Strategy
in your
pocket

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Agency for Economic Development

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Introduction

In this manual are my standards for organizational strategy. I use it as a reference for my projects. I use it to get ideas. I use it to make sure that I'm not overlooking anything.

I add comments to it as I learn new things. I scratch things off it when something no longer applies. I make it warn me that the strategic planning process does not change; skipping steps will weaken it. I make it remind me that there are standards to follow within each step but that they are not set in stone; they keep evolving as I grow in experience, expertise, and wisdom. I make it challenge me to make strategies sustainable not only by putting ambitious goals into action, but by making organizations take a long, hard look at themselves to determine whether such aims are realistic. I make this manual get me results.

And it works. Whether it be to achieve millions of dollars in cost savings for multi-national corporations or by doubling or tripling the annual funding of a nonprofit, I have seen it work.

As a manager, consultant, or adviser of organizations of any size and sector (government, business, and non-profit alike!), you can also make this manual work for you. Give it a read from cover to cover. See how its take on strategy compares to yours. Before brushing anything off, put some effort into meeting these standards and you will see the results for yourself.

There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.

Colin Powell

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Set-up for strategy

So you've been called upon to create a strategy, or maybe you took it upon yourself to do it? Regardless of whether you are a manager, consultant, or adviser, you need to make official the decision to conduct a strategic planning process. Put it on paper. Make a plan. Show it to a room full of anybody who is anybody and have them sign off on it. Start the strategic planning process on the right foot, and you will have saved yourself some headaches along the way.

Draft the Project Brief

1.1. Use of the Project Brief. The project brief is a 1-2 page document describing any expectations that key stakeholders may have from a strategic planning process. The final brief is to be signed by project sponsors and stakeholders with decision-making power over the proposed project scope. An approved brief authorizes the strategy consulting team to begin the strategic planning process.

Keep in mind:

- Avoid skipping this step. Resist any pressure that you may get from stakeholders to do so. Clearly documenting expectations is a powerful tool that you will later benefit from when communicating across the organization, gaining key supporters, attempting to establish consensus, and aligning efforts that will ultimately result in success.

1.2. Project name. The name of the project should give an indication of the activities and scope covered in the brief. The full name should not exceed 10 words.

Project name: Organizational strategy for the Agency for Economic Development (AED)

The use of common-knowledge acronyms is allowed. Lesser-known acronyms should be unabridged.

1.3. Background and current state. This section should clearly trace a logical path towards investing in a strategic planning process. As such, it should include:

- Description of the organization: people, funds, programs, and other criteria

- Changes in the organization or its environment

- Failures or successes that merit review

- Reactions to the results of past strategic plans

- Statistics that describe the type, behavior, or needs of internal and external stakeholders

- Conditions limiting the achievement of goals

- Opportunities that can be exploited

1.4. Geographic scope. Use the terms "in scope" and "out of scope" conjointly to draw the boundaries of the project at a level of detail that can be reasonably understood by all stakeholders.

In scope: Kiev region
Out of scope: Kiev city

Keep in mind:

- Use maps, graphs, tables, icons, color-coding or other visually appealing and easy to understand tools for more complex geographic scopes.

1.5. **Organization in scope.** Use the terms "in scope" and "out of scope" conjointly to draw the boundaries of the project at a level of detail that can be reasonably understood by all stakeholders.

In scope: Agency for Economic Development
Out of scope: Partner organizations and networks

Keep in mind:

■ You will get the most benefit out of strategy when creating it from the top to the bottom of the organizational pyramid. Bottom-up strategies are OK as long as stakeholders understand the risk of their decisions being overturned or that resources are reassigned at the whim of top management, as well as the effect that such conflicts may have on the motivation of the staff.

■ When the scope includes several departments or programs, the strategy should be limited only to what those departments or programs have in common. The leaders of each department or program will be then responsible for achieving their fair share of the resulting strategic goals. As such, each should create its own separate strategy that will enable it to address its particular needs while contributing to the achievement of those higher-level goals set.
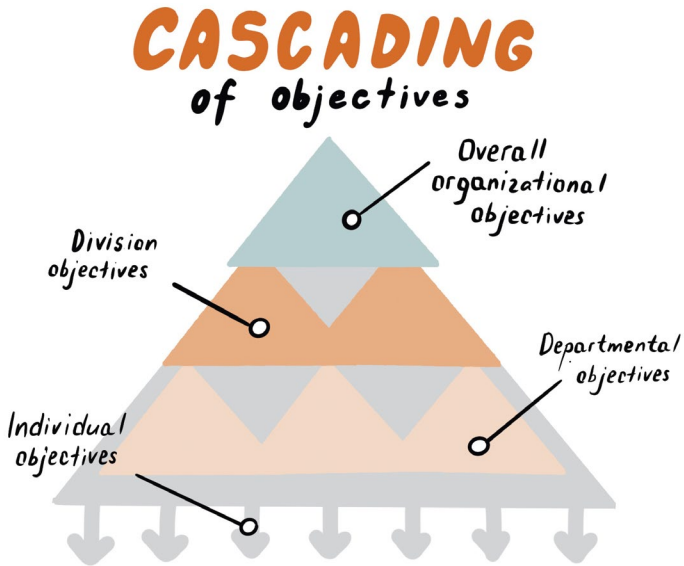
Figure 1.5: Cascading of goals and objectives

- In the example above, "Partner organizations and networks" were defined to be "out of scope". Removing them from the scope makes it clear to interested parties that they will not take part in the strategic planning process as described in this manual. However, you still need to understand who they are and what they do so that you may consider the effects that their activities may have on the organization in scope.

- Use maps, graphs, tables, icons, color-coding, or other visually appealing and easy to understand tools for more complex geographic scopes.

1.6. **High-level objectives.** Initial objectives will be based on the expectations of the key stakeholders signing the brief, any known standards applicable to the environment in which the organization operates, and perhaps your input as a consultant. A 10-15% annual improvement in any desired indicator of success is normally adequate in the absence of such standards.

Objective: Increase the total income from social services by 15% annually

Keep in mind:

- Objectives should be set using clearly defined baselines. However, some organizations may not have enough command over their data to do so. In such cases, baselines must be estimated as part of the strategic planning process.

- Ensure that there is enough value in the results expected from the implementation of the strategy to justify the investment of time and resources. Stakeholders can measure value in a number of ways, including:
    - Data visibility or transparency
    - Control over processes
    - Increase in quality or efficiency
    - Increase in income
    - A defined increase in impact

- These initial objectives could become strategic goals themselves, but only after the full strategic planning process confirms them as such.

1.7. Time frame for the strategy. A 3-year period is adequate for most stable organizations.

Keep in mind:

- Organizations considering 1-year strategies may benefit more from the tactical toolbox in Step 5 and the methodologies for implementation in Step 6 than from the strategic planning process itself. See points 5.5-5.12, 6.1-6.8.

- Avoid periods lasting longer than 3 years. It will never hurt to go through the strategic planning process every 3 years and make new decisions based on fresh information.

- A stakeholder may point out that some activities may take longer than 3 years to complete, such as the construction of a building. Consider how such activities could be best looked at in the context of the strategic planning process, given that they are the means to achieve strategic goals rather than strategic goals themselves. Perhaps such activities could be broken down into smaller steps in a way that can reduce risks and gives flexibility to make changes down the line.

1.8.   Time frame for strategy development. Assuming full co-operation from the organization in scope, reaching Check-point 3 – Strategy sign-off (see points 5.13-5.16) should take a minimum of 8 weeks of full time work and up to 4 months of part-time work for a team of 2-3 consultants. Avoid longer periods given the need to have up-to-date data for decision-making and keep a good momentum for managing change.

1.9.   Working teams. Use the 5 Working Teams model described in this manual as a guide to forming an effective working structure. See points 1.11-1.16.

1.10. Other considerations. Add as necessary according to stakeholder needs.

Form the 5 Working Teams

1.11. Use of the 5 Working Teams. Stakeholders will have a structured role to play in the success of the strategic planning process. Such a structure should grant your strategy consulting team access to all the information needed to understand the organization in scope, remove roadblocks, and meet project deadlines.

Keep in mind:

- Depending on the size of the organization in scope, some of the roles and teams may overlap one another (e.g. your sponsor may also be your counterpart). Note potential conflicts of interests and try to remove them early on in the process.

- The project sponsors should approve a draft of the Project Brief before you approach other key stakeholders and form teams.
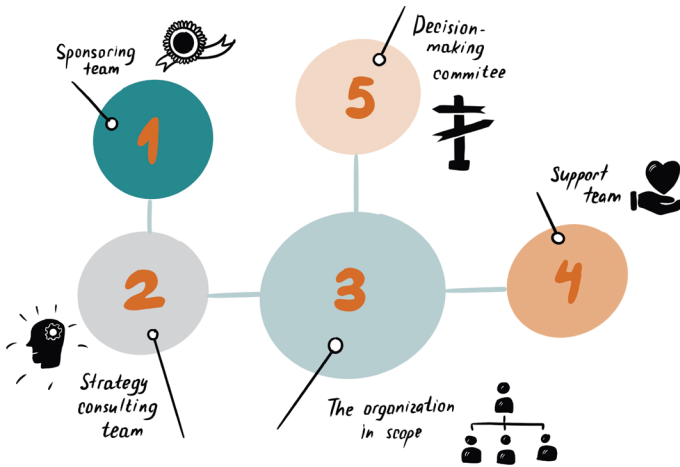
Figure 1.11: Organizational structure of the 5 Working Teams

1.12. **#1: The sponsoring team.** A representative from the team of sponsors who approved the brief should be assigned as an advisor and catalyst to rally support for the project and remove project roadblocks. If, as an example, internal or external stakeholders refuse to contribute to the strategic planning process, your sponsor can advise your strategy consulting team on how to proceed.

Keep in mind:

- Some decisions made by the sponsor may limit your team's ability to understand the organization in scope and, consequently, may cause the organization in scope to fail in the approval or the implementation of the strategy. Negotiate with your sponsor revisions to the Project Brief in order keep expectations realistic.

1.13. #2: Your strategy consulting team. Depending on the organization in scope, your team should consist of a project leader (you) and 1-3 analysts (direct reports). Your team's role is to become experts in the organization in scope, guide it through the strategic planning process, and develop recommendations.

Keep in mind:

- Your team is there to support the organization's staff, not to replace them.

- In order to ensure an adequate flow of ideas and strong recommendations for the organization in scope, the team should not consist of only 1 staff member, regardless of the level of experience of that individual. In other words, never work alone.

- Teams consisting of more than 4 members may be counterproductive to the process. Your team should operate as one, each member embodying the best practices the team wishes to instill onto the organization in scope. The project leader should never stop coordinating, aligning, training, and coaching the team. The larger the team, the more difficult this will be.

- Your team should operate as an independent body. None of its members should have part-time responsibilities within the organization in scope. Making exceptions to this is sure to threaten the stability of the strategic planning process and may introduce unnecessary conflicts of interest.

1.14. #3: The organization in scope. Your team should work directly with one counterpart who is functionally responsible for all operational and strategic aspects of the organization scope (e.g. the Executive Director, Department Head). As the person who will ultimately be responsible for implementing the strategy, your counterpart should be fully engaged in all aspects related to the strategic planning process.

As a rule of thumb, your counterpart should be directly overseeing no more than 8 managers of departments or programs, regardless of the number of staff in the organization in scope. For larger organizations, the counterpart should select qualified individuals who can represent the interests of groups of departments or programs.

Notify your sponsor when reporting lines are not clear or consistent, such as:

- The counterpart does not report to any sponsor
- Staff members report to more than one manager
- Staff members report to managers that are not functionally part of the organization in scope

Keep in mind:

- Why should the counterpart oversee no more than 8 managers? Leaders who manage too many people often struggle in fulfilling the operational, strategic, and professional development demands that are so essential for running an organization sustainably. Leading under such overwhelming conditions will ultimately put the success of the strategy at risk.

- Individuals selected to represent the interests of various groups of departments or programs do not necessarily need to be functionally in charge of such groups. This coordination role can be rotated among members of the same group.

1.15. #4: The support team. As applicable, certain parts of the organization that are not in scope may need to be notified in order for your team to get adequate support throughout the strategic planning process (e.g. IT, Legal, Finance, etc.).

Note where bureaucracy, lack of resources, lack of transparency, or unwillingness to cooperate make it difficult for your team to access information that is critical to the strategic planning process. Get advice from your sponsor as necessary.

1.16. #5: The decision-making committee. This team is composed of the sponsor and any other high-level stakeholders who have an interest, power, or control over the resources or organizations that may be necessary to implement the strategy. Committee members need to be actively engaged in providing feedback at each Checkpoint throughout the strategic planning process. They have the final say in the approval of the strategy proposed.

The sponsor, your counterpart, and your team should identify and approach each potential member of this committee in order to secure their participation in the process and to collect any input relevant to the organization in scope (e.g. perhaps changes in scope are necessary). In the case that members have other priorities that prevent them from contributing to the process, they may wish to appoint someone else to represent their interests.

Keep in mind:

- While it is advisable to limit the number of members of the decision-making committee to the minimum necessary to make a decision, it may not always be possible. Both you and your sponsor should agree on an approach to manage large groups (e.g. more than 10 members).

- Assess the effectiveness of the decision-making committee throughout the strategic planning process and consider making recommendations for its improvement as part of the strategy.

