

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

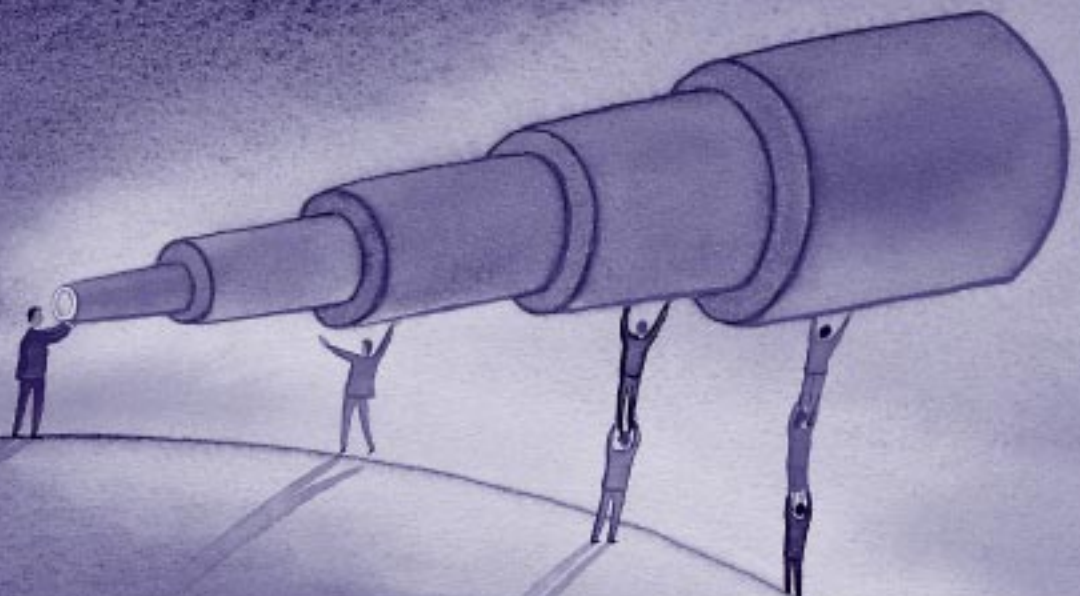
from
SCAN
to **PLAN**

Integrating Trends Into the Strategy-Making Process

James G. Dalton, CAE

Jennifer Jarratt

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By

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Washington, DC

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From Scan to Plan

Integrating Trends Into the Strategy Making Process

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What will your organization be tomorrow? Who are its future members? Where are its opportunities?

During times of economic stress and change, thinking about the future becomes more difficult—and more necessary. Uncertainty and change in the world forces organizational leaders to consider and respond to clues about the challenges that may affect their associations in the years to come. At the same time, they must act effectively to manage today's crises. But how do you create and maintain a balance between “forward” thinking and “now” acting?

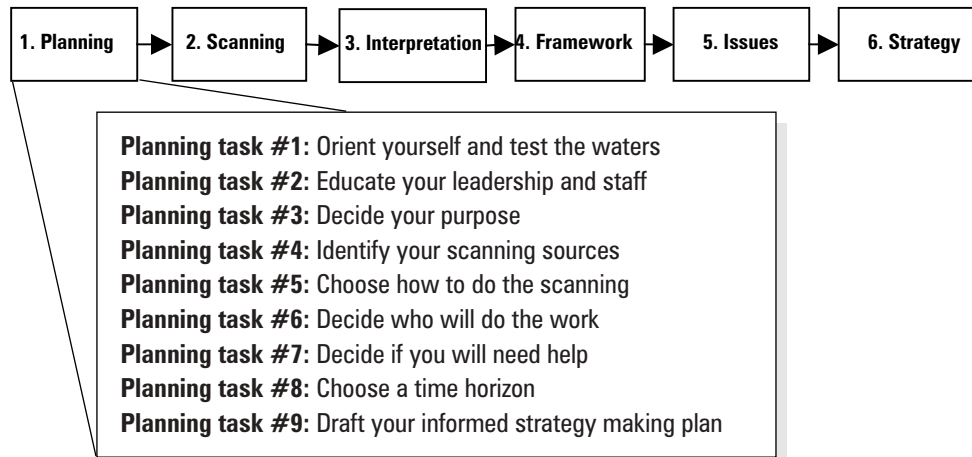
You do it by creating a “foresight” culture in your organization. In other words, you develop the ability to think and strategize for the future so your operations become more purposeful.

