

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT involves assessing the internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats.

As shown in figure 1, the first task in the strategic management process is conducting a SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths (S), Weaknesses (W), Opportunities (O), and Threats (T). An organization's SPC and stakeholders, including its leaders and followers, must always track its internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as its external opportunities and threats. Decision-makers need to understand and assess both what is happening within the organization and in the external environment.

Environmental Scanning

No organization exists in a vacuum, and ignoring its external environment will not safeguard it from external forces. The Prophet was intensely aware of the need to gather intelligence about, and keep track of, the external environment. This aspect of strategic leadership is discussed in *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*.¹ Given below is an example from the Prophet's *sirah* of how Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman kept him informed of external environmental threats during the danger-prone period of early Islam:

Hudhayfah (ibn al-Yaman) had three qualities which particularly impressed the Prophet: his unique intelligence which he employed in dealing with difficult situations; his

quick wittedness and spontaneous response to the call for action, and his ability to keep a secret even under persistent questioning.

A noticeable policy of the Prophet was to bring out and use the special qualities and strengths of each individual companion of his. In deploying his companions, he was careful to choose the right man for the right task. This he did to excellent advantage in the case of Hudhayfah. One of the gravest problems the Muslims of Medina had to face was the existence in their midst of hypocrites (munafiqun) [...]. Although many of them had declared their acceptance of Islam, the change was only superficial and they continued to plot and intrigue against the Prophet and the Muslims.

Because of Hudhayfah's ability to keep a secret, the Prophet, peace be on him, confided in him the names of the munafiqun (hypocrites). It was a weighty secret which the Prophet did not disclose to any other of his companions. He gave Hudhayfah the task of watching the movements of the munafiqun, following their activities, and shielding the Muslims from the sinister danger they represented. It was a tremendous responsibility. The munafiqun, because they acted in secrecy and because they knew all the developments and plans of the Muslims from within, presented a greater threat to the community than the outright hostility of the kuffar.

From this time onwards, Hudhayfah was called "The Keeper of the Secret of the Messenger of Allah." Throughout his life, he remained faithful to his pledge not to disclose the names of the hypocrites. After the death of the Prophet, the Khalifah often came to him to seek his advice concerning their movements and activities, but he remained tight-lipped and cautious.²

Although figure 1 suggests that a SWOT analysis is done only initially, this really should be an ongoing activity. An organization has to monitor its internal and external environments continuously to determine where the organization's boundaries end and where the external environment begins, because it is often hard to distinguish between outsiders and

Value maximization also means providing the best value-added service or product to your key stakeholder or customer.

insiders. Members of the board of directors are often appointed from the outside and may not necessarily be considered insiders. As a result, decisions about what data to gather and who should receive it need to be made. An organization would not inadvertently want to give proprietary information to its competitors.

In carrying out a SWOT, Islamic organizations need to focus on value maximization: matching their best strengths to the most promising and attainable opportunities open to them.³ Value maximization also means providing the best value-added service or product to your key stakeholder. If you are a business, your key stakeholder is your customer, not your stockholder. If you are an Islamic center, your key stakeholders are, typically, your near-by Muslim community, the Muslim community at large, and the other faith-based communities. Value-maximization requires a critical but difficult fit between the organization's internal configuration and the external environment, for this fit is dynamic and needs to be maintained in the midst of a turbulent environment.

Internal Audit

The first part of a SWOT analysis is an audit of the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and an assessment of its current state. An internal audit tells you what your organization can do by detailing its strengths and weaknesses. It enables you, as the leader, to uncover areas in which you might be able to develop a competitive advantage.

A strength is something that the organization excels at or a feature that makes it competitive, such as the following⁴:

- Human resources (e.g., experienced and motivated workers, managerial expertise, and deep leadership ranks).
- Competence or knowledge in a certain area (e.g., advocacy skills, web-based expertise, manufacturing prowess, or conference organizing).
- Ownership or control of key physical assets (e.g., location of facilities, first-mover advantage into certain geographical areas, and leading-edge technology).
- Financial resources (e.g., the equity in your company and actual cash – not pledged – donations).
- Intangible assets (e.g., customer goodwill, the organization's reputation and culture).
- Collaborative organizational relationships (e.g., inter-organizational

Organizational strengths can be both tangible (e.g. physical assets) as well intangible (e.g. competence and good morale).

