What are some of the possibilities?
- ✓ What is do-able?
- ✓ What would you be committed to doing?

Stage 3: how will you get there?

- ✓ What are the main things to do to achieve this?
- ✓ What are the other considerations?
- ✓ What could you do immediately?
- ✓ What support do you need?
- ✓ Where will it come from?
- ✓ What are you going to do next?

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