Pass Checkpoint 1 — Project kick-off

1.17. Use of Checkpoint 1. This is a formal meeting in which key representatives of the 5 Working Teams, including all of the members of the decision-making committee, gather to officially sign-off on the Project Brief and announce the kick-off of the strategic planning process.

1.18. Preparation for Checkpoint 1. As the coordinator of the organization in scope and the person ultimately responsible for the implementation of the strategy, your counterpart will be leading this meeting. Your team should support your counterpart in preparing the following recommended content:

- Have printed copies of the final version of the Project Brief for each participant
- Present each of the 5 Working Teams and their expected roles and responsibilities
- Present key features of the Project Brief, such as the background, scope, period, and objectives
- Present a high-level overview of the proposed plan to complete the strategic planning process as described in this manual
- Include any important observations or concerns shared by stakeholders prior to the meeting

Limit the duration of the meeting to no more than one hour, allowing 20-30 minutes for questions, feedback, and open discussions.

Keep in mind:

- The content presented in this meeting should not surprise any participant. Each should have already been exposed to the draft of the Project Brief during the creation of the 5 Working Teams.

- All members of the decision-making committee must attend Checkpoint 1. In case some members cannot attend Checkpoint 1 as scheduled, your team should conduct separate presentations with each of them before or soon after it takes place. Consider re-scheduling Checkpoint 1 as necessary to ensure that the majority of the key decision-makers will attend.

- At this point, all stakeholders should be aware of their roles and responsibilities in this process. Note instances where stakeholders reveal their hesitance or disagreement with the project. The sponsor, your counterpart, and your team should select an approach to resolve such issues as early into the process as possible.

- The most significant changes in the scope of the project will happen all the way through to this point. Note any changes in the original scope thus far and the sources of such changes. This may indicate gaps in information flow at the highest levels of the organization that may need to be addressed as part of the strategy.

- Never assume that stakeholders know each other, especially in large organizations. Get them to know and interact with one another. Developing professional networks will prove valuable towards the implementation of the strategy.

- Make sure that your counterpart is getting all of the attention, not you or your team.

1.19. Communicate the project kickoff. Having officially approved the project, your counterpart should brief all staff members on the project, planned activities, as well as your team's role in the process.

It is critical that the staff is regularly briefed on the status of the strategic planning process in order to collect feedback, address their concerns, and avoid any misinformation to spread.

2

Bathe in data

How can we make a strategy irrefutably good? Simply put, a good strategy must build its foundation from good data. And good data is only available to organizations that rely not only on what people know, but also on the documented activities that build long-term organizational memory.

Is organizational memory being valued? Can you tap into it on-demand? To what extent is the organization capable and willing to develop its organizational memory further?

Before making any recommendations, make sure that you have a deep understanding of one of the most overlooked bottlenecks to success in any strategy.

Send a Request for Information (RFI)

2.1. Use of the RFI. Before making recommendations, your team must first understand the organization in scope. The information collected through the RFI will be very telling. It will give you a first impression of the organization in scope based not only on its documentation, but also on your observations of its ability to organize, follow instructions, pay attention to detail, and communicate professionally. The more you know, the more your insight will trigger valuable self-reflection in the minds of stakeholders.

Keep in mind:

When sending an RFI, make sure that it is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). The organization in scope should:

- Understand what needs to be done and to what level of detail (Specific, Measurable)

- Be qualified to respond and given an adequate amount of time to do so (Achievable)

- See how it fits into the project scope (Relevant)

- Know by when to fulfill it (Time-bound)

2.2. Standard RFI. The quantity and type of documents requested will depend on the scope of the project.

Sample RFI items for the organizational strategy of a small/medium sized NGO:

- *Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool. See points 2.5-2.9.*

- *Annual reports for the last 3 years*

- *Current and past strategic/operational plans*

- *Second-tier strategies (Program level, Financial, Communications, Human Resources, etc.)*

- *Management metrics to monitor performance and impact (how is success measured?)*

- *List of key programs: description of how they work, what they do, who they impact, etc.*

- *Detailed list of projects completed in the last 3 years, including:*
  - *Project name, description, and program responsible for implementation*
  - *Budget, sources of funding, and source type (grant, donation, fee-for-service, etc.)*

- *Goals vs. results for key indicators*

- *List of partner organizations and networks*

- *List of potential partners or competitors*

- *Statutes and policies (e.g. ethics and values, anti-corruption, financial, volunteers, etc.)*

- *Financial reports for the last 3 years, including any certified external audits*

- *Data analyses, or raw data collected about programs or target groups for the last 3 years*

- *Organizational chart and list of employees;:*
  - *Name, position, and experience*
  - *Status (full time, part-time, volunteer, etc.)*
  - *Departments or programs involved in*
  - *Number of years with the organization*

- *Job descriptions for each position*

- *Board Member structure, including:*
  - *Name, position, professional experience, and number of years serving as a member*
  - *Frequency of Board meetings*
  - *Member activity within the organization*
  - *Documentation of meetings and decisions*

- *Other relevant information*

Keep in mind:

- If you need to receive information in a specific format or level of detail, prepare templates for the organization in scope to complete. This will help you in the analysis phase.

- Avoid using too many templates, though. Part of the analysis includes assessing the level and quality of the organization's documentation and their interpretation of the RFI.

- Balance your team's need to understand with the organization's ability to provide you with information. Ask for too much, and it may struggle to meet commitments, may prioritize sending you non-critical information, or may not send you anything at all.

2.3. **Time to complete an RFI.** All of the documentation requested should be made available to your team within 2 weeks. Regardless of the organization's size, its inability to provide such standard information in a timely manner without disrupting its day-to-day program activities indicates that such information is likely not collected, analyzed, or acted on regularly in any meaningful way. This automatically becomes an organizational gap. Your team may recommend conducting data collection or efficiency projects in order to obtain information critical to the strategic planning or implementation processes.

2.4. **Sending the RFI.** All requests for information should be discussed with your counterpart prior to sending. They should be sent in written form, considering the following standards of professional communication:

- Briefly introduce yourself and include your name, position, and contact information.
- Briefly introduce the project scope, any relevant agreements reached during previous meetings, and the current project plan.
- Briefly explain how the RFI will contribute to the strategic planning process and indicate your availability to discuss the request in detail.
- Clearly mark deadlines in **bold**.

- Ask the recipient to acknowledge the request and confirm their ability to meet the deadlines.

- Keep accountable parties (such as team leaders) on copy in all communications to ensure that they are informed of the request and can respond in case the person cannot be reached.

- Avoid using acronyms unless you are sure that they are understood by all staff members. Include clarifications or supporting information as needed.

Follow up if no response is received within 3 working days. Escalate issues to your counterpart or sponsor as necessary.

Keep in mind:

- Stakeholders may challenge your request for a number of hidden reasons, including:
  - Not agreeing that a strategy is needed
  - Not agreeing that the request is relevant
  - Not having enough time to respond
  - Not wanting to do the work
  - Not respecting you

Regardless of the reason, you team should note any deviation in professionalism throughout this process, especially in cases where issues need to be escalated.

On selecting the right Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool

2.5. Use of the OCA. This is a benchmarking exercise, comparing the organization in scope to accepted best practices relevant to its sector. The best OCAs use rubrics with detailed definitions of each score level, assessing multiple items and criteria blocks.

Typical assessment criteria blocks for an NGO:

- Governance structure
- Strategy and operational planning
- Monitoring and evaluation methodologies
- Financial management and sustainability
- Partnership activity
- Quality of the services provided
- Image and reputation in the sector

In this manual, the OCA is a complementary tool to your team's overall assessment. It will be filled-in, reviewed, and calibrated in Step 2, Step 3, and Step 4 (see points 2.60-2.61, 3.23-3.25, 4.1-4.4).

Figure 2.5: Sample of OCA scoring format for one criteria (USAID; rev. July 27, 2015)

	(1) Low Capacity	(2) Basic Capacity	(3) Moderate Capacity	(4) Strong Capacity
1.1 Vision and Mission	Vision and mission statements are ■ Not written ■ Written, but not clear and specific ■ Written, but no longer relevant to the organization's current purpose or aspirations ■ Not considered in decisions on priorities and actions ■ Not included in staff orientation and public communication materials	Vision and mission statements are written, but ■ Vague and general ■ Partly relevant to organization's current purpose or aspirations ■ Not usually considered in decisions on priorities and actions ■ Not usually included in staff orientation and public communication materials	Vision and mission statements are written and ■ Reasonably clear and specific ■ Relevant to the organization's current purpose or aspirations, but may need some updating ■ Usually considered in decisions on priorities and actions ■ Included in staff orientation and public communication materials	Vision and mission statements are written and ■ Clear and specific ■ Relevant to the organization's current purpose or aspirations ■ Consistently considered in decisions and actions ■ Included in staff orientation and public communication materials

2.6. Relevance to the organization. Work with any assessment tool that the organization is already using. Recommendations are more likely to be adopted when they originate from a familiar source. Propose using different or complementary tools only when you can demonstrate that those being used are not adequate for the scope of the project or the depth of the analysis to be conducted.

2.7. Relevance to the sector. Consider assessment tools that are widely recognized in the sector where the organization in scope operates. Recommendations are more likely to be adopted when they are based on commonly accepted best practices.

2.8. Ease of use. Ensure that the tool is simple to understand in content and format. Otherwise, it is likely that people will either not complete the work, will complete it only partially, or will complete it without putting too much thought into it.

Keep in mind:

- Avoid using tools that go beyond your team's capabilities, especially if you do not have the support necessary to develop them.

- Avoid making unsupported interpretations or "figuring it out" with your counterpart. One thing is to work on it together (where you take the role of an expert and coach) and another is to try to understand it together. The latter is not an effective use of anyone's time and may reduce your team's credibility as experts.

- Some tools may leave some scoring definitions up to interpretation. Use your experience and the guidelines described in this manual to agree on certain definitions that will clearly trace the boundaries between scores.

- Support all scores with documentation.

- The final score will be used to set a baseline for organizational development. Since the scores will be reviewed regularly, choose a tool that the organization can put to long-term use.
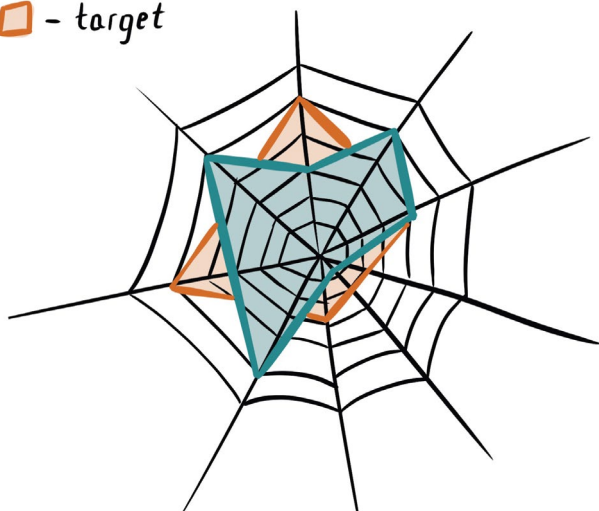
Figure 2.8: Spider Chart

2.9. Time to complete. Avoid tools that require an untrained person more than 1 hour to complete. The tool selected should be comprehensive and useful, not burdensome.

On managing RFI commitments

2.10. Use of managing RFI commitments. To process your request for information, the organization in scope should understand the contents of the RFI, ask for clarification if needed, commit to the deadline set, delegate work as necessary, and execute the work. Communication gaps between your team and the organization in scope will often result in delays.

2.11. Preventive follow-ups. Get a commitment to meet the 2-week deadline set within a maximum of 3 working days after the RFI has been sent. Follow up on commitments at the halfway point (7 days) and 1-2 days before the deadline. If communication is failing, escalate issues to your counterpart and sponsor as necessary.

Keep in mind:

- Create a sense of urgency. The organization in scope needs to understand the effect that delays have on the overall project. Consider sharing visual aids that keep track of all commitments, the people responsible, and their completion status.

- Early on in the process, discuss and agree upon preferred methods of communication, such as phone, email, social media, etc. Consider that some channels may not be appropriate for official communication.

2.12. Plan for delays. Consider keeping an undisclosed 7-day buffer in your team's planning in order to manage the risk of delays. Organizations often underestimate the amount of work required to reply to an RFI, so you should prepare for that.

Note whether you are informed of delays or not at all. If you are, note whether you are given enough notice in advance. Note the reasons used to justify delays. These instances can give you insight into the organization's management dynamics, as well as gaps in its ability to foresee and communicate issues in meeting commitments.

Keep in mind:

- In most cases, an organization's inability to foresee issues in meeting commitments is a project management issue and nothing else.

2.13. When to escalate. If a reply to the RFI is not received as agreed, follow up in writing. Stress the importance of keeping with the agreed plan. Call if no response has been received within 24 hours and escalate as necessary.

2.14. While you wait. Your team should make sure that the strategic planning process goes smoothly. Use this time to get ahead on tasks such as:

- Planning
- Approaching new stakeholders
- Collecting benchmarking information needed for Step 3 and Step 4
- Developing the professional skills of your team through training and coaching

Close the RFI

2.15. Use of closing the RFI. Your team should trace a clear line between receiving the documentation needed and reviewing it. This will allow for better alignment among working teams and control over the progress of the strategic planning process.

