

Strategic Planning: Deliberate Organizational Change

Fred C. Lunenburg
Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is a change strategy that is very carefully planned and deliberate. With this in mind, strategic planning may be defined as the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating decisions that enable the organization to achieve its goals. The process of strategic planning typically follows nine steps: (a) develop a mission, (b1) conduct a critical analysis of the internal environment, (b2) conduct a critical analysis of the external environment, (c) prepare planning assumptions, (d) develop a strategy, (e) communicate the strategy, (f) develop evaluation procedures, (g) implement the strategy, and (h) evaluate the results. Although these steps are not always followed in the exact order specified, they do describe the way most organizations go about planning change strategically.

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. —Charles Darwin

For most organizations, “*change is not the exception, but the rule*” (Greenberg, 2011, p. 553). The impact of organizational change can be found everywhere. *Organizational change* can be defined as planned or unplanned transformations in an organization’s structure, technology, and/or its people (Bourne, 2012). Strategic planning is a management change strategy that is very carefully planned and deliberate. *Strategic planning* may be defined as the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating decisions that enable the organization to achieve its goals (Goodstein, 2011).

The process of strategic planning typically follows nine steps (Wootton, 2011). Although these steps are not always followed in the exact order specified, they do resemble the way most educational organizations go about planning strategically (Ewy, 2010). As I describe these steps, you may find it useful to follow along with the steps shown in Figure 1.

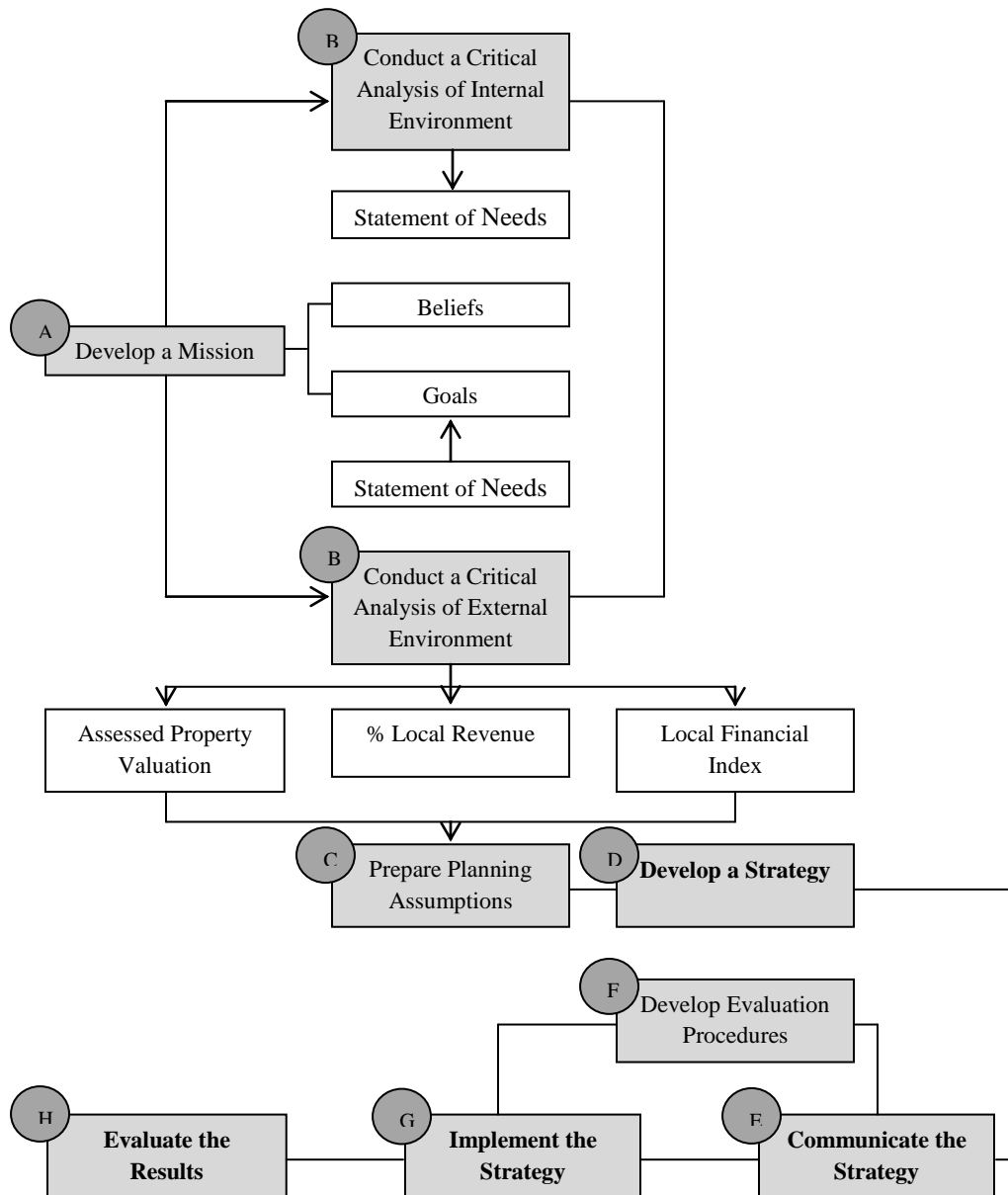


Figure 1. Strategic planning: A nine-step process.

