

www.ncsl.org.uk



Success and Sustainability:

Developing the strategically-focused school

© National College for School Leadership

Authors

Dr Brent Davies, Professor of Leadership Development, University of Hull

Dr Barbara J Davies, Headteacher of Washingborough Foundation Primary School, Lincolnshire

Linda Ellison, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, University of Nottingham

Authors' Note

This has been a fascinating project. First, it has given us the opportunity to work with outstanding leaders in primary, secondary and special schools. In the report we have sought to capture these leadership voices as part of the text. Second, we have been enthralled, not only by the ability of school leaders to manage their schools effectively in their current context, but by their efforts to seek new and innovative ways of enhancing educational provision for the future.

Strategy is often associated with dull plans and programmes. Nothing could be further from the truth with these leaders. They have seen strategy as a way of thinking and creating the future. Indeed it has been a liberating experience for them as they move from the operational part of their role and seek to improve the educational opportunities for their students in the future. Significantly, strategic processes focused on strategic conversations with colleagues have been a major factor in developing the strategically-focused school. Being able to discuss and work with colleagues on ideas for the future educational direction of the school is vital. However, it is an activity that can become marginalised by the day-to-day pressures and challenges of school life. Strategic leaders in our study have managed the short-term pressures and built a strategic dimension to their leadership. They have met the challenge of doing this while at the same time ensuring that the present operation is providing quality education.

Building capability and capacity to shape a successful and sustainable future is what strategic leadership is all about. The booklet outlines a framework that combines strategic processes and approaches with strategic leadership to develop successful and sustainable schools for the future. We are very grateful for the leaders who have shared their time and expertise with us and we hope that this booklet allows that knowledge and expertise to be more widely shared in the educational community.

Brent Davies

Barbara J Davies

Linda Ellison



Success and Sustainability: Developing the strategically- focused school

Contents

INTRODUCTION		3	
What is Strategy and Why is it Important?		6	
A. Strategy is about direction setting		7	
B. Strategy is about the medium- to longer-term		8	
C. Strategy is about whole school broader trends and actions		9	
D. Strategy is about strategic thinking and taking a strategic perspective		10	
E. Strategy acts as a template for current actions		11	
F. Strategy is about providing for the long-term sustainability of the school		12	
A Model for Developing the Strategically-focused School		14	
SECTION ONE: STRATEGIC PROCESSES		15	
Introduction	15	C. Articulating the Strategy	28
A. Conceptualising	16	i Oral	28
i Reflecting	17	ii Written	29
ii Strategic thinking	18	iii Structural	30
iii Analysing and synthesising	20	D. Implementing the Strategy	34
iv Constructing mental models	20	i Translating strategy into action	34
B. Engaging the People	22	ii Strategic alignment	35
i Strategic conversations	23	iii Sequential and parallel actions	37
ii Strategic participation	24	iv Strategic timing and abandonment	39
iii Strategic motivation	26		
iv Strategic capability	27		

SECTION TWO: STRATEGIC APPROACHES		43
Introduction		43
A.	Strategic planning	44
B.	Emergent strategy	50
C.	Strategic intent	52
D.	Devolved strategy	58
Integrating the Approaches		59
SECTION THREE: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP		61
Introduction		
A. What Strategic Leaders Do		62
i	Setting the direction of the school	62
ii	Translating strategy into action	63
iii	Aligning the people and the organisation with the strategy	63
iv	Determining effective strategic intervention points	64
v	Developing strategic capabilities in the school	65
B. Characteristics that Strategic Leaders Display		66
i	They challenge and question; they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present	66
ii	They prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding	68
iii	They display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system	68
iv	They have powerful personal and professional networks	69
v	They have high quality personal and interpersonal skills (EQ)	70
Conclusion		
CONCLUSIONS: BUILDING THE STRATEGICALLY-FOCUSED SCHOOL: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS?		71
A.	Develop both a short-term and a strategic perspective in the school	72
B.	Develop and enhance strategic processes in the school	73
C.	Develop and deploy a variety of strategic approaches in the school	74
D.	Develop and enhance strategic leadership throughout the school	75
E.	Develop strategic measures of success in the school	76
REFERENCE MATERIAL		77
References and Further Reading		77
Appendix: Methodology		79

Introduction

This booklet is based on a research project focused on how schools can build on good short-term school development (improvement) planning and address the issues of both sustainability and of longer-term capability and capacity building. It takes as its theme one of the 10 leadership propositions of the National College for School Leadership that:

School leadership must be futures orientated and strategically driven

The study has looked in depth at highly successful strategically-focused primary, secondary and special schools to ascertain the critical factors in schools that contribute to a strategic approach. The aim of this has been to seek schools that are effectively managing their current provision but are simultaneously developing and enhancing educational provision for their children in the future.

The questions about which the project has been seeking insights are:

- How do schools translate their core purpose and futures perspective into action by deploying a strategic approach?
- How do schools build strategic processes that enable staff to engage in futures and strategic discussions to build capability to move ahead from the short-term target-setting culture to enable longer-term development to take place?
- How do schools go about planning for strategic development – what strategic approaches can be used to plan for the future?
- What are the components of strategic leadership that can be developed within the school?
- What are the characteristics of successful strategically-focused schools? Can these be identified and articulated?

These sorts of questions suggest that leaders should ensure that they are meeting current targets and benchmarks, but that they should also be looking further ahead. They should be seeking not just to improve incrementally on what they are doing but should be planning to develop significant capacity and capability to make radical and important shifts in provision so as to make major educational gains.

There are different challenges facing different types of schools. Those in 'special measures' or with 'serious weaknesses' put huge effort into improving performance on short-term targets but do they also need a strategic approach? It is a common view that once they are out of current difficulties, they can move on to a more strategic long-term approach. We would suggest that short-term improvement and longer-term capacity and capability-building should take place concurrently as one supports the other. At the other end of the scale, highly successful schools can fall into the complacency trap and not challenge current orthodoxy. We suggest that strategic reappraisal and redirection are equally important for these schools.

There has been a great deal of misunderstanding of strategy, aligning it almost exclusively with strategic planning — a rather predictable linear process which best suits a stable environment. This booklet will look at strategy in terms of strategic thinking, a strategic perspective and strategic capability/capacity and will present a number of frameworks that are available to the strategic leader.

In particular, the booklet will address the issue of developing strategic leadership capability and capacity across the school community. We believe that one of the key contributors to enhancing distributed leadership in schools is the development of a strategic perspective in a wide section of the staff community by involving them in strategic processes that enable them to take on this strategic view. We will define strategic capacity as the appropriate level of resources, people and financial or physical resources; we will define strategic capability as the quality and skills of those resources. Thus, one of the significant strategic challenges for schools is to ensure that they have the right number of people (capacity) and that those people have the right skills and competencies (capability).

This booklet addresses the following questions:

1. What is strategy and why is it important?

Strategy is a process of both looking forward to a new way of operating for the school and of developing the means of planning a journey to get there. This section looks at definitions of strategy and why it is important, what is meant by a strategic focus and how models of strategic development can be established. Finally, it looks at different time-frames for planning.

2. What is an appropriate model for developing the strategically-focused school?

Creating a model for the strategically-focused school can provide a framework for effective strategic development. This booklet proposes a model that links strategic processes, strategic approaches and strategic leadership to create the dimensions of a strategically-focused school.

3. What strategic processes do schools deploy?

This section draws on the concept that when a school involves itself in strategic development, the 'how' of the developments are as important as 'what' is done to achieve successful change. It develops a four-stage sequence for the operation of strategic processes and draws on schools' exemplars to illustrate how this approach works in practice.

4. What strategic approaches do schools adopt?

Traditionally strategy has been closely aligned to strategic planning which assumes a rational longer-term and often detailed plan. While there is value in strategic planning, this section develops the view that complementary approaches of emergent strategy, devolved strategy and, particularly, strategic intent can be adopted effectively for use in schools.

5. What are the key organisational and individual characteristics that strategic leaders need?

Leaders in both the senior and distributed leadership teams need to develop organisational leadership capability as well as individual leadership capability. This section looks at what those capabilities are and how they can be developed.

6. What are the implications for school leaders?

The final section considers the key attributes of a strategically-focused school and how they can be enhanced and developed to build future capability.

This booklet has been produced with the help and support of school leadership teams who have shared their insights, experiences and school documentation to enable us to develop the material. We worked with 10 primary, 10 secondary and three special schools to conduct in-depth case studies of strategic practice. In interviewing the staff in those schools, examining their approaches and documents, we were able to put together an exciting picture of how schools build capacity and capability for future development. We are grateful for all their contributions.

We believe that the information here will provide a framework for leaders in schools to review their practice and enhance their ability to provide strategic direction for their schools. We would encourage you to read the whole booklet, however, it has been organised into sections to facilitate accessing specific aspects of strategy as and when appropriate.

What is Strategy and Why is it Important?

It is important in schools to have an agreed understanding of what is meant by strategy to facilitate discussion and debate about the strategic direction and development of the school. This section looks at six dimensions of strategy to build that common understanding:

- A. Strategy is about direction setting.
- B. Strategy is about the medium to longer term.
- C. Strategy is about whole school broader trends or actions.
- D. Strategy is about strategic thinking and taking a strategic perspective.
- E. Strategy acts as a template for current actions.
- F. Strategy is about providing for the long-term sustainability of the school.



A. Strategy is about direction setting

The most common view of strategy is that it involves setting the direction for the school. It is the process of providing a coherent way of translating the core moral purpose of the school and its values into action, influenced by a futures perspective and vision. It is vital that the school establishes the strategic context through a clear articulation of its core moral purposes and values as strategy is a delivery vehicle that can effectively translate those values; in itself strategy only takes on the values of the context within which it is operating. The core purpose and values are precursors to establishing the futures perspective and vision for the school. Poor strategies often emerge because of lack of clarification of core purpose, values and vision. School leaders should ensure that sufficient emphasis is placed on this critical first stage. This strategic context is as important as the strategic deployment approach. Thus, strategy provides the medium-term, broad directional view of the school which leads to effective operational activities. These relationships can be seen in figure 1:

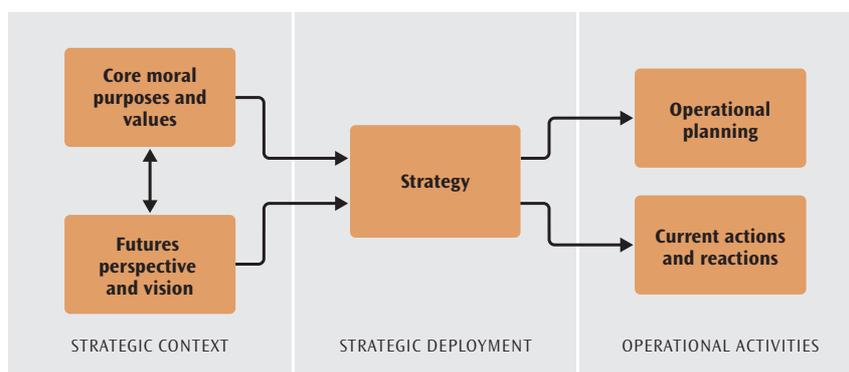


Figure 1: The role of strategy (based on Davies and Davies 2005)

Figure 1 illustrates how the core moral purposes and the futures perspective clarify the context for the strategy which links them to operational planning and actions. This is very well articulated by headteachers in the study:

I think at different levels. My levels are:

- the moral purpose that informs why we actually do the things that we do
- visionary thinking, which I define as being long-term and idealistic, that's where we would like to head for
- strategic, which is more medium-term realistic steps towards that vision
- school development planning, which is fairly short-term operation for specific events and activities

Secondary headteacher

Strategy for me is about having a plan of where you are going and why you are going.

Primary headteacher

Strategy is also about aligning the organisation and its resources to that future direction as articulated by these two headteachers:

Your strategy is how you are going to get there, what kind of structures you put in place in the school, what measures you take to make things happen, how you use the money - all these things build up a strategy to getting where you want to get to.

Primary headteacher

It's talking about marshalling your resources and looking with a future perspective in order to achieve the maximum potential in an organisation.

Primary headteacher

It is important to remember that strategy is a neutral delivery vehicle. If you have a poor vision and a dubious moral purpose then a good strategic process and approach may effectively deliver it for you! The significance of this is that strategy does not exist in a vacuum; it needs to be part of a wider process of values-led leadership and futures visioning.

The view of strategy as direction-setting is often linked to writing strategic plans. This can be a useful process but it is a mistake to link strategy and strategic planning as if they were the same thing. They are not. Later in the 'strategic approaches' section, other ways of delivering strategy will be considered, especially emergent strategy, strategic intent and devolved strategy formation.

B. Strategy is about the medium- to longer-term

One of the common misunderstandings is to think that strategy can be achieved by adding an extra year or two onto a short-term operational plan. While it is not possible to draw hard barriers between the short, medium and long term because, in practice, the stages blend into each other, as a rough guide it is useful to think of short-term action planning as a one- to two-year process with strategy as a five-year view and futures thinking as moving beyond that. This can be seen as follows:

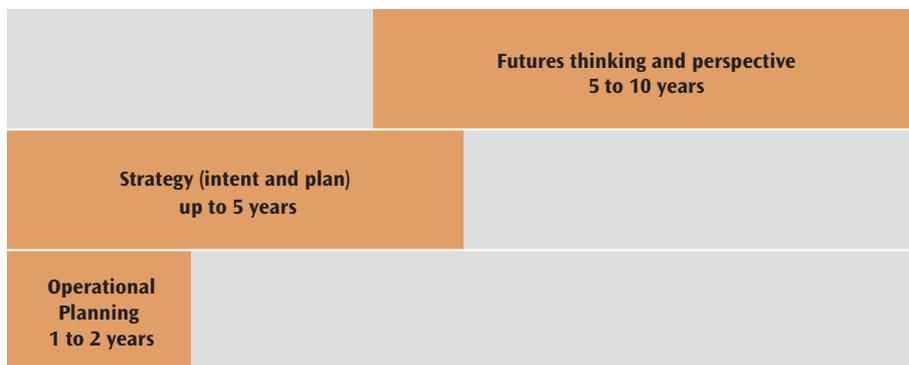


Figure 2: The planning time-dimensions (based on Davies and Ellison 2003, p.5)

The way that headteachers see the medium- to longer-term perspective is articulated in the following views:

Strategy for me is taking a long-term view about how to make realistic sense of the vision and how you achieve that vision over a period of time. At the moment we are working with a five-year time scale and I think that is right for a strategic plan, personally. But I don't think we should ever lose sight of the longer-term after that.

Secondary headteacher

For me it's very much a kind of multi-faceted concept and I like the idea of having the futures thinking dimension and then the strategic intent then the operations bit of it as well.

Primary headteacher

A five year plan with less detail as you go on...it's not the detail you want, it's the general direction that you need, futures thinking and having ideas to generate discussion.

Special school headteacher

It's the governors in particular that I am working with at the moment. They are producing documents to try and describe what these future perspectives are...that futures thinking is up to 10 years.

Primary headteacher

C. Strategy is about broader whole-school trends and actions

Strategy is about broader and fundamental elements of the school. It should address the core and significant issues that the school will encounter and seek to deploy approaches that will meet those challenges. It should not be seeking to replicate the short-term detailed plans but with an extra year or two of detail.

I think when we talk about strategy within the school that we are actually talking about the main features of the school, how they develop and how we adapt to changing issues and challenges. We are seeing which are appropriate or not and how they fit with our direction in school to get a clear view of where we are going to go in two to five years.

Primary headteacher

To me strategy is the way of me trying to look forward to make sense of a whole big picture and find ways of going forward and improving my school in a number of ways.

