

higher likelihood of a valid result. If the plan is a part of a larger organisation, it is appropriate and politic to include representation from your management group. This will help with acceptance of the plan at an early stage, will encourage supply of the necessary support to implement the plan (usually money), and accords with the concept of an inclusive approach to planning.

■ **Development.** In the first instance, every organisation needs some form of Vision and a Mission. The Vision describes the ideal end state which an organisation might strive to achieve. This would tend to be the highest order and principle goal that an organisation pursues to justify its existence. This is the theoretical long term outcome that would show the organisation has fulfilled its destiny and reached it's most mature state. In other words, it is the principle goal that will always be strived for but is barely attainable. Visions tend to reflect either far-reaching service or performance levels that rely on the highest order of quality. The establishment of the Vision will drive all other processes throughout the development and application of the strategic plan. The Mission usually consists of a simple and brief statement of the *raison d'être*. For what principle purpose does the organisation exist? Strangely enough, although this seems like a relatively easy step, obtaining agreement on a clearly defined Vision and Mission can be difficult and time consuming. However, do not despair. Agreement on these matters is critical to the remainder of the process, so the value of time spent at this stage will become self-evident as the process continues. From this point a number of sub-set activities can be developed. These are:

- i. **Objectives.** Objectives are defined as the principle measurable outcomes sought in the delivery of the product and/or service. These can be defined as the highest level of activity that contributes directly towards the achievement of the Mission. The key here is that the objective must be expressed in a form that can be measured. This might be in financial performance or customer satisfaction as external measures, and staff performance, development and quality levels will provide an indicator of internal effectiveness.
- ii. **Priorities.** As with most activities, there is usually a conflict between resource availability and the number of tasks to be achieved. This conundrum can be best overcome by prioritisation. Sometimes these will be set by the upper echelons, but at the least, you should be in a position to make recommendations on priorities for tasks if you do not have the autonomy to decide yourself. This is another benefit of a well thought through plan; it provides the information to help with these decisions.
- iii. **Responsibilities.** There is not much point in producing a plan if it is not clear who is required to implement it. As mentioned earlier, ownership and inclusiveness are critical components of any strategic plan. The key stakeholders should include representatives of those elements required to implement the plan and achieve the objectives. Responsibility for the various elements of the plan should be clearly identified in the plan along with timelines to complete objectives. In this way, there should be no surprises at the end of the process and the transition into the plan should be relatively seamless. This includes the assumption that all involved will be kept informed and any precursor processes, such as training and equipment acquisition, have been implemented.

Use of development processes.

The manner in which the strategic plan is developed will, to a large extent, depend on a number of factors. These include available resources, the availability of and range of inherent knowledge and skills within the organisation and the normal internal working processes. Most significantly, the development requires a sense of commitment at all levels and an appropriate allocation of time. It follows then that without "top down" support, the resources and impetus will not exist to produce an effective outcome. The League approached the process through the use of a representative planning group, voluntarily broken into study groups to look at each of the major activities comprising the objectives. Results were reported back to the group for consolidation, then to the Board for progressive ratification and subsequently to the members for constructive criticism. There are many other alternative approaches that can be sought through referencing or through access to external assistance.

Approval.

Approval and support is required throughout the process, especially if you are working at a functional level within a larger organisation. Report back to the parent body and other stakeholders to "keep them in the loop". This will allow adjustments to be made in a progressive manner, i.e., to align the plan to higher organisational positions for example. Such an approach will help to maintain ownership at all levels and the impetus to achieve the required outcome, resulting in a strategic plan that is workable and has the necessary support to be implemented.

Application & Resources.

In most foreseeable scenarios, it is anticipated that strategic plans would be implemented immediately. This is not to say that all matters would be addressed at once due to the reality of time and/or other resource constraints. That is why the question of priorities must be addressed in the plan so that a clear sense of what is most important to the scheme can receive the most immediate attention and appropriate allocation of effort. Likewise with the identification and allocation of responsibilities, whereby the people or elements who have the carriage of various aspects of the plan have already been identified in the analysis process. It now becomes clear how the process of strategic planning provides a clear and unequivocal guide to the way ahead. Having established what has to be achieved and having gained the approval for these objectives, the support and resources required will be provided, usually however within tight budgetary constraints, to pursue the Vision and fulfil the Mission.

Review.

The strategic plan is a "living document", designed to provide focus and an appropriate sense of priorities in the pursuit of identified objectives. As such, it is imperative that the plan should be frequently referred too, and reviewed at least annually, using the same general processes described above. This part of the process ensures that the plan remains relevant by providing for inevitable changes that occur within and beyond the organisation. It ensures continuous alignment to any master document of a higher organisation, and it provides some protection against and allows the opportunity to adjust to any variations to circumstances or unintended outcomes. It is useful in the review process to bring in "new blood" to challenge the status quo; otherwise the original group involved in the plan runs the risk of developing an overriding sense of ownership

that will inhibit change. Both the initial construct of the plan and subsequent reviews require moral courage, integrity and honesty for the process to be successful.

Conclusions.

Organisations need to look towards the future while learning from their past. To do so requires a rigorous, objective and honest investigation of the *raison detre*, or reason for being. This can take the form of a strategic plan that can provide an organisation with vision, a mission and objectives that are relevant and timely, from both an internal and an external perspective. A strategic plan that considers all aspects of operations, and includes representation from all vested interest parties, will generate ownership and provide clear responsibilities and priorities that will allow the organisation to pursue its Mission in a comprehensive manner. The principle outcome from this is the provision of relevant, customer focussed activities that will remain on course while providing the flexibility to adjust to the chaos of modern society.

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