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Strategic Planning and Strategic Management: What are they and how are they different?

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"We are tackling 20-year problems with five-year plans staffed with two-year personnel funded by one-year appropriations."

Harlan Cleveland

Why Strategic Management?

This quotation sums up why today's public sector decision-makers must plan and manage strategically. In the developing world as much as the industrialized nations, the increasingly rapid nature of change as well as a greater openness in the political and economic environments requires a different set of perspectives from that needed during more stable times. When a certain degree of equilibrium existed in the LDCs (as during the 1960s and 70s, with constant positive economic growth, low debt, manageable budgets, and relative political stability), managers could concentrate almost exclusively on the internal dimensions of their organizations and assume a constancy in the external environment. Forward calculations were simple, inputs were predictable, and planning was mostly an arithmetic exercise. Now, systems are much more open, LDCs are characterized by increasingly unstable politics and negative economic growth, budgets are constantly revised, inputs are thoroughly unpredictable, and planning in the traditional sense is no longer possible.

Despite the need for strategic planning and management, there is a certain degree of confusion regarding these terms. Purposefully or inadvertently, the two terms are often used interchangeably—which then leads to confusion regarding the appropriate usage of each. As shall be pointed out in this note, the distinction between strategic planning and strategic management rests primarily on where one ends the process or the emphasis one puts on particular parts of the process. As might be inferred, strategic planning places more emphasis on the development of the strategic plan and often "assumes" implementation. Strategic management specifically includes and emphasizes implementation. This, of course, does not mean that the planning element is any less important, rather, implementation is regarded as just as important. In the literature, there is little interest in this distinction, however, and quite often, when the term strategic planning is used, it also includes the "management" components of implementation. Likewise, when strategic management is used, it also implies the "planning" components as well.

Contributing to the confusion is the overlap between the two concepts. In practice, it is certainly possible to develop a strategic plan without giving much thought to the actual management of that plan. However, it is

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probably impossible to manage an organization strategically without having developed a strategic plan. Moreover, both strategic planning and management are iterative processes, so managers will be continuously involved in cycles of strategic planning as they manage policy implementation.

Further contributing to the confusion is that strategic planning and management are more than a set of managerial tools. They constitute a mind-set, an approach to looking at the changes in the internal and external environment that confront the manager. Using planning and management tools strategically, then, involves essentially a way of thinking, a mental framework or approach, as well as a set of analytic tools. For strategic management to be effectively used the manager must develop a strategic mentality or outlook. The problem for the consultant is how to help the manager acquire that mentality.

The Strategic Approach:

The strategic approach or mentality consists of four main elements:

- First, the strategic approach is oriented toward the future. It recognizes that the environment will change. It is a long range orientation, one that tries to anticipate events rather than simply react as they occur. The approach leads the manager to ask where his/her organization wants to be after a certain period, what it will need to get to where it wants, and how to develop strategies and the means to get there, and finally, how to manage those strategies to achieve the organization's goals and objectives. It is recognized that the future cannot be controlled, but the argument can be made that by anticipating the future, organizations can help to shape and modify the impact of environmental change.

- Second, the strategic approach has an external emphasis. It takes into account several components of the external environment, including technology, politics, economics and the social dimension. Strategic thinking recognizes that each of these can either constrain or facilitate an organization as it seeks to implement policy. Politics will determine the policies that are to be implemented, economics will determine the organization's level of resources, and social factors might well determine who the organization's beneficiaries will be. In particular, strategic thinking recognizes and emphatically takes into account politics and the exercise of political authority. Managers are not free to do anything they decide. Managers must be sensitive to the needs and respond to demands of constituents over whom they have little or no control. Among those constituents, political actors are perhaps the most important.

- Third, the strategic approach concentrates on assuring a good fit between the environment and the organization (including its mission and objectives, strategies, structures, and resources) and attempts to anticipate what will be required to assure continued fit. Under conditions of rapid political, economic and social change, strategies can quickly become outmoded or no longer serve useful purposes; or the resources traditionally required by the organization to produce its goods and services may suddenly become unavailable. The strategic approach recognizes that to maintain a close fit with the environment, the different elements of the organization will need to be continuously re-assessed and modified as the environment evolves.