Secondary headteacher

It's about futures thinking not about the detail - it's the big picture stuff based on what the community needs - we exist for parents and children.

Special school headteacher

Writing a strategic framework, that includes a strategic intent statement and a strategic plan, should not result in replicating the detail of the two- to three-year school improvement/development plan. Strategy should focus on the core and fundamental elements in a school's future direction and should articulate these. The management maxims of 'more from less' and 'the thicker the plan the less it affects practice' are very true here. Strategy development should be a way of the whole school community focusing on the key issues that are fundamental for successful future development. It should also enable the school to separate out the strategic activities and the operational activities in a coherent way.

D. Strategy is about strategic thinking and taking a strategic perspective

Strategy can usefully be considered as a way to think about things. Bob Garratt (2003: 2-3) gives an excellent definition of strategic thinking:

'Strategic Thinking' is the process by which an organisation's direction-givers can rise above the daily managerial processes and crises to gain different perspectives Such perspectives should be both future-oriented and historically understood. Strategic thinkers must have the skills of looking ... forwards ...while knowing where their organisation is now, so that wise risks can be taken while avoiding having to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Henry Mintzberg (2003: 79-83) gives a famous definition of strategic thinking as "seeing ahead", "seeing behind", "seeing above", "seeing below", "seeing beside", "seeing beyond" and, significantly, "seeing it through". In essence, it is the way that we look at the school in the broader context of its current situation and its future direction with the skills necessary to implement any actions successfully.

The way that strategic thinking and perspective can be linked is described by one headteacher as follows:

I have often been fond of the expression of 'keeping your feet on the ground whilst having your head in the clouds' and I sometimes call myself a 'pragmatopian' - a mixture of vision and pragmatism based on 'we are here and now and there are only certain things that we can do'. So where you want to go, you are not quite sure how you are going to get there but you actually have the capacity within the school and the capability within the school to seize the opportunities as they arise to realise that strategy.

Secondary headteacher

E. Strategy acts as a template for current actions

Imagine yourself at a desk in the school and the desk has a sheet of bevelled glass across it. Underneath this glass are four or five pages that outline the key strategic frameworks for the future development of the school. These can be used in decision-making about choices as explained below.

In a school setting, a strategic aim could be to enhance the creative and expressive arts. If in this year's short-term plan a member of staff suggests that the school spends money on a theatre group to run some workshops what should the response be? Obviously if such expenditure contributes to the current year's school improvement plan it would seem to be good idea. If it was also meeting the strategic template for longer-term development, the rationale becomes significantly stronger. In judging whether such expenditure is valuable then, activities that meet both short-term and longer-term aspirations would certainly merit support. Thus, strategy can act as a template to reflect on whether activities in the short-term also enhance the long-term capability of the school.

What I find helps me is to have some key strategic direction points that I can keep referring to. It is very easy to get diverted by current challenges and forget about what is really important and what you are trying to achieve in the longer-term. What I need is a set of compass points that I can keep coming back to.

Secondary headteacher

The staff and I have a set of strategic benchmarks for what we are trying to achieve over the next five years. What is really important to us and why it is important is a key issue. We then use those benchmarks as a framework for current decisions. We ask ourselves, will undertaking a certain activity help us achieve those strategic benchmarks or not? It is important for us to keep focused.

Primary headteacher

F. Strategy is about providing for the long-term sustainability of the school

Good strategy is not sufficient by itself. It needs to be built on sound short-term operational planning and vice versa. One of the major themes of the government’s educational agenda on standards is to ensure that improving schools do not regress to previous underperformance and that successful schools can build on that success and move to significantly higher levels of performance. To achieve this, schools not only need short-term improvement agendas but also a strategic approach to longer-term sustainability. This is represented in Figure 3. Short-term effectiveness will not be sustainable if longer-term strategic approaches are not established. Schools will not be able to deploy longer-term strategy if short-term ineffectiveness drives the school into crises. The ideal therefore is to ensure that shorter-term effectiveness is complemented with a longer-term effective strategy.

Operational processes and planning (SDP and Target Setting)	EFFECTIVE	Functionally successful in the short term but not sustainable long term	Successful and sustainable in both the short term and long term
	INEFFECTIVE	Failure inevitable both in the short and long term	Short-term crises will prevent longer-term sustainability
		INEFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE
Strategic processes and planning			

Figure 3: Short-term viability and long-term sustainability. (based on Davies, B. J. 2004)

School leaders need both to be effectively managing the present and leading the school to the next phase of its development. While good short-term planning and target-setting will ensure effective education for the current year or the following one, it may not be adequate to keep replicating current practice by a series of incremental improvements. Therefore combining this effective short-term target approach with longer-term strategic development is the key to sustainable growth and improvement for schools.

The challenge for us is to make sure we get all the basics right, so in terms of SATs and Ofsted accountability we can be seen to be doing a good job while at the same time addressing longer-term developments. We have to look at how we reconceptualise learning so that we are a better school in five years’ time and not just a more efficient school at producing test results.

Primary headteacher

It is a dual approach really - how to get the staff to give the best deal possible to the kids today but to get them to rethink the way it might be a different deal in the future.

Secondary headteacher

A Model for Developing the Strategically-focused School

In defining strategy, the previous section considered a number of dimensions of strategy. It is now important to define what we mean by a strategically-focused school:

A strategically-focused school is one that is educationally effective in the short term but has a clear framework and processes to translate core moral purpose and vision into excellent educational provision that is challenging and sustainable in the medium to long term.

The research project has identified three components in highly successful strategic schools that contribute to developing and sustaining a strategically-focused school. They are:

- strategic processes
- strategic approaches
- strategic leadership

These three components are iterative and feed into each other but a diagrammatic representation can be shown in which strategic leadership is a central force. In the model, leadership drives strategic processes and strategic approaches which build a strategically-focused school. This inter-linkage can be seen in Figure 4 and is shown in detail in the following sections.



Figure 4: A model for developing a strategically-focused school

Section One

Strategic Processes

Introduction

A modern maxim in the leadership and management field is that how you manage a process is as important as what process you manage. This is as true of strategy as it is of other leadership and management areas. Leaders in the study were very aware of this:

I am going to start again, because in many instances the process of developing the strategy is actually as important as the strategy itself.

Primary headteacher

And one of the things that I am very good at is that holistic bringing it together in a coherent way. And one of the things that I learnt very early on was to spend as much time on how you implement as to what you implement and I spend a lot of time on what is the best way to do it.

Secondary headteacher

This booklet will consider four strategic processes:

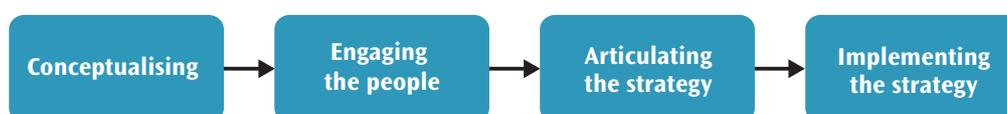


Figure 5: Strategic processes

The flow chart works on the basis that leaders first reflect and think about strategy and share initial thoughts by engaging others. The resulting ideas form a strategy which can then be articulated and finally implemented.

The detail of the four stages can be seen as follows:



Each of these will now be considered in turn

A. Conceptualising

- i. Reflecting
- ii. Strategic thinking
- iii. Analysing and synthesising
- iv. Constructing mental models

Leaders in schools go through a process of reflecting on insights that they have gained regarding future developments and on current practice. They then move into a process of strategic thinking of possible future scenarios. This leads on to a more systematic analysis and synthesis in which possible courses of action can be seen in the frameworks or mental models that are created to encapsulate the new way of thinking.

i. Reflecting

A useful quote to illustrate the danger of neglecting reflection is from Hamel and Prahalad (1994: 4-5) who see that “the urgent drives out the important; the future goes largely unexplored; and the capacity to act, rather than the capacity to think and imagine becomes the sole measure for leadership”. This will be familiar to many school leaders who deal with an increasing number of day-to-day urgent matters. It is not easy to make time to reflect on where the school is and where it should be going in the longer-term. School leaders in the study provided a number of perceptive comments on how they met the challenge of making time to consider the important as well as dealing with the urgent:

I often sit down and just brainstorm - just when I'm on my own because that is my thinking time.

Primary headteacher

Thursday is my reflection time and my reading time - I have been a headteacher now for 12 years. The first two years I ran around like a headless chicken trying to do everything and then I realised I was actually no good to the staff or myself and I decided to give myself a timetable to think.... Thursday is my time just to think, to read and to reflect and that's what I do. To be realistic it doesn't happen every single Thursday because sometimes when you walk through that door you don't know what is going to hit you.

Primary headteacher

It's also about understanding - understanding the institution and understanding yourself, understanding the other players as well in the organisation and so that you can actually take the whole thing forward.

Primary headteacher

My reflection is usually done when I'm on a train... I can't do it in school I need to be out.

Special school headteacher

Some of the ways that leaders can reflect and share ideas are suggested by two respondents:

Basically what I do is I keep a notebook of new things that hit me when I'm either reading or going to conferences and so on - which I automatically relate to this school to see whether they fit in. I do a lot of travelling to various places as well, looking for ideas. I would throw out those ideas to deputies to see what reaction I got. They would then perhaps build on those ideas and come back with something different. It would then perhaps go to the strategic policy team. It would build up right through that. By the time the final idea comes out at the end, it may not seem very much like the original idea but it doesn't matter in that sense....

Secondary headteacher

If they came to me with an idea, I'd act as a sounding board. I'd say well what evidence have you got, how are you showing me that you have thought this through. And I would say 'OK well let's give it a go and see what happens' - as long as we learn from it if it doesn't work let's learn from it....

Secondary headteacher

We are always looking around reflecting on things and asking: is that good for us? Do we need that?

Special school headteacher

ii. Strategic thinking

Reflection moves on to strategic thinking. That is the process of trying to envision a future state for the school and the processes concerned in getting there. It involves looking at the bigger picture and the major developments that the school has to undergo. It involves not only thinking about what to do, but ensuring that the approach leads to results, as one leader observed:

It's not enough just to do that thinking and reflecting... people actually want to see results.

Secondary headteacher

This can involve a fundamental shift in the way that a leader sees the world, as witnessed by these statements:

We were invited onto a school improvement programme some years ago and it's the first time I'd heard about Howard Gardner and multiple intelligences and that really did fire me up because it brought it home to me what kind of learner I was and why I had succeeded in some parts of the curriculum and failed fairly miserably in others. It struck me how much more democratic it was to have that idea about intelligence so I did a lot of personal research and I felt this is the school I want. This is how I see learning going and then other ideas come to you - accelerated learning and emotional intelligence - all those things coming together - the work on 'flow' by Csikszentmihalyi all of that was kind of burning inside and this is the type of school I want for these children.

Primary headteacher

If we need fresh ideas we need to start thinking globally.

Special school headteacher

This thinking is not the preserve of the leader in the school but of the wider distributed leadership team:

We can have a free discussion about the direction that we want to go. Often I am leading that conversation because again that's part of the privilege that I have that through my reading I am getting lots of really good ideas and testing them out.

Primary headteacher

I am trying to encourage middle management to raise the level at which they spend most of their time - a sort of average level and we know you don't do enough strategic thinking, we don't think frequently enough about what our vision is and how we are going to get there because you just get swamped by all the other things. But some of that is building in a capacity to allow yourself to do that.

Secondary headteacher

Technology School status enables my staff to get out countrywide to meet like-minded individuals to bounce ideas off each other.

Special school headteacher

iii. Analysing and synthesising

Supporting the reflection and thinking elements is the process of analysis and synthesis. Reflection is a reactive process trying to understand the significance of where the school is and what is happening in the wider environment. Strategic thinking is trying to understand what should happen. This is a proactive process. When these two processes interact with the analysis of additional information, a synthesis of ideas can take place, resulting in the formation of new mental models. The process of analysis and synthesis are exemplified in the following responses:

We had to convince all the parents it was a good school, that things were going well and so we did a lot of questionnaires, we gave children questionnaires, we looked at what would make a difference. We did on the spot analysis with the teachers - you name it we did it. We brought in consultants to do a kind of mini-Ofsted to find out who were the good teachers, who were the weak teachers and we built on the evidence. We worked on the evidence to try and turn the school round.

Primary headteacher

We are a learning school - we are always analysing what we are doing so a lot of the strategy comes through those review processes.

Secondary headteacher

I suppose it's self-evaluation and analysis by re-telling and understanding the story of the school over the last five years. We did that by using Dean Fink's ideas about looking at the type of school everyone thinks we are at the moment and structuring that in a way that would enable people to see what sort of school we want to be.

Primary headteacher

iv. Constructing mental models

Making sense of the reflecting, thinking and analysing can be facilitated by the construction of mental models. These are frameworks and maps that form the basis of understanding to enable individuals or organisations to make sense of their environment. They do so by removing complexity to make information and perspectives more accessible. Leaders who engaged in this process reflected:

It is about picking things apart, by using a model to base that thinking on. But if you haven't got anything there as a structure you are going to go all over the place.

Primary headteacher

I am working on my own model of achieving our aims through a process which I call awakening articulation and alignment...to try to bring some of those strategic issues in so I can talk about that if that would be helpful at this time.

Primary headteacher

You know as the pennies start to drop with people. A lot of people need the concrete, they can't vision without you showing them something.

Secondary headteacher

If you had to have one word to describe me I think its frameworks now. You know I think headteachers should provide frameworks in which people operate.

Secondary headteacher

It's the capacity of, having heard a lot of things, being able to put that into a word picture, make it into a statement.

Secondary headteacher

I would say I would give them a picture frame; I would tell them what they can and can't do.

Secondary headteacher

These school leaders encapsulate this first stage of the strategic process, creating a model or map of what we understand or where we should be going that provides a basis for common discussion and action.

B. Engaging the People

- i. Strategic conversations
- ii. Strategic participation
- iii. Strategic motivation
- iv. Strategic capability

Written documents that lie on shelves will not affect practice unless people in the school are engaged and involved in the strategic process. It is not surprising that staff with busy teaching commitments focus on the day-to-day reality as do governors attending meetings in the evening. How can they also focus on the medium- to longer-term developments in the school? The model proposed in this booklet suggests that three elements interact to engage people and contribute to the building of strategic capability. The first element is that of holding strategic conversations, both formal and informal. The insights of the school leaders below show that this is the critical to building a wider understanding. The process of sharing ideas about the medium- to longer-term and envisioning that future, by its very nature, draws staff into participating in discussion and ideas. This then has the potential to increase the motivation of staff as they are involved in whole-school development where their contribution is valued. The process of engaging and involving people is significant in improving the quality and capability of the staff in the school. The interconnection of these elements can be seen in Figure 6 below and is discussed in detail in this section.

