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Strategic planning toolkit V.1

June 2016

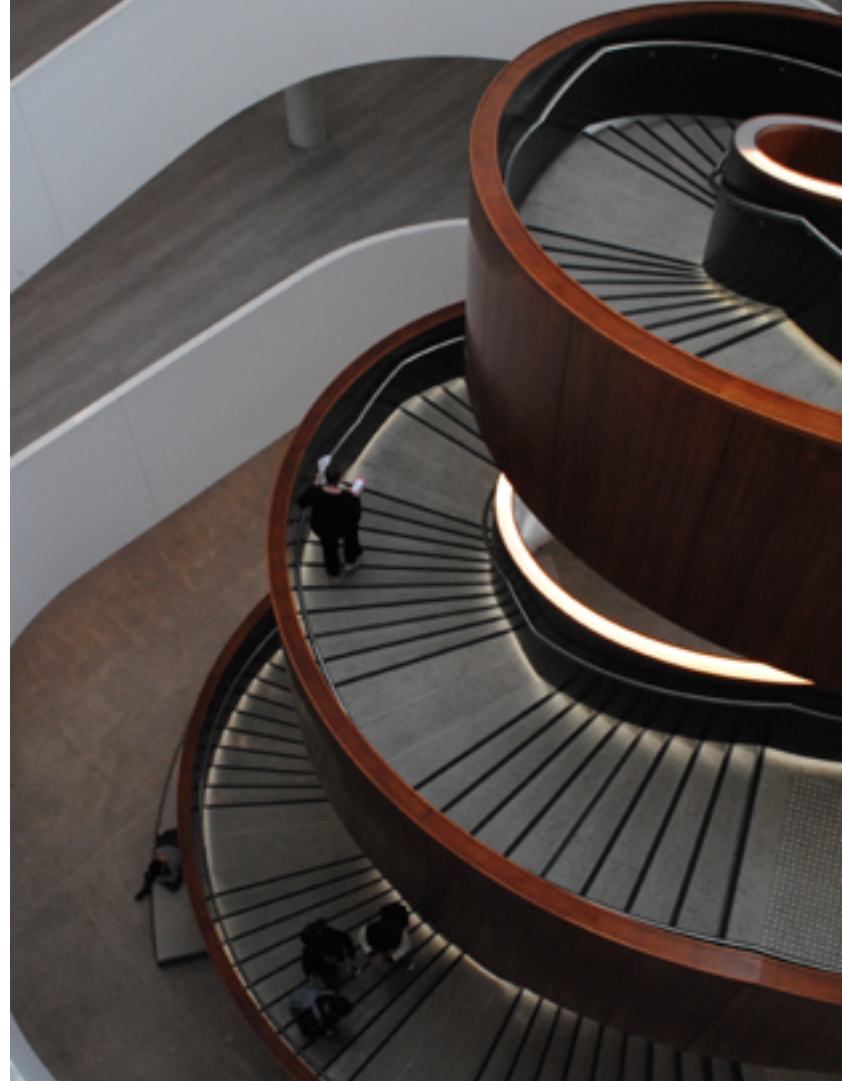


THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



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Welcome to the strategic planning toolkit

The Strategy Office has created a toolkit that draws together a suite of tools, templates and guides to support the strategic planning processes in your faculty or professional units.

It has been assembled following consultation with academics, strategic planners and managers across the University and we are very grateful for the input, contribution and feedback provided by our colleagues.

The tools featured are already in use by schools, faculties and professional service units at the University. They offer a logical framework to undertake a strategic planning process. The wide range of tools included is to ensure that both seasoned planners and those with limited strategic planning experience are able to tap into a variety of resources as they work through each step in the planning process.

The toolkit is designed to provide access to tools and templates that will support your planning. It is not intended as a new strategic planning process or a replacement of established strategy or planning approval processes in your faculty, portfolio or PSU. If you are already using established tools that are working, it is not necessary to switch to these.

“Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, who was sitting in a tree,

“What road do I take?”

The cat asked, “Where do you want to go?”

“I don’t know,” Alice answered.

“Then,” said the cat, “it really doesn’t matter, does it?”

– Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

Thinking about strategy

Strategy is how you get from your present state to your new destination.

Strategy sets a plan that enables you to meet your objectives.

A new strategy requires a change in the way you operate.

Why it is essential

Strategy is important to any organisation because it brings focus to future goals and direction. It provides clarity and a time line for change and improvement.

The alternative to strategic planning is to just keep doing things the same way and hope for the best. However, leaving the future to chance is particularly risky; especially when the contextual environment is in constant flux and rapidly evolving. The lives and expectations of staff and students

are changing, the future economy will be focused on new areas, technology and communications are being further enhanced and our peer institutions and competitors are moving fast to meet these changing requirements. The strategic planning process can take time and a lot of effort, but it is enormously important to ensure that your area rises to the opportunities and challenges of the future and continues to fulfil its potential.

Strategy is important to any organisation because it clarifies the future goals and direction.

Strategy at universities

Whereas most corporations tend to be driven by profit from sales of products and services, the mission of a university is driven by the benefits that can be passed on to society through the education of students and research discoveries. However, there are still similarities between the strategy of a corporation and a university: they both need to offer useful products, services and expertise to secure interest, revenue and enable the organisation to operate. Universities must have academic

courses that interest quality students, research activities need to have relevance to secure funding and staff need to undertake or support the delivery of the best education and research possible. Universities have always needed to do this – but in a globally competitive world, there is now a huge amount of information available that enables people to make more sophisticated choices about whether they choose to join or work with the University of Sydney, or not.

Why it is challenging

Even some of the most clever people can struggle with strategy. This is because there is not a single perfect answer; strategy can be ambiguous and each option has uncertainties. There are usually many destinations to choose from and each destination has more than one road leading to it. With this in mind, it can be daunting to begin the strategic planning process, particularly if this is a new area for you or strategic planning has never been your responsibility before.

However, you will not have to start from scratch; the University's overarching strategy will help to guide your direction and set some clear expectations. There is also a lot of support available in terms of training, toolkits, facilitation support and advice.

Not sure where to start?