The 'curse of competence' takes place either when an organization relies too much on a specific core competency at the expense of its other competencies or when it fails to develop future critical competencies.

alliances). One example is the National Shura Council of North America, which brought together North America's four leading Islamic organizations for joint projects. A more recent example is the American Muslim Taskforce for Disaster Relief, which combines the efforts of 10 or more leading Islamic organizations in North America to help Muslims and non-Muslims whenever a natural disaster occurs. It is important to note here that your organization can engage in collaborative and competitive relationships with the same external entities simultaneously. For example, ISNA cooperates with ICNA (the Islamic Circle of North America) on such joint projects as the Bosnia Task Force, but competes with ICNA when fundraising or trying to serve the community.

While one could list innumerable organizational strengths, the strategic management literature indicates that organizations that outperform their rivals – independent of industry type – have *distinctive core competencies* that are sustainable over time.⁵ Prahalad and Hamel define core competencies as "the collective learning in the organization, especially how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple streams of technologies."⁶ Organizations must identify what competencies to focus on and then abandon those activities at which they are relatively weak and ineffective, and that do not advance their vision and mission. One key issue in this process is the ability to distinguish previous competencies from those that are about to come on-line or from prospective, future ones. For example, one leading Islamic organization held on to its manual processing membership function for too long, and thereby lost considerable momentum in its work.

While identifying your organization's strengths, make sure that you do not fall victim to the "curse of competence."⁷ Indeed, it is very easy for an organization to be so successful using a specific core competency that its workers either do not develop other competencies or let them atrophy. Blinded by their own brilliance in one area, they miss very attractive new opportunities. An excellent example of this is IBM, the leading mainframe computer manufacturer in the world until 1979: The introduction of the personal computer took its leaders completely by surprise. They had totally overlooked the possibility that regular people might want a computer on their desk! Similarly, quite a few Islamic organizations are so good in one area (e.g., organizing conventions and conferences) that they miss other opportunities (e.g., building good relations

VRIO analysis provides a relatively balanced way of assessing your organization's strengths without falling victim to overconfidence.

with other faith-based communities). The curse of competence can also lead to arrogance, as some organizations overestimate their leaders' capabilities and underestimate Allah's contribution to their success. Given that Islamic history is replete with the ultimate demise of such arrogance, never overlook the potential liability of overestimating your organization's strengths or competencies.

A relatively balanced way of assessing your organization's strengths without falling prey to overconfidence is to use a VRIO (value, rarity, imitability, and organization) analysis. Barney and Hesterly suggest that you ask four questions when analyzing your strengths⁶:

1. **The Question of Value:** Does a strength enable your organization to take advantage of an external opportunity or counter an external threat? If not, this strength can potentially hamper your organization. Perhaps it is even a weakness. For example, your Islamic organization could claim leadership of the nation's Muslim community, but be unable to put together a national drive on a specific issue of concern to Muslims (e.g., the constant harassment of Muslims under a draconian law or the non-recognition of Islamic family law with respect to marital and divorce issues). Such feebleness indicates that either your organization lacks a national following, or that your leadership is ineffectual, or that your membership is at best effete and unmotivated. The bottom-line is the following: If your organization is not providing value to its constituency, your constituency may not feel any need to reciprocate with financial, moral, and other support. Why should your members do anything for you if you cannot do anything for them?
2. **The Question of Rarity:** Is your strength one which few organizations in your domain or niche have access to? Is your organization one that can lead and accomplish projects that no other similar organizations or individual can? What is unique and distinctive about your strength?
3. **The Question of Imitability:** Can other organizations that lack this strength build it up without a major investment in resources? Such organizations as CAIR, IMRC, and Savola were not built overnight. Their leaders and founders spent a lot of time, money and effort assembling the right configuration of people and assets, shaping the right organizational culture with appropriate norms and values, and building worthwhile inter-organizational relationships. Trying

to imitate an organization that is already established within a niche means overcoming barriers to entry (e.g., name recognition, capitalization, access to potential donors/investors, and location). Even when an organization has access to a lot of assets and can penetrate a niche, it may still fail because it cannot surpass an established competitor's learning curve quickly enough to provide products or services on the scale that it needs to survive. There are many examples of Islamic banks that failed because their founders underestimated the difficulties of imitating a rival's strengths. Even when they had the financial resources, they did not have the human assets, experience, and credibility required to run such an enterprise. One defunct Islamic bank I know of was literally run from its president's front shirt pocket. He was an honest man, but he did not understand basic financial accounting and economics. As a result, he ended up in jail when there was a run on the bank, and it collapsed.