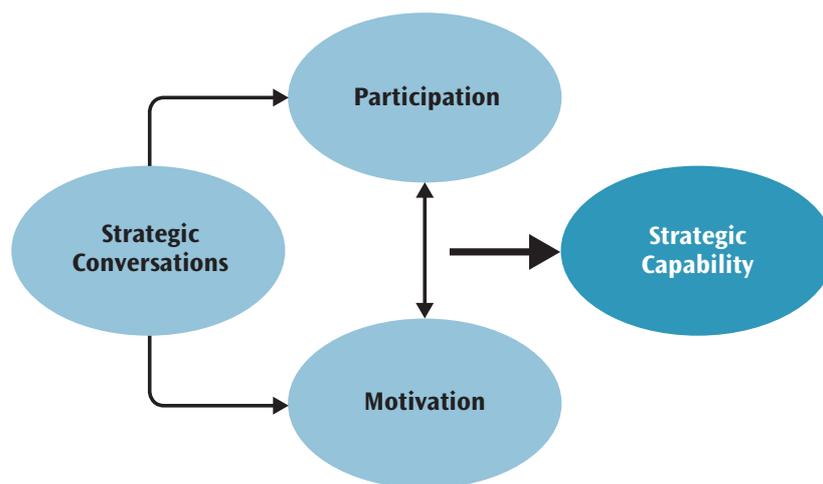


Figure 6: The iterative nature of engagement and capability. (based on Davies and Davies 2005)

i. Strategic conversations

Strategic conversations involve the leadership team in the school engaging the wider staff group in discussions about the core issues driving the school and how these will develop in the future. This creates a culture in which staff are able to set aside the day-to-day management issues and discuss ideas and developments that may change the nature of teaching and learning and the context in which the school operates. These conversations can be facilitated by structural arrangements such as having separate meetings for business items and developmental strategic items. They can also take place in a number of informal discussions that occur during the school week where leaders make opportunities to engage in strategic conversations. Leaders in the project articulated the following insights:

I can, from my walks around the school, in my strategic discussions with people, just plant little germs of ideas, which somebody will pick up on and come back to me with a fully fledged idea.

Primary headteacher

With strategic conversations we have constructed a common vocabulary that helps to build a common vision. It is through that quite intensive personal contact with the key stakeholders that we create an understanding that we could make things happen in the school.

Secondary headteacher

Much more goes on in terms of conversations with people - consensus building, getting people to outline their own visions. I think we do a huge amount of that, I consider we are a very reflective school.

Primary headteacher

So we have to keep having these conversations, but we have to have them at lots of different levels so that we keep everybody involved, carry everybody forward but also take account of the needs of those who, in a sense, are unable to contribute to carrying the school forward.

Primary headteacher

I engage in a weekly strategic conversation into what is happening in the exciting beating heart of education, to really take on some of those issues, so hopefully those conversations are growing.

Primary headteacher

ii. Strategic participation

The aim of the strategic conversations is to engage a larger number of people in discussions about the longer-term future of the school. The idea is that, by greater participation, the school will benefit from more and better quality discussions and information. Participation supports the move within the school from having middle managers in posts of responsibility to having within those staff a broader view and responsibility through developing the wider leadership dimensions of the role.

I think it's partly about this shared leadership and shared management so you can make the best use you can of the people around you.

Primary headteacher

Many of my staff are very good 'knowers' but they are not 'learners' and it really fits in with the whole concept of a learning organisation and changing the culture of the school. I am really fascinated by how cultures change - how do you go from being very defensive and in a shell to opening up your professional life, being prepared to open up your views?

Primary headteacher

I wanted to see how far down the line I could really empower people in the school to be decision-makers.

Secondary headteacher

They have to own it, get a feel for it and take it on. You have to consult because you've got to bring people with you. It's easier to lead than to push.

Secondary headteacher

Having a feeling that we care about each other, a deep fundamental belief that everybody is important, that we care for each other, we pull for each other.

Primary headteacher

It's opened up a lot of discussion in team meetings which is good. I think it's because this year I have got a staff that are emotionally and personally attached to the school where they haven't been previously.

Primary headteacher

Because of the high level of participation, because so much of it is ours, we feel much more in control of the agenda; I think that's where the strength of the school has come from.

Primary headteacher

Participation is not just about teaching staff. Participation in developing the strategic direction of the school also involves a wider group as witnessed by the following:

In terms of our processes, one of the most valuable things that we do here is that we consult a lot with a lot of people. For instance we send out what we call a rapid consultation document and that goes to all parents, governors, all the support helpers.

Primary headteacher

Strategy is something that needs to be discussed with everyone working in the school but not just the staff and I am a great believer in involving pupils because school is about children. For me everything that I do is about the children in my school which is about their learning.

Primary headteacher

I feel I have to speak to the children and ask them where they want to see their school going, where they want to see their learning going.

Primary headteacher

Headteachers become more participative as they gain in confidence.

The strategic view for me was about [strategy] actually being owned by more people. When I started out as a headteacher, I think I felt very much it was mine, and then after about a year or so, I felt I shared it with the senior team, and they owned it and, from years three through to six, every time that I was there I would say definitely that it had filtered down to middle leaders and I think began to embrace the school culture. The school culture began to be more strategic as a result of that.

Secondary headteacher

My leadership style has become far more consensual as the school has moved on into a different phase. My first instance was, I suspect, fairly dogmatic, fairly structured fairly linear in my handling of a very unpromising situation I inherited at the school, and then after the success that we have enjoyed and the camaraderie and collegiality that's been developed we were able to move on to a different phase, a different way of being, where we are more consensual and participative.

Primary headteacher

iii. Strategic motivation

One of the main reasons for using strategic conversations to enhance the level of participation is to develop the motivation of staff so that they feel more part of the school and its future and are committed to it. This was reflected in the project responses:

People who are given the autonomy, given the freedom, given the responsibility, would actually add more to the value of the school.

Secondary headteacher

What we have said is that this is all to do with improving learning and I think one thing is that a lot of people will probably say it's not workload it's because it's actually making them enjoy what they are already doing, giving them an understanding and control. One of the greatest causes of stress is not having the feeling you have control. What we are trying to do is to give people much more control over their destiny, over what they do.

Secondary headteacher

I have some very motivated staff who are quite excited in respect of what we are really trying to do. To really think about what we are doing and where we are going and be part of that.

Secondary headteacher

Empower people then they do astonishing things - way beyond expectations

Secondary headteacher

iv. Strategic capability

Bringing together the strategic conversations, the increased participation and the enhanced motivation will contribute to building increased strategic capability in the school. Strategic capability can be seen as a core competency of the school. Given that the most important resource of a school is the people who work within it, then developing that key resource will build strategic capability to meet future challenges. This can be illustrated as follows:

Leadership is about creating a culture within the school where everyone buys into the responsibility for leadership. To look to one person to lead means there is no sustainability. It might be effective while that person is there but when that one person goes there is no one left and unless you get another hero leader with exactly the same views, visions etc, etc, it will collapse. I think it's unhealthy as well for the staff in the school in that it doesn't build on their strengths - it doesn't allow them opportunities.

Secondary headteacher

The more long-term things are those where you know where you want to get to but you are not quite sure yet how you are going to do it so you need to build some kind of capability within people. For instance, 'learning how to learn' or 'developing a learning focused-school' requires a lot of people to change and to do that you need more time so people need to go on courses, need to do some reading, need to build in some coaching and all that takes much longer. Once people learn how to do that, they have their own views about what a learning-focused school is so then we have to come together and talk about it.

Primary headteacher

C. Articulating the Strategy

- i. Oral articulation
- ii. Written articulation
- iii. Structural articulation

Articulating the strategy and communicating it to the various stakeholders is one of the keys to effective implementation. There are three main ways in which this articulation can take place: oral, written and structural.

i. Oral articulation

Oral articulation links very closely to the process of holding strategic conversations but here it is not about designing the strategy but about communicating the chosen strategic approach. A critical success factor is the way in which leaders use formal briefings to summarise and explain significant aspects to staff, governors and parents at key points in the school year. This needs to be supported by frequent reinforcement of the main strands of the strategy, both formally in presentations and also in informal discussions. This can be illustrated by the leaders in the study:

I think my strategy is about simply speaking - sharing and explaining to people where we are going

Primary headteacher

I articulate our plans to the whole school, all the children and staff, once a term. In the corridors we have things written, pasted on the walls of what we have done, what we are working on, what we haven't achieved and why we haven't achieved it - so it's very, very visual and reference is made to it all the time and sometimes we digress from it but that's perfectly acceptable because it's a working display and new things crop up.

Primary headteacher

Strategic leaders have to explain what they are doing, where they are going... they need the ability to listen and then speak to parents and governors about where the school is going.

Special school headteacher

ii. Written articulation

There are two significant points about the written articulation in the form of appropriate planning documentation. The first point is that the written strategic document should be separated from the short-term school development or improvement plan. As was articulated earlier, in the section on the definition of strategy, a strategic approach is not achieved by adding an extra year onto an existing school development or improvement plan. The strategic document should deal with broad major issues and be significantly concise and focused. The second point is that it is an ongoing adaptive document that changes with experience and should be regularly reviewed. Later in the booklet the use of a strategic intent statement and a strategic plan will be discussed and exemplars provided in section two.

There is documentation but the documentation comes through discussion with the staff and with the children. There is a long-term plan - we don't call it a strategic plan - because the children are involved and because it's aimed at their level. It's actually called 'our school book to make things even better'.

Primary headteacher

The corporate plan for me was really something which the governors asked me to look at. I began to see the value in something which wasn't the school development plan but actually was a much bigger picture of what the next five to 10 years might look like. For example what happens if we lose Technology School status? What happens if our catchment changes? What happens if we can't keep staff? And those sorts of strategic issues. So that was the way we looked at that corporate plan and the school improvement plan is about the much more short to medium term.

Secondary headteacher

Each department has its own version which is a mini version of the school plans. What their futures thinking is to their department, what their strategy is, - one side of A4 for each of those two - and they have their operational targets which will be on a short form like that with strategic targets on one side of A4 - that's all. I have just one page more than that...

Secondary headteacher

But a warning:

Documentation is not as important as what people believe in and what people do and its all very well to say we have this, this and this and you can have amazing documentation but it is actually not a plan if people don't follow you.

Primary headteacher

iii. Structural articulation

Structural articulation is concerned with the way that organisational arrangements are designed and set up to reflect a strategic purpose. One clear way of seeing this is to look at groupings and meetings in schools. Is there a strategic group that considers the longer-term development and that is separate from the operational planning and monitoring group? Otherwise, there is the danger that strategic and policy items come at the end of a long agenda and receive little quality attention. There are several approaches to this. The leadership team meeting or governors' meeting can devote every fifth or sixth meeting to strategy alone or separate organisational structures can be set up so that there is a strategic review group separate from the normal operational review meetings. Other approaches would be to make every middle leadership meeting in school start with a discussion of 'leadership insights' from a particular curriculum or age phase group to share what insights they have gained from students' learning before the meeting moves on to operational items – this gives primacy to a strategic objective. Leaders' views about this are shown below and case exemplars are suggested.

I talk about it in terms of a time horizon - one where we actually have a strategic policy team which, in other schools, might be called a leadership team, and there are about 10 people on it - that's the important thing - a large number of people on it. But we have an operational management team that deals with the nitty gritty day-to-day stuff, which is very important. The idea of splitting the strategic team from the operational team means that the strategic team talks about strategy and doesn't get bogged down in the operational things. Otherwise the urgent drives out the important. So separating the two is, I think, a big success in that sense. It's allowed the strategic team to concentrate on wider issues and the operational management team looks after the here and now. The school development plan team looks at the duration of the plan and the research and development team actually looks a bit further into the future, outside of the box.

Secondary headteacher

Two sets of meetings. First a management group which meets on a fortnightly basis to discuss operational matters, the day-to-day running of the school and the interpretation of policy. Second, a separate leadership team, which talks about strategy and the leadership of learning.

Primary headteacher

CASE EXAMPLE: SECONDARY

One school reported having an innovative management which emphasises quality assurance and continuous improvement and allows greater participation and involvement by all staff. Participation is not simply based on status or seniority but responsibility or the willingness to serve and be a creative thinker. The separation of the 'operational management team' from the 'strategic policy team' has proved to be a great success. Too often senior management teams become bogged down in operational matters with little or no time to discuss important strategic issues. The separation of strategic and operational functions has resulted in a separation of the urgent from the important. No longer does the urgent drive out the important; both are now catered for. In addition, the various teams provide a unique 'time horizon' management structure with:

- 'operational management team' focusing on the next 0-12 months
- 'school development plan team' focusing on the next six-24 months
- 'research and development plan team' focusing on the next two-five years

The relationships between the various teams can be seen in Figure 7.

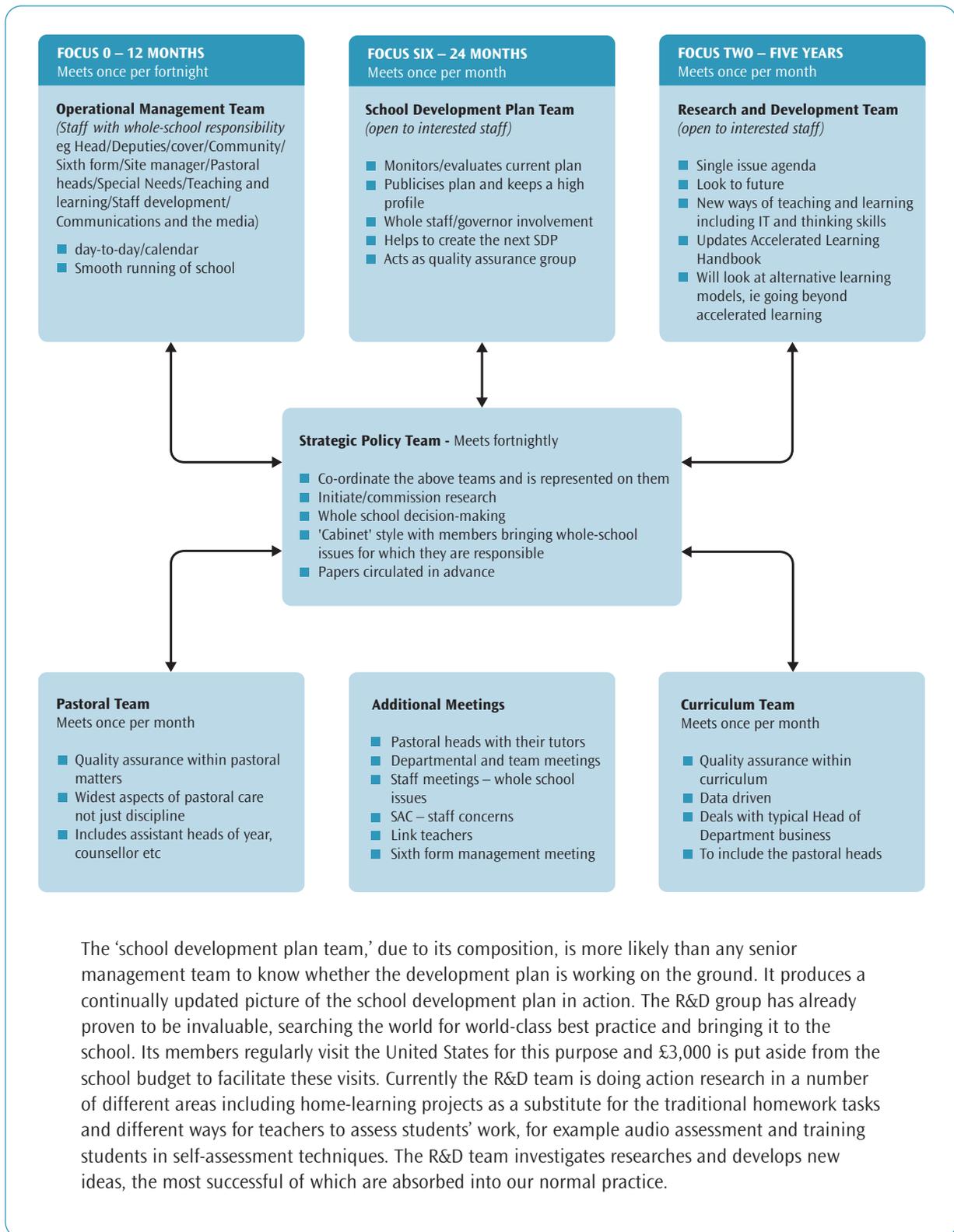


Figure 7: Team structures

CASE EXAMPLE: PRIMARY

An example of good practice in a primary school is shown in the following case and in Figure 8:

The principles behind the structure are twofold: to allow time for focusing on the strategic and operational dimensions and to allow a wide range of staff and governors to engage in discussion, rather than limiting involvement to those in senior positions. This increases understanding but is also a powerful motivator for less experienced staff.