A closed RFI means that the organization in scope has collected the information needed to fulfill the RFI and that it now can be reviewed by your team.

2.16. Set-up a strategy dashboard. Use spreadsheets to organize the different types of documents analyzed, strategy tools used, and stakeholders interviewed.

The format for the strategy dashboard should be agreed with all members of the strategy consulting team, taking into account ease of use, shareability, and adaptability as the process evolves.

Keep in mind:

- The strategy dashboard is a live document that evolves continuously with your project. Avoid specialized management software, as it will likely restrict your team's ability to adapt its methods of analysis to the situation at hand.

2.17. Check your list. All documents requested from the organization should be sent to your team. If they are not, confirm that the sender did not forget to include them. Any information that is not available becomes an organizational gap. At your team's discretion, it may be necessary to dedicate more resources to collecting the documentation needed.

Avoid any task that would take your team more than 3 full days to complete. Unless vital to the strategic planning process, such gaps should be closed during the implementation of the strategy.

2.18. Keep documents simple. All documents should be labeled and the information requested should be easy to find. Ask for instructions as needed.

Instances of important information buried under too much irrelevant information may indicate that it is not reviewed, updated, or used.

2.19. Additional information. Document all information that was received, but not requested, for use in the future. Note any excessive over delivery and ask the sender for clarification or a summary of contents in order to avoid losing focus on the project scope.

2.20. Do not analyze yet. The analysis should begin only after confirming that all documentation has been received. Although it may be tempting to begin analyzing the documents sent before the deadline, these may get corrected and resent later on. Avoid situations in which you will have to redo work.

2.21. Confirm receipt and close the RFI. Once the checklist has been verified and all pending issues have been cleared, your team should inform the organization in scope that the RFI has been closed and that the review phase has begun.

Keep in mind:

- Ensure that your team keeps track of what has been received. Asking for what you already have reflects poorly on you and may undervalue other people's work. Use the search functions in all of your communication channels before asking for documents on the checklist.

Review the mission and vision

2.22. Use of the mission and vision. A vision is an ideal that the organization strives to achieve. A mission is the approach taken to contribute to that ideal. Both are at the apex of the organization. There is no strategy without a mission and vision guiding it.

2.23. Relevance and length. Missions and visions should be inspiring, memorable, relevant to the activities of the organization, and memorizable by staff. While not a rule set in stone, this manual recommends that they be limited to no more than 15 words.

Google's mission: organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful

Google's vision: provide access to the world's information in one click

Keep in mind:

- Can the staff recite the mission by heart? This is the best way to tell whether it is good.

- Going forward, note contradictions between the organization's activities, its mission, and vision.

Review policies, procedures, and published works

2.24. Use of policies, procedures, and published works. An organization's documentation is a reflection of the standards to which it adheres. A careful look can reveal the organization's level of oversight, attention to detail, quality control, and the skills of its staff.

2.25. Elements of style. Written work should be free of errors in grammar and sentence structure as well as inconsistencies in formatting such as in:

- Titles and labels
- Alignment and spacing of paragraphs, images, tables, charts, etc.
- Font size, type, and color
- Footnotes and headnotes

Video, audio, and image quality should be adequate for the outlet in which it is being published. Note excessive use of poor formatting resulting in:

- Pixelation, blurring, vibration, or color fades
- Inadequate volume and breaks in sound

2.26. Impact of media. Video, audio, and images should accurately represent the brand of the organization and the impact of its work. Note instances of:

- Low or no coverage of key events
- Underrepresented staff members
- Use of one event to represent unrelated events
- Use of outdated media (more than 1 year)
- High proportion of staff to attendees featured
- Event size disproportionate to its budget
- Inappropriate behavior of staff or attendees

2.27. Clarity of content. Messages should surface clearly throughout the work. Content and tone should be tailored to the target audience. Note instances of:

- Excessive repetition or paraphrasing
- Personal, commercial, or political commentary
- Misrepresentation of the mission and values of the organization
- Incorrect information portrayed as fact
- Unfounded conclusions
- Imbalances in quantitative vs. qualitative data
- Lack of sources, references, or peer review for analytical work

Internal work instructions and process flowcharts should be approved and communicated to the staff. This is especially important for organizations with a high degree of repetition in operational tasks. Note ambiguity in:

- Purpose
- Start and end points for each step
- Resources and training to complete tasks
- Process owners and approvers
- Latest revision date
- Location of the instructions

Charts and diagrams that summarize internal data should be reproducible at your team's request.

Links to documents or online pages should be up to date. Note instances where links lead to:

- Blank pages or dead ends
- Outdated, incomplete, or unrelated information
- Personal or confidential data
- Documents without adequate access rights
- Irrelevant advertisements

2.28. Legal compliance. All content should adhere to applicable copyright laws. Documents that may be subject to changes in legislation (e.g. organizational by-laws, reporting, labor rights, etc.) should be up to date. Note whether the organization is aware of recent changes in legislation.

2.29. Comprehensiveness. The depth and breadth of documentation should be comparable to that of similar organizations of the same size. Note whether the organization is aware of accepted best practices and assess their efforts to meet them. Pay close attention to relevant policies and processes, such as:

- Values and ethics
- Recruitment, training, and management
- Internal and external communications
- Accounting and finances
- Operational and strategic planning
- Information technology
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Marketing and sales
- Activities of the Board of Directors (if applicable)

While it may be uncertain whether each of the departments mentioned falls within the scope of the project, your team may still note any deeper gaps observed within that gray line, such as:

- Overall lack of documentation
- Technical errors
- Inadequate or outdated practices

Observations in these areas can and often do indicate improvement areas within the scope. Major findings outside of the scope of the project may trigger their inclusion into the scope or a decision to start separate strategic planning processes.

2.30. Auditing. The organization in scope should have internal and external auditing reports up to date as applicable. Ideally, certified financial audits should have been conducted annually for the last 3 years.

2.31. Relevance to your team. The information given to your team should match well with the information requested. The sender should clearly specify the location of the information requested within the documentation received.

When templates are filled in by the organization in scope, note whether the organization foresees the need for more information and improves the template provided. Your team may notice obvious needs for additional information only after a full analysis of the organization. The organization's lack of initiative to provide this information should also be noted, as this may indicate the need for technical training within the staff.

Review past strategic plans

2.32. Use of past strategic plans. Past strategies may give your team insight into the programs and activities of the organization in scope, its measures of success, and its ability to achieve its goals. Additionally, they allow your team to compare whether the strategies surpass or fail to meet the standard detailed in this manual.

2.33. Key areas to look at. Assess past strategic plans of the organization in scope as well as of second-tier strategies, particularly in key areas such as:

- Having a memorable and memorizable mission and vision. See points 2.22-2.23.

- Having a scope that does not attempt to cover multiple levels of the organizational pyramid. See points 1.4-1.5, and 1.14.

- Having strategic goals that are aligned with the mission and vision and have defined baselines with measurable targets. Were goals achieved? See points 5.2-5.4.

- Having a well-structured plan. See point 5.12.

- Having monitoring and evaluation systems that are routinely used. See points 6.1-6.14.

- Highlight strong trends observed (particularly if the organization fails to meet expectations) and attempt to clarify them during Step 3.

2.34. Tactical tools. Even unknowingly, the organization in scope has likely been applying one or more tools from the tactical toolbox described on Step 5, points 5.5-5.11. Identify if and how these tactics are being used, as well as any observable results. Note whether the actions taken by the organization in scope are aligned with existing strategic plans and whether any misalignments are intentional.

Keep in mind:

- As you prepare recommendations, consider the amount of effort in both material and human resources required to implement the approach you see is currently being pursued. Consider the amount of effort that may be required to make changes or even keep the status quo, as well as the effect that either option may have on the staff's morale.

Review performance Indicators

2.35. Use of performance indicators. Indicators are ways in which an organization tracks its progress towards achieving success. The way that they are designed, monitored, and acted on reflects the organization's ability to align activities with strategic goals while adapting to a changing environment.

2.36. Definition and format. Use SMART criteria to design indicators. Both operational and strategic indicators should have targets for each review period (normally weekly or monthly) and record performance for the year. Note instances in which there is a lack of:

- Visibility or readability of indicators
- Color coding to highlight performance gaps
- Adequate titling and labeling
- Consistent performance reporting
- Correct or recently updated data

2.37. Organizational level. All strategic indicators should apply to all departments or programs that fall under the organization in scope. Operational indicators may be specific to a department or program, but they should nonetheless contribute to achieving high-level strategic indicators.

Note instances where there are:

- An overwhelming number of indicators
- Contradictions, interdependence, redundancies
- Overlaps with organizations outside the scope
- Legacy indicators that are no longer relevant

2.38. Actionability. The organization in scope should be capable of collecting and processing the data needed to unambiguously report on performance indicators. Note instances where indicators rely on:

- Overly subjective and broad naming such as "improved stakeholder relationships"
- Untrustworthy data sources
- Conditions that the organization cannot act upon or influence
- Data that takes more than one month to collect

In cases where data is hard to collect but the indicator is valuable to the strategy, your team may recommend projects that will improve efficiency.

2.39. Review. Operational indicators should be reported on a weekly basis (highly standardized work may require daily meetings). Strategic indicators should be reported on a monthly basis.

 Review planning practices

2.40. Use of planning. Poor planning practices affect most organizations, regardless of their size. Such gaps reflect their ability to meet commitments and manage risk. See points 6.1-6.8.

2.41. Operational planning. An organization should have a detailed operational plan of all of its activities for a period of at least 12 months. Plans should be updated at least once per month. Activities should be SMART and last no longer than 1 month. They should be broken down further by week 6-9 weeks into the future. Note instances where:

- Plans are outdated, ambiguous, or non-existent
- There are missing programs or projects
- Plans fail to include administrative, strategic, or organizational development activities
- Ownership for projects or activities is unclear
- Planning formats are inconsistent
- There seem to be too many delays
- Deadlines seem unrealistic

Note any evidence that, at minimum, operational planning meetings are carried out on a weekly basis.

2.42. Strategic planning. For organizations experienced in strategic planning, a strategic plan should exist or have existed (spanning a period of minimum 1 year and up to 3 years) and its action plan should be incorporated into the operational plan.

Note any evidence that, at a minimum, strategy review meetings have been carried out by the organization in scope on a monthly basis.

2.43. Size of planning meetings. In order to allow for more productive discussions, operational planning and strategy review meetings should be limited to no more than 8 staff members. Larger organizations should consider conducting second-tier meetings to prepare team leaders for first-tier meetings.

2.44. Decision-making committee. Committee meetings (e.g. Board of Directors) should take place at least once every 3 months. Note any evidence that an oversight committee exists as well as any activity carried out by it.

2.45. General Assembly. These are mostly applicable to whole organizations and should occur once per year. Note any evidence of General Assembly or Member activity if applicable.

Review raw numerical data

2.46. **Use of raw numerical data.** The observations noted in this section may serve as indicators of gaps in the organization's ability collect, clean, and analyze the data needed to understand problems, address root causes, find opportunities, and prioritize. All of these factors lead to sound decision-making.

2.47. **History.** Organizations need to have the capability of providing well-organized, historical data relevant to its activities (12 months is common and 3-5 years is ideal for most cases). In the absence of historical data, approximations can be calculated combining objective and subjective information from internal and external sources in order to establish baselines and forecasts for the project scope. In such cases, the final strategy has to include sustainable data collection activities to ensure that targets can be adjusted later using more objective historical data.

2.48. **Format.** Numerical data (along with its associated descriptions or details in text), should be delivered to the project team in a format that allows for flexibility in analysis, such as a spreadsheet format (cells, columns, and lines). Ensure that your team requests data specifically in this format, as this is not always evident for the organization in scope.

If such data is available only in other formats (e.g. Word or PDF) this may indicate gaps, such as:

- The information is not frequently analyzed, the analysis is limited, or there is no analysis at all
- The staff may lack the skills to do analyses
- The organization may not want this information to be easily analyzed by other parties

Depending on the value, format, and quantity of data, your team may decide to dedicate resources to converting it to a format that can be analyzed.

2.49. **Cleanliness.** The data received should be free of errors and detailed enough for you to understand which data sets fit within the project scope and which do not. Note whether any systems or standards for data collecting exist and whether the organization in scope is following them. Note data gaps such as:

- Missing information or blanks
- Errors in spelling, numbers, dates, addresses
- Data classified in incorrect categories
- Inconsistencies in the labeling of categories
- Important categories that are missing
- Categories are too broad and cannot be broken down into smaller data sets
- Unclear definitions or descriptions
- Repeated data
- Inability to identify who inputted data and when it was done

Depending on the value, format, and quantity of data, your team may decide to dedicate resources to converting the data into an analyzable format. In such cases, the organization should take an active role in cleaning, re-categorizing, or relabeling data points as necessary. This will allow your team to understand better the project scope as well as the implications of the gaps once the data is analyzed.

2.50. Analysis. The organization in scope should have the technical skills necessary to clean raw data from a spreadsheet, stratify the data in different criteria, and create useful graphs and charts to visualize and derive conclusions from it. These are key skills needed to prioritize and focus on what is important. Basic analysis tools should be well known and frequently used, such as:

- Pareto principle (80-20 rule)
- Impact Matrix
- Venn diagram

In the absence of such analytical skills, your team may choose to put resources into completing the analysis. However, the data analysis techniques used should be reproducible by the organization in scope in order to ensure sustainability. Your team may recommend that additional training or material support be provided for the organization in scope to use throughout the strategic planning process or as part of the implementation of the strategy.