The guiding questions below may help you to determine the tools that may be most useful for your particular challenge or strategic planning stage.

Have you created a strategic plan before?

(if no start here, if yes go onto 1.3 or Section 2)

Do you want to define the role and importance of your faculty or professional unit?

(if no start here, if yes go onto 1.3 or Section 2)

Are you ready to start planning a timeline for your goals?

(if no start here, if yes go onto 1.3 or Section 2)

Have you identified specific challenges you want to address?

Are you ready to start doing some research?

Have you done a health check of your faculty or professional unit before?

(if the answer is yes, start with Section 2)

Are you looking for new ideas?

Have you initiated or facilitated a workshop before?

Are you looking for some questions to brainstorm?

(Yes? The section 3 is the place to start)

Do you already have ideas and initiatives you want to explore?

How do you know which activity to start today or tomorrow?

Do you already have a plan in place? Can you summarise in one page?

(then skip the rest and start at section 4)

1 Vision

2 Current state

3 Collective brainstorming

4 Prioritising options

Tips for starting

- Start the process early, create and communicate a timeline. It is helpful to align local strategic planning activities with the University's strategic cycle.
- Nominate someone to be responsible for the strategic planning process and give them the time or administrative support to run the process like a project.
- To counter the ambiguities of the strategy process, it is highly recommended that you don't go it alone. Make the strategic planning process very inclusive and seek as many different perspectives as possible.

Section 1: Vision

“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.

Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

– Sun Tzu

Related tools

This section provides some simple tools that will help you start thinking about your work from a ‘big picture’ perspective.

1.1 Strategy tree

A simple tool that will give you an aerial outlook; it will help to highlight the overarching dynamics of your area.

- Who are you and why do you exist?
- What are your goals?

Why do this: Align all colleagues and activities to the department’s vision.

1.2 Logic model

This tool looks at how the different functions of an area are interrelated. It can also be used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of operations or particular initiatives, highlight imbalances and help to identify places that need to be improved.

- Are you clear on your operations model and it’s achievement of your strategic goals?
- Effectiveness model, are your activities and outputs providing you the best value?

Why do this : Ensure all effort and funds are utilised for maximum value.

1.3 Strategy roadmap

This is a communication and planning tool that simply describes the strategic process time lines and milestones.

- Do you have a clear timeline and milestones set?

Why do this: Keep everyone on track and accountable.

1.1 Strategy tree

What is a strategy tree?

The strategy tree is a simple tool to kick-off the strategic thinking process. Using this tool will give you an aerial outlook as well as highlight the overarching dynamics of your area.

The language may sound a little business-like for a university, however, the tool can easily be translated for use in an academic environment.

How does it work?

There are four different themes to think about. Each theme is accompanied by a question that helps gain clarity around the fundamental functions of your area.

On the next page, there are some examples for each of the themes, and how they may be relevant to your area.

When do you use it?

This is a good exercise to do as a group as it generates some interesting discussions and will also help to build consensus at the very beginning of your strategic planning processes.

1.1 Strategy tree

1 Purpose	2 Organisation Definition and value proposition	3 Target customer segments	4 Goal and metrics
<p>Why do we exist/ what is our purpose?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach the next generation? - Cure cancer? - Community engagement? - Improve the experience of our students? 	<p>What is our value proposition?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique selling point? - Flexible curriculum? - Expertise/ know-how? - Access to resources? 	<p>Who are we trying to serve/ target?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faculties and/ or Units? - Communities? - Industry? - Academic discipline? 	<p>How will we know we are successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions? - ERA? - Rankings? - Financials? - Service awards? - Impact/reach?

Using this tool will give you an aerial outlook as well as highlight the overarching dynamics of your area. You can [download a template here.](#)

Reference: Anthony Tjan/ Mats Lederhausen

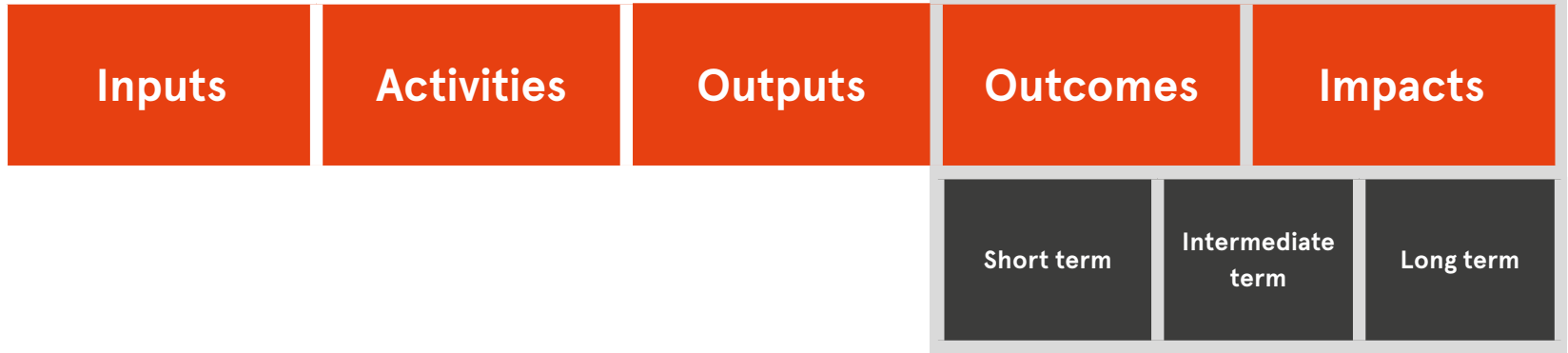
1.2 Logic model

What is the logic model?

The logic model helps to determine the core functions, critical pathways and value chains in your area. It can also be used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of operations by identifying areas for improvement and highlighting imbalances.

The logic model categorises what happens in your area in the following way:

This tool helps to determine the core functions, critical pathways and value chains in your area .



Reference: W.K. Kellogg

1.2 Logic model

How does it work?

The model helps you to understand the relationships between the various components in your area. The tool is particularly useful because it forces you to think about long-term and external impacts. These outlooks can sometimes get overlooked in favour of internally focused or short-term perspectives.