The school is driven by three strategic groups which form a strategic framework and planning process. The futures and strategy review group meets annually with governors (chair and sub-committee chairs) and the school leadership team (headteacher, deputy headteacher, Foundation Stage leader, KS1 leader, KS2 leader and SENCO). They review and set the long-term strategic direction of the school. The school leadership team meets termly to continue that review and direction setting process. The school also has team and task groups (research and improvement groups) to investigate new initiatives and projects that will inform future practice. These three groups feed into the overall strategic and operational framework of the school.

The operational part of the school's planning framework is seen in three further groups. The normal cycle of governors' meetings and sub-committees, the fortnightly leadership team meetings and the weekly staff meetings. This framework is designed to link strategic and operational planning so that the school can drive the short-term improvement in standards while developing the long-term capacity of the school.

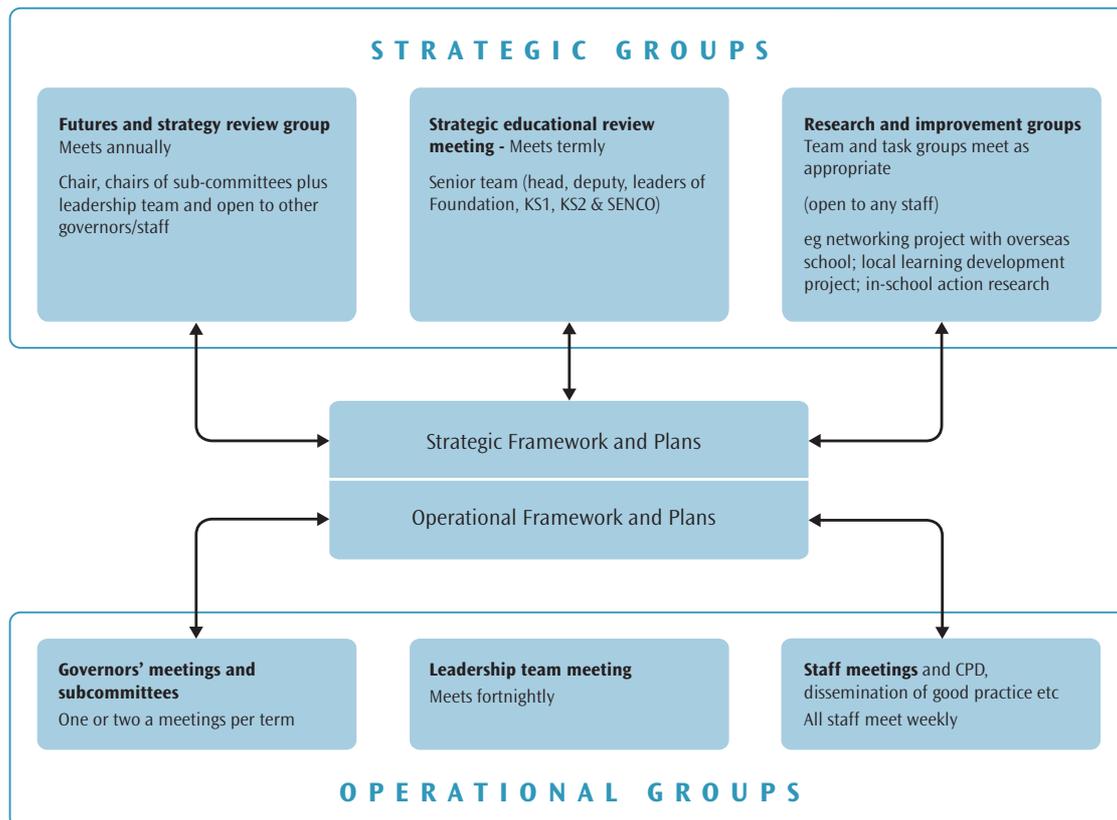


Figure 8

D. Implementing the Strategy

- i. Translating strategy into action
- ii. Strategic alignment
- iii. Sequential and parallel actions
- iv. Strategic timing and abandonment

i. Translating strategy into action

Consider the story of the three frogs on a lily pad: one decides to jump off – how many are left? The answer is three; deciding to do something and actually doing something are very different. A school may have eloquently written plans which do not come to fruition. The maxim (Davies and Ellison, 2003: 1) that the ‘thicker the plan the less it affects practice’ is very useful here. It is important to consider how any strategic approach can be translated into action effectively. The following are ideas to assist in this process of translating strategy into action:

- 1. Focus.** It is important to have a limited number of strategic objectives that can be delivered. By focusing on these, it is possible to achieve them whereas a long list of desirable activities will often end up half complete.
- 2. Delivery.** It is critical to translate the overall broader aims into the shorter-term activities. This enables those in the school community to make sense of current actions and the way that they link into longer-term strategic frameworks. This involves making strategy everyone’s job – strategy should be seen as influencing current behaviour but also as a source of dialogue to build future behaviour.
- 3. Leading by example.** School leaders need to demonstrate commitment to the strategy by reinforcing its key factors at regular intervals.
- 4. Making strategy a continual process.** Strategy should not be articulated and then left; it should involve a process of continual review and development.

School leaders in the project summed this up as:

What is very useful for us all to try and think about is if it's a whole school target (improvement in writing for instance) how do we translate that into action? How does the science co-ordinator address that in whole school targets for science? How does the numeracy co-ordinator address that? And we have found that to be so useful and I think we have hit those targets better and more effectively because we are all involved in it - we are not isolated in our own subject area.

Primary headteacher

In one sense it was evolutionary because we had to take people with us on the journey

Primary headteacher

I do a full staff briefing every Monday afternoon and I will go through aspects of the vision, tell them what it means, real down to earth stuff - what does it mean on a day-to-day basis.

Secondary headteacher

It's about us and not the old thing of 'oh well it's what the senior leadership team want', 'oh it's about what someone else wants', or 'it's an external imposition' - it's now actually about what we want.

Primary headteacher

The strategic view for me was about actually being owned by more people. When I started out as a head, I think I felt very much it was mine, and then after about a year or so, I felt I shared it with the senior team, and they owned it and from years three through to six I would say definitely that it had filtered down to middle leaders and I think they began to embrace the school culture. The school culture began to be more strategic as a result of that.

Secondary headteacher

ii. Strategic alignment

The challenge in most organisations is to reconcile organisational and individual perspectives. The processes of involving staff in the organisation's values and direction are critical. A key feature of alignment is the way that individuals come to believe in what the school is doing and can articulate broader school aims as well as their individual targets. Staff have to both understand the strategy as well as commit to it. The challenge of aligning individuals and the organisation was highlighted many times in the study:

Documentation is not as important as what people believe in and what people do and it's all very well to say we have this, this and this and you can have amazing documentation but it is actually not a plan if people don't follow you.

Primary headteacher

So I think I am talking about the processes as well as the action because what I wanted to avoid was that the staff would come together with some great ideas, and then I would take it away from them and I would do it. I need them to take on the organisational perspective and take responsibility.

Secondary headteacher

We are constantly talking, large groups, small group, individual, a constant feast of two-way conversations bringing people in line with where we are going.

Primary headteacher

We are articulating clearly our intents and I guess the stage that we are going into now is a sense of alignment where I can align the desires of the staff, the parents and the governors to move the school forward in the coming five to 10 years.

Primary headteacher

Every year at the beginning of each academic year I always go through the vision on the training day. I do an analysis on the vision - it's trying to align everyone to core purposes.

Secondary headteacher

I think it's all about sustainability and what you have to do - in fact leadership is about creating a culture within the school where everyone buys into the responsibility for leadership - if you look to one person to lead, it means there is no sustainability.

Secondary headteacher

However, the need to be realistic about individuals' differences in alignment was pointed out:

I don't think it will happen easily because there are always blockages and you can kind of foresee the staff that are going to cause the blockages.

Primary headteacher

iii. Sequential and parallel actions

One way of considering organisational development is that schools, for example, move from one phase of their development to another in a sequential way. A common rationale for this is that once the improvements in the current operation have been achieved, the leadership in the school has both the courage and the experience to take more fundamental strategic moves. While this can be an effective way of moving forward, there are some developments that require a less linear and sequential approach. An alternative perspective is to consider a twin-track approach as illustrated in Figure 9.

The 's' or Sigmoid Curve suggests that organisations, as they become more successful, move up the curve but eventually they decline down the other side of the curve. This figure suggests that strategic leaders should have parallel sets of development, which could be considered a twin-track approach. Concurrently they attempt to extend the effectiveness of the present way of working by extending the existing s-curve through improvements in practice while at the same time building the capability and capacity for new developments and move to a significantly new way of working at an appropriate time by making a strategic leap. These two activities combine the management task of 'doing things better' and the leadership task of 'doing things differently'. Critical to success is knowing when to start 'doing things differently' ie strategic timing. The research would suggest that outstanding strategic leaders operate this concurrent approach.

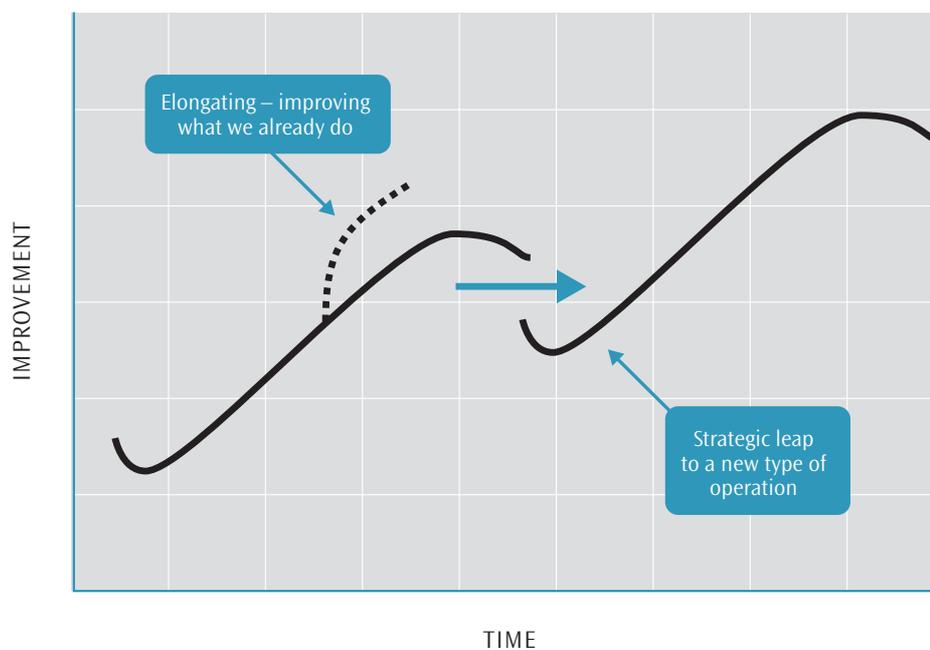


Figure 9: Sequential and Parallel Developments (based on Davies 2003: 306)

An example of this is provided by a secondary headteacher:

We worked on twin-track strategies. At one level we worked on measures to raise the expectations of the staff and the aspirations of the students. In particular we introduced a new timetable (four periods in the morning, two in the afternoon) and a new curriculum to go alongside it with staff held accountable for both discipline and results. We also improved the learning environment with carpeted classrooms, improved student toilets and social facilities. We publicly shared examination results and because the curriculum structure consisted of 90 per cent common core we were able to compare faculty areas with each other and to ask pointed but essential questions such as why is this faculty/department/member of staff doing better or worse than that faculty/department/member of staff given that they have exactly the same students? With the students we shared data on their progress, set targets and celebrated success wherever we could find it. We established regular reviews of departments, and guidelines for schemes of work and what we considered to be good teaching and learning.

At the same time we were aware that we needed to create capacity and capability for significant change - a strategic leap in performance. If we were to be a school where 'learning is our business' we must recognise that learning is a highly individual matter, and students learn in different ways with preferred styles to access and process information. The decision was taken, therefore, to make a leap to our new Sigmoid Curve by re-engineering the learning process. We adopted the accelerated learning cycle as a framework and planning tool to design lessons. The cycle blends our developing knowledge of neuroscience, motivational theory and cognitive psychology to increase student engagement in learning and their motivation to achieve. To achieve this we set up a research and development group and identified pilot departments to 'make the leap' to new ways of working. Strategic timing was critical; we needed to move when we had enough capacity and capability to make the change.

Leaders in the study commented on these approaches as follows:

Sequential actions

I think the key thing there is that you have to be doing well at what you are doing before you can embark on a second thing.

Primary headteacher

I said you have to get the basics right before you can do the fancy stuff.

Secondary headteacher

Parallel actions

Now it was at that very point that I feared, the danger is that you get that complacency and 1997 was when we used the Sigmoid Curve to show to the staff 'look what we need is to move onwards', and we have leapt since 1997. Whereas I guess the first five to six years were pretty much the 'continuous improvement' type of syndrome as opposed to the 'metamorphous approach' which I would espouse now.

Secondary headteacher

It is vital that you sow seeds for the long term too and you run those concurrently. And one of the things that I am very good at is that holistic 'bringing it together' in a coherent way. And one of the things that I learnt very early on was to spend as much time on how you implement as on what you implement and I spend a lot of time on thinking 'what is the best way to do it?'

Secondary headteacher

iv. Strategic timing and abandonment

The judgement part of leadership is often associated with timing. The leadership challenge around when to make a significant strategic change is as critical to success as choosing the right strategic change to make. The issue of timing can rest on leadership intuition as much as on rational analysis. It is important to balance a number of factors one against the other. These are

- when individuals in the organisation are ready for change
- when the organisation needs the change
- when the external constraints and conditions force the change.

As Figure 9 on page 37 shows, the leader's skill, his or her critical strategic judgement, lies in knowing when to make the leap to a new way of operating. Such judgement is manifested in not only knowing what and knowing how but also knowing when and, equally importantly, knowing what not to do.

An additional category came out of the study: what to give up, what is called strategic abandonment. It is not only important to time the strategic developments but also to create both personal and organisational space to undertake the new activity and that involves abandoning other things.

These concepts of strategic timing and abandonment were reflected on by heads as follows:

Strategic Timing

I think from my own point of view a lot of that goes on fairly intuitively - I know I can't go down that road because I am not ready or they are not ready. So timing is so critical.

Primary headteacher

But the structure wasn't right and it wasn't the right time so we need to come back at that again.

Primary headteacher

Sometimes there is too much, you have got to step back and think what's best for the school.

Special School headteacher

I wrote a paper and that basically argued that the climate was right for change, there are some issues that need to be changed but if we are going to do it, then it needs to be part of a coherent programme rather than piecemeal.

Secondary headteacher

But there is a danger of waiting too long and sometimes there is a need to press ahead:

We are more proactive...If you waited for everything to come right it would never happen...Get out and do it that's my view.

Special School headteacher

Strategic abandonment

I see abandonment as being two different issues really. One is the abandonment of things that are not working and actually taking people's time and energy and you're flogging a dead horse and actually it's not gone ahead it isn't working - so let's get rid of it. That's easy to do. The other side of it which I did several times was to actually say 'OK this is working well and we are really comfortable with it and it's getting the results we want, but actually there is another strategy here that takes us on to the next stage but we can't run them both together. This has to be suspended or abandoned in order to give the other one time to grow.'