Review additional Information

2.51. **Use of additional information.** This is an indicator of what the organization considers important and that your team perhaps did not know to ask for. Note wide differences in what your team considers relevant to the strategy vs. what the organization in scope considers is relevant. Wide differences may indicate that training is needed for the organization in scope. Alternatively, it may also mean that your team's expertise is not adequate for the project.

Information that is not requested or is clearly not relevant to scope may be saved for future use or looked at in less detail. Consider asking the staff to orally present some of this information to you.

Assess the state of the workplace

2.52. Use of the workplace. The state of the space in which the organization in scope carries out its work is generally a good indicator of the organization's ability to provide safe and comfortable working conditions while projecting an image aligned with its mission and vision. Major observations may indicate gaps in planning, budgeting, and training.

Keep in mind:

- The points covered in this section are by no means exhaustive. Different work conditions may require a more comprehensive assessment.

- Standards for "comfort" and design may vary by country. Research and choose the standards that best apply to the organization in scope.

- When discussing your observations, be sure to approach stakeholders with care. Some may not consider that this section falls within the scope of organizational strategy or may not be aware of the effects that workplace conditions have on productivity and the image of the organization.

2.53. Health, safety, and the environment. While health, safety, and the environment are topics deserving of a book of their own, your team should cover and note some of the most commonly overlooked issues affecting the average work-space:

- Inadequate temperature control, such as:
  - Overall uncomfortable temperatures
  - Hot/cool zones

Office areas should range between 22-25°C (70-77°F). Higher temperatures may cause loss of concentration and tiredness (25-30°C; 77-86°F) or potentially serious adverse effects (upwards of 30°C; 86°F).

- Indicators of poor ventilation, such as:
  - Stiffness in air
  - Unusual odors
  - Humidity
  - Mold on the walls or ceiling

The level of CO_2 in a room is a good indicator of whether there is good ventilation. CO_2 levels in office environments are acceptable between 600-1000 parts per million. High CO_2 levels can cause drowsiness (1'200-2'500 ppm), as well as headaches, dizziness, and more serious adverse effects (2'500 ppm and upwards).

- Too much, too little, or inconsistent illumination in the workplace, such as:
  - Glares, dark patches, or flickering

In an office environment, 500-1'000 lumens per square meter is acceptable. Improper lighting can cause eyestrains, headaches, and neck or back strains.

- Fire safety hazards, such as:
    - Live wires
    - Overloaded electric outlets, cable clutters
    - Exit doors that need a key to be opened
    - Lack of smoke and fire detectors
    - Lack of fire extinguishers or sprinklers.

Organizations should have an approved fire safety and emergency plan.

- Inadequate restroom facilities, such as:
    - Constant occupation
    - Needs cleaning
    - Unpleasant odors in "clean" water

Mixed restroom facilities should have 2 toilets and sinks for 6-25 people. An additional toilet and sink is needed for each increment of up to 25 people.

- Improper waste management, such as:
    - Inadequate number of wastebaskets
    - Wastebaskets not emptied when needed
    - Waste not sorted for recycling
    - Unpleasant odors in the office
    - Organic and inorganic waste littering office and common areas
    - Sticky surfaces
    - Evidence of pests

- Signs of deteriorated infrastructure, such as:
  - Water leaks from ceilings, walls, or windows
  - Worn paint or cracks
  - Loose fixtures

2.54. Layout. The office should have enough rest and waiting areas, meeting rooms, restroom facilities, and work stations in order for the organization in scope to conduct its core activities comfortably. Note any opportunities to optimize the space while improving comfort or capacity (in the case the organization is expected to grow), such as:

- Overly wide hallways that could be repurposed
- Reconfiguring work stations to save up space
- Repurposing storage areas or unused rooms
- Removing clutter in common areas
- Using schedules to prevent overcrowding
- Adding character and functionality to areas that lack interior design

2.55. Work station. Employees should have at least 4 square meters of personal workspace. Note some common work station issues, such as:

- Paper and cable clutters
- Litter
- Inadequate desks, chairs, computers, etc.

Note whether a clean desk policy has been adopted (desks empty of clutter by the end of each workday).

2.56. Security. Office valuables data should be protected from damage, loss, or delinquent behavior. Note common security gaps, such as:

- Overly dark entrance points
- Improper locks or reinforcements on doors or windows; no security personnel or cameras
- Unrestricted access to office by non-staff
- Important data saved on personal computers rather than on internal servers
- Unlocked server rooms
- No safe boxes for valuables
- No password-protected computer access
- No security policy for staff
- No criminal background checks for new staff

2.57. Location. Workspaces should be located in safe and accessible areas (unless otherwise needed to reach specific beneficiary groups). Note instances where:

- Criminality rates are exceedingly high
- Office location and food purchase points are more than 15 minutes away by foot from public transportation points (for suburban areas: 15 minutes by car)

2.58. Façade. The organization should be recognizable by any passer-by. Note common gaps, such as:

- Deteriorated façade
- "Hidden" or inconspicuous entrance points
- Lack of signs, or identifying colors

2.59. Budget. The financial documents provided should include budget forecasts to fulfill current and future workplace needs as analyzed above. Incomplete or non-existent budgets automatically become gaps that should be addressed in the strategy.

Conduct an OCA-L1 Analysis

2.60. Use of OCA-L1. The OCA (see points 2.5-2.9) will show your team how the organization in scope has scored itself compared to how your team would score it. This will prove helpful throughout the OCA-L2 and OCA-L3 Analyses as your team gets closer to a final score.

2.61. OCA-L1. Complete the tool only when you have reviewed and analyzed all of the documentation relevant to the scope of the project. Identify the areas where you may want to focus on during your interviews in Step 3, especially those where there are more differences in opinions.

In the absence of adequate documentation or reasonable belief, it is preferable that your team errs in the side of caution when assigning a score.

Note whether the organization receives overly high scores. This may mean that the tool is not robust enough or that your team's is not too demanding in its scoring. Make sure that your team is up to date on the best practices in your field.

Keep in mind:

- OCA criteria should not be modified, even when deemed irrelevant by you or by the organization itself. When in doubt, seek expert advice.

- It is not always in an organization's best interest to get the highest score for all criteria assessed. Some criteria are more important than others.

- Your team should not review the OCA in detail with the organization in scope until the final calibration exercise of the OCA-L3 Analysis (see points 4.1-4.4).

Send additional RFIs

2.62. Use of preparing additional RFIs. Your team may need to conduct additional RFIs as it reviews the information received or if there are any unforeseen changes in the scope.

Keep in mind:

- Your specific situation will determine whether you want to wait for additional RFIs to close or to continue with Step 3 in parallel.

3

Listen to people

Having bathed in data, you should now have a long list of observations that have shaped your understanding of the organization in scope: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Now you need more depth. You need to become almost as knowledgeable about the organization as the stakeholders themselves. Confirm whether your observations are really accurate. Tactfully clarify anything that does not fit or does not make sense. Ask informed questions until people can no longer come up with answers. Listen to the point that stakeholders begin to see what they could not see before.

Prepare for interviews

3.1. **Use of preparing for interviews.** Your team should visualize productive interviews as a product of design rather than improvisation. Having completed Step 2, you should be ready to ask questions that go deep into the gaps observed and into the inner workings of the organization. Getting the most out of each interview is a matter of good preparation, prioritization of issues, and the right approach.

Keep in mind:

- Preparation allows your team to focus on what is important to the strategic planning process. It is a sign of professionalism and respect other people's time that stakeholders will appreciate.

3.2. **Interviewers.** The interviewing team should consist of not more than 2 people. This will provide a more comfortable environment for the interviewee as well as improve the interviewing team's ability to remain focused on the goals of the interview. As possible, your counterpart should be one of the interviewers, especially when a member of the decision-making committee is being interviewed. Consider preparing the following points:

- Set goals for the interview.
- Create customized questions for interviewees.

- Assign roles: Who will ask questions? Who will keep time? What will we do if we lose focus or time is running short? Who will take notes?

- Prepare to be asked questions, such as how are your questions relevant to the strategy?

- Review issues that may arise, both positive and negative, and mitigate risks.

- Remind your team to read between the lines and observe body language. Gain insight into, strengths, motivation, and improvement areas.

- List any supporting materials needed as well as who will be responsible preparing them.

- Prepare the strategy dashboard created in Step 2 (see point 2.16) to document your interviews. Assign one sheet for each interviewee. This allows for faster formatting, editing, and will make it easier to compare responses.

Keep in mind:

- Note taking is an often overlooked, but critical part of an interview. Never convince yourself that your memory is reliable enough to capture every detail of a conversation. Most people who think that they do, really don't.

3.3. **Interview schedule.** Avoid scheduling interviews that will last longer than 1 hour. This will force you to narrow down questions to the most essential points. Additionally, it will be less likely that your meeting is interrupted, rescheduled, or cancelled.

Keep a 30-minute buffer after each meeting in case of delays. Respect the interviewee's time by asking for permission to continue the discussion or otherwise schedule another meeting.

For longer meetings, break for 15-30 minutes every 1.5 hours. Otherwise, everyone's ability to focus pay will be compromised.

Note individuals who are non-responsive, hard to reach, or consistently fail to meet commitments made to you or your counterpart. This may indicate gaps related to planning, training, and oversight.

Keep in mind:

- Prepare a full schedule of interviews starting from your counterpart and key staff to members of the decision-making committee, and then continue on to the rest of the staff as necessary in the form of individual or group interviews. Consider how staff meetings, lunch or dinner plans, holidays, the seasonal calendar, or any other commitments that the organization in scope has may affect your interview schedule.

- Your counterpart should schedule first-time interviews, if possible.

- All requests for interviews should be SMART (see point 2.1). Interviewees should:
  - Get a brief introduction about the project and the topics to be discussed (Specific)
  - Understand objectives (Measurable)

- □ Have enough time to confirm attendance and to prepare (Actionable)
- □ Be qualified to discuss the topic (Relevant)
- □ Understand when the meeting will be and how long it will last (Time-bound)

- ■ Lead by example and always schedule meetings with time, get confirmations, send reminders, attend on time, and use the escalation process if ultimately necessary.

- ■ Plan for social exchanges as appropriate and allow for a 10-minute window for interviewees who arrive late. However, avoid significantly disrupting your schedule to compensate for individuals who arrive late. This is out of respect for the time of the rest of the interviewees in your schedule.

3.4. Meeting area. In an office setting, ensure that the meeting area is adequate for the number of people attending, is free of distractions, and has privacy.

Keep in mind:

- ■ Other settings for conducting the interview (e.g. a walk outside, a restaurant, etc.) should be chosen based on overall goals, the resources needed to achieve them, and the interviewee's specific needs or availability.

Conduct individual interviews

3.5. Use of conducting individual interviews. Ideally, there shouldn't be misalignments between what is documented, what the leadership guides the staff to do, what the staff does, and what stakeholders need. It is not easy to keep this alignment for long in such a dynamic environment, so organizational gaps are bound to exist and they need to be found. In Step 2, your team got to see what is documented. Step 3 will let you to see the rest.

Keep in mind:

- A key benefit of interviews, beyond the collection of information, is to make the interviewee aware of the boundaries of their knowledge. This will lead to deeper, more fruitful discussions that will translate into meaningful strategic decisions.

- Interviews will help your team identify potential supporters or detractors of change. Having an understanding of your stakeholder's needs and what motivates them will lead to better, more robust strategies. Ask open-ended questions and avoid sharing your opinion.

- Interviews will help your team identify not only the key experts of the organization in scope, but also the infamous "heroes" that always save the day. Organizations should not depend on a minority of individuals to operate. Professional development and process improvement should be designed towards identifying and removing such dependencies.

- Observe how individuals behave during the interview, noting unprofessional behavior that may be repeated elsewhere, such as:
  - Makings/taking calls during the interview
  - Browsing unrelated content in e-devices
  - Making frequent Interruptions to bring up topics irrelevant to the conversation
  - Taking a defensive stance to questions
  - Evading or refusing to answer questions

- It is common that an interviewee may want to search for some documents in order to better answer a question or illustrate a point. This often leads to a loss of focus in the interview and loss of time finding such documents. Unless critical to the interview, make a note of the document and ask for it to be sent after the meeting for review.

3.6. Introduction. Before beginning the interview, take no more than 10 minutes to:

- Conduct formalities and social exchanges

- Briefly introduce the interviewing team and the project. Describe your role in the project, your professional experience, and mention personal interests or hobbies as appropriate. Encourage those present to do the same.

- Let interviewees know that you have prepared questions and objectives specifically designed for the interview based on the documentation reviewed. Your team should apologize in advance for any interruptions throughout the interview to keep focus on those objectives.

- Request for e-devices or other possible sources of distraction to be put away.

- Avoid recording interviews. Take notes instead. If your team wishes to record an interview, always ask all present for permission to do so. Consider the effects recording the interview may have on interviewees and the integrity of their responses.

