

DEVELOPING OPERATIONAL PLANS

A strategic plan must be translated into an operational plan to facilitate short-term implementation.

Shura is critical in helping a leader during both strategy formulation and implementation.

Effective strategic plan implementation depends on people. Picking the right person for implementation is absolutely critical, as indicated by Khalid ibn al Walid, the best strategist in Islamic history. At the onset of the battle of Yarmuk, where the Muslims faced a far more numerous Byzantine army, Abu Ubaydah, the general appointed by Umar to lead the Muslim army, delegated this task to Khalid. Khalid agreed: "*Abu Ubaydah is a man of the purest character, but he does not know the stratagems of war.*"¹ Realizing that he was, by the grace of the Almighty, the right person to lead the army, this seasoned veteran went on to win another major victory.

Commenting on the importance of selecting the right person, Beekun and Badawi indicate that it may not always be possible to find a strong Muslim with the requisite skills.² In fact, an Islamic organization may have to choose between a strong Muslim with weak leadership skills and a strong leader with moderate or weak Islamic understanding. Amr ibn al-'As had only been a Muslim for four months when the Prophet appointed him to lead the Muslims at the battle of Dhat al-Salasil. Ibn Taymiyyah provides a rationale for this decision in his *As-Siyasah al-Shar'iyah*.³ A leader with weak or inadequate expertise can bring disaster to an organization, whereas a skilled leader may advance and help it. Even if a skilled leader is not a strong Muslim, his shortcomings can be made up through the *shura* process of decision-making, sound advice (*nasihah*), and the implementation of jointly agreed-upon goals.

Operational Plans

After formulating the organization's strategic plan, the SPC should turn its attention to shorter-term plans, namely, *operational* or *tactical* plans, for each key results area.⁴ The plans developed for each of these areas typically cover a span of one year. Strategic and operational planning are rarely done at the same time and by the same people. An operational plan needs to focus on the following:

1. In order to offer products or services consistent with our strategic plan, what are our short-term objectives (targets) within the next year? Targets are SMART, shorter-term actions designed to accomplish longer-term objectives. Each target may be subdivided into sequential activities, must have a time component (usually a year or less), and should always be attached to specific units (e.g., functional areas, departments, or committees). To repeat, the length of time attached to a target may be less than one year, depending on the velocity of the external environment. A faster, more turbulent environment makes it harder to forecast far into the future and requires much shorter time frames with respect to targets.
2. Which performance measures can we use to gauge our progress toward meeting these targets?
3. How will we reach these short-term objectives? In other words, what human, financial, and other resources can we assign to each objective? Resources are the means by which we can accomplish predetermined activities, including plant, labor, raw material, and other assets.

Functional, Departmental, or Committee Plans

After developing the organization's strategic and operational plans, it is time to develop functional area plans (e.g., finance, human resources, operations), departmental, and/or committee plans. These must be communicated and agreed upon so that they will be carefully aligned with the organizational level plans (strategic and operational). Again, this is an iterative, not a top-down, process that requires both lateral and vertical communication as well as coordination across product and service areas and/or functional areas.

Both lateral and vertical (downward and upward) communication are critical in the iterative process of developing and implementing operational plans.

To ensure that the various levels of the organization's plans work together in a coordinated manner, the SPC and you, as the leader or the CEO, must stay vigilant and keep a bird's eye view of the whole planning landscape. While you should rarely get involved in operational details, you may delegate key tasks without abdicating your own responsibility. Throughout the implementation process, use your own leadership skills, an appropriate organizational structure, and a culture based on excellence to execute the strategic and operating plans. At all times, stay focused on the organization's shared vision. It is your responsibility, and nobody else's, to be the drumbeater and cheerleader who galvanizes your followers into action.

An example of an operational plan from IMRC and SMO (a hypothetical composite Muslim student organization based on several existing organizations) is given in illustration capsule 7.

Illustration Capsule 7

Example of an Operational Plan

IMRC:

GOAL (1990): To provide health care to Indians in general, and to Indian Muslims in particular.

STRATEGIES:

- To educate people about health and health care.
- To emphasize preventive medicine.

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE: To establish 3 mobile clinics by end of 1992.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES OR TARGETS: (linked to 1-year, short-term objectives):

- Survey needy areas by mid-1991 (task assigned to A,M)
- Purchase equipment by end-1991 (task assigned to M,J)
- Staff the clinic by March 1992 (task assigned to S,R)

RESOURCES:

- Volunteers from local organization (names listed).
- Unemployed medical doctors (names listed).

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- By January 1993, establishment of mobile clinics in needy areas in Bombay and Madras.
- By January 1995, decrease in pre-birth mortality rate in targeted areas.

SMO**GOAL:**

Increase SMO presence on North American campuses

STRATEGIES:

- Attract and retain more members
- Educate members in *da`wah*

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE:

To increase the number of registered SMO members to 10,000 within the next five years.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVE:

Decrease membership application processing time by 50% within 1 year.

ACTIVITIES:

- Streamline application form (assigned to specific individual)
- Change membership database software (assigned to specific committee)
- Train staff in new database software (assigned to specific individuals)
- Test and refine new process (assigned to specific committee)

RESOURCES:

- Membership services staff (names listed)
- Benchmarking organization (name listed)
- Database software designer training staff (names listed)

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

- 10% decrease in complaints from new applicants within 1 year.
- All new membership applications to be processed within 3 days of receipt.

A more detailed example of SMO's operational plan with respect to the training activity is listed in illustration capsule 8. You can also use worksheet #13 (Appendix A, p. 176) to outline your operational plan. Your strategic plan must be translated into an operational plan for it to make sense to the implementers. Otherwise, it will remain too lofty and nebulous, and your followers or employees will find it difficult to translate

the organizational plan into something meaningful and executable. It is possible that once they work on the operational plan, gaps between what is intended and what can be realistically accomplished will surface. If this happens, the strategic plan may have to be adjusted accordingly.

Illustration Capsule 8
Examples of an Operational Plan

Action Step, Task, or Activity	Responsible Person or Group	Begin Date	End Date	Estimated Hours	Cost
1. Evaluate various membership database software	Muhib to lead All play a role	4/20	4/21	8	\$750
2. Select, purchase, and supervise the customization of database software	Nabeela and the information technology team	4/22	6/23	120	\$6,000
3. Solution: Train 3 more staff members in the new database software	Nabeela/Issa	6/23	6/30	30	\$1,000

Advice in Mapping Out Operational Plans

- Work for long-term goals while striving for small wins and immediate results. If you place too much emphasis on the long term, the day-to-day or month-to-month results may be neglected and end up suffering.
- When making short-term decisions, always keep your vision, mission, and goals in mind.

Delegate,
but do not
abdicate.

- Draw up clear targets, activities, and related directives. Make sure that all of these are clear to those who are expected to implement them. Post them on a large wall exhibit so that everyone can see at a glance what they are supposed to be working on and how much progress has been made.
- Do not assume that they understand. Use multiple channels of communication to make sure they do, such as face-to-face exchanges, group discussions, direct phone calls, e-mail, videos, and handouts. You may wish to store handouts and committee minutes on a secure intranet site so that implementers can retrieve them as needed.
- Keep the language of the operating plan simple and understandable.
- As indicated by Beekun and Badawi, delegate authority but do not abdicate responsibility.⁵