From Scan to Plan: Integrating Trends Into the Strategy Making Process lays out a six-step process for creating and internalizing that balance. It offers practical advice on how to collect useful information, interpret it, and convert the interpretation into strategies that will address future opportunities and threats. You can build a “foresight mechanism” for leaders and members alike by following these six steps:

- 1. Plan.** Decide your purpose and desired outcomes from the effort, who will lead it, who will do the work, and what approaches you will take.
- 2. Scan.** Conduct environmental scanning to discover trends important to the association's strategy making.
- 3. Interpret.** Identify and analyze trends and what they mean to your association.
- 4. Establish a framework.** Establish a common understanding of strategic management, reach consensus on the definition of key terms, and create a dynamic model of how strategy works.
- 5. Identify strategic issues.** Define strategic issues based on the scan and trend analysis.
- 6. Develop strategies.** Build strategies through identification of strategic issues, principles, desired outcomes, and action plans.

In *From Scan to Plan* a simple graphic of the steps shows you where you are:

FIGURE 1: STEP 1 TASKS



This six-step model provides a foundation on which to build your unique approach to strategy making. Time and resource commitments will vary by association. However you tailor the processes to fit your organization's needs and resources, follow the basics of the six steps. Introducing this model into your association's culture may mean facing hard truths or moving your staff and members out of their comfort zones. If you succeed, however, you may end up with startling new ideas or a radical shift in focus.

Trends Affecting Your Operating Environment

The following pages present highlights of the 2003 environmental scan commissioned by the ASAE Foundation, outlining the six-step process for scanning, and recommending how to connect the results to your association's strategy making process. The 2003 scan, which represents the fourth in a collection of environmental scans commissioned by the ASAE Foundation since 1994, includes both external trends and those internal to the association community. Some trends are emerging, while many others are drawn from previous scans and updated.

A *trend* is a statement of the direction of change. It is usually gradual, long-term change in the forces shaping the future of an organization, a region, a nation, a sector, or society in general. In the association sector, understanding the emerging trends in the operating environment helps you and other leaders take a longer-term view of current systems and identify what can—and must—be done to preserve an organization's health and longevity.

A TREND: is a statement of the direction of change. It is usually gradual, long-term change in the forces shaping the future of an organization, a region, a nation, a sector, or society in general

Here is a recap of the important external and internal trends that *From Scan to Plan* covers in greater detail.

External Trends

TREND GROUP ONE: GLOBAL

Even if they do not have any international members, associations are increasingly shaped by what is happening around the world. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **1.1 People and institutions have increasing sensitivity to global affairs.** Associations must anticipate the changes coming from other countries that can reshape their home markets and agendas.
- **1.2 More businesses are going global.** Trade associations must globalize their thinking to anticipate new membership needs. This means expanding research, information, and service offerings related to the rest of the world.
- **1.3 People around the world are gaining more education and exposure to new ideas and lifestyles.** Services for international members will have to be approached separately and in partnership with associations, members, and consultants in the relevant countries.
- **1.4 Populations are increasingly mobile, with greater migration for work.** There will be new cultures and languages to work with and provide services and support for, as well as new values and attitudes to understand.
- **1.5 Societies around the world will have fewer workers who must support a growing population of older people.** Professional associations can expect members to have longer careers. Many professionals may continue working in their 70s, 80s, and 90s.

TREND GROUP TWO: DEMOGRAPHICS

Modern societies age as people live longer and families have fewer children. The impact of aging on American society is not yet fully appreciated because immigration keeps the population young and increasingly diverse at younger ages. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **2.1 The U.S. population is aging, although more gradually than the populations of Europe and Japan.** This could lead to tensions between those over the age of 50 and their more youthful competitors. The tensions will be particularly rooted in issues of access to senior-level jobs and volunteer positions in the association.
- **2.2 There is a long-term shift in the ethnic makeup of the population, particularly among youth.** With more varied viewpoints represented, there could be increasing conflict about the priorities of an organization's political agenda.
- **2.3 Generational shifts continue to shape the workforce and society.** It is essential for association leaders to “stand in the shoes” of young potential members and think about what the association has to offer them.