3.7. The individual. Begin your interviews with open questions that can trigger a sense of self-reflection of the individual's responsibilities as they relate to the organization's overall goals, such as:

- *"In one sentence, what does your organization do?"* Note the answer and how close it relates to the mission or goals of the organization in scope. Note whether the interviewee knows the organization's mission and vision by memory.

- *"What do you do? Explain the steps required to complete key areas of your work from start to finish."* Note any differences between the steps described and what is documented. Oftentimes, key steps or processes are not documented well enough to be analyzed for efficiencies, cost reduction, etc.

  Note instances where the interviewee struggles to answer or insists that such processes cannot be organized. All core activities of an organization should be translatable into systematic processes despite the perceived volatility of each step. Given the importance of mapping key processes, your team may need to ask additional questions until arriving to a satisfactory level of detail.

- *"In which fields do you consider yourself an expert? How so?"* Note whether the answer correlates to the interviewee's current role in the organization. Are skillsets being underutilized, underestimated, or overestimated?

3.8. The team. Expand your questioning to understand interdependency within the staff, such as:

- *"What do your colleagues do? Which projects are they working on?"* Note the accuracy and level of detail of the answer as well as any inconsistencies with the documents received. These may indicate communication gaps that could result in work overlaps or may be limiting how individual's network with one another and share their knowledge.

- *"How many people work in your department? Are they working full time, part time, other?"* Note observations as commented above.

- *"How do you communicate with staff members to plan and execute projects?* (e.g. meetings, emails, etc.)" Note individuals overly reliant on social media or other hard to search or hard to document methods, as well as teams that do not conduct operational meetings. These are indicators of gaps in project management skills. These observations also apply to virtual teams.

- *"How is employee performance assessed and incentivized? What do you need to do to get ahead?"* Note the answer and compare it to the documentation, especially if assessments are not periodic or are conducted primarily with a disciplinary mindset rather than one promoting an individual's professional development. Note the level of maturity of the evaluation:
  - ☐ Focus on completing tasks
  - ☐ Focus on achieving measurable targets
  - ☐ Focus on the development of soft skills
  - ☐ Focus on living up to organizational values

  Note misalignments between incentives, what is evaluated, and the organization's mission and vision. Consider the disruptive potential this can have on work culture, such as:
  - ☐ Too much competition among staff
  - ☐ Too much focus on dreams and ideals
  - ☐ Too much dependence on the leader
  - ☐ Too little oversight

- *"What is the employee turnover rate? What is driving it?"* A high turnover rate may indicate core issues in the organization, such as:
    - Inadequate or unstable pay
    - Work overload
    - Toxic environment created by the leadership or by the staff
    - Inconvenient or dangerous location of work
    - Lack of growth opportunities

3.9. **The beneficiaries.** Expand your questioning to get insight into the interviewee's understanding of their beneficiaries. Depending on the organization, this can include both internal and external beneficiaries and thus the questions may need to go into more detail. Note that internal and external beneficiaries should be defined as they relate to the organization in scope. Such questions include:

- *"Who are your beneficiaries?"* Note how they are defined compared to what is documented.

- *"What needs do your beneficiaries have?"* Note whether the needs identified are subjective in nature or are based on documented research.

- *"How effective is the organization in meeting the needs of their beneficiaries?"* Note whether any formal or informal indicators exist and are consistent with the documentation received, as well as any systems to receive and document feedback from beneficiaries.

3.10. Strategic outlook. Expand your questioning further to understand the interviewee's thoughts on what the future may look like, such as:

- *"Where do you see the organization can be in 3-5 years? In 10 years?"* Answers can set a level of expectations regarding the strategic planning process and are a good source for ideas. These may indicate which of your recommendations are likely to get more buy-in from the team.

- *"What should the organization do more of? Why?"* Answers will usually reflect current trends and priorities in core areas of the organization in scope. Note how monitoring is conducted in those areas and identify potential efficiency or cost reduction projects.

- *"What should the organization do less of? Why?"* Note whether the issues raised are more related to people, processes, finances, or other.

- *"Are you well informed about the financial state of your organization? How so?"* Note the level of detail of the answer. In an ideal case, the interviewee should be aware of the financial goals of the organization in scope and any higher-level goals, as well as their individual contribution to them. Staff members should know where their salaries come from, how their projects are funded, and which are the cost drivers of their activities.

- *"What key indicators would make you feel that your organization is successful?"* Note how measurable and relevant these indicators are for the organization in scope.

3.11. Gaps in documentation. Use your team's Step 2 notes to close as many of the gaps observed as possible.

Keep in mind:

- Avoid starting interviews with a discussion your team's observed gaps. The line of questioning proposed is designed for interviewees to better understand the strategic planning process, to trigger self-reflection, and to demonstrate that they are being listened to before delving into the observations of a foreign party (your team).

3.12. Questions for the interviewer. Towards the end of the interview, give interviewees the opportunity to ask you questions and make comments. Make sure that you thank them for their time.

Debrief

3.13. Use of interview debriefs. Holding short debriefing meetings will give your team a chance to share fresh thoughts, ideas, and notes in order to get the most out of the information received. Debriefs are also important for team members who were not present in the interview, since they can not only learn what was discussed, but also pose additional questions for the team to discuss. Take time to reflect on the effectiveness of the interview itself:

- Were the goals of the interview achieved?
- Did the interview go as planned? How could your team have prepared better for it?
- Was the interviewee difficult to talk to? Could your approach have been improved?
- Which questions triggered the most discussion? Loss of focus? Confusion? Change in tone and mood? Why do you think that happened?
- Which questions are worth asking again?
- Which questions should be modified or added?

Work with groups

3.14. Use of working with groups. Group interactions are extremely valuable not only for gathering the information needed to fill in the gaps found in Step 2, but also for understanding the impact that team dynamics have in the culture of the organization in scope and vice versa.

Keep in mind:

- For management or members of the decision-making committee, individual interviews are always preferred to any type of group interviews or workshops.

3.15. Operational planning meetings. At a minimum, the organization should be having operational planning meetings on a weekly basis. If it is not, your team should strongly recommend that the practice be adopted as soon as possible (see points 6.1-6.4). Note to what extent existing meetings deviate from the standards in this manual and, if possible, create an assessment mechanism that can be used to set a baseline to monitor improvement.

3.16. Focus groups and workshops. Given limits in time and resources, your team may choose to conduct focus groups with staff members or beneficiaries. Prepare, conduct, and debrief for focus groups following the guidelines for conducting individual interviews (see points 3.1-3.13).

Workshops should be conducted only after your team has reviewed all the documentation provided by the organization in scope as well as completed all individual interviews and focus groups planned. In this way, your knowledge of the organization in scope will be at a level where your team, rather than taking simply moderating the exercise, can also understand the points brought forward by participants and do a critical analysis of the results of each exercise.

Workshops should include as many staff members from the organization in scope and as many members of the decision-making committee as possible.

Consider conducting workshops (in the form of teams, round tables, world cafes, etc.) to:

- Discuss the most important questions as well as those having the most diverse answers during individual interviews. A workshop environment will expose all team members to different points of view, including key members who already went through the individual interviews. Such exercises will help clarify core issues and will help you get more buy-in for your final recommendations.

- Close open gaps in documentation, especially to get more details on: key process map flows; cost structures; organizational charts. This will allow your team to clearly understand each gap and its effects on the organization in scope.

- Gather insight to complete the strategic tools needed for Step 4 (such as PESTEL, 5-Forces, or SWOT), as well as collect and prioritize certain ideas or projects. This is initial, subjective insight that you will later consolidate with the rest of the data during Step 4.

- Gather insight regarding which indicators are key for the organization in scope (and thus common to all programs and projects under that scope) to achieve success and compare them to any existing indicators.

Participants should get a 30-minute break between each 1.5 hours of workshop sessions.

Keep in mind:

- Create an environment of open discussion and active participation from all participants.

- Have participants voice out and set house rules to facilitate the discussion, such as:
    - What to do with electronic devices
    - When to speak and what tone to use
    - What to do while others are speaking
    - How to engage differing perspectives

- Manage individuals that "take over" discussions by not letting others speak, being long-winded, or bringing up issues that are irrelevant to the discussion. Consider assigning turns to speak, selecting an object that gives the individual the right to speak, and putting time limits.

- During workshops, encourage participants to present their work. Challenge presenters to give convincing arguments to the conclusions or ideas reached by their teams and encourage the audience to do the same.

Survey stakeholders

3.17. Use of surveys. Qualitative and quantitative surveys can uncover the behavioral trends of large groups of people. They can be a valuable source data and ideas that will make strategic decisions stronger.

Keep in mind:

- Surveys (including OCA) are not substitutes for individual interviews, focus groups, or any other part of Step 2, Step 3, or Step 4.

3.18. Survey goals. Your team should know what the survey should accomplish and each question should be formulated to meet those goals, such as:

- Confirming qualitative information from focus groups (e.g. which segments of the population are interested in a specific service)

- Getting new information to understand trends or behaviors (e.g. ecological issues beneficiaries care about; prices they are willing to pay)

- Measuring success (e.g. using different criteria to determine satisfaction with a service)

3.19. Survey questions. Survey questions should prevent inaccurate responses. Common mistakes include:

- Assumptions that the respondent is familiar with certain aspects of a question, such as:
    - □ Names of people or organizations
    - □ Definitions, acronyms, or technical terms
    - □ Historical facts

    Example:

    Should young people (as defined by AED) be activists?
    (Yes; No; I don't know)

    Alternative:

    Should young people (ages 18-35, as defined by the Agency for Economic Development) be activists?
    (Yes; No; I don't know)

- Information that may lead the participant to give a particular response, such as:
    - □ Common knowledge
    - □ Statistics
    - □ Facts from trusted sources

    Example:

    A recent study has concluded that more than 80% of food contains insecticides. Do you believe that the food you eat is healthy?
    (Yes; No; I don't know)

    Alternative:

    Do you believe that the food you eat is healthy?
    (Yes; No; I don't know)

- Merging 2 or more questions into one question. This can confuse a participant who may not think that both questions have the same answer.

  Example:

  Do you believe AED has a good strategy and operational plan?

  (Yes; No; I don't know)

  Alternative:

  1. Do you believe AED has a good strategy?

  2. Do you believe AED has a good operational plan?

  (Yes; No; I don't know)

- Proposing response options that do not cover the full range of possible responses.

  Example:

  How much time would you be willing to spend completing this survey?

  a) 2-5 minutes

  b) 5-10 minutes

  c) More than 10 minutes

  Alternative:

  How much time would you be willing to spend completing this survey?

  a) Less than 2 minutes

  b) 2-5 minutes

  c) 5-10 minutes

  d) More than 10 minutes

- Formulating questions in a manner that includes multiple answers and/or negative statements. Participants may not understand how to interpret the question correctly.

    Example:

    Do you agree or disagree that a non-profit organization should not earn income from the services it provides?

    (Agree; Disagree; I don't know)

    Alternative:

    Do you believe that a non-profit organization should earn income from the services it provides?

    (Yes; No; I don't know)

Keep in mind:

- Consider placing questions that are personal in nature (name, age, gender, orientation, etc.) at the end of the survey. This will increase the likelihood that respondents will complete the survey. Having seen the content, they may be more inclined to share personal information.

- Consider framing certain questions in a manner that will let you identify whether respondents are reading the questions or giving random answers. Such responses can be invalidated during the analysis phase.

3.20. Pilot test. Conduct a pilot test of your survey with experts in the field relevant to the organization in scope as well as a small sample of the target group. This will help you get the most value out of you surveys and the resources used to create, collect, aggregate, and analyze them. Look for aspects that may lower the quality of responses, such as:

- Questions are unnecessary or irrelevant to the goals of the survey
- Questions are poorly written or formatted
- Language is inappropriate for the audience
- The order of questions is not logical
- The options offered are too limited or too broad
- Questions can be interpreted in multiple ways

3.21. Time to complete. To increase the probability that results are reliable, a survey should not take the participant more than 10 minutes to complete.

3.22. Sample size. For surveys carried out within the organization in scope (where the size of the total population is known and relatively small), an 80% response rate or higher is adequate. For external surveys using randomly selected participants, the sample size should largely depend on the margin of error your team will consider acceptable.

Margin of error = $1/\sqrt{N}$; where N = sample size

A sample size of 100 randomly selected participants will have a margin of error of 10%.

A sample size of 500 randomly selected participants will have a margin of error of 4.5%.

Conduct an OCA-L2 Analysis

3.23. Use of OCA-L2. Having completed all interviews and group work to close as many of the gaps found on Step 2, your team is now ready to review and adjust its initial response to the OCA (see points 2.60-2.61). However, the score is not final until the calibration exercise with the organization in scope in Step 4 has been completed.

3.24. OCA-L2. Complete the tool only when you have conducted all interviews, group work, and surveys. Note significant differences in scoring between your team and the organization in scope.

Keep in mind:

■ Have the team question its own judgment and ensure no documents have been overlooked.

■ Ensure that your team has clear interpretations of each assessment criteria. It should have strong arguments that justify every score, as well as practical examples of recommended practices at an operational and strategic level.

3.25. Set recommended targets. When setting targets for each of the criteria assessed, consider that the assessment should be conducted quarterly or at least once every 6 months. An action plan detailing your team's recommendations should be included.