- Finally, the strategic approach is a process. It is continuous and recognizes the need to be open to changing goals and activities in light of shifting circumstances within the environment. It is a process that requires monitoring and review mechanisms capable of feeding information to managers continuously. Strategic management or planning are not one-shot approaches, they are ongoing.

When all taken together, these attitudes and behaviors are really a way of approaching or thinking about how to manage or how to implement policy change. Strategic management (or planning) is not something that can be applied only once and then forgotten about or ignored. In that sense it is more than a tool; it is a mental framework.

The Strategic Management Process:

What does a strategic management process look like? The approach described below is suggested as a guide:

1. Agreement on and initiation of the strategic management process.

2. Identification and clarification of the organization's mission, objectives, and current strategies.

3. Identification of the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses.

4. Assessment of the threats and opportunities from the external environment.

5. Identification of key constituents/ stakeholders and their expectations.

6. Identification of the key strategic issues confronting the organization.

7. Design/analysis/selection of strategy alternatives and options to manage issues identified in step 6.

8. Implementation of strategy.

9. Monitoring and review of the strategy's performance.

There is much similarity in the approach described here and that of others (see Appendix One for a description of three). If one were to stop after Step number 7, the process would be simply a strategic planning exercise. Frequently, this is exactly where the process does stop, especially when management and the strategic planning functions have been de-linked. This occurs when there is no attempt to develop a strategic mentality among line management; instead, the organization attempts to set up a special department, division, or "guru" for strategic planning rather than integrate the functions into normal line management. Without the expressed linkage it is often difficult for the line manager to see the value of the strategic plan, and there will therefore be less interest and incentive in strategically managing. In contrast, if the strategic approach is employed, or the organization is imbued with a strategic mentality, then strategic planning will be done as part of the course of normal (strategic) management functions.

Step One: Agreement on the process. The first step in the strategic management process is to get agreement—not only to carry out the process but also to get agreement on how and when and by whom it will be carried out. Since the strategic management process is not a one-shot exercise, commitment to the longhaul is vital; without commitment, the exercise will be sterile and likely regarded as a waste of time.

Who should be included in the strategic management process? At least three different types of individuals should be considered for inclusion: the organization's top decision-makers and those officials who will have direct responsibility in implementation of policy; those who have a major stake in the outcome of the policy, whether from within or outside the organization, whether supportive or oppositional, clients or resource suppliers; and those with specialized knowledge that can add to the analysis of the policy to be decided or implemented. Although relatively broad involvement in the process should be encouraged, care must be taken that such groups not be expanded to the point of incapacity to make agile decisions.

How should the process be initiated? First, agreement to carry out and commitment to the process of strategic management must be obtained from one or more of the organization's key decision makers. Once such agreement and commitment is accomplished, then decisions about what should be considered and who should be involved can be addressed. If issues are complex and there is a need to involve a relatively wide spectrum of actors and stakeholders, then workshops might be considered. If the issues are less complex or fewer actors need to be involved, then direct consultations or small group arrangements might prove more efficient.

Step Two: Identification and clarification of the organization's mission, objectives and current strategies. Once an organization has agreed to engage in a strategic process, the first task is to determine what and where the organization is. What are the needs that the organization attempts to satisfy, whose needs are they, and what is the value of satisfying those needs? All too often organizations develop a service or a product and then fail to periodically examine whether or not that product actually satisfies a demand or whether satisfaction of that demand actually matters. Who are the people that compose the organization, what are their values, and what needs does the organization satisfy for them? (In resource-poor environments, agencies that satisfy only marginal or peripheral demands are vulnerable to budget cuts, abolishment, or absorption by other organizations.) What are the objectives of the organization and how well do they mesh with the needs and demands of clients, stakeholders and constituents? What strategies does the organization employ to achieve the objectives it has set for itself? Is the organization being asked to make fundamental changes in what it does, or in the kinds of clients it benefits? If so, what are those changes?

At this point, Louise White, whose framework is incorporated in the IPC project paper, argues that the policy in question should be examined with respect to its compatibility with the organization's mission, objectives and strategy. To accomplish this it is necessary to state the objectives of the policy, the nature of the service or activity intended, the benefits to be produced and the beneficiaries, and describe the complexity of the policy. (White 1989)

Clarification of the mission, objectives, and strategies is fundamental to initiation of the strategic process. It amounts to a statement of where the organization is, what it does and how it goes about its business. It should also help clarify which policies or demands can be facilitated by the organization and which will be impeded.