A. Develop a Mission

A strategic plan must begin with a stated goal. Typically, goals involve an organization's outcomes (e.g., to improve student achievement on standardized tests) and/or improve its organizational culture (e.g., to make the work environment more pleasant). It is important to note that a school organization's overall goals must be translated into corresponding goals to be achieved by various organizational units. In large school districts, this would include Divisions of Instruction, Finance, Public Relations, Research and Development, etc. and individual school buildings and departments within them. In a university, this would include various colleges (College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of Engineering, etc. and individual departments within each College.

B. Conduct a Critical Analysis of the Internal Environment

By "internal environment," I am referring to the nature of the organization itself as identified by the characteristics that constitute an organization. For example, does the organizational structure stimulate or inhibit goal achievement? Does the culture of the school district (individual school) or university encourage personnel to be innovative and to make positive changes, or does it encourage organization members to maintain the status quo? Are organization members motivated sufficiently to strive for the realization of the organization's goals? Is there adequate, effective leadership to move the organization forward? Do decision making practices encourage goal accomplishment? Do people communicate with each other clearly enough to accomplish their goals? Are organization members willing to change in order to improve organizational performance?

B. Conduct a Critical Analysis of the External Environment

Organizations do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they function within external environments. For example, local, state, and federal laws impact the internal operation of school districts (individual schools) and universities. For instance, consider the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on the internal operation of public schools throughout the United States.

C. Prepare Planning Assumptions

To clearly understand the nature of your strategic plan, it is important to highlight the assumptions underlying the plan: (a) Is the planning process based on deliberate analyses or based on intuition and informal knowledge? (b) Is the strategic plan based on the assumption that radical change is not only possible, but desirable; or instead, will the plan involve only minor incremental adjustments to the current ways of operating? (c) The strategic plan will be made primarily in the interest of which stakeholder groups

(community, school board/board of trustees, administrators, teachers/faculty members, support staff, or students)? Furthermore, What resources does the school district (school) or university have available to plan and implement its strategy? The resources include financial, physical, knowledge, and human resources. The assumptions underlying the strategic planning process are important to the ultimate success of the strategic plan.

D. Develop a Strategy

A strategy is the means by which an organization achieves its goal. Based on a careful assessment of the school district's/university's position on the aforementioned factors or characteristics (e.g., the organization's organizational structure, its culture, motivation of its members, leadership, decision making strategies used, communication, inclination toward change, and available resources), a decision is made about how to go about achieving its goal.

E. Communicate the Strategy

The strategy must be communicated to the stakeholders—individuals or groups in whose interest the organization is run. These are individuals who have a stake in the organization. The most important stakeholders include students, teachers/faculty members, support staff, administrators, school board/board of trustees, and community members. It is essential to communicate an organization's strategic plan to stakeholders very clearly so they can contribute to its success, either directly (e.g., organization members who help achieve goals) or indirectly (e.g., school board/board of trustees who set policy, taxpayers who provide local funds, as well as the state and federal government). Unless stakeholders fully understand and accept an organization's strategic plan, it is unlikely to receive the full support it needs to meet its goals.

F. Develop Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation procedures need to be developed prior to *Evaluating the Results*. These procedures will serve to guide the implementation of the strategy and evaluation of the outcome.

G. Implement the Strategy

Once a strategy has been developed and communicated, the strategy is implemented. When this occurs, there may be some resistance. A well-documented finding from studies of organizations of all kinds is that people tend to resist change (Grievess, 2011; Spector, 2011). Even when organization members are shown data that suggests that change is necessary, they resist it. Most employees see change as

threatening (Hargreaves, Lieberman, & Fullan, 2011). School administrators need to apply various techniques to overcome resistance to change (Argyris, 2007; Fullan, 2009).

H. Evaluate the Results

Finally, after a strategy has been implemented, it is important to determine if the goals have been achieved. If so, then new goals are developed. If not, then different goals may be defined, or different strategies for accomplishing the goals may be attempted.

Business has devoted a great deal of attention to strategic planning (Campbell, 2012). Only recently has any emphasis been placed on the study of strategic planning in school settings. In a study of 127 school districts in Kentucky, researchers found relationships between strategic planning and student achievement in reading, language arts, and mathematics at several grade levels. None of the relationships was strong, however. In addition, the researchers found a direct relationship between strategic planning and both school district wealth and per-pupil expenditures. That is, the higher the assessed property value per child and the greater the percentage of revenue from local sources supporting education, the more likely the school district is engaged in strategic planning efforts (Basham & Lunenburg, 1989).

Conclusion

Strategic planning is a change strategy that is very carefully planned and deliberate. With this in mind, strategic planning may be defined as the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating decisions that enable the organization to achieve its goals. The process of strategic planning typically follows nine steps: (a) develop a mission, (b1) conduct a critical analysis of the internal environment, (b2) conduct a critical analysis of the external environment, (c) prepare planning assumptions, (d) develop a strategy, (e) communicate the strategy, (f) develop evaluation procedures, (g) implement the strategy, and (h) evaluate the results. Although these steps are not always followed in the exact order specified, they do describe the way most organizations go about planning change strategically.

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