Secondary headteacher

But the challenge for me personally is this idea of abandonment - that if we take on these initiatives and new things come on, I know I have to give some things up so one of the things I am saying with my strategic team is 'this may be a good idea but it's not as good an idea as that' - so the idea of strategic abandonment is attractive - a challenge is that you have so many things you can do that you have to put some on one side or put some off even though they are good things because others are more important.

Secondary headteacher

In considering what things we might do we also have to consider what we are going to stop doing. And it may be that we will stop doing to make space for something else. It may be we stop doing them because we are not doing it very well anyway, it may be that we have stopped doing something because it doesn't actually fit in with our new direction.

Primary headteacher

I think it's important to say 'no' if you really want to keep your eye on the ball. You would be running yourself ragged doing everything they wanted you to do but things that fit with your agenda that's fine, things that don't you have to say no to.

Primary headteacher



Section Two

Strategic Approaches

Introduction

Having considered the processes involved in formulating strategy, it is now appropriate to examine the approaches that are available to implement strategy. This booklet adopts a model which considers four approaches:

- A. Strategic planning
- B. Emergent strategy
- C. Strategic intent
- D. Devolved strategy

This categorisation of strategy is based on four assumptions:

- There are some activities that are predictable and can be planned for in advance using strategic planning.
- There are some activities that schools can learn by doing and, when they have reflected on that experience, the strategy emerges by taking the successes of the past and turning them into a strategic framework for the future. This is known as emergent strategy.
- There are some areas that the school knows it wants to develop but does not know how. By setting strategic intents and building capability to achieve them the school will work out solutions as part of a learning journey.
- Devolved strategy occurs when the senior leadership in the school sets the broad direction but devolves responsibility for the detailed strategy to others in the school. This is the least used strategic approach in the study.

Each of these types of strategy will be considered in detail in this section.



A. Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a traditional approach used by many organisations. It assumes that, in broad terms, you can predict where the school will be or where it wants to go over a three- to five-year period (ie the medium-term). Part of the strategic planning process is based on defining outcomes and measuring them. In schools, some of the activities are predictable, such as pupil flow through a school; Year 4 becomes Year 5 and so on as children grow older. Part of it is less predictable such as the new intake numbers. Similarly, a regular schedule of redecoration can be planned over five years but storm damage to the school is less predictable. School development planning has usually been a detailed plan in a one- to three-year framework in which attempts are made to be precise about what is to be done and the outcomes to be achieved. Problems can arise when the detail of the school development plan is extended over a fourth and fifth year. Criticisms of trying to extend the SDP centre on the fact that it is not possible to be accurate about detailed outcomes, the further you move into the future, hence the value of strategic planning.

Strategic planning can be seen to be of use where schools separate out their shorter-term planning in the form of traditional school development planning and have a separate strategic plan. The strategic plan is much more broadly based than the SDP. It only deals with a limited number of key developments that are critical for school success and development. In our research, many schools separated out their strategic plan from their school development or operational plan, some using other terms such as a corporate plan. The heads indicated that schools used strategic plans to clarify strategic activities that related to the major themes of development over five years.

Where plans act as frameworks for the future and focus on a limited number of issues that affect the major thrusts of a school's development, they are likely to be more useful than a continuation of detailed school development plans. Features of strategic plans are:

- they are proactive in that they set out to shape the future
- they are aggregated plans in that they deal with broad themes not disaggregated detail
- they deal with core developments and not every development

Leaders commented on strategic planning as follows:

So in all our forecasting of staffing we have got to do the five-year budget plan to make sure that staff we are employing now we'll be able to afford in year three or four.

Secondary headteacher

We see strategic planning as working in a medium three- to five-year framework looking at the bigger issues. Strategic planning gives you a sense of direction and a map. Plans set the broad framework in which to develop short-term activities.

Primary headteacher

A five-year plan with less detail as you go on.

Special school headteacher

A framework document is shown on page 46, followed by a primary exemplar on page 47 and a secondary one on page 49.



Strategic plan framework

PULL OUT

Strategic plan framework

MAJOR STRATEGY THEMES OR AREAS	NATURE OF DIRECTION/ACTIVITY	KEY OUTCOMES	TIME?	COST?	PERSON WITH OVERSIGHT
<p>These are broad categories – the headings can be chosen by the school. Three different suggestions are given below:</p> <p>MODEL 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning outcomes: pupil/student progress and achievement 2. Support for the quality of learning and teaching processes 3. Leadership and management arrangements 4. Physical and financial resources; school structure and organisation 5. Community interrelationships <p>MODEL 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standards and excellence 2. Innovation 3. Community/customers 4. Income generation 5. Premises development <p>MODEL 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children's attainment and learning 2. Staff support and development 3. Pastoral support and home/community links 4. Leadership and governance 5. School learning environment 	<p>Include here the major areas which are being developed.</p>	<p>List here what you would see in relation to each area when success has been achieved.</p>	<p>Include here the time period of the development.</p>	<p>Include here an approximate cost (source of funds may be noted)</p>	<p>As these are strategic activities, they would be overseen by a senior member of staff.</p> <p>While senior staff might review the activities half-termly, governors might have a termly update Remedial action can then be taken.</p>

Strategic plan exemplar: Primary

PULL OUT

Strategic plan exemplar: Primary

MAJOR STRATEGY THEMES OR AREAS	NATURE OF DIRECTION/ACTIVITY	KEY OUTCOMES	TIME?	COST?	PERSON WITH OVERSIGHT
1. Children's attainment and learning	1a Raise standards of literacy	1a No child with reading age below chronological age, unless specific learning difficulty identified; x% at level 5 at the end of Year 6	3 years	These will depend on the scale of the individual school, the local context etc	This will be a senior member of staff as appropriate within the school's structure
	1b Involve all in extra-curricular activity	1b Strategy developed for full range of activities (creative, community, sporting etc).	3 years		
	1c Develop more flexible approaches to personalised learning		1c (i) SMT post established to lead this		
(ii) Strategy for a more creative approach to learning activities developed and introduction commenced			2 years		
(iii) Strategy fully implemented			4 years		
2. Staff support and development	2a Develop appropriate staffing capability and capacity for the school of the future	2a (i) Shadow structure designed for all posts (ii) Structure implemented gradually	2 years over 5 years		
	2b Ensure that all staff are competent in the latest ICT developments	2b Investment in leadership, technical support, hardware, professional development leading to significantly enhanced learning opportunities	3 years and ongoing		
3. Pastoral support and home/ community links	3a Develop opportunities for life-long learning for community members	3a (i) Community needs and appropriate funding identified (ii) Space and facilities made available and activities established	3-5 years		
	3b Develop and an extended school for children and families	3b Some links to 1b but also partnerships and space found for other activities/provision eg health and welfare	3 years		
4. Leadership and governance	4a Develop the leaders of the future	4a Programme of innovative development opportunities - internal and national - established for all staff	3 years		
	4b Senior team to be active in strategic networks	4b Active participation in national and international activities for all senior staff.	3 years		
	4c Increase the pool of availability for governor elections	4c Networks with community (parents, business etc) developed and interest encouraged in school	2-3 years		
5. School learning environment	5a Refurbish KS2 art/technology area	5a Designs completed, funds acquired and project implemented	2 years		
	5b New reception area	5b Designs completed, funds acquired and project implemented	4 years		



Strategic plan exemplar: Secondary

PULL OUT

Strategic plan exemplar: Secondary

MAJOR STRATEGY THEMES OR AREAS	NATURE OF DIRECTION/ACTIVITY	KEY OUTCOMES	TIME?	COST?	PERSON WITH OVERSIGHT
1. Standards and excellence	1a Key Stage 3 results	1a x% level 5 y% level 6 at the end of Year 9	3 years	These will depend on the scale of the individual school, the local context etc	This will be a senior member of staff as appropriate within the school's structure
	1b Key Stage 4 results	1b x% 5 GCSE A* to C; y% A* or A	5 years		
	1c Personalised learning	1c Personalised learning established for all	4 years		
	1d Administrative support	1d Dedicated administrative support in each subject area and Key Stage	3 years		
2. Innovation	2a Leading edge technology	2a ICT provision maintained and enhanced through internal support and external partnerships	Ongoing		
	2b Effective learning solutions	2b Most appropriate approaches to 1c created through linking knowledge from learning sciences, ICT, and staff	3 years		
	2c Reengineer staffing to meet new challenges	2c Staffing structure developed and adjusted in order to support 1c and 1d	3 years		
3. Community/customers	3a Support local community learning needs via learning opportunities, especially ICT	3a (i) Staff and space infrastructure established (ii) Opportunities identified, funding obtained and activities begun	2-4 years		
	3b All students involved in community projects – local or global	3b (i) Co-ordination procedures established (ii) Time provided to plan and implement	3 years		
4. Income generation	4a Increase student roll	4a Increased roll by 10%	5 years		
	4b Income generation	4b £100k generated per year from business to support ICT	5 years		
	4c Increase percentage of income from bidding	4c (i) Enhanced capacity for bid writing (ii) Income from non-core sources up 10% per year	3 years		
5. Premises developments	5a Joint community/school creative arts centre	5a (i) Proposal agreed	1 year		
		(ii) Plans finalised	2 years		
		(iii) Funds obtained	3 years		
		(iv) Building commencing	4 years		

B. Emergent Strategy

Emergent strategy occurs in a situation where the school is required to take on a new initiative. While the change involved is not overwhelming, it is significant and the school may have little initial expertise or knowledge as to how to proceed. As a result, schools proceed cautiously through a process of trial and error. As some actions are successful, they will be reinforced and repeated while the unsuccessful actions will be abandoned. Compared with strategic planning, which is a proactive process, this is a reactive process of learning from experience.

The key strategic processes that link with this approach are those of strategic conversations and reflection that allow an effective analysis of practice to take place. This analysis will enable patterns of good practice to be identified to form the basis of future strategy. This learning by experience can only take place if leaders in schools create reflective learning organisations.

Examples of where emergent strategy is appropriate can be seen in a number of situations. When performance management was introduced for the first time, although there was some initial briefing and training many schools were faced with a new and untried approach. While they had some strategies to deploy much of what needed to be learnt was done by simply engaging in the new process. As a result leaders in schools adapted and changed approaches as they went along. When it was possible to reflect on which performance interviews had gone well and why, it was possible to build up a picture of good practice that could be utilised again. When those ideas of good practice are collated they become the strategy for how to proceed in the future; thus a reactive strategy becomes a proactive approach.

In the research project many of the heads who have adopted new learning approaches such as accelerated learning or brain-based learning talk of it being an emergent strategy. Adopting new approaches where schools have limited experience of practice involves a continuous process of review and adjustment until they are comfortable with the best way of doing things. When they have gained the expertise, the most appropriate way to proceed emerges and they can then clarify the strategy or approach for the future.

Leaders in the study reflected:

We are adapting as we go along and learning as we go along – emergent strategy is of course a learning process.

Primary headteacher

I think so many strategic plans fall down because they are too prescriptive and an event or a personal change happens and the whole thing is scuppered. You need to build strategy as you go along.

Secondary headteacher

This also should be sharing everyone's learning as follows:

The good thing about emergent strategy is different strategies emerge from different groups within the school but then my job as a head, as a leader, is to share that with everyone.

Primary headteacher

We don't know how it's going to work out but we are going to go into it knowing that we are going to have to face that challenge in a year or two years' time, knowing that it's a problem we can't solve on day one until we experience it.

Secondary headteacher

You never know what the journey's going to be over several years...Seize it, frame it in the context of how you want to take it forward.

Special School headteacher

C. Strategic Intent

Strategic intent allows a school to plan with a broad understanding of what it wants to achieve without the necessity to engage in obsessive detail in the planning process. It involves the leader of the organisation being able to articulate a limited number of strategic intents, say no more than five to prevent loss of focus. These intents involve significantly improving the school's performance in critical areas. Therefore, in order to achieve the strategic intents, a capability- and capacity-building process is necessary. Whereas strategic planning can be summarised, in broad terms, as 'you know where you want to go and you know how to get there', strategic intent can be defined as 'knowing broadly where you want go but not how to get there, although you are committed to finding out'.

When using the concept of strategic intent, the school would set itself a limited number of intents and these would be expressed in concrete terms. They are not vague visions, but specific areas of activity. They may be considered as a means of translating vision into action. The leader in the school would be aware of areas for fundamental change and improvement and would know what s/he wanted to achieve but would not immediately know how to achieve them. A good example would be developing a success and high-achievement culture across the whole school community. The challenge is that organisational capability has to be developed first to understand the nature and dimensions of the area for development and then solutions can be built, rather than trying to solve problems immediately. Strategic intent is about tackling deep-seated cultural change and fundamental rethinking by building organisational capability and capacity, rather than assuming that the school has a set of simple linear plans that it can put into action. In order to achieve strategic intent it is necessary to go through four stages as shown in Figure 10:

ARTICULATE	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Intent
BUILD	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Images Metaphors Experiences
CREATE	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue ~ Conversation Cognitive/Mental Map Shared Understanding
DEFINE	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Perspective Outcome Orientation Formal Plans

Figure 10: Building strategic intent – the ABCD approach (based on Davies 2003: 300)

With a strategic planning approach it is possible to go straight to stage four. However, the capability-building process necessary in establishing a set of common strategic intents involves working through all four stages. Inspection systems, external to the school, often require planning frameworks with definable outcomes that can be measured. That precision is fine for some activities. However, when we come to activities that are more complex and culturally bound, which deal with changing 'social and emotional understanding', such precision is not possible. What is needed is to go through stages 2 and 3 of building and creating understanding. With these deep-seated challenges of shifting organisational culture, the only way to achieve sustainable transformation is by setting intents while the organisation builds an understanding both of the nature of the change and the capability to undertake it.

I think strategic intent is where you want to go, you are not quite sure how you are going to get there but you actually have the capacity within the school and the capability within the school to seize the opportunities as they arise to realise that vision.

Secondary headteacher

I am attracted to the notion of strategic intent. I think it liberates creativity.

Secondary headteacher

What is really important about strategic intent is that it gives us an opportunity to say, here are some areas that we are going to investigate. It could be personal understanding, it could be about practice, it could be about wider reading, it could be about national initiatives. We don't quite know yet how that's going to pan out but in fact by identifying them now and saying let's give ourselves a bit of thinking time, some quality time to develop our thinking in these areas.

Primary headteacher

Strategic intent is the approach that gives you the security to go out and forage, to look, to be reflective, to bring things back, over time and it is this business about it being over time, and some of these areas we might not look at yet, others we are already plucking out and popping into this year's plan.

Primary headteacher

I had to get them to stop thinking about 'but you can't go there because you need the route'. The intents are established first, and you don't know the pathway to get there and that allowed me...I am a big firm believer in that in terms of life, and I actually think you don't make the big leaps if you know the steps you are going to get along the way. And I have a problem with target setting for that reason - right - that you always have to break down into little steps and you never think bigger than that.

Secondary headteacher

Strategic intent - it's a combination of vision and values and what we did within our intents we talk about...part of the discussion can be about the values that underpinned some of the things in which we were visioning.

Secondary headteacher

Strategic intent is a wonderful way of unifying and clarifying positions, particularly in times of great turbulence and change - it's a wonderful unifying concept. It's not a detailed vision where we would see we are going with all t's crossed and i's dotted - it's a vision, a gestalt, a feeling of where we may be heading which brings everybody along with you.

