

Like Strategy for the Very First Time

Hilary Barnard

An organisational strategy is a powerful idea but maybe not easy to develop the first time round. We've taken a light hearted look at it but with serious intent, in order to help you get started if that's where you are...

Popular songs can express the possibilities of strategy (with a little tweaking) as well as signalling some of the assumptions that limit strategic development in third sector organisations:

What a Strategy can do for You:

Stairway to vision: strategy helps develop vision, builds on values and shows ways those aspirations and ways of working can be realised.

Suddenly strategy happened to me: a strategy conceived in isolation or a deliberate strategy on its own is doomed to failure; apart from anything else, third sector organisations do not control the big picture. Good strategy involves careful positioning and honing the ability of the organisation to spot and take opportunities.

Behind the painted smile: strategic analysis provides an objective picture of an organisation's true resources and capabilities.

Imagine: good strategy is a creative process, building on evidence and analysis and applying a mental elasticity that will come with practice.

You were made for me: customised strategy is worth it. Each third sector organisation is special and different - and so too are its plans.

Come on strategy, hit me one more time: the challenge and insights of a critical friend are invaluable in driving strategic thinking, ensuring conclusions are not only feasible and suitable but also acceptable.

I was only 24 hours away from strategic thinking: it is easy to be diverted from developing strategy and often hard to resist. But it works best as a continual or iterative process (e.g. scanning the horizon, re-examining emerging directions) rather than hastily prepared for the annual awayday.

I can't get no practical satisfaction: some of us love detail but not all detail has strategic importance. Good strategic plans are set within the big picture, but equally drill down to what really matters in organisational performance and drive the direction of business operations.

I heard it through the grapevine: too often, organisational ambition is not owned by a front line that must implement it. A learning organisation will seek the views and engagement of staff, even where they are a 'conservative' stakeholder.

You probably think this strategy is about you: strategies are organisation wide statements rather than the personal expression of the Chief Executive or the Chair of Trustees.

Money. That's what I want: not as an end (!) in itself for third sector organisations but getting resources for the work has to be an integrated part of the strategy and not a bolt on. The strategy must drive the case for funding support, which means that finding resources for the work must be identified within the strategic plan.

One of these days my strategy is going to walk all over you: in the age of commissioning and contracting, third sector organisations need to collaborate through consortia and partnerships.

It takes two, me and you: as consultants in Cass CCE we can help you think through, plan and write your strategy. We can support you through the process, offering constructive challenge, facilitation, analysis, research and evaluation skills.

Let me introduce myself: **Hilary Barnard** is the Head of the Strategy and Change practice within Cass CCE. As a consultant since 1990, he has been helping a wide cross section of third sector organisations develop effective strategy.