4

Set the baseline

Up until now, you've been putting most of the puzzle pieces together and painting a good picture of the organization. But you're not done yet. There are still some pieces left and you still need to figure out how make them fit. Once you do, you will have set the baseline from which all strategic decisions will be made. Naturally, you will want to make sure that you've gotten the puzzle right before you move on to Step 5. This means that you'll have to put anybody who is anybody again in a room together and show them what that picture looks like. The strategic planning process goes no further until everyone agrees that you've gotten it right.

Conduct an OCA-L3 Analysis

4.1. **Use of OCA-L3.** This is a calibration exercise that will result in a baseline for organizational development agreed by both your team and the organization in scope, along with development targets and an action plan for implementation.

4.2. **Calibration exercise.** This is a group discussion that should be conducted with the key leadership of the organization in scope, but may also include additional staff members. Adding to the preparation techniques for group discussions covered previously (see points 3.14-3.16), consider the following guidelines for facilitating this particular meeting:

- Clearly state your team's rationale for each score and provide solid arguments as to why it differs from the one proposed by the organization. If your arguments are solid, your scoring should stay firm unless new information surfaces.

- Allow everyone to contribute their opinion. Note who are supporters, who are detractors, and why. Observe team dynamics and look for power plays, leaders, and experts. Note communication and knowledge gaps. Good stakeholder management will play a bigger role the closer that you get to making strategic decisions.

- Focus on establishing baseline scores first. Steer away from setting targets and action plans until the baseline score has been agreed.

Keep in mind:

- Be tactful in discussing potentially controversial scores. For example, "In the documents provided, we did not find information to justify this score". It's always possible that you may have overlooked certain documents or that the organization in scope may have forgotten to share it with you.

- At times, too much time may be spent discussing a particular interpretation of OCA criteria, usually because the organization is not happy with a particular score. Remind the organization in scope that it is better to be conservative when setting baseline scores and aggressive when setting targets. In the event that you get stuck, take the matter to a vote.

4.3. Review recommended targets and actions. The organization in scope should be given up to 1 week to review the recommendations prepared by your team and propose changes.

Following this period, it should understand well what is required to implement each action. Your team should challenge it to set aggressive targets.

Keep in mind:

- Targets should be reviewed only after a baseline score for the organization has been agreed.

■ While your team should have solid arguments behind every recommendation, the organization in scope will be ultimately responsible for the implementation. They have the final say in what the final targets and actions will look like.

4.4. Create an action plan. Once targets and actions are agreed, the organization should provide your team with an implementation plan. Action plans should be SMART and each activity should be broken down by month (at the very least) with clear owners identified.

The finalized OCA action plan should be integrated into the operational plan of the organization in scope.

Keep in mind:

■ Remind the organization that in order to ensure sustainable growth, organizational development tasks should be given as much importance as program tasks. Organizational development plans cannot be expected to produce results if the organization itself does not take the time to implement them.

Get to work on strategic analysis

4.5. **Use of strategic analysis tools.** Using tools will help your team look at the organization from a wide range of angles while making comprehensive analyses and conclusions understandable and visually appealing for decision makers.

The tools covered in this section are by no means the only ones out there, but they are some of the most comprehensive, recognized, and useful. They should all be applied together in order to meet the minimum needs of most organizations.

Keep in mind:

- Strategic analysis tools are not templates to fill out as part of a checklist. Make the tools work for you. Challenge them to give you powerful insight.

- This section should help your team in interpreting tools, assuming that you have good command of the theory behind them.

4.6. **Map people, processes, costs, and trends.** Having completed Steps 2 and 3, your team should uncover the interconnectedness of all things that make the organization move forward. Complex systems should be broken down into digestible pieces to make deep organizational gaps evident.

Consider the following:

- Map all sources of income, as well as income and expenses by program and project. Note potential gaps, such as:
    - □ One source of income makes up more than 40% of the organization's income
    - □ Sources of income cover various programs
    - □ Sources of income are risky, unstable, or create potential conflicts of interest
    - □ Programs or projects are inconsistent with the mission, vision, or organizational goals
    - □ Expenses are not consistent with expectations
    - □ Programs have higher expenses than income
- Map individuals and their connection to program and project activities. Map the resources needed to pay staff as well as the programs that finance their salaries. Ideally, data granularity should be such that each individual can be connected to each program and project both by percentage of hours worked and percentage of the total salary. Note potential gaps, such as:
    - □ Overlaps of work responsibilities
    - □ Unclear leadership structure or connection to stakeholders
    - □ Work hours inconsistent with expectations
    - □ Uneven work distribution
    - □ Inconsistency in salaries paid for similar work
    - □ Salaries that are too high or low

- Map all major operational processes within the organization in scope. Each process should be broken down by step, where cost drivers, lead times, and parties involved are identified for each step and each step has a well-defined start and end point (e.g. organizations involved in recycling can map the particularities of getting waste from a home to the recycling factory step-by-step).

Ideally, data granularity should be such that the steps that collectively make up more than 80% of cost drivers or lead times can themselves be broken down and analyzed for opportunities. Any other step considered critical for any other reason should be analyzed separately.

- Internal and external data should be combined in order to highlight trends that may affect key cost drivers and lead times, as well as any other priorities identified by the organization in scope (e.g. oil prices will affect transportation costs; weather conditions may have an impact on delivery lead times).

- Group additional organizational gaps observed on Steps 2 and 3 and highlight those that are most critical.

Keep in mind:

- In the absence of data, estimations should be calculated using qualitative information collected through interviews or external benchmarking. The periodic collection of major data points to close such gaps must be included in the strategy.

4.7. 5-Forces Analysis. This tool analyzes the competitive environment where the organization operates. Your team should work together with the organization in scope to list all the relevant factors that will allow for a good assessment of each of the 5-Forces in order to take advantage of opportunities or reduce risks. Consider the interpretation below as a reference for your analysis:

■ Barriers of entry: assesses how difficult it is for new players to enter the competitive environment in which the organization operates, resulting in increased competition for resources, beneficiaries, etc. Consider elements such as:

  □ Legislation
  □ Facilities and equipment
  □ Skilled staff

Note that new entrants may result in additional partnerships opportunities or access to resources or beneficiaries that would otherwise not exist.

■ Threat or possibility of substitute products or services: assesses whether other products or services may make those of the organization in scope obsolete. Consider elements such as:

  □ Legislation
  □ Privatization or nationalization
  □ Innovation and technology
  □ Outsourcing

Substitutes may improve organizations in scope or may eliminate their need to exist altogether.

- Bargaining power of suppliers: assesses the ability of suppliers to raise prices, change quality, or increase delivery times for critical items. Consider elements such as:
  - Contract stipulations
  - Market volatility
  - History
  - Number of suppliers and buyers
  - Patent ownership
- Bargaining power of buyers: assesses the ability of the organization in scope to change prices, costs, quality, or delivery times for its product or service offering. Consider elements such as:
  - Contract stipulations
  - Market volatility
  - History
  - Number of suppliers and buyers
  - Patent ownership
  - Internal budget control
- Rivalry among existing competitors: assesses the overall attractiveness of the environment in which the organization in scope operates. Your team should list and analyze how many comparable organizations or networks exist as well as their ability to differentiate from others. These could remain competitors or become partners with common strategic interests.

Figure 4.7: 5-Force Analysis

Keep in mind:

- Despite the tendency to associate this tool only to the business sector, all organizations compete for resources to operate. They should not exclude themselves from being assessed with this tool.

- For organizations that do not trade exclusively in money, it may be difficult to differentiate buyers from suppliers. When such types of trades are significant, it may be necessary to agree on how they will be defined and segmented.

- The terms "buyer" and "supplier" are a common source of confusion even among experts. Is the buyer the person/organization benefiting from a service that the organization in scope provides? Is the organization in scope the buyer? Is the person or organization funding a program the buyer? Rather than delve into the theory and pick a side, include all possible perspectives in your analysis. It will only make it stronger.

4.8. PESTEL. Complementary to the 5-Forces, this tool considers Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal aspects that impact the environment in which the organization operates. Your team, along with the organization in scope, should list all factors that will allow for a good assessment in order to take exploit opportunities or reduce risks. Consider the interpretation below as a reference for your analysis:

- Political: assesses factors where normally the government has the power to decide. Consider elements such as:
  - Election results
  - Short and long term effects of current or upcoming policies and regulations
  - Politicians' views on the environment in which the organization operates
  - Civil unrest
  - Stability of the country or neighbor states
  - Corruption
  - Bureaucracy
  - Politically-driven trade restrictions or reforms

- **Economic:** assesses factors influenced by money and trade. Consider elements such as:
    - Trade restrictions or reforms
    - Access to credit
    - Interest and exchange rates
    - Taxes
    - Inflation
    - GDP
    - Cost of living
    - Supply and demand
    - Unemployment
    - Stock market fluctuations
    - Labor costs
    - Underground economy
    - Access to foreign capital
- **Social:** assesses factors related to how individuals interact with one another, such as:
    - Education and skills
    - Mentality towards change
    - Seasonal events
    - Activism, volunteering, charity, and social engagement
    - Population demographics
    - Poverty and marginalized sectors

Note opportunities to incorporate policies that address social trends into the organization in scope, such as:

- Race, gender, and minority issues
- Sexual harassment
- Child protection
- Human rights
- Ethics
- Physical and psychological well-being
- Personal and professional development
- Motivation and incentives

- Technological: assesses factors influenced by the current level of access to technology. Consider elements such as:

  - Effectiveness of current technology and the prospects of technological advancements
  - Patent controls
  - Innovation in research
  - Ability to collect, manage, and analyze data
  - Technology maintenance and renewal cycles
  - Competitive advantages of the products and services offered
  - Ease of use and overall comfort

- Environmental: assesses factors have effects on health, safety, comfort, and the ecology. Consider elements, such as:
  - Waste management
  - Life cycle of the products and services sold or purchased by the organization in scope and their direct or indirect effects
  - Water and air quality
  - Workplace conditions
  - Accidents and near-misses

Note opportunities to incorporate policies that address environmental issues, such as:
  - Health and safety guidelines
  - Sorting recyclable and compostable waste
  - Reviewing designs of products and services
- Legal: assesses factors related to legislation and binding agreements. Consider elements, such as:
  - Contract conditions imposed by a source of income or beneficiary
  - Internal policies on contract agreements
  - Exposure to penalties for non-compliances in legislation or contracts
  - Unnecessary contract liabilities
  - Risk due to non-existent contracts
  - Copyright protection
  - Traceability of legal and financial records
  - History of fines or lawsuits

■ All sections of the PESTEL are applicable to all organization types.

■ Challenge the organization to see PESTEL from three dimensions:
  □ As uninfluenceable external factors affecting how the organization approaches external stakeholders
  □ As influenceable external factors that affect how the organization approaches external stakeholders
  □ As external factors driving the organization to improve internal processes and set priorities

■ The classification of ideas into each part of the PESTEL is a common source of confusion even among experts. Rather than delve into whether something should go into "Political" instead of "Economic" or "Social" instead of "Legal", use the power of the vote to get consensus in a group. In the end, what is most important is the actions taken to remediate issues, rather than how those issues are classified on the tool.

4.9. Weighted rubrics. Rubrics are an attempt at turning subjectivity into "objectivity by consensus". They allow for a broad, subjective concept (e.g. impact, benefit, risk, etc.) to be defined and assessed under an umbrella of specific criteria. While a rubric gives one criteria no more importance than another, a weighted rubric assigns a value to each.

Example: The quality of a proposal evaluated on a weighted rubric consisting of:

1) Relevance: (50%)

2) Creativity: (20%)

3) Plan: (15%)

4) Budget: (15%)

Use weighted rubrics to:

- Define key indicators that the organization in scope considers reflect "success"

- Evaluate a series of options or proposals

- Decide where to focus on based on what is considered most important

- Find inconsistencies between the weight a criteria is given vs. the resources assigned to it

Keep in mind:

- The more an organization relies on subjective criteria to measure success, the further it will be from actually achieving it.

4.10. Impact Matrix. This tool consists of essentially two axes where each axis represents something important for the organization in scope. Objects can be plotted on the axes, allowing your team to make comparisons from multiple dimensions in order to establish priorities and facilitate decision-making, such as:

- Which problems to address

- Which ideas or strategic tactics to develop

- Which organizations, beneficiaries, customers, or suppliers to work or partner with
- Which geographical areas to focus on
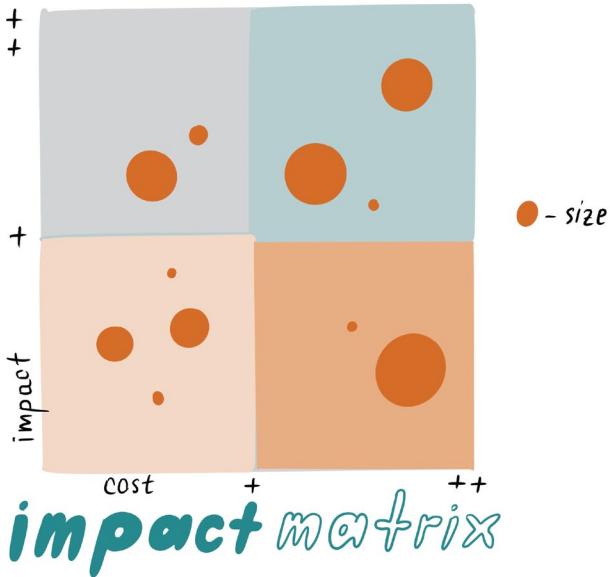- Which employee skillsets to develop

Figure 4.10: Impact matrix

Consider commonly used dimensions, such as:

- Impact vs. Cost
- Impact vs. Risk
- Impact vs. Effort
- Cost vs. Benefit
- Quality vs. Cost

- Waiting time vs. Client satisfaction
- Size vs. Geographical reach
- Time to implement vs. Cost

Keep in mind:

- Each dimension should be clearly defined and measurable in order for objects to be plotted on the axes. Dimensions that are more subjective in nature can be evaluated using weighted rubrics.