Primary headteacher

And that's where strategic intent comes in. I think it has this wonderfully liberating factor within a school - that we have a direction, that people have confidence in the leadership, that we know the direction that we want to go. It's not easy, it's not a linear pattern, it's dynamic, it's interactive but that's why I think the strategic repertoires that we are using are actually meeting the needs of the school and its given case.

Primary headteacher

We want an individual child to have an individual laptop and we have had to take a jump of faith that we can actually afford that because our strategic intent is every child will have a laptop, we will raise the money to do that, so we have set up an e-learning foundation

Secondary headteacher

And sometimes you really don't know how you are going to do it but you set out the intent.

Secondary headteacher

A framework for strategic intent development is provided on page 56 and a generic exemplar can be found on page 57.



Strategic Intent framework

PULL OUT

Strategic Intent Framework

In building strategic intents, the school will decide on a number of strategic intents that it wishes to establish and outline them at **SI 1**.

Each intent will then be taken separately to be developed (perhaps by different groups of staff or staff and other stakeholders).

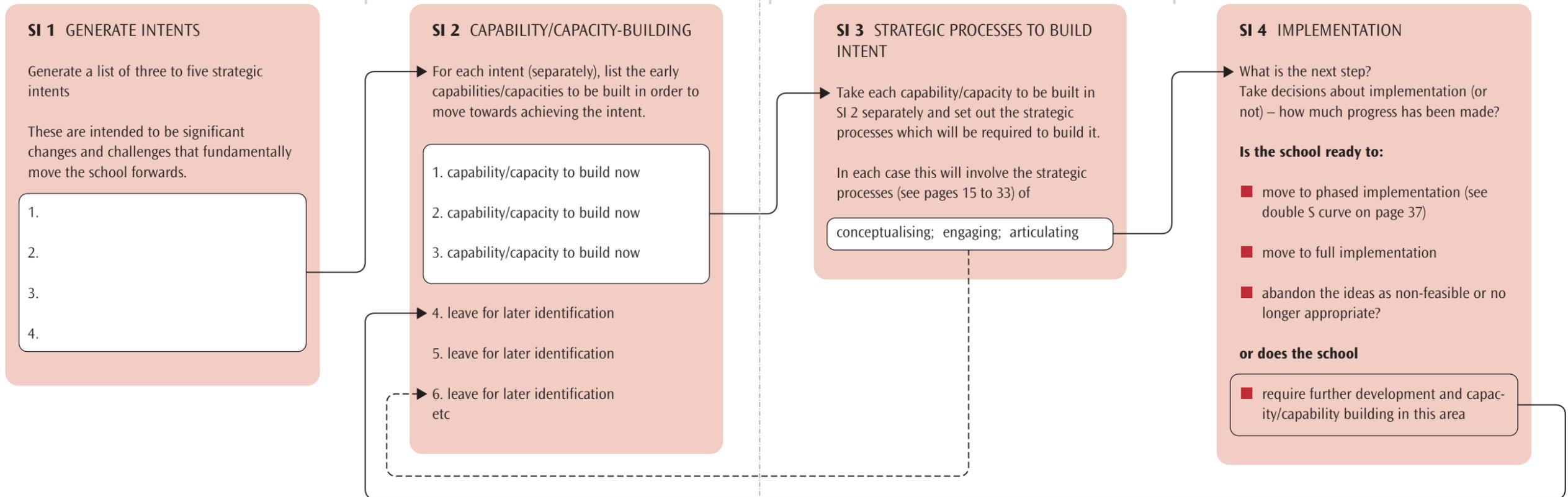
The next stage is for intent to be developed as follows:

At **SI 2**, the school or sub-group will list the capabilities and capacities to be developed in order to achieve the intent. At the outset, some will be proposed while others will be identified at later points.

At **SI 3**, the school will note the initial process by which it is intended to build each capability or capacity. This involves proposing how it will be conceptualised (the thinking stage), how the individuals will be engaged in conversations and discussions around the possible actions (the discussion stage) and how any proposals will be articulated (the record stage). (This links in with the strategic processes on pages 15 to 33). It may be that, during these processes, there is recognition of the need to return to develop further capabilities or capacities as shown by the dashed line.

The possible next steps are suggested at **SI 4** of the framework. A decision will need to be taken as to whether the intent can be taken to phased implementation OR to full implementation OR other decisions could mean that the action is abandoned as inappropriate or requires further development. In the latter case, there is an arrow on the flowchart to take this back for further consideration at **SI 2**.

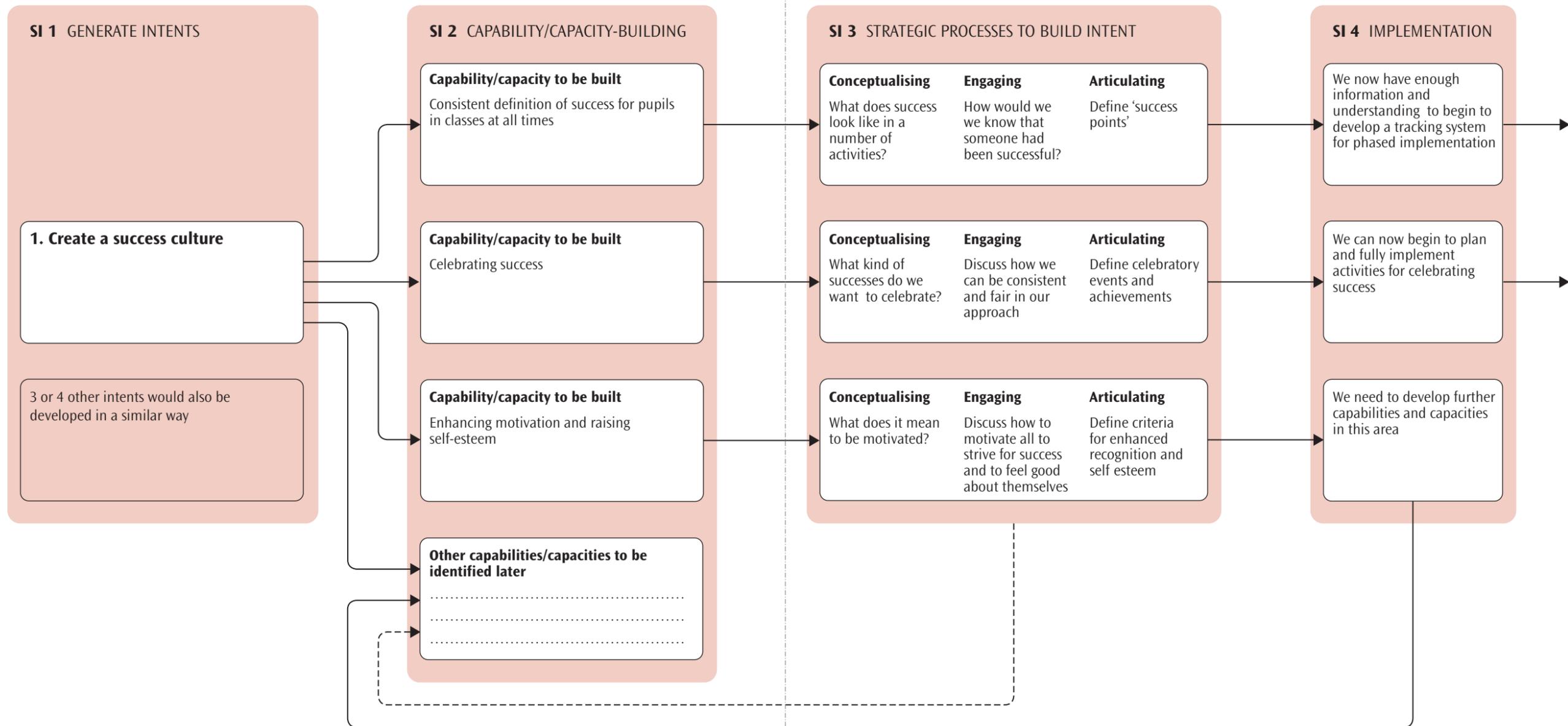
This links to the information on strategic processes on pp.34-41.



Strategic Intent exemplar

PULL OUT

Strategic Intent Exemplar



D. Devolved Strategy

Devolved strategy is the term used in a situation where those at the centre of an organisation determine a limited number of key strategic parameters but delegate or decentralise the details of the strategy to others in the organisation.

In schools this is likely to happen where the headteacher of a secondary school leaves the details of a particular policy to be worked out by subject leaders or in a primary school where the headteacher delegates the details to key stage leaders. This strategy was the least used in the schools in our research.

Leaders have to ensure that key organisational values are clear and the framework of the policy is clearly articulated. It is also important that colleagues in the organisation have the capability to develop strategy and that there is a climate of trust. The example referred to most in this project was ICT. Here headteachers were happy to provide frameworks in terms of desired outcomes but relied on the expertise of others in the school to develop the detailed strategy and deployment of resources.

Examples of devolved strategy were provided by headteachers as follows:

I know in broad strategic terms what I want from IT - I don't have a clue about the depth of how to do it (so you let someone get on with that) and we actually work with a company because they have more expertise. We delegate the detail to them.

Secondary headteacher

It was interesting for me to stand back and watch how other people managed it and I found it frustrating at times because I could see a way in which, with a minor alteration, I could make it work. But I deliberately didn't do that - and so sat back to try and let them get there themselves.

Secondary headteacher

Integrating the Approaches

The mistake from reviewing these four types of strategic approach is to think that schools use one strategic approach to the exclusion of all others. In practice a school may use a portfolio of strategic approaches in differing circumstances. Strategic planning may be the preferred approach when there is full knowledge and a time frame that facilitates it. However, given a need to implement a significant change at short notice with little prior knowledge of the area, then the strategic approach needs to be built up drawing on the experience of implementing the change; thus an emergent strategy would be evident. When the school is attempting to build a major cultural and organisational change by developing the capacity to achieve a significant shift in performance it would build a series of strategic intents. All these approaches could be used concurrently in response to the challenges and possibilities which face schools, so deploying a portfolio of strategic approaches would be the appropriate response.



Section Three

Strategic Leadership

Introduction

The research has highlighted key activities that strategic leaders undertake and has also revealed characteristics that they display. The importance of these two categorisations is that they provide a framework for leaders to reflect on their leadership development needs and a framework to develop strategic leadership abilities in the wider group of distributed leaders.



A. What Strategic Leaders Do

The research isolated five critical activities that the successful strategic leaders in the study identified as prime activities that they undertook. These were:

- i. Setting the direction of the school
- ii. Translating strategy into action
- iii. Aligning the people, the organisation and the strategy
- iv. Determining effective strategic intervention points
- v. Developing strategic capabilities in the school

i. Setting the direction of the school

Strategic leaders are not just concerned with managing the now but also with defining where the school needs to be in the future and, thus, setting a direction for the school. As one of the headteachers commented earlier in the booklet ‘it’s a dual approach really – how to get the staff to give the best deal possible to the kids today but to get them to rethink the way it might be a different deal in the future’. The function of strategy is to translate the moral purpose and vision into reality. School leaders articulate the organisation’s moral purpose, which can be considered as ‘why we do what we do’. The values that underpin this moral purpose are linked to the vision, considering ‘where we want to be and what sort of organisation we want to be in the future’. Strategy is the means of connecting this broad activity to shorter-term operational planning. Strategy is defining that medium-term sense of direction.

We saw earlier in the booklet that there is a need to stand back from the day-to-day activities of the school and look at the bigger picture and consider whole school issues. Perceptive comments from headteachers earlier in the booklet included, ‘to me strategy is the way of me trying to look forward to make sense of a whole big picture and find ways of going forward and improving my school in a number of ways’ and ‘strategy for me is taking a long-term view about how to make realistic sense of the vision and how you achieve that vision over a period of time.’ It is this driving forward to new and better ways of doing things that sets strategic leaders apart. They are, by definition, transformational and not transactional leaders.

Understanding where the school is now, what might be called ‘seeing behind’, has to be accompanied by the ability of ‘seeing ahead’ to move the school in a new direction. Balancing the understanding of what is possible and what is desirable is the challenge for strategic leaders. Strategic leaders not only need these two abilities of ‘seeing’ but they need a third, and headteachers in our research emphasised this, the critical ability of ‘seeing it through’. This ability to translate strategy into reality will be considered next.

ii. Translating strategy into action

One of the headteachers in the study commented: “It’s not enough just to do that thinking and reflecting but then people actually want to see results.” Headteachers need to be good managers as well as good leaders to make sure that things happen and are not just discussed. We suggested early in the booklet that there were four factors that were useful in translating strategy into action.

The first of these was focus. The standard management maxim of ‘getting more from less’ is important here. Refining down the many issues to the really important ones is critical. Headteachers reported that they needed to concentrate on fundamental issues and ensure that they were used to direct the school and not become deflected by short-term issues. As one said, the need “...is to have some key strategic direction points...it is very easy to get diverted by current challenges and forget what is really important”.

The second factor is delivery. This is important in two ways. First, leaders obviously need to achieve the strategy’s objectives for the benefit of the school. Second, by effective delivery of strategic objectives, leaders establish credibility for themselves with staff as they are seen as individuals who can carry through change and make a significant difference for the school. This makes future change easier to accomplish because the staff trust the leader to translate strategy into real outcomes and not to leave it as empty rhetoric.

Leading by example is the third key to successful conversion of strategy into action. It is important because if the school is to set up a culture where everyone is involved, then strategy and strategic thinking should not be left to chance. It takes involvement of all individuals to both articulate and implement strategy. Thus leaders in the study saw that they needed to be fully involved in the strategic process.

Finally, headteachers in the study saw strategy as a continuous process. Plans were not written and then left; strategy was seen as an ongoing process of discussion and review, leading to adjustment. Strategy was seen as much as a process as it was a definitive document.

iii. Aligning the people, the organisation and the strategy

Leaders in the study reported that it was fundamentally impossible to change mission and strategy without changing culture and behaviour. Key to this is changing the mindset and the behaviour of the people within the organisation. The importance of alignment was recognised by the headteachers in the project. The research interviewees articulated a process based on strategic conversations which built participation and motivation within their schools to improve strategic capability. These alignment processes work in an iterative way.

Aligning people, the organisation and the strategy involves moving through stages. First, it is necessary to build a common understanding of what is possible through shared experiences and images. This building stage entails envisioning a clear and understandable picture of what a new way of operating would look like. This involves awakening colleagues in the school to alternative perspectives and experiences and building an agreement within the school that a continuation of the current way of working is inadequate if the school wants to be effective in the future. Second, the leaders need to create, through dialogue, a shared conceptual or mental map of the future. What strategic leaders are able to do is to step back and articulate the main features of the current organisation, which might be called the strategic architecture of the school, and lead others to define

what the future of the school and the new architecture will be. In the third stage, leaders need to define desired outcomes and the stages of achieving those outcomes. This will establish a clearer picture of the new strategic direction and architecture of the school. This stage involves the identification of a series of actions that need to be undertaken to move the organisation from its current to its future state.

The significance of this approach is that stage three can only be embedded in the organisational culture if time is taken to work through stages one and two. Being successful at this was reported earlier in the booklet by one headteacher as: “It’s about us and not the old thing of ‘oh well it’s what the senior leadership team want’, ‘oh it’s about what someone else wants’, or ‘it’s an external imposition’ – it’s now actually about what we want”

iv. Determining effective strategic intervention points

The leadership challenge of when to make a significant strategic change is as critical to success as choosing what strategic change to make. Three critical points have to be balanced one against the other: when individuals in the school are ready for change; when the school needs the change, and; when the external constraints and conditions force the change. Such judgement is manifested in not only knowing what and knowing how but also knowing when and, just as important, knowing what not to do. Therefore we could add to this list knowing what to give up or abandon in order to create capacity to undertake the new activity.