TREND GROUP THREE: SOCIAL

Education, including lifelong education, is becoming more significant. Planning how to pay for higher education is a big concern for students and their families. Perhaps because people are spending more time educating themselves, their values are becoming more holistic and spiritual. People are also spending more time at work and longing for a better work/life balance. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **3.1 People are spending a larger proportion of their lives in the educational system.** People will turn to their associations for quality educational opportunities they cannot get elsewhere.
- **3.2 The cost of staying longer in the educational system is increasing.** Part-time work, paid internships, or financial support may help hard-pressed students who will eventually be members or work for members.
- **3.3 More people are questioning their values in light of environmental, technological, and social issues.** Emerging concerns, such as greenness, sustainability, and better work/life balance, will engage association leaders in a reassessment of the impact the association has on society.
- **3.4 American families collectively are spending more time at work.**
- **3.5 People continue to try to improve the balance between their home and work lives.** Achieving a better balance has implications for staff work hours, scheduling, planning volunteer time, and overall flexibility.
- **3.6 People have more information about risk to use in their decision making.** Doing a periodic check on the association's involvement with risk and asking the legal staff for an assessment of exposure will be more important.
- **3.7 People have more choices of media and message.** Is the core audience receiving your message, with so many more opportunities and channels available?
- **3.8 Consumer expectations are rising as people learn to anticipate speed, service, quality, and access in their transactions.** Managing expectations for services may become more important than delivering them.
- **3.9 Anti-aging will be a widespread trend among Baby Boomers who want to hang on to their youth.** Keep presentations, programs, and activities focused on active learning and doing.

TREND GROUP FOUR: WORK AND WORKPLACE

With an aging workforce, the United States has to compete with younger and cheaper workforces around the world. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **4.1 The U.S. workforce is growing more slowly and becoming more diverse.** Have strategies to recruit and develop younger workers and minorities to ensure continuity of organizational skills and knowledge.
- **4.2 The Baby Boom generation begins its retirement years by redefining the idea of retirement.** Offer the emerging post-retirement generation interesting work as volunteers or part-timers to fill temporary gaps.

- **4.3 Women constitute an increasing share of the workforce.** Association executives should consider whether their organizations sufficiently reflect and respond to women’s growing power in the workforce.
- **4.4 Rising unemployment trends are turning a tight labor market in North America into a slack one.** Individuals will be more in charge of their own career marketing than ever before, which makes their association especially important as a place to network and gain career information.
- **4.5 Telecommuting continues to grow slowly.** Associations gain geographic and time flexibility with telecommuting, as well as saving on office space.
- **4.6 More workers have flexible work schedules, although progress towards flexibility is slow.** Recruit and retain staff with flexible schedules.
- **4.7 Critical labor shortages are likely to continue in high-tech fields.** Temporary opportunities to acquire specialists in information technology may evaporate as the economy improves.
- **4.8 A demographically caused shortage of managers in all areas is likely over the next decade.** Shortages of managers will force executives to be creative in filling management positions.
- **4.9 A surplus of U.S. workers may develop in information and services over the next two decades.** Most associations and not-for-profits expect to reduce the number of employees needed to provide services and programs through gains in efficiency and productivity.

TREND GROUP FIVE: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

New developments in science and technology—particularly in genetics and information technology—will challenge the public’s knowledge and capabilities for decision making. With increased ability to collect, store, and use data, associations must use the information to serve members more effectively and avoid invading their privacy. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **5.1 We are adding to and building on what we know of life at the molecular scale.** New professional specialties and industry sectors will develop, promoting spin-offs and new associations.
- **5.2 Once owned by experts and authorities, information is increasingly within the reach of the average citizen.** As content creators, associations should be concerned about protecting the integrity of their content and their rights to say who can use it.
- **5.3 Sensor and network technologies are expanding monitoring and data collection throughout society.** Acquiring more data on members may be essential to providing services at lower cost and more efficiently.
- **5.4 The rate of science and technology innovation is rising.** Keeping up with changing science and technology requires maintaining and expanding the research and monitoring capabilities of the staff and members.
- **5.5 Technology is creating new ways for people to communicate and associate.** Balance virtuality with face-to-face interactions. Make sure you don’t have less than an association when you’ve put everything on line.
- **5.6 People are beginning to question the value and utility of always being connected.** Associations should ensure they do not violate user privacy or contribute to the spam problem.

TREND GROUP SIX: ECONOMIC

In a long-term trend, the inequalities of wealth and income are increasing in the United States. For those who are hit by layoffs and worries about income and debt, association membership can be a life-saver for making contacts and finding new opportunities. The cost of time is about to become the key driver of fees for service. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **6.1 The prosperity and complexity of the economy continue to increase.** Build strategies that are robust in almost any economic circumstance.
- **6.2 Prosperity among a segment of U.S. households is increasing.** This is good news for associations who rely on the upper income segment for membership or support, although the competition for this segment's attention will be intense.
- **6.3 Increasing economic uncertainty for many Americans is becoming a daily concern.** In uncertain times, an association may be a lifeline to people whose confidence has been threatened.
- **6.4 Income inequality is increasing in the United States.** Not-for-profits should define their core mission to clarify direction and intent. In uncertain times, funders want the certainty of a focused mission.
- **6.5 Rising healthcare costs are challenging all employers, including local, state and federal governments.** Association health plans, which enable business and individual members to get health insurance through their professional or trade association, offer one solution.
- **6.6 The value of personal time is increasing.** Services or products that save time can be worth premium fees.