4. ***The Question of Organization:*** Does your organization have the capabilities (viz., structure, alliances, and policies) in place to use this strength to its full potential? Having a strength does not mean that it can be deployed effectively. At the battle of Yarmuk, the 200,000-man Byzantine army lost to the 40,000-man Muslim army because they literally got in each other's way during the battle. Similarly, Islamic organizations that were nimble when they were still young and small can become oceans of mind-numbing bureaucracy as they mature and expand. Instead of larger size being a strength, it actually becomes a major weakness when coupled with a poorly designed structure and conflicting rules and standard operating procedures. Unless an appropriate structure is coupled with your organization's strategy, any strength it may have can easily be dissipated through disorganization.

In contrast to organizational strengths, organizational weaknesses are typically something that the organization lacks, is relatively ineffective at, or a situation that somehow hampers it. With reference to the above list of strengths, organizational weaknesses include a lack of human resources and competencies, an inability to own or control key assets, a poor reputation, a weak corporate culture, and/or the absence of cooperative relationships. Table 3.1 lists potential strengths and weaknesses that Islamic organizations may face.

Table 3.1
SWOT Analysis – Internal Audit

Potential Strengths	Potential Weaknesses
Financial stability backed up by a good stream of assets	Poor debt/asset ratio
A national reputation associated with a growing membership or customer base	A no-name organization or declining reputation
Strong corporate values	A weak corporate culture
Strategically located facilities that are easily accessible	A lack of facilities or dilapidated physical assets
An effective leadership	No clear leader or a poor leadership succession plan
Great intellectual capital	Copycat
A superior quality product or service	Easily imitable or low quality product or service
A clear, disciplined strategy	No strategy or fuzzy strategy that is unevenly implemented
A motivated, unified workforce or membership	A lethargic, internally fragmented workforce or membership

Strengths can sometimes be weaknesses just as opportunities can be threats, or vice-versa.

Note that strengths and weaknesses are relative to one's competitors within the same or adjacent domains or business areas. Often, a factor that an Islamic organization views as a strength may be viewed by an outside observer as a weakness if one of its rivals can do better. For example, a leading national Islamic organization used to be very proud of its membership size. But when the number of its registered members was expressed as a percentage of the nation's Muslim population, it was far less than one thousandth of one percent (.001)! You can engage in self-deception by calling something a strength, but rivals and external stakeholders do not have these same perceptual biases and will correctly assess that "strength" as a weakness.

Cultural Audit

While analyzing your organization's strengths and weaknesses, work to uncover the values and assumptions that guide your employees, members, and key stakeholders. These values and assumptions underlie the organization's decision-making process and, if they are not congruent with the strategic plan being developed, they may represent an organizational weakness and hinder the planning and implementation processes. For the purposes of this book, a value within the context of organizational culture is defined as "the collective principle and ideal which guides the thoughts and actions of an individual, or a group of individuals,"⁹ and a core assumption is defined as a fact or statement taken for granted or a "theory-in-use that is neither questioned nor debated."¹⁰

SWOT should also include a cultural audit.

In performing a cultural audit, the SPC must distinguish between personal and organizational values and assumptions. The organization's key decision-makers must be forthright about their personal values and recognize that the organization may have different values. For example, Savola is guided by such internal values as *`azm* (resolve), *iqtida* (apprenticeship), *itqan* (relentless pursuit of perfection) and *tawadu* (humility), as well as by such external values as *ihsan al-dhan* (trusting) and *mu'azarah* (caring to help). Similarly, Southwest Airlines prizes its customer friendliness, whereas Dupont emphasizes safety, ethics, respect for people, and environmental stewardship.

A cultural audit is critical, because values can represent an important source of competitive advantage and be a strength, as they have been for Savola and Southwest Airlines. On the other hand, a weak culture can be a major obstacle to rethinking an organization's strategy and implementing key changes.

