Developing a Culture of Strategic Awareness

Strategic plans by their nature are focused on defined times (3 years, 5 years etc). Strategic awareness is ongoing, no beginning, no end. Strategic plans tend to focus on how. Strategic awareness focuses on what matters to the vision of the organization, the impact on the community the organization serves.

Let’s start with the Board
Select the right people - skills and attributes
• No fixed point of view
• Willing to be the question
• Willing to receive everything without judgment
• Willing to both analyze and listen to intuition
• Prosperity vs Scarcity
• Everyone has the ability—it is all a matter of personal choice

Develop a strategic induction program
• Relevant papers…and…
• Culture of the Board
• Questions we expect you to consider and ask
• High expectations
• How we live the vision and mission

Design meetings to facilitate strategic thinking and strategic awareness
• Make every meeting a planning session - structure the agenda
  i. Add the vision statement to the agenda
  ii. Staff reports aligned to strategy
  iii. Professional development of Board
  iv. Staff presentations to Board
  v. Changes to strategic environment section (370degrees group example)

• Dashboard reporting
• Briefing materials prior to meeting
• Don’t allocate timings to sections of the meeting. It should be fluid.

Structure interactions to facilitate strategic awareness
• Value disagreements as an opportunity to seek creative new approaches.
• Remind them that when two people have the same opinion, one is unnecessary!
• Provide them with a cheat sheet (H) Strategic Questions Every Board Member Should Ask
• Make it a standard to ask “Why?” before “How” – e.g. “Why tackle it?”
“Why does it matter?”
“Why shouldn’t we proceed?”
• Teach importance through assigning Organization Skeptic
• Ask different board members to
  Provide viewpoint from their business or community perspective
  Provide viewpoint of a specific stakeholder group by taking on that persona
• While encouraging vigorous debate, keep things issue-oriented
• Insist on multiple options

Benefits
• Keeps the Board engaged
• Taps into their skills and networks and awareness
• Leads to better decision making
• Minimizes the “operational” tendency of many Boards
• Ensures the staff/CEO and Board work as a team, not abdicating responsibility to the staff

Let’s move to the senior leadership team, everything mentioned previously, plus Environmental Scanning

Environmental scanning is a process of ongoing and active scanning of the environment to identify weak signals of change that are starting to appear in areas typically not looked at by the day to day operations of the organization. The significant value of environmental scanning is that it provides a focus away from the here and now, and provides the opportunity to look at the risks and opportunities (or are they the same thing?) from a wider perspective.

There are a number of ways to conduct environmental scanning.
The Internal/collective method is where you task staff to collect information they think is interesting, contribute this to an electronic Scanning folder each month together with a paragraph on how this might affect the sector or services, and then review this on a regular basis.
The External/assigned method is where you assign this to a person, they subscribe to a variety of websites, blogs, journals etc, identify information of interest, analyse the information and file according agreed criteria, and provide a monthly report on emerging signals and possible implications.

Scenario planning
Scenarios are stories that are created from possible plausible futures, and are used to inform planners about what might be so this can be taken into account today. Scenario planning is a systematic way of creating these stories, which can then be used to test the robustness of your strategies.

Backcasting
Backcasting is a process of looking at what might, possibly, perhaps be happening into the future, and reviewing the implications for strategy right now.

And let’s take it to the staff

Mindset: ensure that the language of the strategic plan is used
**Behaviour:** align the reporting, reward and performance management system directly with the strategic directions, especially the CEO and senior leadership team

**Symbols:** have the key elements of the strategic directions in public places, develop appropriate symbols eg strategy scorecard wall, innovation awards.

**Processes:** ensure all internal processes are reviewed in line with strategic directions.

**Benefits**
Facilitates staff to make better decisions directly related to the vision/mission
Shared excitement about the possibilities
“Change management” as a concept disappears-it’s just way we are around here!