TREND GROUP SEVEN: BUSINESS

There are cautionary tales among these business trends for association executives because of recent scandals. Executives borrowing business innovations must adjust them to the different conditions in the association community.

Like businesses, associations must also pay greater attention to government and regulatory issues that affect their operations. The emerging opportunities include online transactions, knowledge acquisition and sharing, and the customized delivery of services. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **7.1 Firms are rethinking their business models more frequently as they strive to compete and grow.** Associations can follow the lead of business by turning to their core assets as new sources of revenue generation.
- **7.2 An increasingly vocal and activist public and the rise of watchdog groups are pressuring business for greater transparency.** More associations are likely to be called on to set new standards and codes of ethics for the trade sectors or professions they serve.

- **7.3 Business is responding to new pressures to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.** Associations, while not responsible for many of the public image problems business has, are likely to be swept up in the new climate of reform as not-for-profit representatives of professions and sectors.
- **7.4 Organizations are struggling to share what they know internally, and to acquire what they don't know.** Learning organizations must innovate socially by improving how information and knowledge are shared.
- **7.5 E-commerce continues to grow in importance despite setbacks.** More revenue may be derived from a wider variety of “menu-driven” online offerings, with users paying as they use the services.
- **7.6 People increasingly expect organizations and systems to “know it’s me” and deliver individuality.** Members are likely to want relationships of trust with their associations; they will want to be recognized and catered to as individuals.
- **7.7 Business involves customers more in innovation.** There may be emerging opportunities to capture reactions to conference sessions or new products, for example, in close to real time.
- **7.8 U.S. firms face new competitors from overseas.** Greater world competition may exacerbate the competitive issues within an association. Look for alternative ways to offer information and market access.

TREND GROUP EIGHT: GOVERNMENT & REGULATION

Government is a more expensive enterprise every year, with greater demands on its resources. It is also being profoundly influenced by the availability of online access, which can help those who would influence policy organize in new ways. Trends in this group and their key consequences for associations are:

- **8.1 Governments at all levels struggle to meet greater demands with limited resources.** In the long term, associations and not-for-profits will have to rely more on private sector funds and fees for services.
- **8.2 The costs of government continue to rise.** The competition for new program funding and for maintaining current program support will get increasingly tougher.
- **8.3 Demands for transparency are rising.** Executives and boards should take a soul-searching look at how the association manages its affairs and insist on consistent, frequent, and clear communication of the financial facts.
- **8.4 States are likely to seek more and new ways of raising revenues.** Governments will seek to collect a microtax on every business transaction online.
- **8.5 Women are becoming more influential in elected and appointed positions in the U.S. federal, state, and local governments.** This has implications for advocacy, political action committees, selection of issues, networking, and the recruitment and training of people for political and leadership positions.
- **8.6 Interest groups are organizing into electronic networks and coalitions.** An association can extend its influence by forming electronic coalitions and communities with like-minded organizations.

- **8.7 Federal, state, and local governments are becoming more involved in surveillance.** Careful monitoring of new demands for tracking and information will help an association stay ahead of this trend.
- **8.8 Governance is being influenced by wider Internet access.** The Internet is shaping politics and political response. Associations must be aware of and ready to influence these changes.

Internal Trends

Since 1994, the ASAE Foundation has researched and identified trends in the association community and explored the implications of those trends for ASAE members and their business partners. Many of the association trends established in earlier environmental scans remain valid, and their implications are still topical and relevant. For instance, the 1999 ASAE Foundation publication titled *Facing the Future* identified these trends shaping associations and their partners, which remain valid in 2003:

The Internet. Innovative use of the Internet has become a mainstay for associations, with many using interactive technologies for education, collaboration, member communications, management of meeting attendance, and publishing. What once was considered innovative is probably mainstream today, as both associations and their members become increasingly accustomed to online access for all of the association's key services.

Shifts in strategic focus. Faced with rising and changing expectations from members, associations must focus on core competencies and the services members consider most important. Job seekers, for example, may find accreditation, and certification programs especially advantageous in tight economic times. Small associations, in particular, will have to concentrate on fewer issues where they can have the most influence.