Scanning the External Environment

When scanning its external environment, an organization focuses on potential opportunities and threats related to current or prospective customers, suppliers, rivals or competitors, and partners.¹¹ As Barney and Hesterly indicate, the external analysis builds on the internal analysis and tells you what the organization *should* do.¹²

Opportunities, which originate from the organization's external environment, can include any potential areas for growth, technological change, or demographic trends (see table 3.2). Note that even when an external opportunity is rated very high in attractiveness, you may still

The external analysis tells you what your organization should do, and builds on the internal analysis.

decide not to channel resources toward it, for as Spulber indicates, it may not match your organization's strengths or may not be right for your community's stage of development.¹³ For example, a small American Muslim community learned that a very large and spacious building was on the market. It had everything: a large hall that could be converted into a prayer hall, an indoor gym/basketball court, a swimming pool, lodging facilities with numerous rooms, a large parking lot, and was located close to a park. The community's leaders realized that they simply did not have the financial resources to maintain this building, even if the community were somehow able to purchase it through fundraising. The community's current and projected sizes were below the critical mass needed to support such a large center over the next 20 years. Thus, despite the attractiveness of the opportunity, the leadership decided not to purchase the property. Here is a case of the community rejecting something that looked very appealing. Had its leaders bought this property and then been unable to remodel or maintain it, this building could have drained much needed resources and hurt the community's very viability.

In contrast, as shown in table 3.2, external threats are agents, factors, or trends that pose a danger to the organization.

Table 3.2
SWOT Analysis – External Environment Scan

Potential Opportunities	Potential Threats
Growing Muslim community	New crop of rivals and imitators providing new/better services and products
New technologies enabling new ways of delivering da`wah and zakah donation and distribution services	New technologies making it easier to vilify Islam and to create a negative and harsh public image
Tapping into financial aid sources available to minorities or low-income families	Legislation restricting fundraising and sending funds to Muslim causes
Establishing strategic alliances	Increased scrutiny from external stakeholders because of alliances
Developing new customer services	Obsolete customer services
Acquiring rivals that possess unique competencies	Potential takeover or ban
Interfaith initiatives	Increased isolation from other faith-based communities

Worksheets nos. 3 through 6 (Appendix A, pp. 166-169) are designed to guide you through the SWOT analysis. I will discuss the ranking column in these worksheets shortly.

Prioritizing the SWOT

After listing your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, rank each category within itself. In other words, rank strengths from "most important" to "least important," weaknesses from "most critical" to "least critical," opportunities from "most attractive" to "least attractive," and threats from "most serious" to "least serious." There are multiple ways of doing this balloting process. Worksheets nos. 3 through 6 (Appendix A) consist of several forms that you can use to list all of your SPC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. After doing this, ask the committee to collapse the complete list into a more concise one and to rank it. There are two methods of calculating ranking:

After listing your organization's strengths, rank your strengths from most important to least important. Do a similar ranking for your weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

First Method

Photocopy the list for each SPC member and have him/her rate (in secret) each strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat as suggested by worksheets nos. 3 through 6. Next, ask an assistant to enter the resulting ranked data into a spreadsheet, calculate each strength's mean rank, and then rank the strengths from the most important (strongest) to the least important (weakest). Do the same for weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Second Method

Use green dot balloting, a technique that is both simple and fun.

- Before conducting the SWOT exercise, purchase about 25 sheets of sticky green dots (about 40 per sheet with each dot being about .5 inch in diameter). Clearly, the number of sheets you need depends upon the number of participants at the retreat (about 40 dots per participant), and the number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that are generated during the SWOT analysis. You will also need a pad of easel-sized sheets of paper and a roll of masking (or regular) tape that will not damage the walls. 3M makes a large easel pad size of Post-it note sheets; however, these are somewhat expensive. Draw two

Green dot balloting is a simple and fun technique to facilitate the ranking process.

columns on your easel pad, a wider column on the left and a narrower column on the right.

- Start with the strengths. Ask each participant to read his/her top two strengths and have a volunteer with good handwriting write these (listed as A, B, etc.) in the wider left-hand column. Next, ask each participant to read his/her top two strengths, provided that nobody repeats a strength that is already listed. Once each easel sheet is filled up, tear it off and have your volunteer tape it on the wall. Continue until all strengths have been listed without any duplication. You should now have several sheets taped to the wall, each one of which lists your organization's strengths in the wider left-hand column.
- Have your volunteer distribute to each participant between $\frac{1}{5}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ as many dots as there are listed strengths. The same amount of dots should be given to each participant. In other words, if there are 24 strengths listed and you have decided to give $\frac{1}{3}$ as many dots as there are listed strengths, each participant should receive 8 green dots.
- Ask each participant to allocate his/her dots to the strengths listed. Each person must do so silently and write on the dot the letter of the strength he/she is ranking. Let's say you gave 8 dots to each participant. If he/she were to rank strength B as "most important," followed by strength D and strength A, he/she would write B on 4 dots, D on 3 dots, and A on the remaining dot.
- Once each participant is done, he/she cannot change his/her mind. Ask the participants to get up and, in an orderly manner, stick the appropriate number of dots in the right-hand column next to the relevant strength. Your easel pad should look like exhibit A.
- Once everybody is done, a quick visual count will reveal the rank of each strength. It may now be possible to group together those ranked strengths that are close in meaning in order to provide a tighter set. In exhibit A, your strengths are to be ranked in the following order based on the number of dots attached to them: D (18), B (10), C (8), and A (7).

