

A DEFINITION OF APPLIED STRATEGIC PLANNING

“**APPLIED STRATEGIC PLANNING (ASP)** is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future.” This vision of the future state of the organization provides both the direction in which the organization should move and the energy to begin that move. The envisioning process is very different from long range planning ~ the simple extrapolation of statistical trends or forecasts ~ and it is more attempting to anticipate the future and prepare accordingly. Envisioning involves a belief that aspects of the future can be influenced and changed by what one does now. Properly implemented, the strategic planning process can help the organization to create its future.

ASP, is however, more than an envisioning process. It requires the setting of clear goals and objectives and attainment of those goals and objectives within specified periods of time in order to reach the planned future state. Thus, targets must be developed within the context of the desired future state and must be realistic, objective, and attainable. The goals and objectives developed within the strategic planning process should provide the managers in the organization with a set of core priorities and guidelines for virtually all day to day managerial decisions.

This new model of strategic planning focuses on the processes of planning, not the plan that is produced. Although documents delineating mission statements, strategic goals, functional objectives and so on, do emerge from the planning processes, it is the process of self-examination, the confrontation of difficult choices, and the establishment of priorities that characterize successful strategic planning. Documents too often are merely filed away until revisions are mandated by some external force.

Strategic planning also is a reiterative process. Strategic planning and strategic management ~ the day to day implementation of the strategic plan ~ are the most important, never ending tasks of all managers and especially those in top management. Once a strategic planning cycle is completed, the manager’s task is to ensure its implementation and then to plan when to begin the next planning cycle. The future, by definition, always faces us; thus, organizations and the people who run them, must be in the simultaneous processes of planning and implementing plans.

Understanding Applied Strategic Planning

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What Do You Mean By “Applied Strategic Planning?”

First of all, strategic planning is a process not a procedure. It is an especially powerful process because *it merges linear logic with non-linear vision* through the examination of increasingly specific questions.

- What is our social-cultural-political-economic situation? How is this influencing your group/organization/business? Where does our organization fit?
- Given this situation analysis, what services and products should we provide? For whom? In what kind of facility &/or mediums? At what cost and at what profit? How can we evolve this vision? How will this vision be accepted in our community?
- In terms of today’s operational realities within our association, what are our weaknesses, opportunities, threats and strengths ~ personally and organizationally?
- In terms of attaining our vision, what are our weaknesses, opportunities, threats and strengths ~ personally and organizationally?
- How can we utilize all of this information in the development of an underlying plan?

In the presence of all this information, most of us would be inclined to develop a plan which would carry us from where we are to where we want to be. *However, there is massive evidence in the private sector that we inevitably carry with us our limitations, and they bias the outcome of our future.*

Through strategic planning, we conceptually leap forward into our vision. As a result of assuming that our vision is fully operational, we are able to **concretely** visualize what **can be** AND THEN WE PROCEED BACKWARD IN OUR PLANNING UNTIL WE MEET OUR CURRENT REALITY.

The result is very different than planning forward. When we plan from reality toward vision, the process is linear and sequential. *This is not wrong but it is incomplete.* However, when we assume the operational validity of our vision, we shed our limitations; we build upon aspirations rather than limitations.

“In conventional planning, current reality influences our Vision; but in Strategic Planning, our Vision influences current reality. The difference in outcome is enormous. Applied Strategic Planning permits extraordinary, creative synergy within prudent business considerations.”
~ Dr. Bob Frazer