Outsourcing/co-sourcing. This is an ongoing trend, with most association staffs having to do more with less in 2003 and years to come. Some of the emerging co-sourcing efforts are with technology companies to develop software and business-to-business services.

Volunteer management. A shift is underway from long-term, time-intensive volunteer participation to short-term, focused volunteer opportunities. In the next few years, different groups of people will have volunteer time available. For example, women executives taking time out from their careers will be interested in high-powered change initiatives that will give them new experience and skills. Post-retirement workers will want to put together a portfolio of part-time work and part-time volunteering.

Organizational structure, culture, and governance. Associations continue to seek greater flexibility, less hierarchy, and more collaboration through staff and board structures. Recession will lead to more layoffs and smaller staffs, meaning that new structures may not receive all the support they were intended to have.

Increased competition. Large associations with broad memberships may face more competition from microspecialty associations. In the future, information technologies will make it possible for a small staff to provide personalized information and services for a particular affinity group or technical specialty. Associations can deal with competition by merger or by alliance. More mergers are likely to occur in tough economic times, with the association best prepared for the merger benefiting the most.

Operating Conditions

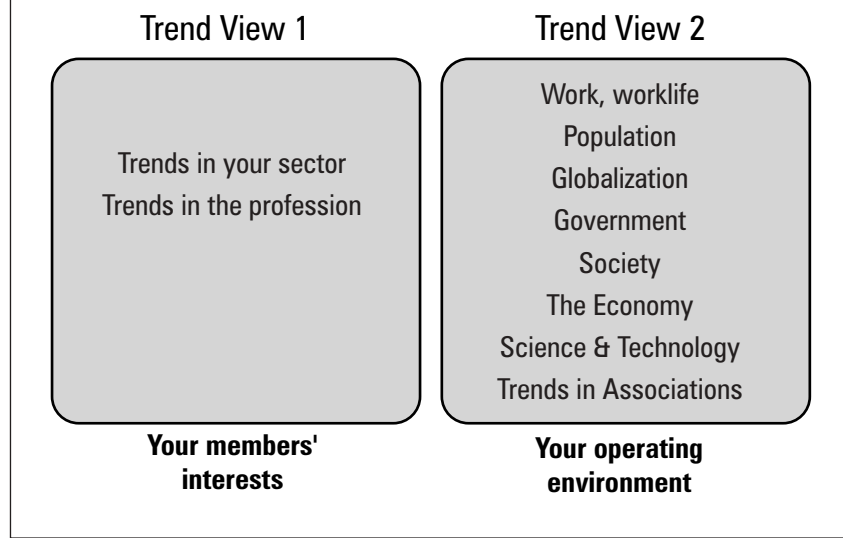
As a consequence of changes in the internal environment for associations, several conclusions emerge. Taken together, these six conclusions represent operating conditions that associations are likely to face in the future:

- 1. Micro-specialties will expand.** This model, once typical of the healthcare field, is now likely to develop in other areas where members believe their interests are diverging from those of an older, more generalized organization.
- 2. Differentiation is occurring.** People and organizations have more choices. To stand out clearly, associations must clearly differentiate their mission and market it as a brand.
- 3. An aging membership may limit appeal.** Aging will affect some associations profoundly. Associations that make a deliberate transition will find themselves bringing younger people into leadership roles earlier than in the past.
- 4. Relevancy concerns increase.** Because of increasing pressure on members' time and a sense of the greater value of personal time, associations could become a lower priority for many people.
- 5. Perception of risk remains high.** Over the next decade, general social anxiety—a feeling of being in an uncertain society with an uncertain future—is likely to recur. The perception of greater risk in the world will affect association operations. For example, staff or members may think twice before volunteering to travel to parts of the world considered dangerous.
- 6. Traditional association structure and operations are being shaken up.** Associations are taking a more business-like approach, which includes an interest in measuring results. Shaking up association operations, although it may have painful implications for people and programs, may lead to leaner, stronger organizations.

Bringing the Future into Strategy Making

It is easy to be aware of the near-term forces, issues, and trends that your organization faces. But how do you fit them into longer-term patterns of change? And how do you process, sort, and analyze the deluge of information that comes your way? Some of it may not be relevant; on the other hand, you might overlook information that could have serious repercussions for your association's future.

FIGURE 2: TWO TREND VIEWS



As this illustration shows, looking at trends in two areas—member interest and your operating environment—enables you to understand current issues and changes in their full context. This is what foresight is all about. In one area you have macro-trends—sometimes referred to as mega-trends—that include broad changes in the economy, society, the population, policy, business, science, and technology. These define the macro-environment in which your association operates. In the other area are trends that have relevance to your particular association.