The tool invites you to think about your area in the following terms:

- What goes in?
- What happens internally?
- What comes out?
- What happens externally?

You can either look at your entire function holistically or consider specific areas in isolation (such as students, fundraising, administration) to understand the underlying mechanics of each operation.

Here are some examples of how you might think about each of the themes:

Theme	Meaning	Possible Examples
Inputs	What goes into your area?	Materials, funding, students, new staff, visitors
Activities	What happens in your area?	Projects, teaching, research, outreach, finance
Outputs	What comes out of your area?	Graduates, publications, intellectual property, buildings
Outcomes and impacts	What are the outcomes/impacts of these outputs?	Short term: Publicity, new partnerships, customer satisfaction
		Intermediate term: Citations, brand awareness, graduate outcomes
		Long term: Improved ranking, sustainability, reputation

Use in strategic planning

The inputs and activities entered into the logic model can generally be classified as ‘strategies.’ The outputs, outcomes and impacts tend to be your strategic goals.

For example:

For the University’s research strategy, we will invest considerable funds in areas of research excellence (inputs), with the long term goal to become best in Australia (impact).

Improving areas

As you start to use this tool, you may notice that there is a strong relationship with quality. If you want to improve a specific function in your area – it is likely that you’ll need to raise the quality standards in one or more places along the value chain.

For example:

To achieve the goal of ‘improved graduate outcomes’, some of options are: targeting only the highest performing students (inputs) or raising the quality of the teaching and curriculum (activities).

1.3 Strategy roadmaps

What is a strategy roadmap?

A strategy roadmap is a communication and planning tool that simply describes the strategic process timelines and milestones. It is usually mapped out in a visual format so that people can understand the activities outlined at a quick glance.

How does it work?

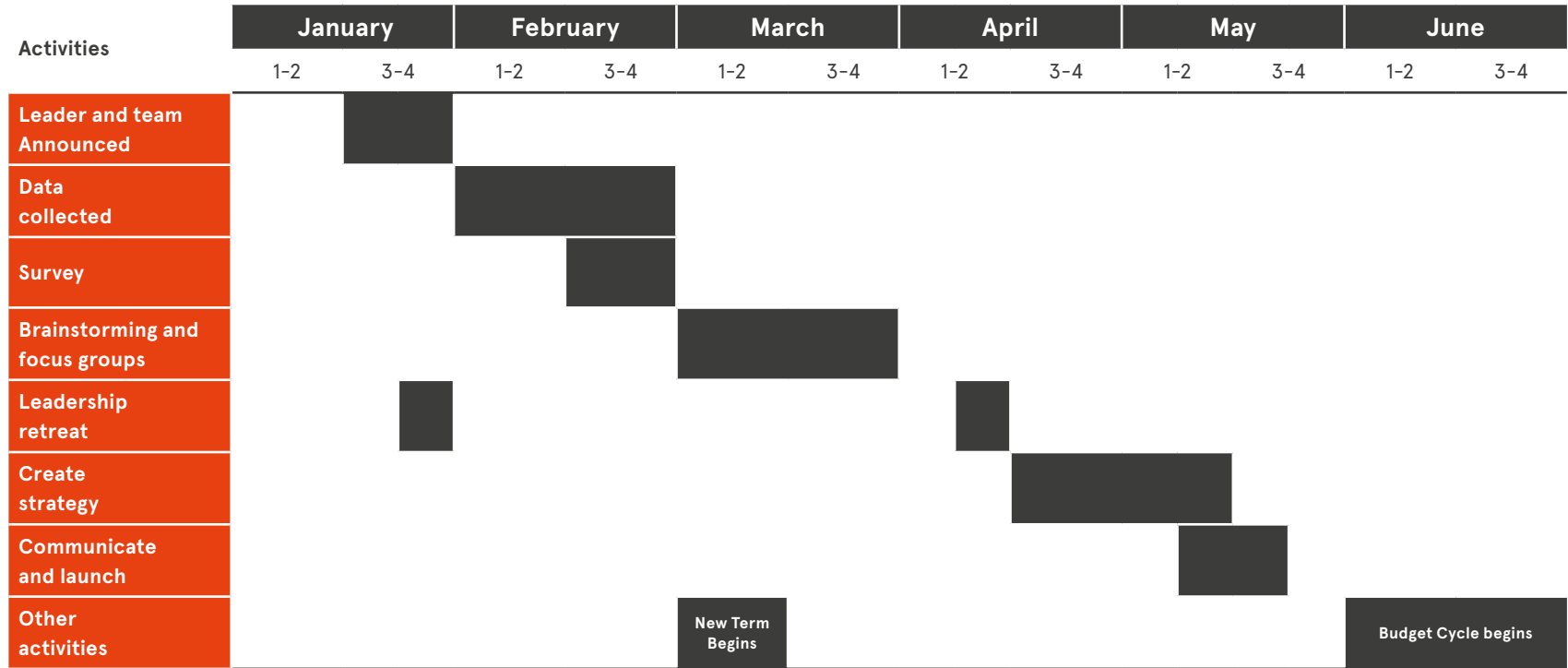
The strategy roadmap is a very simple but highly effective tool for keeping activities on track. It provides a timeline to help people understand what is happening and when.

The strategy roadmap is a communication and planning tool that describes the strategic process timelines and milestones, mapped out in a visual format.

How to use

- List the activities you will undertake as part of your strategic planning process (read through the other parts in this strategic toolkit to determine the methods and tools you would like to use).
- Make a list of any key dates or deadlines. These dates might relate to the strategy or they may be for any other events that affect your area (such as a major discipline conference that many academics in your area will need to attend or Easter or exam periods).
- Determine your final deadline for creating a strategy and work backwards from this date to fit in all your activities.
- Once you have a first draft, circulate the roadmap to a few colleagues who will be involved in the process.
- Communicate the final version to all people who are likely to be involved with the strategic planning processes.
- The roadmap can evolve to be more complex if this is required.
- If any of the timelines or activities change, the roadmap should be updated and communicated again.