Step Three: Identification of the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses. One way to examine these is to look at the organization's resource base (skill base, capital or financial resources, etc.) Does the organization have the wherewithal to achieve its stated objectives or to put into motion its strategies? What are the levels of internal resources possessed by the organization? How available are they?

Analysis of resources by itself is not sufficient, the organization must also look at its task performance. What tasks does it do well, which does it not? This will give a better idea of how the organization's resources are organized and how effectively those resources are put to use. An organization may well have excellent research skills, but if its primary tasks are in service delivery, then such skills may be more a weakness than a strength. However, one should not automatically make the assumption that since idle capacity exists, it should be dispensed with. Such skills may well be quite useful if the organization should need to make changes in order to be more compatible with its environment.

In addition to skills and resources, other elements of the internal organization need to be examined: what is the nature of the organizational climate (are there cleavages, are they conflictive?), how adaptable are the participants (would they readily take on new tasks, how long have they been doing the same thing?), what is the nature and flexibility of the organizational structure (is it rigid, have significant changes been made in the past, and what has been the reaction?), is there an informal structure (how does it work and is it more cogent than the formal structure?), what is the nature of the incentive structure (is it designed to encourage innovative behavior, can it recruit and maintain a sufficiently high level of personnel?)? Which elements facilitate and which impede performance of the organization's tasks and which might facilitate or impede organizational change?

Step Four: Assessment of threats and opportunities in the external environment. While there is frequently a tendency on the part of managers to focus on the internal dimensions of the organization, policy change and the often volatile nature of politics in countries undergoing major policy changes requires conscious exploration of the environment outside the organization.

Political, economic, social, and technological changes will influence the direction and shape of an organization's policies and objectives. What are the major trends that can be detected in each of these areas that will have some bearing on the activities of the organization? How might macro-economic measures being instituted affect the financial resources of the organization? What is the nature of political support for the policy under consideration? How politically stable is the current regime? Is policy leadership about to change? Will key officials within the cabinet be changed and what will that mean to the development and implementation of the proposed policy change? To what extent have the government's primary political coalitions begun to change? Does this signify impending changes in policy priorities? How effective is the political opposition? What role do international forces or actors play in the determination of policy? To what extent has the social composition of the organization's primary clientele group changed? Has it outgrown the resources of the organization? Have its needs changed over the years?

An important factor in the organization's external environment is its bureaucratic and institutional setting. Is the organization autonomous? Or is it linked to a ministry, or must it coordinate its actions with other entities and what is the nature of those mechanisms? Are other organizations involved in the same activity, what are their roles? Are there incentives for cooperation?

Step Five: Identification of key constituents and stakeholders, their expectations and resources. The expectations and demands of constituents are key ingredients for decisions about what an organization will do and how it goes about carrying out its tasks. Stakeholders or constituents are those who have a direct interest in and are capable of influencing in some measure the outcomes or actions of the organization. Stakeholders provide the primary base of political support for the organization, and in a significant way are its raison d'etre. A rather wide range of actors might be included: competitors, beneficiaries, directors, employees, political parties, consumers, international donors, etc. What do these particular groups want from the organization? Are they satisfied with the current array of services and level of performance? Are their interests shifting? In which direction? And if so, will the organization be able to react favorably?

In examining the interests of stakeholders, a cautionary note is in order. There can be a temptation to try to consider every actor who might have some interest or influence in the organization. That temptation ought to be avoided and the analyst should take care to assure that only those that can have a realistic and reasonably significant impact are considered in the stakeholder analysis.

Step Six: Identification of key strategic issues. The information generated by the preceding steps should identify a set of fundamental questions or key problems regarding the fit of the organization with its environment. These problems might concern the organization's mission, its products or services, its clients, financing mechanisms, management, or relationship to certain stakeholders. Strategic issues are the principal problems that must be dealt with effectively or the organization can expect undesirable results. The effective treatment of strategic issues can signify fundamental change in how the organization goes about its business. Such issues may generate conflict within the organization since their resolution will produce winners and losers both internally and externally. The organization must be prepared to deal with that conflict.