Typical responses from headteachers in the study to support this perspective were: “one of the things that I learnt very early on was to spend as much time on how you implement as on what you implement and I spend a lot of time on thinking ‘what is the best way to do it?’ and “I think from my own point of view a lot of that goes on fairly intuitively - I know I can’t go down that road because I am not ready or they are not ready. So timing is so critical”.

Leaders in the study said that their most important challenge was making the right strategic judgements about what to do and also how and when to do this. They commented on the value of having strategic conversations to inform decision-making. They saw the value of networks as a means of providing a ‘sounding board’ for possible courses of action. They all saw this as one of the most challenging parts of their role as it affected the long-term future of the school. The maxim of ‘doing the right thing at the right time’ was a recurrent theme in the discussions.

The headteachers were also aware of the danger of taking on too many new initiatives, resulting in the organisation losing focus and overburdening the leadership capacity of the school. Key to maintaining focus and operating within capacity is strategic abandonment. Leaders make clear decisions to undertake the difficult challenge of abandoning some areas of development and activity in order to create the organisational capacity to undertake the new challenge. This strategic abandonment involves a constant process of focusing on priorities and making strategic choices.

Strategically-focused schools position themselves to be able to build the right capability to take advantage of future opportunities. It is possible to consider positioning as a key to enabling the school to be strategically opportunistic. There is a significant difference between schools who simply respond to happenstance (ie they bid for initiatives as they come along) and being strategically opportunistic. Strategically opportunistic schools position themselves to make a choice between alternative opportunities and to choose only those that fit their strategic direction and development framework. As one headteacher articulated: “I seized the opportunity, but laid down the terms of how I would do it”.

v. Developing strategic capabilities in the school

If the school is to develop and be sustainable in the longer-term then it needs to develop strategic capabilities, a term used by Stalk et al (1992), while Prahalad and Hamel (1990) refer to 'core competencies'. These can be illustrated using the analogy of a tree, where the branches represent the short-term actions and the roots are the underpinning fundamental capabilities of the school. Examples of these would be: the fundamental understanding of teaching and learning rather than the ability to deliver the latest curriculum innovation; a problem-solving culture rather than a blame culture for the staff; assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. Creativity in problem-solving and team working are necessary to give the school deep-seated strategic capabilities or abilities.

A representation of this can be seen in the following figure. The figure does not claim to show a comprehensive list but illustrates the difference between specific dimensions and activities for the current operation of the school and the more deep rooted core strategic capabilities that would contribute to the longer-term success and sustainability of the school.

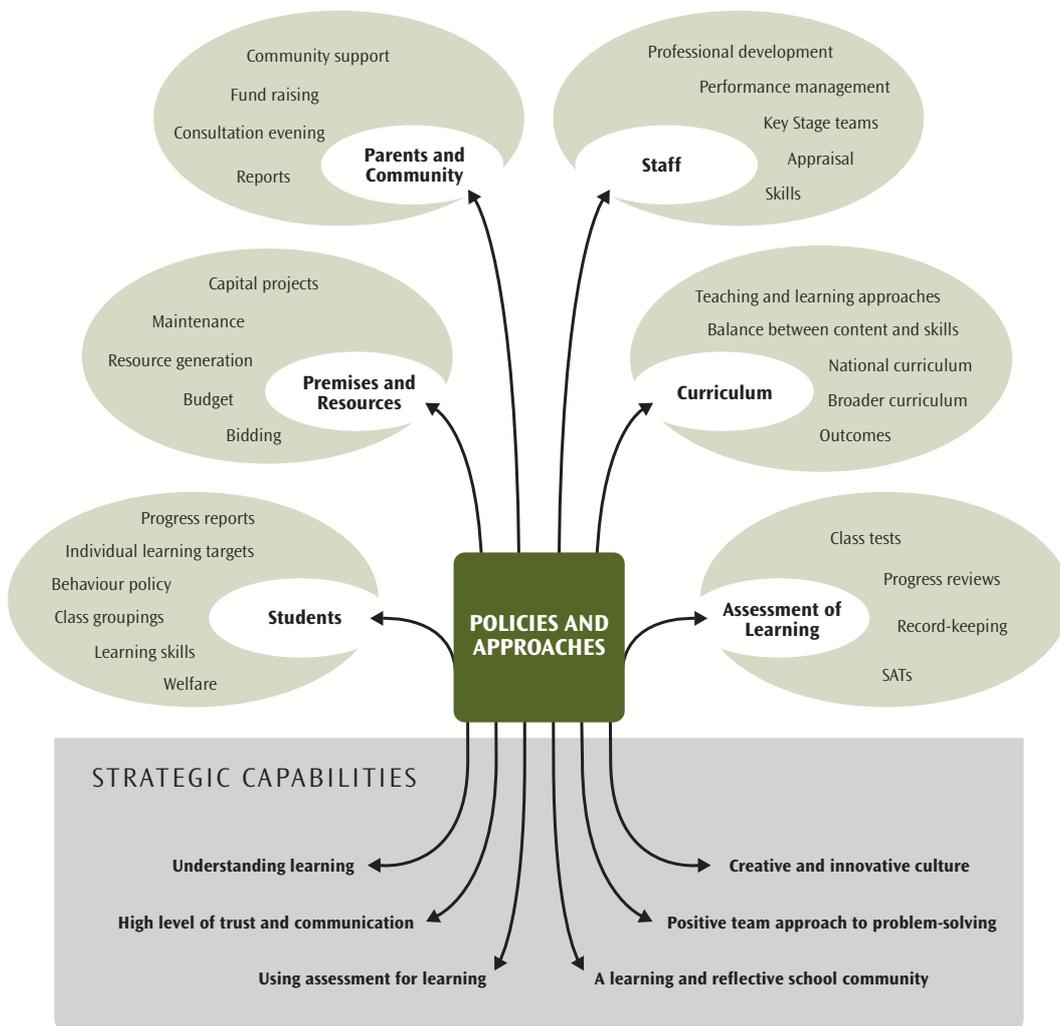


Figure 11: Core strategic capabilities underpinning action

B. Characteristics that Strategic Leaders Display and Develop

As well as explaining what they do, successful strategic leaders in the study talked about the characteristics that they possessed. We found that:

- i. they challenge and question; they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present
- ii. they prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding
- iii. they display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system
- iv. they have powerful personal and professional networks
- v. they have high quality personal and interpersonal skills (EQ)

We now expand on these characteristics in order that heads can reflect on them for developing themselves and their colleagues.

i. They challenge and question; they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present

One of the key characteristics of strategic leaders is that they are constantly challenging the status quo – the existing way of doing things. They are conscious of the school not being a 'cruising' or 'strolling' school. While not dismissing current approaches and strengths, strategically-focused leaders are constantly looking for the next development idea or phase and they realise that what is good enough for now will not remain so. They are forward-looking and futures-orientated. They see the future as affording better opportunities; they see change as desirable not undesirable; they see challenges rather than problems. In brief, they are improvers not maintainers. They see a constant need to keep up-to-date and draw in ideas about how they may challenge current patterns and do things differently in the future.

This may involve a degree of creative tension which emerges from seeing clearly where they wish to be, what their vision is, and facing the truth about their current situation. Strategic leaders have the ability to live with the reality that the organisational culture may not be as forward thinking as they are. A key characteristic of strategic leaders is the ability to live with the ambiguity of maintaining their restlessness for change and improvement while, at the same time, not being able to change the organisation as fast as they would like. This dissatisfaction or restlessness with the current situation can lead to a degree of frustration which has to be managed. Individuals who are able to do this are able to challenge current ideas and processes to seek better ones.

A primary headteacher illustrates this:

Part of the problem has been that, in some people's eyes, we were already successful. Why, then, change a winning formula? Some were content with the way things were, they were comfortable with existing strategies because they appeared to be working. For some, therefore, there was little motivation to change. So part of the agenda was to improve what we already did to ensure we did not start to peak and go down the Sigmoid Curve to point B but the other strategic agenda was to reconceptualise how we could operate in a totally new way. As I learnt more and more about whole-brain learning and Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, I became discontented with the existing situation and the task became clear - there would have to be a significant development programme to introduce the staff to this new science of learning and to promote the introduction of accelerated learning techniques. The work of Davies and Ellison on school planning has helped me to develop a more holistic and more strategic view of school improvement so that, even in the turbulence that schools now find themselves, it is still possible to remain focused on the core purpose of helping our children to become effective life-long learners. Thus from a new perspective of multiple intelligences and accelerated learning together with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' we prepared a staff development programme that would totally reengineer our concept of learning and how we would structure our learning and teaching process.

ii. They prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding

A very significant number of the school leaders participating in the study referred to their own learning and stressed the importance of new knowledge to promote the strategic direction for the school. The time for reflection and thinking is critical in order to understand new ideas. Equally important is the ability to conceptualise these ideas in such a way as to create new, clear models of understanding and to communicate them to the wider school body. If we are to develop creative schools, then the importance that we attach to thinking and learning needs to start with the leader so that that he/she can both model and develop creative thinking in the wider group of staff and students in the school.

A common theme in the leadership and management literature is, first understand yourself, then understand the team and then understand the organisation. The importance of this was articulated by one headteacher in the study as “It’s also about understanding – understanding the institution and understanding yourself, understanding the other players as well in the organisation and so that you can actually take the whole thing forward. The challenge of modern headship is that often the urgent crowds out the important”. Earlier in this booklet, we referred to one of the headteachers in the study who recognised this and tried to put in place a strategy “The first two years of headship I ran around like a headless chicken trying to do everything and then I realised I was actually no good to the staff or myself and I decided to give myself a timetable to think.”

So a recurring theme in the study was the importance for strategic leaders to spend time on their own professional development in terms of providing time to think and develop new ideas. This gave them the ability to develop new frameworks for understanding and action which they could share with others in the school community.

iii. They display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system

Strategic wisdom requires a clear value system on which to base decisions. Once that is established, it needs the ability to balance a number of factors. Strategic leaders need the wisdom to balance the effects of ideas on themselves, others and schools in both the short and long term. This links to the earlier point regarding effective intervention points. The deployment of both analytical intelligence (to do the right thing) and emotional intelligence (to do it in the right way) is critical here. The balance of short- and long-term expediencies and needs was often seen by the heads as requiring reflection and judgement and, often, intuition. Benchmarks for judgements were referred to as the need to consider ‘the common good’ or what is ‘in the best interests of children’. This was supported by headteachers in the study with statements such as “Never, ever to lose sight of the number one objective – education of children” and “The strategies are important but when they are achieved we will move onto others. But the strategies must be within a set of values”.

In a perceptive presentation to the 2002 International Thinking Skills Conference, Robert Sternberg articulated that leaders need wisdom because they need:

- creative abilities to come up with ideas
- analytical abilities to decide whether ideas are good ideas
- practical abilities to make your ideas functional and to convince others of the value of your ideas
- wisdom to balance the effects of ideas on yourself, others and institutions in both the short and long run

Put simply, wisdom may be defined as the capacity to take the right action at the right time. But the right action is based on a whole set of moral and ethical positions. The strategic leaders in our study acknowledged the importance of clarifying the underlying value system in a proactive way so that when difficult strategic decisions had to be made they were able to benchmark their decision on a predetermined set of principles. The dangers of not clarifying values were identified by two headteachers. “You also need to look at yourself and find out what your core values are because if you try and work outside your own values system it’s not going to work. And you shouldn’t ever take on a headship if the governors don’t know what are your non-negotiables in terms of values.” and “Well the other thing is you do not fudge and compromise. The one lesson I have learned in life is once you start to fudge compromise you make it worse.”

The significance of leadership and values being dispersed was highlighted by one headteacher as: “At any time, any member of the school may be called upon to lead in their particular area; therefore in order to ensure consistency and direction then it has to be within certain agreed values.”

The headteachers in the study put a very high importance on clarifying values and making decisions in the context of those values. They also involved others in trying to make difficult judgements in an informed way.

iv. They have powerful personal and professional networks

Strategic leaders constantly seek to scan their environment locally, regionally and internationally. They seek both to develop new ideas and to benchmark current practice in their own schools with those of colleagues in the wider educational community. The ability to develop personal and professional networks that provide alternative perspectives from those prevalent in their immediate educational environment is a key skill of strategic leaders. This has become possible on a global basis with the rapid expansion of technological communication. Our research shows that strategically-focused leaders invest considerable time and energy in building and sustaining networks locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. These are not confined just to benchmarking current practice but are fora for ideas where visioning and future-oriented dialogues are facilitated. They are constantly seeking new ways of thinking and working and they seek to build their own solutions from a wide range of sources.

The leaders are involved in national networks through Networked Learning Communities of NCSL, international visits for staff through LEAs, the British Council and the Technology Schools’ Trust, Vision 2020 groups, and local networks, either formal or informal. Often such networking involves staff from many parts of the school, including support staff, rather than being seen as the privilege of the senior team. In several schools, the network extends to other groups in the community and to industry and commerce.

It was seen in the project that strategic leaders place a high importance on networks and networking to draw in ideas and inspiration for strategic change and development. This is a very important personal characteristic of strategic leaders.

v. They have high quality personal and interpersonal skills (EQ)

Key characteristics mentioned in the research interviews were personal confidence and resilience which were cited as necessary when driving through the early stages of strategic change. This was seen in parallel with the ability to listen to others and also to admit mistakes when the evidence suggested that a different strategic course should be taken. This ability to both focus on strategic ends but also to have the flexibility to adapt if circumstances changed was seen as important. This links to the wisdom concept and the significant key to success in relating to others is that 'how' something is done is as important as 'what' is done.

All of these qualities affect the way a leader learns and is able to change. Most leadership researchers agree that leaders need to have important interpersonal skills such as empathy, motivation, and communication. Bennett (2000, p.3) expands the importance of personal values:

If moral leadership is to be exercised and pedagogy re-engineered with any degree of success, then future leaders will need a firm set of personal values. No doubt many will have their own lists, but integrity, social justice, humanity, respect, loyalty and a sharp distinction between right and wrong, will all need to be included. Strategic relationships will soon flounder unless such a value system is held with conviction and exercised on a regular consistent basis.

Although not specifically included in Bennett's comprehensive list, social intelligence is important for strategic leadership because the processes of decision-making, solution implementation and organisational improvement are rarely free of emotion. Social intelligence includes having a thorough understanding of the social context, and is defined by Gardner (1985, p.239) as the ability 'to notice and make distinctions among other individuals ... in particular among their moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions.' So a key component of social intelligence is the ability to discern emotion both in self and in others. Gardner identifies this as both intra- and inter-personal intelligence. The ability to connect the involvement of others and to resolve conflicts will be increasingly vital in a context of developing strategic relationships and finding creative solutions. Bennett (2000, p.4) also identifies the importance of strength and courage; 'visionary projects, delivered with passion, will fail unless the leader has the ability to counter adversaries and remain confident until the conclusion has been reached.'

Conclusion

The force that harnesses and brings together the capacity to build a strategically-focused school is the quality of leadership. This booklet has outlined in this section what strategic leaders do and the characteristics that they display.

A useful developmental exercise for school leadership teams is to discuss these in order to evaluate their relevance and then seek ways to develop, in a wider group of leaders within the school, those leadership attributes which are thought to be valuable.

Conclusions

Building the Strategically-focused School: What are the Implications for School Leaders

The research with schools that have been both operationally and strategically successful has provided valuable insights into the strategic development processes and approaches which are utilised by effective strategic leaders.