Strategic Roadmaps can be displayed in many different ways. Below is a simple Gantt chart example



Reference: Henry Gantt

Section 2: Current state

“It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”

- Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes

2.0 Gathering information

Introduction

Before you decide where you want to go, it is important to understand where you are at the moment. Collecting relevant information and taking time to familiarise yourself with it will help to provide a holistic view of your area.

- Data describes and clarifies where you are
- Data can help to determine the scope, trends and trajectories of activities in your area
- The data will set a baseline measure for the success of future initiatives



Data sources

Information is a strategic asset of the University and the effective use of information to support evidence-based decisions is of increasing importance. The University already collects a significant amount of data and information about its internal operations. There are many different information sources and platforms - including a diverse array of business intelligence (BI) tools and processes in use at the University. The Planning and Information Office (PIO) is a good first point of contact for the provision of internal information and analysis supporting university-wide planning processes. The PIO has developed and implemented a data governance framework that consists of a Data Stewards Network (DSN) and Data Owners Management Group (DOMG). These groups meet regularly with representation across the University. Find out what data is available to you by contacting the Owners and Stewards of the information. Go to this website for more information on the sources that might be available to help you:

http://sydney.edu.au/staff/planning/dg/PDF/Data_Owners_and_Data_Stewards.pdf

There are a range of methods available to seek qualitative data to feed into your strategic planning processes. You could obtain feedback through market research, surveys, interviews, focus groups, competitions or virtual suggestion box tools (i.e. IdeaScale).

External data: Many universities and higher education bodies collate data and share it with their member institutions. Accessing benchmarking information relevant to your areas, and/or researching comparator or aspirational peer universities can provide significant insight and opportunity to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of your operations. A tool is provided in this kit, that describes external benchmarking and research in further detail (2.4)

The importance of this step

Analysing data related to your core activities can give valuable insights into opportunities, trends or concerns; as well as clarify any critical factors that need attention.

Data provides evidence; it can inspire new perspectives and also substantiate personal experiences. If you ask ten different people the following questions: What is our current situation? What needs our focus? You're likely to get a broad range of responses. People often have different (sometimes conflicting) opinions on the current state. Many people will have anecdotes, stories and examples that describe their experiences.

Ideally, collect feedback from as many people connected to your area as possible. If your area is strongly student focused, then ensure that the student voice is captured in the feedback. If you work with many external parties – get them involved and understand their experiences and perspectives. Isolated personal experiences, agendas and anecdotes may bias strategic discussions, therefore, it's important to understand if the issues raised were isolated incidents or a reoccurring pattern.

Consulting and collecting data gets people involved and informed about what you are doing. It's an opportunity to ensure that others feel part of the strategic planning process and the future of their areas.

The challenges of this step

Finding the time

.....
If you do not already have a system set up, it can take time to gather accurate information, consult others and bring people together as a group to workshop ideas. Start this work early – get dates in the diary. Give people ample time to consolidate their thoughts and provide feedback.

However, it is a critical step and provides a baseline that can be used to design the future state. For the overarching University Strategic Plan, the discussions and consultations took a full year and involved the entire university community.

Collecting relevant information

.....
The most important information to collect should relate directly to the activities that fulfil your core mission. If you completed the 'strategy tree' exercise in the last section, you will have a solid idea of what these are. It is easy to fall into a state of 'analysis paralysis' where you become overwhelmed with masses of information and cannot determine how to make sense of it all and move forward.

Related tools

The tools in this section are designed to help gather all of the information needed to ensure that during planning the right processes are undertaken. These processes will also help to keep you focused on the strategic goals you're trying to achieve.

2.1 Data collection plan

A Data Collection Plan will ensure that you are collecting the right information, from the appropriate sources to inform decisions about your most important activities.

- A template and structured approach that ensures the data you will be gathering will be relevant

Why use this: Makes sure you won't be wasting your time

2.2 SWOT Analysis

This tool looks at how the different functions of an area are interrelated. It can also be used to look at the overall effectiveness of operations, highlight imbalances and help to identify places that need to be improved.

- Do you know where your most viable opportunities are?

Why use this: Identify opportunities and mitigate threats

2.3 PESTLE Analysis

A PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analysis can help you to predict external opportunities and risks that are developing on the horizon and enable you to form a strategic response to them and not be caught off-guard.

- Are you susceptible to external factors such as industry regulations, trade, legal etc. changes?

Why use this: Prepares you to be in a better position to handle external influential factors

2.4 Research and benchmarking

Researching and Benchmarking before planning allows you to build insights into your current activities, developments and processes within your specific area. This ensures you're focusing on the right areas.

Why use this: Build insight into where best to affect strategic planning

2.5 Fishbone Diagram

This tool is used to identify the root causes of an outcome by deep-diving into a specific activity.

- Do you have a reoccurring, major or apparent problem/ challenge?

Why use this: Helps you get to the root of your issue



2.1 Data collection plan

A data collection plan will ensure that you are collecting the right information, from the appropriate sources to inform decisions about your most important activities.

When you begin collecting data for your strategic plan it is very easy to go off track. You can use this template to ensure that your information gathering is coordinated and linked to the decisions that you will make. Hopefully, this will prevent you from falling into some of the pitfalls associated with the information gathering stage, such as:

- Not collecting enough data
- Not collecting the right data
- Not collecting accurate data
- Collecting data on only one part of activities
- Collecting too much data and don't know where to focus
- Collecting too much data and become paralysed

Use a data collection plan to collect the right information, from the appropriate sources to inform decisions about your most important activities. You can download a template [here](#).

What are the benefits of using a data collection plan?

- The plan helps to ensure that the data collected is balanced amongst each of the core activities rather than focusing on a single area
- Planning can help you think creatively about how to use your data, including: Information you have, information you could available, information that would support your initiatives in the future
- Seeing all the data requirements together can help you to prioritize the data and pick out key indicators
- Establishes relevant baseline data at the very beginning of your strategic planning process
- Helps to coordinate data requests rather than taking a piecemeal approach
- If there is information that you want but do not currently have, the plan can instigate a data collecting initiative, such as: survey questions/ focus group/ interview question
- Creating a plan can help shape an ongoing approach to reporting. This activity can begin or improve regular reporting mechanisms.