In identifying strategic issues or problems, care must be taken in specifying exactly what the problem or issue is, why it is a problem for the organization, and the organizational consequences of inaction. All too often insufficient attention is given to problem identification resulting in misallocated resources and lost opportunities. It is also important to determine whether or not the organization can do anything about the problem—if not, it is not an issue. Managers must also recognize that it will be impossible to tackle all issues at once; therefore, problems should be identified according to short-, medium- or long-run importance and the urgency of action needed. Managers will find that energy expended in problem and issue identification and clarification will have payoffs in the development of strategies for their treatment.

Step Seven: Design, analysis, and selection of strategy alternatives and options to manage issues identified in Step 6. Once issues and problems have been identified, strategies to solve those problems need to be identified. Generally, more than one option for dealing with the problem will be identified; then options must be examined for their comparative viability, feasibility, and desirability. Can the strategy work from a practical as well as theoretical stance? Is the organization capable of carrying out the strategy? Is the strategy acceptable to those carrying it out and to those to whom it is directed? Does the organization have the human and material resources, does it have the know-how necessary, and is the appropriate organizational structure available for implementing the strategy? Will the strategy accomplish what the manager wants and benefit those intended? Can the strategy be sustained, and can it adapt to the projected changes in the environment? Is flexibility built into the strategy? Can the necessary resource base be sustained over the life of the strategy?

Desirability has to do with the fit of organizational and environmental values and objectives with the strategy. Is the strategy compatible with the implementing institution's mission or its fundamental objectives, and/or with the mission and objectives of collaborating organizations? Is the strategy targeted to the most appropriate beneficiaries? Is it compatible with the legal and bureaucratic setting? How well will the strategy adjust to forecast trends in the medium and in the long term? How will key stakeholders be affected, how compatible is the strategy with their values and expectations?

Step Eight: Implementation of the strategy. Implementation of a strategy is not an automatic process; there are two major parts to the process. The first step is the development of an action plan, which is a statement of what, who, when, and how the actions necessary to carry out the strategy will be done. Performance goals and objectives will also be specified. Much of the information needed to develop the action plan will have been generated in Step Seven.

The second part of implementation consists of actions aimed at marshaling and applying resources. In the context of policy change these actions may consist of (but are not limited to), changes in organizational structures, shifts and reclassification of personnel, the establishment of new routines, tasks, and procedures; installation of new incentive systems; retooling production for new products or services; marketing of new services or creation of demand among new beneficiaries or consumers; development of new financing mechanisms; organizing coalitions to maintain political, budgetary, and beneficiary support; and developing collaborative mechanisms with cooperating organizations. It should be noted that the managers' task is more than just the internal operation of his organization, they must also manage its fit with the environment.

Step Nine: Monitoring and review of performance. Strategic management assumes continual change. Therefore mechanisms must be developed for monitoring and analyzing the performance of the organization with respect to achieving the goals and objectives set in the action plan. As the environment undergoes changes, as ministers change, elections occur, or budgets go up or down, priorities will also change. Resource flows may be uneven. All of these elements can alter performance, priorities, and the desirability of certain policies. If the organization wants to maintain a good "fit" with the environment, it must first be able to track these changes in order to adjust.

The monitoring process should be continuous, regular, and capable of feeding into the decision-making process. The manager should develop control mechanisms to gauge the efficiency of resources used and impact mechanisms to gauge the effectiveness of its actions. Finally, it is vital that the monitoring process be timely and usable.

APPENDIX

Different Approaches to Strategic Planning and Management

Much attention in the literature has been devoted to strategic management and strategic planning—but with most emphasis on the private sector. Nevertheless, in the last several years, there has been a growing interest and literature (eg., Ring and Perry, 1985, and Samuel Paul, 1983) on applications in the public sector. Three recent approaches are briefly described in this appendix.

Two recent books on strategic planning and strategic public management illustrate the overlap between the two concepts. Each develops a strategic "process" consisting of several steps. Drawing on Nutt and Backoff (1987), Bozeman and Straussman (1990) outline six steps for putting strategic management to work. These steps amount to a basic framework for strategic management:

1. **Dealing with history:** an analysis of the history of the organization, its mission and its mandate.