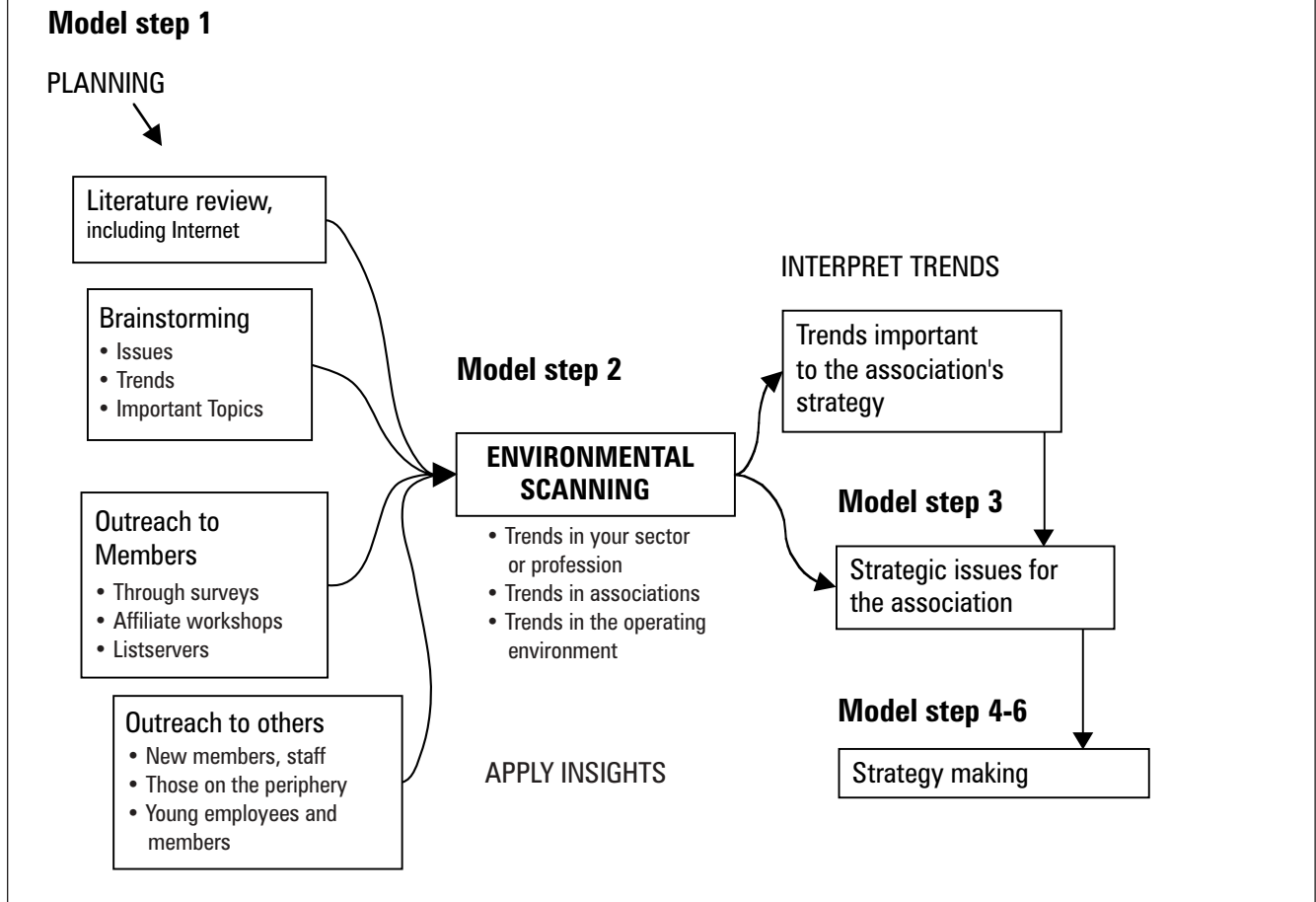
Preparing Your Association

Before you start a strategy making process, determine where your association is in its growth and development and what is ripe for change. Part of your work may involve getting ready for new thinking and preparing your association for it. Busy professional lives mean that association leaders can make decisions with too little foresight. Often, they may not think about the wider context of the organization.

To introduce new thinking into your association, to move beyond what you already know, conduct environmental scanning. The aim of an environmental scan is to find and identify change in society by examining the sources and direction of change as they become evident through media, publications, and individual observation and experience. Much of this information is gathered by reviewing current and recent issues of periodicals, magazines, newspapers, and newsletters and from material published on the Internet. This material is then tested and validated against the experience of the scanners and their contacts within the system or sector for which the scan is intended.