Exhibit A
Sample Easel Pad Sheet after All Participants Have Voted with Their Dots

A. We have a large Muslim community	A A A A A A A
B. Many professionals live in our community	B B B B B B B B B B
C. We have excellent relations with other faith-based communities	C C C C C C C C
D. We have a full-time Islamic school	D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D

- Repeat the same voting process for assessing the organization’s weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The rationale for this ranking process is that your organization may not be uniformly strong across all areas. Each organization has distinctive core competencies in which it outshines its competitors and should capitalize on them. Similarly, your weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are not uniformly weighted; there are some weaknesses where you are more at risk, some opportunities that are more promising, and some threats that are more dire. Ideally, a value-maximizing goal for an Islamic organization is to match its most important strength to its most attractive opportunity, given situational parameters. The rationale for secret balloting is to preempt flaws in group decision-making processes, such as groupthink,¹⁴ risky shift, and even polarization.

Collaborator Analysis

Competitors can also be collaborators.

While doing your external environmental scanning, distinguish between external stakeholders with whom you could build a strategic alliance (a collaborator) and those with whom you will have to constantly compete (a competitor). Collaborative strategies are now an important part of the business and the nonprofit worlds.¹⁵ For example, Dell may currently

compete with Sony, but for quite a while Sony manufactured Dell's best-selling notebooks. In analyzing various potential collaborators, be aware that the ensuing collaborative relationship may only extend to a specific product, program, or activity. To protect proprietary know-how, you may wish to compartmentalize your activities. The core issue is one of synergy and whether the collaborative relationship adds any value.

Before initiating any collaborative ventures, delimit the nature of the area of cooperation. Try to gauge how your service or product benchmarks against theirs, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of working jointly with them, the length of the relationship, and the conditions under which either party can extend or terminate the relationship. It is a good idea to have the relationship formally written up, as Islam suggests, and signed by the leaders of both organizations before initiating it. Doing so will enable you to avoid unpleasant surprises and feeling a potential sense of betrayal if the relationship does not work out.

Competitor Analysis

Competitor analysis allows you to obtain a deep understanding of your rival's strategies, objectives, assumptions and capabilities in order to forecast and anticipate his future behavior.

Conducting a competitor analysis enables you to gather intelligence about your rival's strategies, objectives, assumptions, and capabilities in order to predict potential future behavior. From Caesar to Khalid ibn Walid to Salahuddin, all great generals have been characterized by their ability to go beyond the intelligence gathered and see through the enemy's plans. Listen to Khalid ibn Walid's advice to his commander Abu Ubayda, as the overwhelming forces of Byzantium were gathering to annihilate the Muslims:

Know, O Commander, that if you stay at this place, you will be helping the enemy against you. In Caesarea, which is not far from Jabiyah, there are 40,000 Romans under Constantine, son of Heraclius. I advise you to move from here and place Azra behind you and be on the Yarmuk. Thus it would be easier for the Caliph to send reinforcements, and ahead of you there would be a large plain, suitable for the charge of cavalry.¹⁶

In contrast to the grim indecisiveness of Abu Ubayda and other Muslim generals, Khalid was able to visualize the whole battlefield, the enemy's position, and the need to relocate so that the Muslim army could both attack using one of its core strengths (its cavalry) and receive reinforcements.

Just as Khalid used intelligence to outthink his enemy, so too Harvard's Michael Porter has introduced the idea of using competitor analysis for organizational leaders who wish to outthink and preempt potential competitors.¹⁷

The importance of this analysis depends on the structure of the industry or domain in which your Islamic organization exists. In general, a competitor analysis is undertaken to:

- Forecast and map out your competitors' future strategies and initiatives,
- Anticipate their potential reactions to your own organization's strategic moves, and
- Assess how their behavior can be rechanneled to benefit your organization.