2. **Stock Taking:** an evaluation of the organization's current internal financial, organizational, and human resources.

3. **Evaluating Issues:** identification of the significant issues that will affect the performance or capacity of the organization.

4. **Developing Strategies:** development of strategic alternatives to respond to and manage the issues identified.

5. **Assessing Feasibility:** evaluation of the capacity of the organization to carry out the strategic alternative within the context.

6. **Implementation:** the actual carrying out of the strategy selected.

It is easy to recognize several parallels between Bozeman and Straussman and the eight-step process for strategic planning laid out by John Bryson (1988):

1. Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process.

2. Identifying organizational mandates.

3. Clarifying organization mission and values.

4. Assessing the external environment opportunities and threats.

5. Assessing the internal environment: strengths and weaknesses.

6. Identifying the strategic issues facing an organization.

7. Formulating strategies to manage the issues.

8. Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future.

Louise White (1989) establishes a slightly shorter but similar strategic process:

> **Step 1.** Agree on a process for developing an implementation strategy.

Step 2. Map or assess the situation (this includes analysis of the external and internal environments, the content of the policy, and stakeholder expectations and resources).

Step 3. Identify the strategic issues.

Step 4. Design an implementation strategy.

Step 5. Design a process for monitoring results and making ongoing adjustments.

Where do these "processes" differ? Is it really only at the ends of each process? Bryson concludes with the formulation of strategies and the establishment of an effective organizational vision for the future: Bozeman and Straussman conclude the process with implementation of the strategies formulated. Planners in Bryson's model, are not directly responsible for the implementation of what they have planned, except insofar as those same persons also will be tasked with implementation (not all organizations can readily separate the planning and management functions). But in all fairness, Bryson is adamant in insisting that the alternatives developed to cope with strategic issues be both workable and acceptable. Assuring that could well be considered tantamount to implementation.

White, on the other hand, goes further than either of the other two. Whereas Bozeman and Straussman end with "implementations," White concludes her model of strategic management with suggestions for the development of mechanisms for monitoring to feed the ongoing process of adjustment and corrections. This last step is a vital one, and deserves emphasis. The LDCs undergoing adjustment tend to be characterized by environmental volatility—to assume that a single strategy is not subject to either revision or modification (and often rather extreme revision or modification) would be short sided. Therefore, mechanisms to monitor the organization's continuing fit with the environment as well as progress toward objectives are critical.

Another difference lies in each's treatment of the external environment. White and Bryson put considerable specific emphasis on the environment in the steps they describe as part of the strategic process. Bozeman and Straussman certainly recognize the importance of the external environment as can be seen in the following excerpts from their work:

> One purpose of strategic management is to mediate between the organization and the environment.
>
> Public management necessarily requires attention to the organization's environment because the influence of external political authority emanates from the environment [for this reason, effective public management requires attention to strategy.
>
> ...an external perspective emphasizing not adapting to the environment] but anticipating and shaping of environmental change. Strategic public management adds an additional ingredient: strategic thinking must be cognizant of the exercise of political authority.

However, unlike either White or Bryson, Bozeman and Straussman do not describe a specific step for analysis of the external environment within their recommended framework. Analysis of the environment is left as an implicit task. The danger of this approach is that such analysis might simply be overlooked as being too hard to do or as being too tenuous to add anything. Given the impact of the environment on public organizations, explicit and direct analysis is imperative.

Not surprisingly, the fact that both approaches employ the term "strategic" gives the two a great deal in common. Strategy, or the strategic outlook signifies a forward looking mentality. Strategy does not concern the past except for the lessons and input that can be extracted from past experience. Strategy concerns the future, and to the extent that the future is unknown, the greater its uncertainty. Tasks that concern the very short run are generally not grist for the strategic mill. The further the horizon of time involved in the task, the greater the level of uncertainty. Inasmuch as strategy involves the future, and particularly the mid- to long-run future, uncertainty then becomes a part of the strategic problem. The strategy mounts to a bet that the future will evolve in a particular way and that the manager's particular vision of the future implied in the selection of a strategy will be the correct one.

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