4.11. SWOT. Despite this being such a powerful and popular tool for strategic planning, it is too often underutilized. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is merely a summary of all the objective and subjective depth of analyses carried out during a strategic planning process (Steps 1-4 of this manual). A SWOT should never be used to cut corners. Consider the interpretation below as a reference for your analysis:

- All of the gaps identified in Steps 1-4 should be grouped and summarized to fit a 1-page SWOT.

- All statements in the SWOT should be verifiable through analytical documents. A SWOT should not replace these analytical documents.

- The wording in the SWOT should be actionable and have the potential to become real projects for implementation.

- Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to the organization in scope.

Strengths should consist of actual competitive advantages that most organizations struggle to reach. Consider the example below:

"Qualified staff" - What is "qualified"? How is this a strength? Is it hard to find qualified staff? Are they recognized experts? Do they all have PhDs?

Alternative:

Qualified staff (80% hold a relevant PhD)

- Opportunities and Threats are external to the organization in scope. If the organization in scope is part of a larger organization, there should be clear definitions of what is considered external. When in doubt, analyze all perspectives.

Keep in mind:

- The SWOT is very useful as an executive summary for stakeholders to understand the situation and then probe deeper according to their interests.

- Use the SWOT in combination with other strategic analysis tools to compare and prioritize any ideas that surface.

- Organizations often brush aside their data collection gaps. Weaknesses should include any internal gaps in data collection considered vital for the strategy and Opportunities should attempt to close external gaps in data collection. Neglect to do so, and these gaps will likely not be closed before the next strategic cycle.

Keep track of strategy precursors

4.12. Use of strategy precursors. Precursors are the trends happening within the strategic planning process with respect to consensus and the likely directions in which the strategy will head.

4.13. Changes to the mission and vision. If changes are deemed necessary and the organization in scope agrees, this will be an important point of discussion during Checkpoint 2. At this point, the organization in scope should decide an approach:

- Propose to the decision-making committee one or more options for a new mission and vision to be selected during Checkpoint 2

- Propose the decision-making committee that a new mission and vision should be formulated soon after Checkpoint 2 to be approved during Checkpoint 3 along with the rest of the strategy

4.14. Organizational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Steps 1-4 should have set a baseline for the current state of the organization. Your team's observations should result in a list of no more than 5-8 recommend KPIs to measure success.

At this point in the strategic planning process, KPIs are not final. However, they should be agreed on with the organization in scope, as well as defined SMART with calculated baselines using existing data (or estimations if no data has been collected in the past).

The decision-making committee should share its feedback and expectations regarding possible annual targets for final KPIs during Checkpoint 2.

Keep in mind:

- Organizational KPIs should be applicable to all programs and projects within the organization in scope and are the main indicators that your counterpart will manage. Each program or project may have its own indicators, but these are not part of the scope. Separate sub-strategies will be necessary for them (see point 1.5).

- Remind stakeholders that the KPIs selected will be used to formulate strategic goals. As such, all future programs, projects, and methodologies adopted must in one way or another contribute towards reaching the targets set.

- Remind stakeholders how important it is to have objective, measurable indicators. Indicators left open to interpretation with targets that cannot be measured have little chance to drive change.

4.15. Quick wins. Keep track of and highlight any new benefits or practices adopted during the ongoing strategic planning process, such as:

- Updating important policies or processes
- Engaging new stakeholders
- Improving compliance, communication, etc.

Pass Checkpoint 2 - Set the baseline

4.16. Use of Checkpoint 2. This is a formal meeting in which key representatives of the 5 Working Teams, including all of the members of the decision-making committee, gather to validate the analyses conducted by your team during Steps 1-4 and thus set an official baseline for improvement. Members of the decision-making committee who did not attend Checkpoint 1 should be briefed separately prior to attending Checkpoint 2.

4.17. Preparation for Checkpoint 2. The presentation of your team's findings should paint a picture of the organization. Begin with the mission and vision and touch on all of the key findings of Steps 1-4. Consider the following Checkpoint 2 presentation tips:

- Mold the presentation into something digestible. Lead the way to reaching logical, fact-based conclusions that will bring about consensus.

- Organizational gaps should be measured against a standard set by the organization, a recognized best practice, or your own team's expertise. Understand why a standard is not being met and determine where changes are needed:

  - People, equipment, or standards

- Focus on the organization in scope and not on individuals. The failures of individuals may be rooted in wider organizational gaps.

- Show decision-makers more of what they don't know, rather than what they already know. Make hidden gaps evident. Find untapped synergies.

- Present a high-level overview of the proposed plan to complete the strategic planning process as described in this manual.

- Include any important observations or concerns shared by stakeholders prior to the meeting.

Limit the duration of the meeting to no more than one hour, allowing 20-30 minutes for questions, feedback, and open discussions.

Keep in mind:

- It takes courage for organizations to undergo an external assessment and have their vulnerabilities exposed. Acknowledge and celebrate their efforts.

- While Checkpoint 2 is not the place to discuss the final strategy, your team will receive a lot of feedback, questions, and ideas. Avoid losing focus of the presentation. Note them down, analyze them after the presentation has ended, and use them to prepare for Step 5.

- Be impartial. Listen to all input and acknowledge valid points regardless of your personal opinions.

4.18. Formal validation of Steps 2-4. The decision-making committee should raise any issues they may have regarding the accuracy of the baseline presented by your team before moving forward. In the unlikely case that important gaps in information surface, the committee should decide whether such gaps warrant further research before Step 5 can begin or if they will be addressed as the strategy is being implemented.

4.19. Communicate the formal validation of Steps 2-4. Your counterpart should brief all staff members on the findings and planned activities going forward.

It is critical that the staff is regularly briefed on the status of the strategic planning process in order to collect feedback, address their concerns, and avoid misinformation to spread.

5

Strategize

Missions should fit nicely into visions. Strategic goals should fit nicely into missions. Tactics should fit nicely into strategic goals. Action plans should fit nicely into tactics. These are the interdependent elements without which strategies would not exist. As a newly minted expert in all matters related to the organization, your task now will be to put those elements together to the satisfaction and delight of your stakeholders.

Create, change, or keep your mission and vision

5.1. **Use of the mission and vision.** Refer to points 2.22-2.23 for general guidelines to follow.

Set strategic goals

5.2. Use of strategic goals. Strategic goals are essentially the strategy itself; all of the rest is a means to an end. Just as the strategic goals of the organization in scope should be aligned with its mission and mission, all of the programs and strategic tactics used should contribute to achieving those goals.

Strategic goals should be formulated from a selection of KPIs that apply to all activities of the organization in scope.

Keep in mind:

■ Unfortunately, it is a widespread practice to set strategic goals without baselines or measurable targets. Stakeholders may hesitate to correct this counterproductive practice. It is your task to translate this manual into persuasive arguments relevant for your particular situation. That being said, the decision-making committee has the final say, despite your recommendations.

■ The most important part of the strategy is having the right indicators to measure success as it is implemented. There is no other way to objectively understand whether the organization is moving on the right track.

5.3. **Turning KPIs into strategic goals.** The organization in scope should have no more than 3-5 strategic goals that determine its success, where each goal may consist of 1-3 indicators. Use the feedback gathered during Checkpoint 2 to adjust the selection of KPIs and review or determine baselines for each. There should be no more than 5-8 recommended indicators in total. Focus on ensuring that the wording for each is clear, that all terms are defined in consensus with the team, and that they are measurable at least on a monthly basis.

Strategic goal 1: Engage our community (community engagement defined in terms of people coming to events and volunteer hours contributed)

KPIs measuring strategic goal 1:

- ☐ *Increase number of people coming to events by 30% compared to previous year*
- ☐ *Increase volunteer hours by 30% compared to previous year*

Furthermore, strategic goals should be broken down by department or program, where each should be aware of its expected contribution to the organization in scope. Departments and programs may then create their own separate strategies to determine how to best achieve their goals at their level (see point 1.5).

- ☐ *Program 1: 30% of goal*
- ☐ *Program 2: 30% of goal*
- ☐ *Program 3: 40% of goal*

Strategic goals should then be quantified by year (percentages should be converted into whole numbers) using the baseline set.

Keep in mind:

- The goals and indicators chosen should be consistent with the abilities of the organization in scope. Anything beyond those abilities will result in ineffective goals.

- Note the omission of the term "objective". For the purposes of strategic goals, this manual will use the term "indicators". Indicators tend to monitor infinite improvement, whereas objectives may sometimes be limited to discrete or one-off activities. As such, the term "objective" is better suited for project goals than for strategic goals.

5.4. **On setting targets for strategic goals.** When setting SMART targets for strategic goals, they should be framed as a percentage of improvement. This implies that a defined baseline exists and that there are good implementation controls. Other possible, but less effective alternatives are:

- Framing targets as whole numbers: This may be necessary when there is no baseline data and it is impossible to estimate a baseline with any level of accuracy. For stakeholders, such targets may imply that there is little process control and it is unknown whether the target is achievable. If you must, use them during the first year of a strategy, at a maximum. After the first year, there should be enough data to set a baseline and frame the target as a percentage of improvement.

Example:

Attract 50 people to events – Is there a baseline? Does this represent an improvement?

Alternative:

Increase the number of people coming to events by 30% compared to last year (the baseline is known to be 100; the target for the year is 130)

- Framing targets as general statements with no quantitative measures: Never do this. It implies that there is no process control and no interest in changing the status quo.

Example:

Attract people to events – Is there a baseline? How many participants? Does this represent an improvement?

Alternative:

Increase the number of people coming to events by 30% compared to last year (the baseline is known to be 100; the target for the year is 130)

Keep in mind:

- The targets selected should challenge the current abilities of the staff. Beware. Targets that prove impossible to achieve may demotivate the team and put the overall strategy at risk. Targets that are too easy to achieve may cause the team to slow down, and the leadership will lose trust if they try to readjust the targets later on.

Reach into your tactical toolbox

5.5. **Use of the tactical toolbox.** Tactical tools provide the means to achieve strategic goals, capitalizing on the opportunities for improvement found during Steps 1-4. These tools can be analyzed independently or combined into hybrid scenarios according to the needs of the organization in scope.

Keep in mind:

- The organization in scope may decide to turn one or more of these tactics into strategic goals. This is possible, as long as the goal can be monitored on a monthly basis, it is not a one-off activity that will make the goal automatically obsolete (these are better suited for action plans), and can be worded SMART with annual targets.

- Tactical tools are by no means limited to this section. Use whatever tools available beyond this manual to consider other strategy scenarios, while keeping to the limitations of your scope of work.

- Look at each tactic in detail and find creative ways to make it work. Think out of the box.

5.6. **#1: Development of products and services.** Assess scenarios that can help the organization in scope develop new products and services or add value to existing ones, such as:

- Overhauling and remarketing existing products and services

- Adding new features to products and services

- Offering products and services at different quality levels for different target segments

- Diversifying the product and service offering by creating new products and services or through mergers and acquisitions

5.7. **#2 Expansion.** Assess scenarios that can help the organization in scope grow its beneficiaries, such as:

- Expanding geographically through new facilities or partnerships, mergers, and acquisitions

- Adding new supply channels by offering products and services online, including them as part of a larger product with partners, or belonging to a network with common interests

- Targeting new segments of the population or new types of organizations

- Finding new applications for existing products and services

- Increasing supply or demand by investing in more people and equipment

- Increasing the amount and frequency of use by creating awareness campaigns and establishing incentive and loyalty programs.

5.8. **#3 Vertical integration.** Assess scenarios that can help the organization in scope benefit from owning the supply chain, such as:

- Buying vehicles or property as opposed to renting
- Acquiring servers
- Developing customized software internally
- Generating energy using renewable resources
- Integrating products and services by mergers, acquisitions, or developing in-house expertise

5.9. **#4 Stabilization approach.** Assesses scenarios that can help the organization in scope benefit from maintaining its current position, such as:

- Pursuing marginal or no growth
- Optimizing processes
- Improving organizational capacity, culture, and professional development
- Using existing resources and limiting investments
- Reducing debt
- Tapping on synergies between programs

5.10. **#5 Retrenchment approach.** Assesses scenarios that can help the organization benefit from scaling back operations, such as:

- Outsourcing non-core activities
- Reducing geographical reach
- Reducing or eliminating uncompetitive programs
- Consolidating operations or functions

5.11. Analyzing tactical scenarios. Use the Impact Matrix or other comparative analysis tools (see points 4.9-4.10) to assess the potential of each scenario. Note that each scenario will have effects related not only to costs but also to factors that are more difficult to quantify, such as:

- Change management, training, and coaching for the people whose responsibilities and scope of work will change

- Changes in processes and efficiency

- Changes in the ability to meet the needs of key stakeholders

Before making a recommendation, your team should involve as many stakeholders as possible in the scoring and prioritization of scenarios.