2.2 SWOT analysis

What is a SWOT Analysis?

SWOT is an acronym for: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is a tool to help with strategic planning of an organisation, area or project.

How does it work?

A SWOT analysis pulls together all the factors that may affect the ability to meet objectives. This process creates a framework that maps out the positive and negative dynamics shaping the current situation. It also identifies factors that could affect the future.

SWOT is a tool that empowers you to decide where you need to focus your efforts to enable you to meet your objectives. SWOT also supports you to think in a balanced and holistic way about your area rather than focusing from a single angle.

When to use a SWOT?

SWOT is a good tool to use towards the beginning of a strategic planning exercise once you have collated some information about the core activities of your area. This tool is particularly suited for brainstorming sessions, workshops and focus groups.

A SWOT will highlight core strengths and draw attention to any weaknesses or threats. You can download a [template here](#).

It is best to get multiple perspectives from a range of different groups who are involved with the various activities in your area. In general, the more people involved in the exercise - the better the final outcome will be.

	Positive/Helpful Factors	Negative/Harmful Factors
Internal Factors	<p>Strengths</p> <p>Internal factors of a Positive/Helpful nature</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Internal factors of a Negative/Harmful nature</p>
External Factors	<p>Opportunities</p> <p>External factors of a Positive/Helpful nature</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>External factors of a Negative/Harmful nature</p>

Reference: Albert Humphrey

How to complete the SWOT:

1. Decide how you are going to fill in the information. Make a plan for creating a SWOT. Ideas include:
 - Completing this during a group ‘Away Day’
 - Collect perspectives via email/ through a survey/virtual suggestion box
 - Collect and consolidate the information generated by brainstorming sessions from different teams within your area
 - Place a poster-sized copy on a notice board for people to contribute

2. List the core activities of your area. (for example: research, education, student experience, fundraising, facilities and operations, etc.) You should ensure that all of these activities are evaluated for their relative strengths and weaknesses.
3. Engage people. Particularly those with expertise in each of the activities that you have identified. Tell people about your strategic planning processes and how their input will help. Share the data you have collected with them.
4. Complete the quadrant.

What next?

The completed SWOT will give you a good understanding of the factors that affect the core activities of your area. It will highlight core strengths and also draw attention to any weaknesses or threats.

Tips on using a SWOT

- The more honest the information gathered the more useful your SWOT will be. Therefore, the process requires strong leadership to ensure that people feel empowered to share their perspectives
- Although the SWOT is structured as a simple quadrant, to derive the full benefit of using this method takes some time. The more time put into creating the SWOT and the more perspectives contributed - the more accurate and informative the end result will be.
- Take care to link the brainstorming to the appropriate data sources to ensure that your SWOT doesn’t get filled with assumptions or opinions.

2.3 PESTLE analysis

What is a PESTLE Analysis?

PESTLE is an acronym for: Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental. It is a useful tool that helps to understand the way that the external environment affects an organization, area or project. A PESTLE can help you to predict external opportunities and risks that are developing on the horizon and enable you to form a strategic response to them and not be caught off-guard.

How does it work?

A PESTLE analysis helps identify external factors that may influence your strategies and ability to meet your objectives. The PESTLE can give a deep understanding of the linkages between your area and the external environment.

For example – when you consider the ‘Political’ theme, you might ask the following questions: How will a new government policy affect our support for students with a disability? Will updated regulations delay research activities? Can we benefit from new government funding schemes?

A PESTLE Analysis can be used to predict external opportunities and risks that are developing on the horizon. You can download a [template here](#).

Theme	Factors to Consider
Political	Government policy and priorities, elections, regulations
Economic	Exchange rate, cost of living, inflation, unemployment, loan availability
Sociological	Social trends, demographics, wellbeing, career attitudes, religion
Technological	Online learning, MOOCs, social networking, mobile technology, data science
Legal	Employment law, access to resources, import/exports, taxation, human rights
Environmental	Local competition, sustainability, carbon emissions, climate, traffic

When to use a PESTLE?

Like the SWOT Analysis, the PESTLE analysis is a good tool to use at the beginning of a strategic planning exercise once you have collected and reviewed some relevant data.

This tool is particularly suited for brainstorming sessions, workshops and focus groups. This is an externally focused exercise; therefore it is essential that some of the people contributing to this process have insight of what is going on the field or sector.

How to use?

1. Go through the list of themes that form the PESTLE Analysis and brainstorm ways that they are currently or will potentially affect the activities of your area.
2. Engage people in your area as well as people with specific subject-matter expertise who might have additional insights on the effects of future events.
3. Start filling in the grid

What next?

If any serious risks or great opportunities were highlighted during the course of this exercise, ensure that your future strategies prepare you appropriately for any developments and the situation is monitored.

2.4 Research and Benchmarking

Why is Research and Benchmarking important?

Obtaining data about other places and institutions can help you learn more about the current activities, developments and initiatives of your specific field or area. It can also help to shape your vision for where you want to go next and help to design targets for your strategic plan.

Why do this?

This is something worth doing regularly, regardless of whether or not you're in a formal strategic planning stage. Researching other institutions and learning about their plans, foci and performance can provide information and inspiration to your strategic planning processes. It is highly beneficial to undertake an 'environmental scan' of organizational peers and competitors. This will ensure that you are keeping up with their innovations and yet maintaining your own unique differentiation. You only know whether or not you are succeeding at this if you know what everyone else is doing.

Benchmarking is the systematic comparison of organisational processes and performances. Benchmarking is a way to better understand current performance by gathering information from other areas (both internally and externally).

Research and Benchmarking ensures you have a good understanding of the current status within your area, and allows you to effectively target activities, developments and initiatives that require attention.

How does it work?

1. Determine the scope

- Be clear about what you want to look at. The more specific you can get the scope, the more relevant the information will be. For example: “We want to look at graduate employability outcomes for people who have graduated from an education course in the last 2 years.”

