

# Strategic Planning In Times Of Uncertainty

*Times they are a changing. The only real constant is change itself.* These are both sayings we have heard before. They reference the pace and speed of change. With everything changing so fast and in ways that we have no way of predicting, how can we undertake a strategic plan and think about planning for the future?

To answer this question first requires dispelling some widely held myths about strategic planning.

## **Myth 1. A strategic plan predicts the future.**

This is a common belief and the foundation of the argument that you can't plan in times of uncertainty. It is true that a strategic plan helps set an organization's direction. It's also true that the organization will move in specific direction in uncertain times whether you plan a strategy or not. The real question you have to ask yourself is whether you want the organization to drift along in any direction or whether you would rather set the direction. Times of uncertainty aren't the time to let go of the reins; it's a time to take charge. However, the way you take charge has to change.

## **Myth 2. The goal of a strategic plan is only to set a specific direction.**

The focus of the strategic planning process is to set a general direction, obtain stakeholder input and commitment to that general direction and build the organization's capacity. The strategic plan doesn't limit the organizations capabilities it builds them.

## **Myth 3. Once a strategic direction has been set it's difficult to change it.**

There is no doubt that an organization that has been doing the same thing for many years and has focused purely on a specific objective will have challenges changing direction. The key to developing the capacity to change direction is in the pursuit of a general direction through the development of resource capabilities. This building of internal capabilities provides the basis to continue to move forward towards your objectives while building the capabilities to change direction if required.

## **Your Current Strategic Planning Process May Be Your Achilles Heal**

The key during your strategic planning process is not to focus on the detailed development of numerous goals and objectives. This type of thinking works well in stable environments, but becomes far too cumbersome in fast changing times. Many organizations that take the approach of developing a series of objectives that are too specific and end up constantly reviewing their objectives as they try to stay aligned with the ever-changing environment. Isn't there a better way that makes more effective use of resources?

## **So How Do You Undertake Strategic Planning In Uncertain Times?**

This is where we can take a page out of the book of successful technology companies. These organization's built themselves around a strong vision and used their strategic planning processes to build organizational capabilities and resources that provided them the ability to grow and leverage.

As a non-profit organization you need to remain true to your vision and focus your strategic planning process on the building of resources and capabilities that you can use in pursuit of your current vision and leverage successfully if you need to change direction

in the future. This doesn't mean that you abandon setting goals and objectives or linking your strategy to performance measures. What it does mean is you have to change the basis of your goals, objectives and measures. The focus would move towards measuring activities and capabilities and less on outcomes.

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