A competitor analysis consists of four inputs: the competitor's current strategy, objectives, assumptions about the industry, and capabilities. Assessing the competitor's current strategy involves seeking answers to one key question: How is your rival competing at present? To find out, look at the official pronouncements of its president/CEO and at all official publications, reports, and other public documents. However, you will need to distinguish between what Mintzberg calls an *intended* versus a *realized* strategy.¹⁸ What an organization intends to do may be different from what it actually does. Organizations are also more likely to divulge their official initiatives (*public* strategies) than their real intentions (*private* strategies). To guess through the fog of all these strategy variants, focus on any changes in your competitor's strategy, for these are what may reveal his/her real strategy.

What an organization intends to do may differ from what it actually does.

When identifying your competitor's current objectives, try to answer the following three questions:

- a) What are his/her current goals with respect to profitability and market (membership) share?
- b) Does current performance meet current goals?
- c) How are his/her goals likely to change in the future?

To the extent that your competitor is more concerned about meeting the bottom-line numbers, he/she may not care whether you are reaching into his/her niche or domain. Your competitor is more likely to leave you alone if his/her business is performing well and meeting its current goals comfortably. As long as current goals are being met, your competitor will assume that his/her business or organization model is working effectively.

He/she will hold on to his/her "industry recipes" or industry-wide beliefs about the factors that drive success and, as a result, will be less likely to adjust his/her goals, strategies, and objectives to challenge you.

Finally, gauge your competitor's capabilities carefully to ascertain his/her principal strengths and weaknesses. At this point, I suggest that you do a SWOT of each major competitor, for the extent to which a competitor threatens your organization's industry or domain position depends upon his/her capabilities. If your competitor has a major strength in an area in which you do not, it would be unwise for you to mount a challenge. Your SWOT will reveal his/her weaknesses and, hence, potential areas in which you can make an inroad.

Once you are done with your competitor analysis, you can more accurately forecast your competitor's future strategy shifts. Of course, such shifts are not idiosyncratic, for they require an understanding of forces that are likely to provoke a change in strategy. Clearly, such external jolts as the 9/11 tragedy, a change in consumer preferences, a tsunami, internal pressures (e.g., failure to achieve current market-share targets), or internal factional conflict are examples of strategy-shifting forces.

After 9/11, for example, many Islamic organizations realized that they needed to dialogue with members of other-faith based communities to allay their misunderstandings and fears about Islam and Muslims. Mosques in North America opened their doors for the first time to non-Muslims. As a result, many Muslims made new friends and became more involved in their local community, instead of perpetuating the awkward aloofness that had existed until then.

Worksheet #7 (Appendix A, p. 170) will enable your organization to assess exactly who its potential competitors may be and what their likely impact will be on your organization and its niche and/or domain.

Driving Forces

Driving forces represent the top three or four primary causes underlying industry and competitive conditions.

To understand the external opportunities and threats facing your organization, the SPC must identify the forces that drive the relevant industry or niche, for these represent "the major underlying causes of changing industry and competitive conditions."¹⁹ Identifying these forces and taking appropriate steps to plan and implement your organization's strategic plan is critical for long-term effectiveness. Examples of driving forces in one's industry include changes in who buys/uses the product or service (e.g., older vs. younger customers, families vs. singles, immigrant or indigenous Muslims), product or service innovation (e.g., new instruments in the

Islamic finance industry), technological change (doing *da`wah* via the Internet rather than face-to-face), the entry or exit of major organizations (e.g., the exodus of Muslim relief agencies after 9/11), changes in cost and efficiency (e-mail vs. regular mail), and changes in government policy (the U.S. Patriot Act and subsequent negative side-effects). Such driving forces change the dynamics faced by Islamic organizations or businesses and need to be taken into account when developing your strategic plan.

When assessing driving forces, the SPC should scan a broad array of political, religious, social, economic, technological, and environmental factors that are likely to influence the Islamic organization or business. Since many external events can affect the organization's industry or domain quite strongly, focus on the top four or five driving forces and try to track trends rather than discrete, unrelated blips. For example, a continuous pattern of harassing Muslims (e.g., burning down mosques, desecrating the Qur'an or Islamic cemeteries, loss of jobs, verbal abuse, physical assaults, murder, and so on) indicates a trend, whereas a couple of isolated and random hate crimes signify no more than a blip.