2. Choose benchmark areas

- Often the Australian GO8 universities are highlighted as appropriate benchmark institutions. However, it depends what you want from the exercise.
- You will pick your benchmark institutions or areas by your special interest. For example: In the above scenario you might want know which university is getting most graduates into local teaching positions. Therefore, you might limit your institutions to benchmark universities in NSW only.
- Or you may want to know the success rate for the top programs or institutions. Therefore, you would either select the highest ranked education programs in Australia or the world, to determine the graduate employability outcomes from their courses.
- You may know of a couple of institutions that recently changed the curriculum for their education course, perhaps you are thinking of doing the same and wanted to see the affect that this has had on the graduate outcomes.

3. Make sense of the information

- Work out what is causing any discrepancies and get the data as ‘like for like’ as possible.
- Determine the performance of your area against the data that you have collected.
- If there is a performance gap or the exercise has generated other important data or information – ensure that this is brought up with a wider group for a brainstorming session.

Like for like

It's extremely hard to find true 'like for like' situations. Universities and other academic institutions strive for differentiation; and they are therefore seeking to be unique in some way or another. But find the closest comparison to whatever facet you are researching.

Quality

Focus on quality. Understanding the inner workings and vision of a mediocre or failing institution is not going to provide you with a useful baseline to benchmark or shape your own activities. Unless, of course, it's forming a 'lessons learned' dossier of what not to do.

Progress as well as plans

This exercise is not just what other institutions are doing, but how they are doing it and whether it is on the road to success. To reference the 'Logic Model' in this toolkit: if you research and benchmark the 'inputs' and 'activities' this will only ever tell you the first half the story. Instead, researching and benchmarking the 'outputs'

and 'impacts' is a good place to start. This enables you to go back through the value chain and determine how they achieved their success. A university may be putting \$50million into research each year, but they may be frittering it away on poorly executed projects or buying core laboratory equipment that no one needs.

Share

Where possible make the data available to people in your area so that they can comment, analyse or provide feedback that will improve the research and benchmarking in the future.

2.5 Fishbone Diagram

What is a Fishbone Diagram?

This type of diagram goes by many different names including: Cause-and-Effect Diagram and Ishikawa Diagram. The tool is used to identify the root causes of an outcome by deep-diving into the topic.

How does it work?

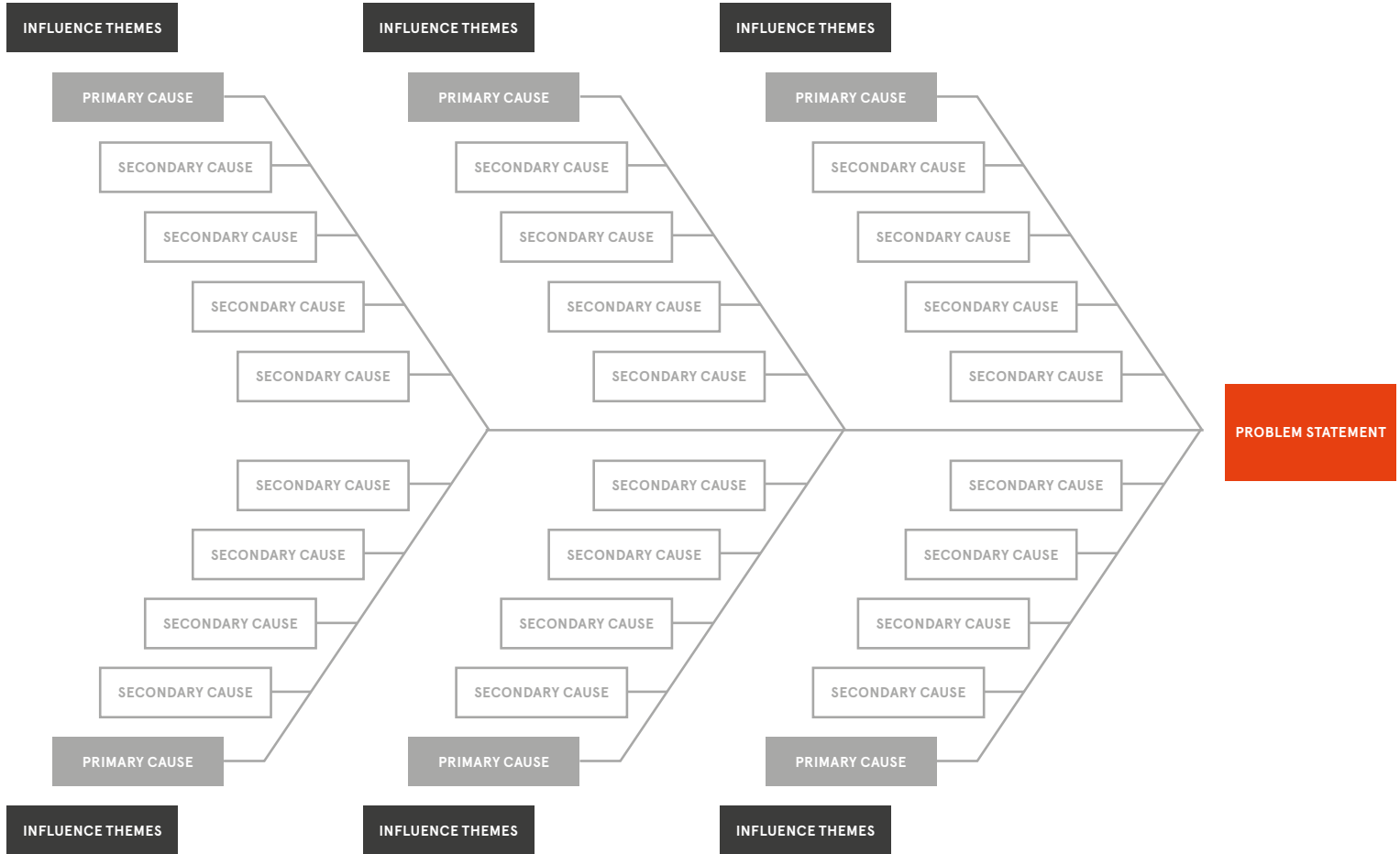
A Fishbone Diagram helps to research the root causes of why something is happening. It can give insight into problems (conversely it can also help identify the 'magic ingredient' when something is working exceptionally well).

