Strategic Planning has become essential in our times of rapid and uncertain change. However, before just following the often published steps to build a plan, there are some stages that need to be done first. For example, there are different types of strategic plans – determine which is applicable in your situation. What context is the plan being written? Is it a big picture approach for a large organization, a subunit in an organization, or a small and young organization. And of course, you need a mechanism to implement the strategic plan. These topics are outlined below are part of a presentation to the strategic planning course at the University of Arizona College of Public Health taught by Professor Ernie Schloss.

Normal Planning vs Strategic Planning
Some planning is so natural or common that we don’t think of it as planning. For example, in teaching a course you normally plan out at least the lecture titles, in organizing a project you develop milestones and build in some type of measuring process, or in planning a vacation you need to know where to go, how to get there, what to take, what to visit, and how to get back on time; you probably also have a contingency plan, or can develop one as needed, if something goes wrong. Therefore we should be accustomed to processes that involve some degree of initial thinking, evaluating alternatives, selecting what seems like the best approach, and doing it. So, we probably all have some experience in planning.

The planning process gets a little more complicated when you actually try to do strategic planning, or at least to do it well. For example, you need to:

- Know what you want to do in a general way
- Recognize what you know about the external world and what you don’t know about it
- Understand how changes are occurring in the external world for some period into the future
- Know your own strengths and some of the major challenges that have to be addressed
- Know how to identify the opportunities and danger spots; and how to tell them apart
- Be clear on your assumptions, list things that are near certainties and a few major uncertainties
- Know your values system, so when all else fails you have something to guide you
- Be able to integrate all this into a brief, clear, and understandable statement that informs you and others on what you plan to achieve and a few guidelines that will make you successful.

You do not want your plan to be a book but only a page or two. The more detail you have the less it will strategic (rather than operational) and the more people will avoid reading it.

Three Types of Strategic Plans – All are Commonly Used
1. The big idea with no detail
2. A focus on a few strategic directions - looks at the big pictures and is used as a guide
3. A detailed plan - as goals, objectives, metrics to measure, targets to meet, strategies to achieve the targets, and ways of reporting progress

We are Living in a Relatively Unique Period
1. Several driving forces of change indicate lots of important changes are underway and that they will cause significant changes for all of us – and several are coming at about the same time.
2. Fundamental change is occurring, some through slow but continuous changes, and others through paradigm shifts that will change the way we do business
3. Examples in education: major changes in the way learning is accomplished and how mastery of the subject is determined
4. Tried and true procedures of the past may or may not work in the future
5. It is very important to recognize the period we are in – one of change and uncertainty
The Importance of Foresight (or Forward Thinking)
Without doing some foresight a plan is useless. Foresight is looking at future trends and possibilities, critically reviewing what you find, understanding the range of possibilities, and developing a statement about what might happen in the future. Simply looking at data trends is not foresight – it is extrapolating the past.

Once you know more about possible futures – you should define your desired future. This is a where you want to end up. Just stating your desired future is not foresight – it is wishful thinking. Once you understand where you want to end up, it is time to start your formal planning process.

Understanding the Future: The Basic Underpinnings of Preparing a Strategic Plan
What is our reliability of our knowing what the future will be like? What are we ignorant about? What do we know for sure? How many possible futures are there? These questions guide your planning.

- Understanding where we are today AND a small range of possible futures we find ourselves in
- Having an idea of where we want to go and what our competition is
- Understanding relevant driving forces and paradigm shifts
- Identifying uncertainties and assumptions
- Developing several scenarios for better understanding of what is possible (4 is a good number)
- Revising the idea of where you want to go (if necessary) and how to get there

Don’t Reinvent the Wheel – Look to Others for Ideas and Techniques
- Institute for the Future (Futures Organization)
  Foresight to Insight to Action (environmental scan, analysis, strategic plan)

- Peter Drucker (Management Icon)
  Enshrine the institutional values
  Articulate a vision
  Set the strategic path to that vision
  Demand performance
  Empower the people (and get out of their way)
  Say thank you

- Maree Conway (Australian Futurist)
  Do strategic thinking before you do strategic planning

- Marlys Witte (University of Arizona College of Medicine)
  Understand ignorance – answer these questions early in the process
  o What do you know and what don’t you know know?
  o What are the things you don’t know that you don’t know?
  o What do you think you know but you really don’t know?
  o What is too painful to know and therefore you don’t know?

