



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

**ACT/EMP**

PUBLICATIONS



## **A Guide to Strategic Planning in Employer Organizations**

(Irish Business and Employers Confederation - IBEC)

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### **Introduction**

*"Organizations are generally complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical. The real challenge is to learn to deal with this complexity."*

Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization*

The purpose of this guide is to assist employer organizations with the task of strategic planning.

In addition, material is also included which could be used in a workshop format by employers' organizations (EOs), or their advisors, who wish to start a strategic planning process.

What follows has been based, in some measure, on the practical experiences of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). We believe that the process that led to the adoption of our Strategic Policy Framework (SPF) in May 1996 and on-going work on organisational issues provide useful benchmarks for other EOs who wish to embark on a similar strategic path.

A case study of IBEC's planning process and the lessons learned is attached (**Appendix 1**).

As the guide will demonstrate, there are many ways to go about strategic planning. The textbooks are full of options, ideas and concepts. While the approach described below draws on the best practices recommended by corporate planners and other such experts, the guide is firmly rooted in reality and is driven by what has worked for IBEC. Thus in writing this guide we have had to strike a balance between not being too simplistic, while not going overboard on complex conceptual theories or esoteric and less essential matters.

The guide is pitched at a level to be of special interest to small EOS and those in developing countries. However, it is equally relevant to larger and better resourced EOs who have engaged in strategic planning in the past and who wish to renew their commitment.

We assume that a copy of this guide will be used by all the executives responsible for strategic planning within EOs, from the Secretary General level down, by EO members who assist in the process and by project facilitators, including ILO staff.

The basic premise we adopt is that the EOs to whom this guide is addressed have not carried through a full-scale strategic plan. We start on the assumption that building blocks need to be put in place from the initiation stage through to implementation.

Inevitably, many EOs have already addressed some of the issues covered in the guide. Your decision-taking may, however, have been more *ad hoc* in nature and less structured than what is required by the process of strategic planning. For those EOs, we suggest that you review the following chapters in any event as you may glean new insights that will help you fine-tune your current strategic plan when it is next reviewed.

**Chapter 1** deals with the conceptual base that underpins the approach to strategic planning. The work of many prominent experts has been drawn on to explain the basic principles behind strategic thinking, organisational change and the development of a strategic plan.

We move on in **Chapter 2** to the first step in the process: getting started. This is perhaps the most daunting phase for many. Unless the foundations for strategic planning are well laid down at this stage, subsequent work and effort will be much more difficult.

In **Chapter 3** we ask some simple but very essential questions. The *raison d'etre* for an EO's very existence is explored and conclusions are drawn. Defining an EO's mission and vision statement is not as easy as it might first appear.

Building on these solid foundations, **Chapter 4** looks at the internal and external environment facing EOs. Guidance is provided about the completion of an analysis using the SWOT technique (that identifies Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). During this phase it will be necessary to get the views of member companies. Recommendations are made about the completion of a comprehensive survey to gather the necessary information that will prove essential in subsequent stages of the planning process. Assessing the competition is also covered at this stage.

With all this data to hand, the next task is to set priorities and identify core strategies. **Chapter 5** looks at the identification of strategic policy options.

**Chapter 6** goes through a similar exercise but at the level of the organization.

Gathering and distilling all this material and writing the strategic plan is the focus of **Chapter 7**.

You think the work is done? Not so: implementation and the monitoring of progress are essential ingredients in the strategic planning process and these issues are addressed in **Chapter 8**.

We conclude in **Chapter 9** by reflecting on the key lessons learned and why you should keep your EO 'thinking strategic'.

As the guide unfolds, material is provided to assist the reader to make maximum use of the techniques that are explained. EOs are very much encouraged to adapt this material to your particular circumstances. We hope the user-friendly tools that are presented will encourage you to persist with your organization's planning process.

Thus it is recommended that EOs and their advisors study the guide quite thoroughly before deciding whether and under what conditions they should initiate a strategic planning process.

As you will discover, strategic planning is complex, creative, participative, time-consuming, at times irritating, but always rewarding. So be prepared as you embark on what should be an extremely worthwhile and valuable exercise at a personal level and one that will certainly benefit your EO and its members.

(This training guide is available with the Bureau for Employers' Activities)

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*For further information, please contact Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP)*

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