Keep in mind:

- Sometimes analysis tools don't give the result that you or the organization in scope expected. Perhaps the rubric used in defining and scoring each factor is not complete. Perhaps there is a strong bias that cannot be justified at all. Consider both possibilities before making changes to the analysis tools.

- Not all organizations are interested in making major changes. Not all organizations need game-changing strategies. Most organizations want to foresee critical issues and react pre-emptively. Most want to see concrete improvement towards achieving common goals.

- Major organizational changes should result in major benefits vs. maintaining the status quo; otherwise, they should not be done at all.

- Consider conducting controlled project pilots before implementing large-scale projects.

- Always consider the option of "doing nothing".

5.12. SMART action plan. The organization should agree on a SMART action plan for the implementation of the scenario chosen. Consider the following:

- Scenario projects should be broken down by month (no project activity should last longer than one month) at least for the first year.

- Each project should have e a high-level budget.

- Staff members should have clearly laid out roles for each project/activity).

- The implementation plan should consider the day-to-day activities, any major commitments, as well as the seasonal calendar of the organization.

Pass Checkpoint 3 – Strategy sign-off

5.13. Use of Checkpoint 3. This is a formal meeting in which key representatives of the 5 Working Teams, including all of the members of the decision-making committee, assess the recommended strategy and officially sign-off on it. Members who did not attend Checkpoint 2 should get a briefing before attending Checkpoint 3.

5.14. Preparation for Checkpoint 3. As the coordinator of the organization in scope and the person ultimately responsible for the implementation of the strategy, your counterpart will be leading this meeting. Your team should support your counterpart in preparing the following recommended content:

- Checkpoint 2 recap: Present an overview of the key findings from Checkpoint 2 (e.g. SWOT,) and any new developments since Checkpoint 2.

- Mission and vision: Present the proposals for new mission and vision statements to be reviewed and decided on by the committee, if applicable.

- Strategic goals: Present the new strategic goals, their indicators, and yearly targets. These are to be reviewed and decided on by the committee. The committee should know that once strategic goals are approved, they will be used to monitor the success of the strategy.

- Tactics: Present the tactical scenarios with the best chances of achieving strategic goals. These are to be reviewed and decided on by the committee.

- Action plan and resources required: Present the plan to implement tactics and any other activities required to achieve strategic goals. These are to be reviewed and decided on by the committee.

Limit the duration of the meeting to no more than one hour, allowing 20-30 minutes for questions, feedback, and open discussions.

Keep in mind:

- The presentation has to demonstrate that every recommendation proposed is backed up by facts. If it cannot, make sure that you know why and that the strategy is addressing the issue.

5.15. Document the approved strategy. Once the strategy is approved, the decision-making committee should document their approval in writing (on paper or as e-signatures). Signing such documents symbolizes the commitment that the decision-making committee has in supporting the strategic goals of the organization in scope as well as the commitment the organization in scope has to meeting the needs of its stakeholders.

At this point, the action plan for the strategy has to be incorporated into the organization's operational plan along with all other program activities.

5.16. Communicate the approval of the strategy. Having formally documented the approved strategy, your counterpart should brief all staff members on the final strategy and the planned activities going forward.

It is critical that the staff is regularly briefed on the status of the strategic planning process in order to collect feedback, address their concerns, and avoid any misinformation to spread.

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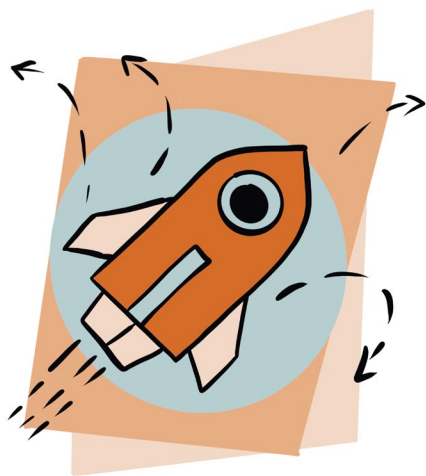
Make it happen

A strategy that isn't implemented will not succeed. Period. After doing all of this work, do we really want to leave the organization's success up to random streaks of good luck? Before you leave, make sure that the organization builds up the will and discipline to make its strategy succeed. Show stakeholders your repertoire of proven project management and monitoring methodologies. Teach them how to adapt to changing circumstances in real time without losing focus of strategic goals. If they do happen to get hit by luck, make them see how much better it can be to reap its benefits rather than naively celebrate them.

Have Weekly Operational Reviews

6.1. **Use of the WOR.** The Weekly Operational Review monitors the commitments made in the operational plan for the year an adjusts them on a weekly basis. Weekly monitoring allows for time and resources to be spent where they are most needed and in response to a changing environment. By now, the organization in scope should have a consolidated operational plan including both program activities as well as the implementation plan for the strategy.

There are also implicit benefits to using this approach, such as:

■ Having participants record their commitments in writing and being held accountable for them

■ Understanding who needs support, whether it be resources, time, training, or coaching

■ Improving visibility the workload distribution

■ Developing facilitation skills within participants

■ Developing a culture of planning and problem solving that simplifies management

Keep in mind:

■ Have WORs even when there is no strategy.

■ If practical, your team can also recommend Daily Operational Reviews (DORs).

- Consider using rubrics to assess and improve the performance of the WOR.

- WORs are useful for organizations of any size.

6.2. **Setting up the area.** This area should display all information needed to conduct a WOR. The area should be comfortable to carry out meetings, considering elements such as:

- There is enough room for participants

- The area is not noisy

- The area is well equipped (markers, sticky notes, a clock, projectors, and laptops)

- Information posted can be read easily

At a minimum, the area for the WOR should display the following information:

- WOR management: includes all aspects related to conducting the WOR itself, such as:

  - An agenda outlining the key topics normally discussed and the time allotted for each.

  - Roles and responsibilities for participants

  - A rotating schedule determining who will lead the WOR, who will update metrics, etc.

  - A calendar for absent or vacation days

  - Metrics for efficiency in completing actions as planned, WOR attendance, start and end times, etc.

- Operational plan: should be available in printed format for each department or program and posted on the meeting area. Activities should be broken down further by month (no activity should last more than one month) in electronic form. Operational plans for the year should be updated at least once per month.

- Weekly planning: this is a large board (2-4 m²) resembling a spreadsheet. Each line of the first column should represent one or more programs or projects. Each subsequent column (6-9 of them) should represent one week. Thus, each cell represents the status of a project in a given week. Use color-coded sticky notes to break down weekly commitments into activities.

Figure 6.2: WOR planning board

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week ...
Program 1					
Program 2					
Program 3					

- Metrics: includes key performance indicators for departments or programs that can be reported on a weekly basis, such as:
  - Productivity
  - Response times
  - Quality defects
  - Financial performance

Other indicators that are reported on a monthly basis should also be included, such as:

- □ Monitoring of strategic goals
- □ Training matrices for key functions

- Ongoing processes: tracks the current status of projects following specific processes, such as:

  - □ Administrative (e.g. grant applications)
  - □ Problem solving tools (e.g. Go see, think, do; Lean; Six Sigma)
  - □ Process trends
  - □ Escalated issues (raised to management)
  - □ All steps of each key process, as well as the status of projects should be clearly visible.

This concept is also applicable for managing WORs for distance teams. All the set-up can be done using spreadsheets and shared drives.

Keep in mind:

- Areas for the WOR are not only seen by staff, but also by visitors. As such, the area should always be clean and the information up to date.

- Organizations that cannot effectively plan using this methodology will likely not do any better using specialized project management software.

6.3. **Meeting performance.** At a minimum, WORs for the organization in scope should perform effectively in the following criteria:

- All the information posted should be updated, before the start of the meeting.

- All participants should be present and on time. Meetings should start and end as scheduled and follow a standardized agenda. Interruptions throughout the meeting or "meetings within meetings" should be limited, such as:

   - Use of electronic devices for purposes other than the meeting
   - Discussing topics unrelated to the meeting
   - Noise that could have been prevented
   - Uninvited visitors

- Weekly activities should be planned at least 6-9 weeks into the future. All actions should have a clear owner, completion deadline, and should be relevant to the operational plan of the organization in scope.

- Meeting leaders should have a list of key topics that need to be discussed and staff members should be prepared to share relevant news or possible changes in plans, as well as raise issues and challenge each other. As necessary, any external contributor to the meeting should be invited before the start of the meeting and come prepared with materials and equipment.

- Problems that do not have concrete solutions should trigger the establishment of a team tasked to use problem-solving tools to get to the root causes of issues.
- An overall positive atmosphere is promoted throughout the meeting, such as:
  - Acknowledging positive contributions made by participants
  - Listening to each other and respecting different points of view
  - Information and decisions are transparent
  - Management is supportive and removes barriers to change
  - Participants take ownership of their work

6.4. Time. The duration of the WOR is determined by the organization in scope. WORs of up to 4 participants generally last up to 30 minutes. WORs of up to 8 participants can last up to 1 hour. It is not recommended to have WORs with more than 8 participants or lasting more than 1 hour. Before recommending any exceptions be made, your team should assess the meeting performance of the organization in scope.

Have Monthly Operational Reviews

6.5. **Use of the MOR.** The Monthly Operational Review monitors the commitments made in the operational plan for the year in addition to the progress made towards achieving strategic goals and adjusts them on a monthly level. Monthly monitoring allows for time and resources to be spent where they are most needed and in response to a changing environment. By now, the organization in scope should have a consolidated operational plan including both program activities and the implementation plan for the strategy.

Keep in mind:

- Have MORs even when there is no strategy.

- Consider using rubrics to assess and improve the performance of the WOR.

- MORs are useful for organizations of any size.

6.6. **Setting up the area.** See point 6.2.

6.7. **Meeting performance.** Apply the WOR guidelines in point 6.3 to the key concerns of the MOR:

- Discuss the status of strategic goals and any decisions that needed to be taken to adapt to changing circumstances.

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- Ensure the operational plan for the year is up to date and any foreseeable issues are raised.

- Plan for the professional development needs of the staff.

6.8. **Time.** The duration of the MOR is determined by the organization in scope. It not recommended to have MORs with more than 8 participants or lasting more than 1 hour.

Adjust strategic goals (don't!)

6.9. **Use of adjusting strategic goals.** As a rule, changes in goals should be discouraged. That being said, targets that prove impossible to achieve may demotivate the team and put the overall strategy at risk. Targets that prove too easy to achieve may cause the organization in scope to slow down and the leadership may lose standing if it attempts to readjust the targets as soon as they are achieved. A target may have been set too high or low for a number of reasons such as:

- Lack of historical data to set a baseline
- Lack of external benchmark data to aid in the estimation of a baseline
- Unmet expectations regarding relevant trends
- Major unforeseen changes (natural disasters, political instability, etc.)

Unless the decision-committee notes that changing circumstances have made strategic goals irrelevant, the organization should do its due diligence to ensure that enough effort is being put in the implementation of the strategy before proposing to adjust them.

6.10. When strategic goals are too ambitious. Your team should recommend reducing a goal's target only when the following conditions have been met:

- Meeting performance of WORs and MORs has been externally assessed and deemed to be at a satisfactory performance level.

- All operational work of each staff member has been planned up to a year into the future and broken down by week. Your counterpart has reviewed each operational plan and has determined that it is not possible to do more with the existing resources.

- The staff has met to develop and compare scenarios of programs, activities, or efficiency projects that could allow the organization achieve the goals set. New ideas, if any, were prioritized and compared to the current plan. No positive results obtained.

6.11. When strategic goals are not ambitious enough. Recommend raising a goal's target only when all of the following conditions have been met:

- The organization has determined that raising a target will not adversely impact other goals or the overall strategy implementation plan.

- The organization has considered alternative options, such as:
  - Investing more in professional development
  - Pursuing pet projects
  - Preparing to achieve next year's goals
  - Internal and external networking
  - Reallocating resources to meet other goals
- The organization in scope has collectively decided that the target should be raised.

Keep in mind:

- Consider using incentives to overachieve goals instead of raising targets.

Pass Checkpoint X - Quarterly Reviews

6.12. Use of Checkpoint X. This is a formal meeting in which key representatives of the 5 Working Teams, including all of the members of the decision-making committee, gather to review the implementation of the strategy and make decisions on open issues.

6.13. Preparation for Checkpoint X. Your counterpart should prepare the following content: The key concerns to be addressed are as follows:

- Discuss the status of strategic goals and any actions or decisions needed to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Ensure the operational plan for the year is up to date and any foreseeable issues are raised.
- Discuss the long-term impact that the strategy is having on stakeholders and raise any issues as necessary.

Checkpoint X meetings should take place once every 3 months and should last no longer than 1 hour, allowing 20-30 minutes for questions, feedback, and open discussions.

- Unless you are involved in the implementation of the strategy, Checkpoint X meetings are outside of the scope of the project. That being said, consider requesting your counterpart for periodic updates. Knowing the results of your recommendations will help learn from your mistakes and grow as a consultant.

6.14. Communicate the status of implementation. Your counterpart should brief all staff members on the status of the strategy implementation, the issues raised by the committee, and the planned activities going forward.

It is critical that the staff is regularly briefed on the status of the strategic planning process in order to collect feedback, address their concerns, and avoid any misinformation to spread.