- Abraham Lincoln
  I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.
  Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

A Model Approach to Developing a Strategic Plan
1. Complete your foresight process, an environmental scan, and an internal assessment
2. Draft a mission, vision, values, and some guiding principles you might follow
3. Think of the plan as a high-level road map, with general directions and interstate travel. Then adapt as conditions occur – detours, weather, sickness. Translate these concepts into words
Special Techniques When Dealing with Uncertainty and Change
1. Use scenarios to better understand options under a variety of conditions
2. Recognize the need to know the techniques of futures studies, behavioral change, and communication. Planning is not just dreaming or data collection – it involves a lot of thinking.
3. Increase your knowledge of dealing with uncertainty and change – a lot has been written

Case Histories or Examples of Plans and Related Studies
Materials Used for Update of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan
- Environmental Scans and Driving Forces of Change
- Higher Education Scenarios
- Arizona-Specific Futures Studies
- UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (one page plan)

Examples of Public Health Oriented Strategic Plans
- UCLA School of Public Health (no date) - http://www.ph.ucla.edu/pdfs/SPHStrategicPlan.pdf

Examples of Strategic Planning Efforts
- ASU: New American University – July 2002 (good process, consistent messages)
- UA: Five Year Strategic Plan - 2011-2015 (too operational, public relations format)
- IBM – Smarter Planet program (good, concept driven) and focus letter from IBM CEO

The Planning Context and Plans - in a Nutshell
1. Why have a strategic plan?
   - It is important to know why you are developing a plan
   - Know the difference of a strategic plan vs a tactical (operational) plan
   - Need a general sense of where you are heading
   - Need to have a sense of the future and the relevant issues
   - Cannot predict the future but you can largely anticipate it
   - Provide context for making today’s decisions as they all take place in the future
   - Define the table of contents for a strategic choices - options exist

2. Getting a sense of the future
   - There are lots of ways to do this; do not take a simplistic approach
   - Foresight to Insight to Action approach is the key (from IFTF)
   - The role of driving forces of change and paradigm shifts provides signposts
   - The role of scenarios and how to build them
   - Recycle old ideas under new circumstances
   - Adapt to change, innovate, feel free to get a little wild in your ideas

3. Developing a strategic plan
   - Understand the difference in key terms: long range, strategic, strategy, strategic direction, goal, objective, metric, tactical, environmental scan
   - First step - strategic thinking before strategic planning
   - Choose the general approach (you may or may not also have tactical plan)
   - Detailed goals and targets have may be useful (use when no tactical plan)
   - Make the overall context to be about the future rather than the past
   - Communicate widely with affected parties (before, during, and after) and read widely
   - Combine realism with stretching the possibilities
   - Defining the few key issues and stick with them where possible
   - Dealing with dilemmas (where no good answer exists)
4. Dealing with required formats from higher levels in the organization
   - The plan should serve as a guide, or framework, or roadmap, not detail, but this is often a problem when specific formats are required
   - Make two plans, one that works for you and one you submit. They must be consistent in content, only the format changes

5. Implementing a strategic plan
   - Audience and authority (who is the plan directed to and who releases the plan)
   - Communicate and involve (those that will implement the plan or could kill it)
   - Follow the plan (or change it if conditions change unexpectedly)
   - Make a Tactical Plan (to translate strategic plan to action items)
   - Manage change when necessary (this is often overlooked and is very important)

Conclusions
1. Read widely and prepare for change
2. Plan for the future by thinking a VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous). Respond to this world by using FAIR approach (Flexible, Agile, Innovative, and Responsive).
3. Recognize strategic planning is the vehicle to navigate the institutional future, but there are different formats for a strategic plan and they need to be short and truly strategic to be effective.

Take a Short Course on Anticipating the Future
This is the “short” version on how to “anticipate the future” but more details are available. You can search the site from the home page (cals.arizona.edu/futures).
cals.arizona.edu/futures/shortcourse/index.html

Books for Further Reading

Some Questions
What would you do in each of the following circumstances:

1. Your boss is following the instructions from her/his boss on developing a strategic plan. From your experience you know the plan has a low probability of being successful.

2. You are one year into your five year strategic plan and there is a financial disruption like the one we had in the early 2000s (or something equivalent to it in scale).

3. Your organization is developing a strategic plan but has not done an environmental scan. Everyone on the board of directors agrees they are doing it the right way because they all have experience at planning. You know differently.

4. You have been tasked to develop a strategic plan for your organization. What are the first three things you would do?