

MAKING OUR STRATEGY COUNT

by André Kruger

Every employee and stakeholder within our organisation understands that our core purpose is to serve the needy, the orphans and widows. From our inception in 1989, this purpose has defined the heart of our organisation. At every opportunity and every encounter with staff members, our purpose is re-iterated and emphasized, lest there ever be any form of doubt. The question our executives often ask ourselves is how do we measure up to our purpose; are our activities indeed focussed on achieving our purpose or do we merely pay lip service?

I am of the strong opinion that our staff members and stakeholders alike, echo our true accomplishments, our beneficiaries confirm our continued support, our donors believe in our cause as if it were their own. Our current work plans confirm that we have fully fledged operations in five provinces from where we render integrated community services at more than 440 national contact points of service – an accomplishment not easily equalled by many organisations in our industry. Annually our organisation renders between 3 and 4 million services within various communities and at various household levels, each service being measurable and confirmed.

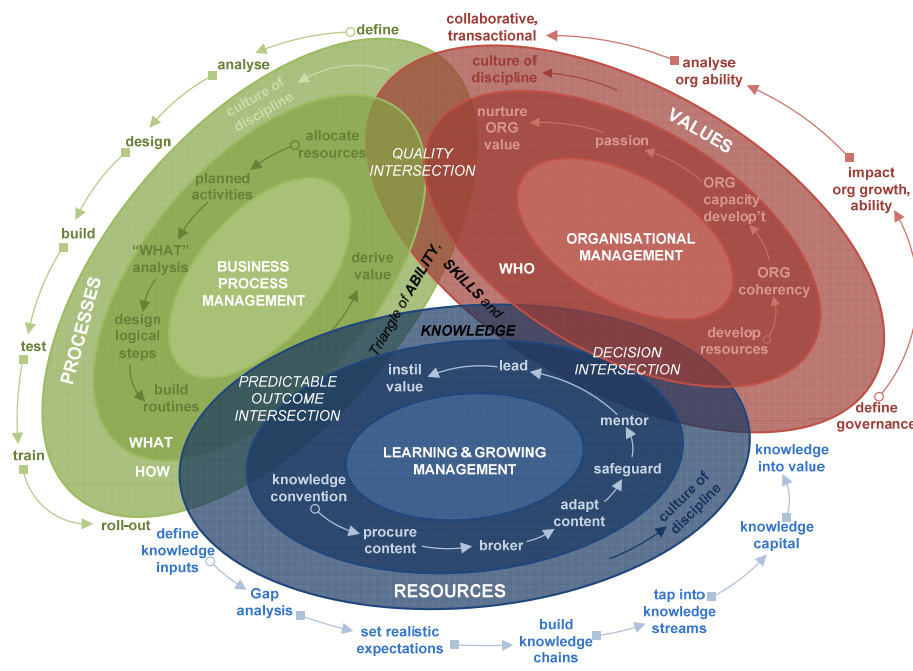
We are now an organisation that does not need to make statements to position ourselves by telling others what we want them to hear – indeed our peers recognise our organisation and define us by our actions and accomplishments. We no longer need to state the obvious, the truth speaks for itself.

One factor really distinguishes our organisation. It can be summarised and conceptualised as our ability to strategise, by positioning ourselves at critical intersections before others recognise shifting trends and interactions. While our focus centres on sustainability, the continuation of services despite the impact exogenous variables, our organisation has nurtured a unique culture or essence through consistency and clear understanding. This has helped to define our approach and align our strategic thinking, a result of comprehensive interaction with communities we serve. Long gone are the days where we prescribe generic services to communities just to be able to tick a checklist of standard activities and to report on positive outputs without having made any significant impact. Our strategy is to ensure that our services result in sustainable development within the communities we serve and at various levels including personal, family and community levels. Our strategy is to ensure that we introduce innovation and creativity in our programs that last and endure through changing circumstances; our ability to provide predictable outcomes within defined processes; and to build consistency into our outputs. As our activities develop individuals, families and communities, our performance improves constantly as functions become engraved, well rehearsed and practiced to completion.