When something is not working optimally, there are often a few contributing factors that could be tackled to resolve the issue (often the culprits are not the most obvious). The Fishbone Diagram enables you to drill down on the areas that could be improved.

This tool helps you to think through the problem broadly by analysing the related activities through different lenses:

Theme	Possible questions
Equipment	Do you have the right tools to do the job? Are they maintained? Are they available?
Environment	Is there anything about the: building, location, weather, that is causing an issue? Is the work environment too noisy?
People	Do you have the right people involved? Are people trained and available?
Measures	When are accuracy and quality checks undertaken? Are the benchmarks suitable?
Methods	Do the processes support the objectives? Are they consistent? Are they outdated?
Materials	Are the materials in good condition? Do the forms make sense? Are there order delays?

A Fishbone Diagram is a tool used to resolve a specific problem and research the root causes of why something is happening. You can download a [template here](#).



When to use a Fishbone Diagram?

Where the SWOT and PESTLE tools take an aerial view of an area or a function, the Fishbone Diagram gets down to the fine detail. Use the Fishbone Diagram to resolve a specific problem. You might use the Fishbone tool to unpick the issues that you identified as ‘weaknesses’ or ‘threats’ in your SWOT analysis. The tool is extremely versatile; it can be used to help identify the root causes for a variety of problems.

You’ll probably have to speak to a few people who are subject experts (the people closest to the problem) or end users (the people who have experienced the problem first hand).

How to use

1. Write the Problem Statement in the red box on the right.
2. Go through the various themes that influence this problem statement – some examples of these are resources, processes and timeframes. Write these in the grey boxes.
3. Consider the possible effects these have in causing your issue. These are your primary causes – write them in the light grey boxes, next to their topic.

4. Once you have done this you need to find your secondary cause – write these in the white boxes following on from their primary cause. This involves delving even deeper into your primary cause to get further details.
5. Keep asking the question ‘why’ so that you can dig deeper and deeper into the cause of the problem and find possible solutions.

What next?

Once you know the sources of the problems – you can begin to correct them. Sometimes small changes that don’t cost anything can make huge differences.

Examples include: Creating a more efficient protocol, adding a new check in the process for accuracy, accepting soft copies of a form, improved timing, speaking to a manufacturer to understand the product, watching an online video to learn how to do something on a software package, designing a template, making a lunchtime rota so that a service is always covered, etc.

Section 3: Collective brainstorming

“Leadership is the art of giving people a platform for spreading ideas that work.”

- Seth Godin

3.0 Participation and brainstorming

Introduction

Strategy shouldn't be written by one or two people. Getting everybody together in groups for collective brainstorming and feedback is essential in shaping and understanding the road ahead. Opinions, ideas, insights, advice and personal experiences are needed to make sense of the data, inject pragmatism and determine the possible destinations for the future.



The importance of this step

This step enables everyone to get involved; it brings people closer to the strategic planning process and moves them together. It helps to keep people informed about the work being done, so that they can feel some personal connection to the strategy.

Ultimately, your plan should shape the direction and emphasis of each person's work in the area. Therefore, if every person connected to your mission understands and feels part of your strategy, it is a lot easier to implement and obtain traction. A whole group of people working daily, incrementally, systematically towards the same clear goals will yield better and faster results than just having a handful of senior staff who are 'in the know' about the strategy.

It can be important in this step for the ideas and directions to get a sounding board from those working in other areas of the university. While the people working closest to the area are will understand the intricacies of their work, the strategic drivers and where there is great scope for improvement, those from others areas can often offer unique insights into their experience as end-users or recipients of the services, and what would improve the experience for them.

Different methods

Workshops

.....
This provides an opportunity to get everyone together and focus on a specific task rather than get distracted by the usual demands of their position.

Retreats

.....
This is an event that's likely to occur over one or two days. The leadership group meet off-site to focus on important issues. The retreat is usually made up of presentations and workshop-style sessions around specific areas of the strategy.

Town hall meeting

.....
The people leading the new strategy present to an 'open house' of people in the affected area. The presentations are usually followed by a questions and answers session or opportunities to provide additional feedback.

Using facilitators

.....
Facilitators help to steer the sessions to ensure that the original objectives are met and the sessions do not over run or go off track. A facilitator is usually totally impartial and from outside the area. If you need any support with facilitation, please contact the Strategy Office.

The challenges of this step

Aligning to the budget process

This work needs to be undertaken prior to the budgeting process, otherwise you might end up with a suite of strategic improvement projects that have no opportunity to be considered for funding until next year's budget cycle. The budget requests are typically submitted at roughly the same time each year.

Logistics

It takes time and effort to get people in a room together. Booking rooms, sending invitations, creating agendas and presentations take work.

Producing outcomes

Without clear objectives and follow up, the brainstorming sessions can wander off track. Sometimes they become a social gathering that struggles to get down to business. At other times the sessions can turn into a talkfest; where huge swathes of issues and ideas are discussed at length, yet nothing crystallizes and nothing is followed up or taken further.

Related tools

It's important to include your colleagues and team in the strategic planning process, but this needs to be managed in a way that will contribute to the success of your plan.

3.1 Managing discussions

Constructively managing discussions ensures that conversations stay on track, the right people are involved, and that your desired outcomes are achieved.

Why use this: Have constructive conversations, with relevant people.

3.2 Brainstorming questions

This tool contains a range of example questions that will help to get people thinking strategically.

Why use this: Guide people to contribute strategic recommendations

3.1 Managing discussions

Why is it important to manage discussions?

To ensure that you get the most out of group discussions and brainstorming events, the agenda should be designed with a theme or a question for the participants to consider together as a group. Ideally, the theme or questions should end in some kind of conclusion, so that the groups will have to collaborate and prioritise their ideas.

Here are some examples:

- Identify and agree on the four biggest opportunities to improve student experience
- How can we increase the number of international research collaborations?
- What are our biggest challenges to providing a good customer service?
- What are five things we could do immediately to raise our external profile?

Facilitation

Ideas and insights develop through group discussions, particularly if the discussions are focused and kept on track and the topics are relevant to the strategic planning exercise.