The insights that emerge from the environmental scanning process provide the full context in which your association will operate over the next year. You'll begin to see what is important now and what will arrive over the next few years.

FIGURE 3: ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING AND THE SIX-STEP MODEL



Establishing a Framework for Strategy

When making the transition from environmental scanning to strategy making, your perspective changes abruptly. You go from observing the world as it is to acting on what you have learned to advance the mission and goals of the organization.

Before strategy can even begin to take shape, the strategy makers must themselves align in a common understanding of what strategy is and how it works. This task has become increasingly difficult, as traditional approaches to strategy making have changed substantially in recent years. Use of the term “strategic planning” is fading in favor of “strategic management” and “strategic governance.”

As the rate of change accelerates, the planning horizon shortens to a point where planning and implementing merge into a seamless experience. In strategic management, leaders set the direction and align the efforts of those engaged in the strategy making process.

If people are to share a common understanding of strategy and how it works, they need a *framework*—a commonly held set of definitions and assumptions about the way people function in a dynamic model of organizational change. Developing such a framework involves three tasks.

1. DETERMINE THE CONTEXT FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT.

Your organization must constantly adapt to changes in the environment, improving the value of its products and services in the process. Adaptation, however, is inherently destabilizing. Consistent, predictable, well-known work patterns must be abandoned while new ones are acquired through trial and error.

An organization experiencing too much change can fall apart from a lack of stability. Conversely, one that is too stable may not be keeping up with important change. Essentially, 80 percent of what the association did last year will be replicated in what it does next year. Perhaps 20 percent of the association's energy will be expended on significant adaptations. This may involve structural change in the organization, the introduction of new programs and the demise of old ones, or a reprogramming in the way leaders think about governance.

The actual set point for this 80/20 rule will vary according to the rate of change in the profession or industry being represented. Some successful organizations have been forced to adapt quickly, with a much greater investment than 20 percent of their energy and resources, but that rate is not sustainable for the long term.

FIGURE 4: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



In this framework, leadership is defined as *the ability to develop a vision that motivates others to move with a passion toward a common goal*. Management is defined as *the ability to organize resources and coordinate the execution of tasks necessary to reach a goal in a timely and cost-effective manner*.

The vertical axis certainly involves leadership: The program activities must remain connected to the values that drive the pursuit of the mission. At the same time, the day-to-day work of delivering programs depends on good management. The horizontal axis requires management skills to recognize issues and develop strategies, while the need to destabilize the routine and inspire people to take the risks associated with change requires strong leadership.

2. DEVELOP A DYNAMIC MODEL OF STRATEGY.

Drawing on the work of James Brian Quinn, a management guru from Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, strategy has four primary elements:

- *Issues* which represent the driving force behind the strategy.
- *Policies* that influence or limit the actions the organization can take in addressing the issue.
- *Desired outcomes* to be achieved as a result of the strategy.
- *Actions* taken to achieve the outcome.

The path from understanding an issue to achieving a desired outcome is never as clear as it may appear in a succinctly stated plan. Strategy always involves a process of discovery, which is guided by the issues, policies, desired outcomes, and the people involved in the action plan. Leadership's function in developing strategy is to establish these coordinates in a way that energizes everyone's sense of discovery.

Take, for example, an association representing applied scientists. Its leaders fear the emergence of a new technology will adversely affect its members; they also see that a demographic group outside the membership will assume growing responsibility for the functions that will be created or dispersed by the new technology. They recognize the need to act and know that building obstacles to keep others out would be at odds with the association's guiding principles. So, they change the association's bylaws and recruit the new demographic group into their membership.

The effort to attract a new membership segment, however, did not pan out. There were many dashed expectations. In retrospect, the leaders should have created a clearer understanding of the driving issue within the larger community of people who would be involved.

3. RECOGNIZE AND REFINE THE TRULY STRATEGIC ISSUES.

A strategic issue is an agent of change. It is coming over the horizon (or up from the depths) and needs to be recognized, understood, tracked over time, and dealt with as a force that bears consequences for the association and its constituents. Environmental scanning provides just one source of strategic issues; ideally, draw on at least four other sources: organizational assessments, program evaluations, market/industry dynamics, and competitive intelligence.