Strategically, not only have we positioned our organisation where we believe the needs are greatest, but our staff members have followed with personal conviction, often taking lead roles, accepting responsibility and showing accountability. Operationally we have commissioned cutting edge technology in support of our internal systems – well ahead of market trends and practices. Our internal skills have added value at every step in unfolding our life-cycle into maturity. Our ability to retain the right staff members, who do not work according to job descriptions, is creating a new culture of excellence within our organisation. We focus on strategic inputs, trusting our business

processes to provide the desired, predictable outcomes, is also yielding new confidences we have never attained previously. Excellence is no longer planned; it's merely a natural outflow from great inputs into a disciplined environment. We have reached several milestones in our walk to maturity. Significantly we have summarised many of our practices into an integrated operational model that constantly reminds us of our focus on inputs of excellence.

Figure: Integrated Operational Model that guides strategic implementations



Ultimately, our strategy makes every activity count.

Internal leadership plays a considerable role in maintaining focus, discipline and momentum. We ensure that we do not live in the past, but do not forget the lessons we have learned, any of which could easily have spelled our final chapter. Lest we forget, we remind ourselves of the depths to which we have sunk but immediately rejoice in the delights of what we have become and accomplished. Our 400 staff contingent is not only more confident than ever before, but actually recognise the changes that our activities add to the lives of others who are less fortunate. Motivation is no longer a daily effort demanding a rekindle, but becomes an outflow of our desired accomplishments in feeding a passion, thus producing a self sustaining cycle. We purposefully engage our staff members at regular intervals, confirming our values and to focus on defined inputs. There are many small things we cherish and treasure as an organisation while we face the daily perils of life. Disease, despair and death are constantly at our door, our own staff members and stakeholders are impacted personally by the reality of what we face in communities by virtue of the services we render. Yet there are positive changes and sound impacts. We can feel the difference, we can measure performance and we experience the frank feedback from community stakeholders.

Suddenly exogenous variables and factors beyond our control have a diminished impact on our organisation, risks are more containable and other variables become more manageable. In my book this is 'best practice' – when outcomes are predictable and variables manageable.

Table: Setting Our Priorities Straight:

WHAT HAS TO GROW	WHAT HAD TO GO
Living out our calling for the needy, widows and orphans -	T-shirt rhetoric and slogans that have no impact on our daily activities;
Our understanding and compassion-	What we thought we knew best;
Value driven organisation -	Impromptu brain waves, ad hoc changes, personal influences, subjectivity;
A new culture without old habits, based on Values, Processes and Resources -	An old culture of external influences, selfish ambition, self preservation, traditions;
Internal discipline, defined, specific core focus -	Head office mentality and lack of leadership;
Ability to listen to local communities before facilitating solutions, incorporating traditional leadership in forming procedures -	Generic programs and standard interventions that are not influenced by local community stakeholders;
Ability to weather extreme challenges without operational disruptions-	Survival mode, living from one crisis to the next;
Alignment with Partners who add value -	Bondage by partnerships that added no value;
Facing brutal facts, presenting objectivity, acting to enforce competency -	'Boy's club', showing favouritism and covering-up, not facing reality, only accepting 'good news sharing';
Program momentum -	Factors that cause stalling, indecisions;
Activities that endure the test of time -	Short term solutions and quick fixes;
Business processes with predictable outputs -	Crisis-to-crisis management
Accountable structures -	Business silos;
Staff who wanted to be part of the passion -	Those who wanted to leave;
Sustainability and enablement -	Prescribed solutions that have no lasting impact;
Trust, delivering on commitments -	Conformity, mediocrity;
Responsibility and accountability -	Job descriptions, subjective performance appraisals;
Superior performance -	Ad hoc interventions, independent divisions;
Being vigorous for the organisation, finding the best staff and utilising resources effectively -	Business as usual;
Distinguishing impacts that effect change -	Routine responsive functions;
Knowing what we do best -	Thinking in terms of grandeur and self esteem;
Setting the organisation up for success -	Setting me up for success.

Looking back over the past few years, I can clearly state that our strategic implementation made the single most significant difference to the future of our organisation. The more we do, the better we get. Let me be more specific, getting our own house in order was the single event that stands most prominently and features in most reflections by our staff and stakeholders. Within our strategy we defined our essence, the one thing that drives our passion and makes our organisation what it is today. In the process we had to agree on certain imperatives that we defined as being key to our purpose; simultaneously we had to recognise that we needed to discard some baggage – especially kicking the old habits that either die hardest or impeded our own development capabilities. We had to learn to undo certain things in order to enable our organisation to claim its rightful place within the communities we serve. Then came the positive results of our strategic implementations, where diligence, good fortune and consistency started to produce multiples and compounded added values we had never anticipated.

It's been the most exciting time of our entire history over the past 20-years, I look forward to our organisation experiencing even greater heights soon!