The role of a facilitator helps to get the most out of these discussions. Facilitators ensure everyone participating in the discussion has a voice and that different perspectives are contributed. Facilitators support the flow of the conversation and keep the discussions on track; ensuring that the objectives of the group discussions are met.

It can be particularly beneficial to get a facilitator who is not closely linked to your area; they are more likely to remain impartial as they are more removed from the topics being discussed. The strategy office will be able to help you find a suitable facilitator.

Use facilitation to keep people informed about the work being done, so that they can feel some personal connection to the strategy.

Facilitator guidelines

The following guidance was prepared by The Director, Talent and Organisational Development, Human Resources.

Your role

Your role is NEUTRAL but active.

Please do not offer your own point of view, however tempting this may be. You may then be seen as representing a view that the whole table does not agree with, stymieing the conversation and impacting the role you have as facilitator.

Facilitation skills

Your two central tactics to employ when facilitating should be:

- Determining who talks when
- Focussing the discussion on the questions

Your Listening Skills are critical.



3.2 Brainstorming sessions

What are these questions for?

The questions below are examples of how to get people thinking strategically. These types of questions help people to road test new ideas and look to the future; rather than becoming bogged down in the current problems and issues.

Vision: Where do we want to be?

- If this strategy is wildly successful – what would happen?
- What is the best case scenario for this strategy?
- What will make us No. 1 in Australia?
- How will we know when we've got there?
- What is the single most important indicator that will show us that we've arrived?

Planning: How do we get there?

- What do we need to get there?
 - What do we need to do?
 - What do we need to stop doing?
 - What resources and support do we need?
- What will progress look like?
 - Internally
 - Externally

Progress: How are we doing?

- How will we know we're making progress?
- What is the single most important indicator that will show us that progress is being made?
- When will we start seeing progress?
- When will we start seeing results?
- What factors will require us to change course?

What does failure look like?

- If this strategy fails – what went wrong? / What is the most likely cause?
- What external things could happen to render this strategy obsolete?
- When do we need to see progress before coming back to the drawing board?
- What will we do if it fails?

It's important to brainstorm to allow ideas and directions to get a sounding board from those working in other areas

Section 4: Prioritising options

“It’s not about the pieces but how they work together.”

- Anonymous

4.0 Prioritising options

Introduction

The stages of information gathering and brainstorming would have generated a long list of initiatives that could enhance and improve your area. It is likely you have many options of where you can focus next to strategically develop your area – both significant and small projects.

Likewise, you may also have some strong ideas about things you should stop doing in your area. This section will help you to align, prioritise and sequence the ideas for strategic projects.

Prioritising options is about sifting and sorting through all available choices and focusing on the most important areas. Whilst it's important to listen and acknowledge each person's opinion during the participation and brainstorming phase; you don't necessarily have to incorporate or act upon every single suggestion that comes through. Trying to please everybody usually ends up pleasing nobody.

- Identifying the most important work to do
- Building consensus within your area
- Sequencing significant projects

The importance of this step

Aligning

Your strategic projects should align with the university's 5-year strategic plan. Each year, the university's leadership will agree and communicate annual institutional priorities. Each portfolio or local area will need to describe the work that will be undertaken to accomplish the organisational vision for that year. Projects that support the overarching strategic objectives are more likely to be allocated centralised funding via the University's Passport Process. The Enterprise Portfolio Management Office (EPMO) working in collaboration with Finance, manage this annual process for those seeking central funding and support for new initiatives; and requesting funding for continuation of multi-year projects.

The EPMO have designed a tool to aid thinking about what initiative your business area needs to undertake to contribute to the delivery of the 2016-20 strategy. This will be updated annually to communicate annual institutional priorities.

You will have local priorities too that might be harder to align with the overall strategy but will be very important to your area: these might be related to a local strategy, improving operations and compliance or managing a risk to your business as usual work.

Prioritising

It is unlikely that you'll have the time, resource or inclination to undertake all the initiatives that were generated by the feedback and brainstorming sessions. If you try and do everything at once, resources and attention become overwhelmed and get spread so thin it will be hard to achieve anything at all. This is can be a demoralising outcome of an interesting and engaged strategic planning process.

Sequencing

Good sequencing can greatly support and bolster your strategic projects. Spending time to think about the logical order and interdependencies will help you get the most from your efforts.

Sequencing around other projects – Some projects will naturally need to happen before others.

Sequencing around timelines – This is important for optimising the impact of your project.

The challenges of this step

Building consensus

The success of the strategic initiatives will partly depend on what level the people in your area: know, understand, agree and support the various initiatives. Building consensus can feel like a bit of a 'sales job' that can take a bit of time – but is well worth the effort.

- Explain the reasons why you're progressing in this certain direction. Detail any data or research that validates making this strategy a priority.
- Be transparent and give feedback about why certain ideas and initiatives were not chosen to take forward. If someone took time to contribute their ideas, it is a good leadership approach to give them an explanation and guidance for the future.
- If people are openly unresponsive and disruptive, do not ignore this behaviour: Speak to the parties involved and ask what it would take to gain their support.

Pulling it together

The strategic planning process can take a lot of time and effort, the final stage is to pull it together in a plan that will drive the work of your area. It is a good idea to fit your entire strategy on a single page so people can easily familiarise themselves with it, print it out and check in regularly with it.

Related tools

The tools in this section are designed to ensure you're planning effectively, whilst aligning with the 2016-20 University Strategy.

4.1 Eisenhower Decision Matrix

This tool is a simple matrix that will help you to prioritise when planning, and help with decision making

- Do you have many great ideas that you need to prioritise?
- How do you know which idea is worth pursuing today vs tomorrow/ 6 months time?

Why use this: Manage your time and effort effectively.

4.2 2016-20 Strategy alignment

Designed by the EPMD this template highlights the University-wide strategic goals and initiatives. Access it [here](#).

Why use this: This will align your planning to ensure it contributes to the University Strategy.

4.3 Strategy on a page

The Strategy on a page gives you a snapshot overview of your planning, goals and desired outcomes.

- Do you need just one page to encapsulate your strategic plan?

Why use this: Easy and simple one-pager to refer to.

For further advice or support contact
the Strategy Office

university.strategy@sydney.edu.au



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