Once you have extracted information from the five primary sources and "preconditioned" it to be clear, concise, and consistent in format, you can further refine a strategic issue. Format each one *as a single-sentence statement containing two variables that are affecting one another in a way that demands your attention.*

A properly framed strategic issue has the following attributes:

- It captures a force at work in the environment that exists independent of the strategy makers or any reference to them. (Note: This applies only to external issues; internal issues from an organizational assessment do not meet this test.)
- It provides a reason to act without specifying what the action might be.
- It is verifiable, in a manner that can be researched and documented.
- It is compelling, creating an urgent need to act.

You might end up with one independent variable driving a "cluster" of dependent variables. For example, one association that accredits engineering programs framed an issue in this way:

Accreditation of degree programs delivered entirely by distance learning brings into question:

- The site-specific requirements of the laboratory experience
- Interpersonal role of the faculty in counseling students
- Security and authentication of examinations
- Development of teamwork in the cultural norms of the profession
- Traditional methods of program assessment

Your industry or profession probably faces an endless number of issues—but how many can your association reasonably address? To deal with this overload, create and promote a “radar screen” of the strategic issues you are both aware of and in a position to do something about.

Keep the radar screen front and center at all times to help build consensus and maintain energy levels. Issues raise passions—and create energy your association can tap into—so use your radar screen as a leadership tool. Make it a prominent feature of your strategic plan. Give it to board officers and directors to use as a speech outline. Allocate time at every board meeting to collect the feedback on what everyone is hearing from the members.

Once you have generated a radar screen, divide the issues into two or possibly three groups. Designate the top group, which should contain no more than three issues, as requiring immediate attention in the strategy making process. This means delegating the issues to specific parties, with the expectation that proposals will be prepared for the next budget cycle or discussion of resource allocation. The other issues will remain front and center in the group’s collective awareness and be next in line for development once strategies for the top-tier issues are underway.

In general, delegating strategic issues to strategy makers takes place as one administrative year begins, with the expectation that plans will be ready for consideration in the next budget cycle. The annual budget cycle simply provides a backdrop—not a requirement—for the pace of strategy making. A fast-track issue may move more quickly, or a demanding issue may take more than a year to deliberate.

Developing Strategies

Once the issues have been evaluated and the priorities set, you have selected the issues for strategy development. But who should do what?

One popular governing model specifies that volunteer leaders should set the policies and desired outcomes and then leave the action planning and deployment to the staff. If applied too strictly, this approach may not work well in the dynamic strategy model because it depends upon assigning the lead responsibility to those who know the most about what needs to be done or those who do most of the work—regardless of title or position.

If, for example, the association is a trade group in which the “active” members are corporate CEOs who fly in and out on the same day for a board meeting, their interest in taking on responsibility may be limited to discussing strategic issues and setting policies. If it’s a technical engineering society that writes standards using an army of volunteers, it wouldn’t make sense to give staff the exclusive authority for developing and deploying action plans.

Ideally, the board of directors or executive committee will delegate a selected issue to a team of people who know the most about it and any likely actions. This might be a volunteer committee, a task force with both volunteers and experienced staff managers, or a staff department. They are charged with developing the four elements of a strategy:

- **Strategic issue**—a background statement that explains what is known about the causes driving the issue and the consequences if it remains unaddressed.

- **Policies**—guiding principles that will influence the determination of the outcomes and action plans.
- **Outcomes**—the target outcome as known at the time
- **Actions**—What needs to be done to achieve the desired outcome, in a manner that respects the principles and resolves the tensions inherent in the strategic issue.

While every strategy will have a unique learning agenda, answering these 10 questions will provide you with a “shopping list” of the basic information needed:

1. Is there a reasonably solid understanding of the forces that are driving the strategic issue (causes) and the consequences (effects) if it is left to play out on its own?
2. What, if anything, is the association, industry, or profession currently doing to address any related aspects of the issue?
3. What don't we know about the issue that we know we need to know?
4. Who are the competitors?
5. Have appropriate guiding principles been clearly established (as in policy)?
6. What are the attributes of the desired outcome?
7. What are the macro cause-and-effects that would move us from the current situation to the desired outcome?
8. What are the known obstacles?
9. What will it cost? Who will be involved? How long will it take?
10. What wild speculations might give some insight into what is not known or even recognized as being important?

Incremental Management

Strategy making for an association is an exploration and a dialogue that pulls the expertise of diverse interests into a collaboration and strives for a goal. Strategy is best thought of in its active state—as a force that is finding its way, intelligently.

In a good sense, the strategic manager is a trouble maker. The status quo is comfortable, while change can be messy. Plus, people disagree about reasons to act differently and the different things that could be done. The practitioner of incremental strategy prods this process along and, when necessary, causes the “trouble” that leads to radical change through well-informed and well-considered strategy.

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