In this section, we have synthesised the key issues from across the research project. We hope this will be informative, both for those in schools and for those who work to support schools and professional development. We would wish to reinforce that strategically-focused schools strive to:

- A. Develop both a short-term and a strategic perspective in the school
- B. Develop and enhance strategic processes in the school
- C. Develop and deploy a variety of strategic approaches in the school
- D. Develop and enhance strategic leadership throughout the school
- E. Develop strategic measures of success in the school



A. Develop both a short-term and a strategic perspective in the school

Many schools have effective school development or improvement plans but these are, by their very nature, short-term. While they may contribute to short-term effectiveness, they do not necessarily ensure the longer-term success or viability of the school (see quadrant one). Similarly, having longer-term plans would be pointless if the immediate viability of the school was threatened, as is the case in a few schools where the senior team does not keep in touch with the day-to-day realities of the school (quadrant four). What is needed is to move to a situation where there is a balance of short- and long-term planning so that the school is effective for its current students but is also building for a successful and sustainable future (quadrant two). Any school which is in quadrant three would probably need considerable support, or some new leaders, if it is to begin to develop both its short-term and long-term plans.

In Figure 12, the desirable position is quadrant two, where both short-term target setting and operational plans are complemented by the medium- to longer-term strategic framework. While many funded initiatives have short-term targets, it is important to ensure that they are used to bring about sustainable improvement, rather than becoming just a short-term quick fix to provide a rapid rise in outcomes which then plateaus.

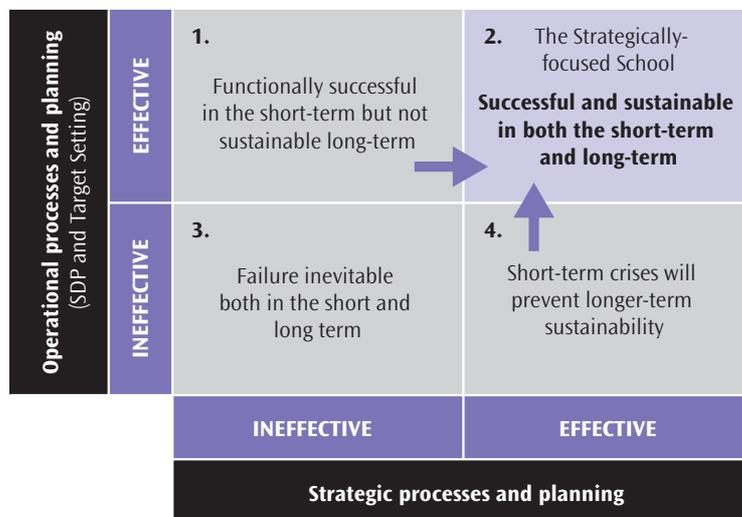


Figure 12: Short-term viability and long-term sustainability. (based on Davies B J, 2004)

This links very strongly with the concept of parallel development earlier in the booklet (page 40). Schools can try to deal with the short-term agenda and then move on to the longer term, more strategic agenda. The alternative is to deal with the short-term challenges and concurrently build for the future. The argument for doing the latter is that it is not possible to do the short-term effectively without also addressing the longer term. It is important that staff see current actions in their strategic context so that they understand the purpose of what they are doing. It may also be important to convince staff that short-term difficult change has to be adopted if a more desirable future state is to be attained.

B. Develop and enhance strategic processes in the school

There is often an urgency to write plans and documents for external accountability or when bidding for funds. While this is understandable, it does have its inherent dangers. The key one is that the rhetoric in the documentation does not match the practice of the staff in the school. If individuals cannot articulate the main strategic intents and direction of the school, then it is unlikely that they will ever be realised. Standard management maxims apply such as ‘process is policy’ which means that it is through the process of discussion and dialogue that effective strategy is developed. This contrasts with strategy being imposed on the individuals in the organisation.

In this booklet we have outlined four strategic processes: how we think about strategy (conceptualising), how we involve others in the processes (engaging the people), how we communicate the strategy (articulating) and finally how we go about putting strategy into action (implementating). One of the most powerful insights from the research was the significance of strategic conversations, not just as part of the process of engaging a wider set of people in the school but also as activities that underpinned the other activities in the strategic process category. Strategic conversations were a central tool in building the leaders’ own understanding by sharing initial ideas with others. They are also a key element in developing distributed leadership. Moving staff members’ understanding of their role from curriculum or organisational management to one that encompasses a wider educational and organisational leadership understanding is heavily dependent on the quality of strategic conversations in the school. In building a culture of leadership in depth in their schools, strategic leaders emphasised the importance of both formal and informal strategic conversations with colleagues.

The research suggests that giving priority to both building and reinforcing the values and vision of the school must be accompanied by regular and consistent strategic conversations and dialogues in the school in order to turn values and vision into reality.

C. Develop and deploy a variety of strategic approaches in the school

The major section on strategic approaches outlines the key conceptual framework of: strategic planning, emergent strategy, strategic intent and devolved strategy. There has been a tendency in the last 20 years to see strategy as strategic planning and also to associate school development planning with strategic planning. The schools in our research were able to distinguish between the short-term school development plan and the strategic plan. They avoided the mistake of adding additional years of detail onto the school development plan in the vain hope that it would become strategic. They were successful in separating out the short-term planning approach and the broader whole school, medium- to longer-term approach of strategic planning. More significantly they could distinguish between the broader concept of strategy and strategic planning.

It is important for schools to have a strategic plan for those predictable medium-term activities. However, we have shown in this booklet that an over-reliance on rational and traditional strategic planning is an inadequate approach for a school. Certainly in an era of rapid change and multiple initiatives from government, schools have to take on new ideas and learn from doing them. The importance of developing a reflective and learning culture so that strategy can emerge from the analysis of experience is a powerful way of dealing with complexity.

We have put significant emphasis on strategic intent. The school leaders in the study saw this as a means of getting back to their educational core purpose and building capability and capacity to challenge new areas of development. Indeed it is a means of establishing a coherent framework for development while allowing ideas and alternative approaches to be worked on to build solutions. It is based on the collective leadership of the school setting intents for the future but having the confidence to not want easy short-term solutions but to take the opportunity to build real understanding and develop meaningful solutions and strategies. The leaders in our study saw this as a liberating educational approach. Devolved strategy was emerging in some of the secondary schools where distributed leadership was well established.

The significance for strategically-focused schools is that they both recognise different approaches to strategic development and, significantly, they deliberately deploy those different approaches.

D. Develop and enhance strategic leadership throughout the school

The significance of strategic leaders in schools is that they can rise above the day-to-day operational activities and see those in a broader longer-term context. The booklet has highlighted two categories to consider in the area of strategic leadership, first, what strategic leaders do and, second, what characteristics strategic leaders display. The importance of these two categories is, first, in sustaining and developing existing school leadership and, second, in providing a framework to develop future strategic leaders.

The booklet does not set out to define in an absolute way what strategic do. Rather it articulates five activities undertaken by strategic leaders. These are:

- setting the direction of the school
- translating strategy into action
- aligning the people, the organisation and the strategy
- determining effective strategic intervention points
- developing strategic capabilities in the school

These five activities provide a framework for leaders in schools to assess how effectively they operate in these strategic areas. Leaders can then review how they want to develop their particular skills to improve their performance. These five activities also provide a framework to establish how the wider school leadership team can benchmark their involvement and performance in these areas in order to begin to establish their personal leadership development agendas.

Similarly, in outlining a number of characteristics that strategic leaders display, the booklet provides a framework for developing capabilities of existing leaders and strategic leaders in the future.

Strategic leaders:

- challenge and question – they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present
- prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding
- display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system
- have powerful personal and professional networks
- have high quality personal and interpersonal skills (EQ)

Readers of this booklet should assess whether they recognise any of the characteristics in themselves and their colleagues. Recognising their own ability to challenge and question may not be the same as encouraging that in others.

This powerful summary of strategic leadership actions and characteristics provides a useful starting point in developing these qualities in a broader group of staff in the school.

E. Develop strategic measures of success in the school

For an individual on a diet, the maxim may be 'you are what you eat'. The organisational equivalent of this may be 'you are what you measure'. While all schools have ways of measuring whether short-term goals, such as Key Stage and examination targets, are realised, how many have strategic medium-term goals and the measurement techniques to judge whether they are reached?

The research evidence suggests that strategically-focused schools have medium-term broader educational measures of success as well as short-term goals capable of being measured by the raw numbers demanded by many agencies.

While strategic measures articulated by schools did incorporate improvement in standards in broad terms and other numerically determined outcomes, they also included many innovative qualitative measures. The schools took as their theme for strategic measurement: 'what would we want our school to look like?' (desirable outcomes or factors) and 'how would we recognise those desirable outcomes or factors?'

In strategic conversations, school leaders discussed such things as developing a learning culture in the school where staff welcomed new ideas and sought to improve their current practice. This would involve moving the staff informal discussion from the current to the more strategic and future orientated. This, they said, could be measured by such things as the involvement of staff in educational dialogue after school; do they stay behind to discuss broader issues and not just operational imperatives? Another measure would be to assess whether the pattern of professional development becomes more outward facing and whether staff are making links with other schools, both in the UK and overseas. These would be powerful measures of success.

Strategic measures of success for students in school would include developing their self-concept of what it means to be a learner. This may be seen in such strategic measures as the level of student involvement in broader educational activities outside the classroom – or a culture where learning is 'cool'.

What is clear is that strategically-focused schools recognise the need to measure strategic outcomes and not just see them as an extension of short-term outcomes.

Reference Material

References

- Bennett, D.** (2000) *The School of the Future*, National College for School Leadership, Leadership evidence base, NCSL: Nottingham.
- Davies, B.** (2003) Rethinking Strategy and Strategic Leadership in Schools, *Educational Management and Administration*. 31(3): 295-312.
- Davies, B. & Davies B. J.** (2005) 'Strategic Leadership' in Davies B, *The Essentials of School Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Davies, B. & Ellison, L.** (2003) *The New Strategic Direction and Development of the School*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Davies, B. J.** (2004) *An Investigation into the Development of a Strategically-focused Primary School*. EdD Thesis, University of Hull: Hull, UK.
- Gardner, H.** (1985) *The Mind's New Science: A history of the cognitive revolution*, New York: Basic Books.
- Garratt, B.** (2003) *Developing Strategic Thought*, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Hamel, G. & Prahalad, C. K.** (1994) *Competing for the Future*. Boston: HBS Press.
- Mintzberg, H.** (2003) 'Strategic Thinking as Seeing' in Garratt, B. (ed), *Developing Strategic Thought*, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Prahalad, C.K. and Hamel, G.** (1990) 'The core competence of the corporation', *Harvard Business Review*, 68, 79-93.
- Stalk, G. Evans, P. and Schulman, L.** (1992) 'Competing on capabilities: the new rules of corporate strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, 70(2), 57-69.
- Sternberg, R. J.** (2002) Wisdom, Schooling and Society, keynote presentation to the 2002 International Thinking Skills Conference, Harrogate, UK.

Recommended Further Reading

Davies, B. (2006) *Leading the Strategically-focused School for Success and Sustainability*. London: Sage.

Davies, B. & Ellison, L. (2003) *The New Strategic Direction and Development of the School*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Garratt, B. (2003) *Developing Strategic Thought*. London: HarperCollins.

Appendix: Methodology

Through our earlier work on strategy and planning, we are aware that the practice of different schools varies considerably. Many have only short-term planning horizons while others are much more strategic in their approaches. However, some of those who appear to be strategic are actually making simple additions to short-term plans. The challenge then was to choose an approach which would allow us to gain detailed insights into what heads and schools do and to reach the insights which would help us to move our project forwards.

A large scale survey was felt to be inappropriate because it may give us a superficial view of current practice in a large number of schools but less of an understanding of both the tensions which heads face and the solutions which they develop as they seek to achieve the strategically-focused school. A survey carried out at a distance may also be weakened by confusion over terminology and the lack of an opportunity to probe when we found interesting ways of working. The decision was therefore taken to study fewer schools using interviews and through examining a range of other evidence. We felt that it was important to collect the school's documents such as plans as we believe that schools which are strategic don't just talk about it but have written evidence of their strategic development.

Sampling

The project aimed to investigate good practice in strategic development, so the challenge was to identify good practice, both in terms of rhetoric, such as written plans, and reality (as seen in the strategic processes of the school). It was decided that the following sample would be feasible and, with careful selection, would allow us to gather rich data.

- 10 primary schools
- 10 secondary schools
- three special schools

While these ratios do not represent the ratio of schools in England, it was felt that they would allow us to see a range of approaches to strategy development and reflect the characteristics listed below.

In our selection of the heads, we wanted to reflect a number of characteristics such as:

- gender of head
- region of England and rural/urban/shire
- type of school (governance)
- school size
- age range of pupils
- socio-economic status of the pupils
- results achieved by the school
- involvement in initiatives eg EiC, NLC, SST, LIG and Primary Strategy where appropriate

Note was also taken of time in post of head and number of years in headship, although these were not first order criteria, bearing in mind the nature of the project which might veer towards the more experienced and confident.

Thus, basic data could be obtained from records of DfES etc. but there was a need to look in several ways to obtain information about those who were 'working strategically in the schools'.

A search of the Ofsted database revealed little to differentiate the strategic from the rest, but did allow us to check out chosen schools in terms of the quality of leadership etc. if the inspection was during the particular head's time in the school. There were, however, limitations and confusions in the Ofsted reports. For example, one praised the strategic processes in the school, commenting on the fact that it had an excellent strategic plan for one year, thus demonstrating that the Ofsted criteria for judging good 'strategic heads' were not going to assist us in our selection.

A national approach to selection was therefore not going to work, so we decided to explain what we were looking for to a number of people in LEAs, headteacher unions and groups, networks, consultants etc. This resulted in names which we could put into our matrix of criteria. Further names were acquired through a snowball technique (more normally used in sensitive situations but appropriate here to uncover the practices which are not always overt in official documents) whereby heads suggested other heads and we sought out further names through conferences etc.

Documentary evidence

We asked for copies of school development/improvement plans and also discussion documents, records of staff development days relating to discussing the school's future, diagrams, mind maps and so on.

The interview schedule

The questions were designed to be very open ended so as to allow heads to draw on the many processes which they used within and beyond the school. The outline questions were developed as a result of the key strands which emerged from the review of the literature, with prompts and explanations being used where necessary.

Several interviews were carried out by various combinations of the research team (usually operating in pairs) in order to develop a fairly standardised approach and to benefit from each other's techniques. Interviews were taped and fully transcribed.

As a result of various interim analyses of the data, questions were refined and revised in order to follow through aspects of significance which were arising from the first interviews.

Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were coded using a set of key aspects identified in the literature and new codes were added as new aspects were identified by the interviewees. Coding was carried out in meetings of the team and individually.

Once the key aspects had been refined and regrouped, the data from each respondent were collated under the following headings:

- Understanding of 'strategy'
- Strategic processes
- Strategic approaches
- Strategic leadership

Success and Sustainability: developing the strategically-focused school is based on a research project focused on how schools can build on good short-term school development (improvement) planning and address the issues of both sustainability and of longer-term capability or capacity building. It takes as its theme one of the 10 leadership propositions of the National College for School Leadership that: School leadership must be futures orientated and strategically driven.

“We’ve been working on the basics because, basically, we’ve been having trouble with the basics.”

Bob Ojeda, Los Angeles Dodgers Baseball Coach

“I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been”

Wayne Gretzky (Famous Ice Hockey Player)

**National College for
School Leadership**

Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155

F: 0115 872 2001

E: nctl-office@nctl.org.uk

W: www.nctl.org.uk