

# CURRENT CONCEPTS AND THE TOOL OF MEGA THINKING AND PLANNING: AN OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

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Mega thinking and planning has evolved, based on application and performance feedback, for almost 40 years. This article describes what has been working to measurably improve our shared world.

MEGA THINKING AND planning, at its core, is both pragmatic and humanistic. It urges that all organizations share the same *Ideal Vision* to increasingly achieve the kind of world best for tomorrow's children. In doing so, each organization is a vehicle for delivering this while also adding value to its own stakeholders. If your organization is not adding value to our shared world, its future is uncertain.

## OUR SHARED WORLD IS BOTH CHANGING AND CHANGEABLE

We can be the masters of that change or the victims of it. Organizational surviving and thriving hinges on the following facts and tool:

- Attention must be paid to the new and emerging realities and paradigms in which organizations operate.
- Organizational purpose defines and verifies where an organization is headed, why it wants to get there, and how to tell whether it has arrived. To assure it is heading in the right direction, the role of defining and using an *Ideal Vision* provides the planning-and-doing “north star” for guiding organizational progress, success, and accountability.
- Needs assessment provides valid data for defining the valid criteria for identifying opportunities and problems to design ways and means to deliver organizational success.

- Strategic planning and thinking (the perceptual lens we use to do our work) is essential for any organization that intends to be successful. It must link everything it uses, does, produces, and delivers to adding measurable value to our shared society. It must focus on Mega—on measurable societal value added.
- A useful template for strategic thinking and planning is the organizational elements model (OEM), which identifies what organizations use, do, produce, and deliver along with their external consequences. It allows for both proactive and reactive planning, design, development, implementation, and continual improvement.
- Plans alone will not deliver useful, planned change. A six-step problem identification and problem-solving process is beneficial.

## There Are New Realities

The realities in the following list will allow our organizations to be responsive and responsible:

- If you can't predict the future, create it (Drucker, 1973).
- Useful change must add value to all partners, internal and external.
- There are two “bottom lines” for every organization: societal and conventional.
- Think globally as you act locally.
- Today's capitalism is not one of money or things but of knowledge and information (Drucker, 1993).

- Tomorrow is not a linear projection of yesterday; you can't solve today's problems with the same paradigms and tools that created them.
- Reality is not divided into disciplines, courses, departments, organizations, sections, jobs, functions, policies, or issues. Don't limit yourself to any one of these splinters.
- Everything we use, do, produce, and deliver must add measurable value.
- If you start organizational change with individual performance improvement you will be wrong 80–90% of the time.
- If you can name it, you can measure it.
- We are now getting better and better at a doing that which should not be done at all (Drucker, 1998).
- Ask "If my organization is the solution, what's the problem?"

### An Ideal Vision, the Kind of World We Want to Create Together for Tomorrow's Children, Is for All Organizations

The Ideal Vision is a measurable statement of what kind of world we want to create together for tomorrow's children: There will be no loss of life or elimination or reduction of levels of well-being, survival, self-sufficiency, or quality of life from any source. Using this Mega level for planning is the most practical and pragmatic starting place for organizational success. It provides "vital signs" for any organization to use to calibrate whether what they are

*The Ideal Vision is a measurable statement of what kind of world we want to create together for tomorrow's child.*

doing and delivering adds value and whether they are on the right path.

- The Ideal Vision is for all society, not for any one organization. It is the Mega level of planning.
- From the Ideal Vision, we roll down to define the Mission Objective (the Macro level of planning). The Mission Objective for an organization identifies the elements of the Ideal Vision the organization commits to deliver while moving ever closer to the Ideal Vision as a whole.
- Organizational functions (the building-block results used to achieve the mission) are defined when we roll down from the Mission Objective. This is the Micro level of planning. The alignment for each level is shown in Figure 1.
- There are two bottom lines for every organization: societal (Mega) and conventional (Macro). Look after the societal bottom line, and success at the conventional bottom line will likely follow.

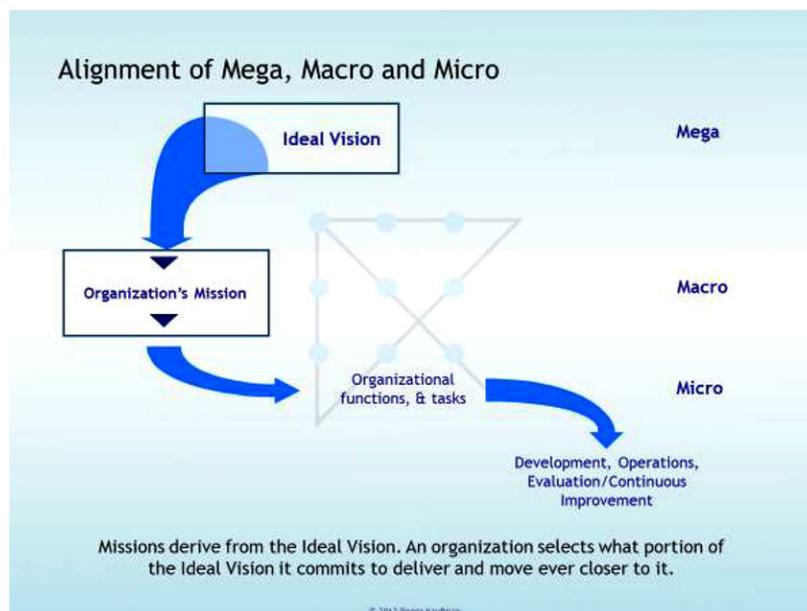


FIGURE 1. THE ROLLING DOWN AND ALIGNMENT FOR THE THREE LEVELS OF PLANNING AND RESULTS

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROVIDES REALISTIC AND VALID DATA ESSENTIAL TO MEGA THINKING AND PLANNING

The following are the essential items for a successful needs assessment:

- A useful needs assessment identifies the gaps between current results and the desired or required ones and places the needs in priority order based on “what it costs to meet the need” versus “what it costs to ignore the need.”
- A problem is a need selected for elimination or reduction—no need, no problem.
- When you define a “need” as a gap between current and desired or required results (used as a noun), it gives you a triple payoff: (1) it provides the criteria for planning, (2) it provides the criteria for evaluation and continual improvement, and (3) it allows you to justify your plans and budgets on the basis of the costs to meet the need versus the costs to ignore it.
- Needs are not the same as “wants.” Don’t confuse wants (or solutions) with ends (results or consequences). Most popular “needs assessments” are really solutions assessments or even “wish lists” of desired methods, means, resources, or activities. Using these can make you pick solutions that don’t address the basic problems.
- Needs assessments are done for each level of results (as shown in Figure 1). The needs at the Mega/Ideal Vision level that are selected from the Ideal Vision form the Mission Objective. The needs selected at the Macro level become the purposes for the Micro level, where another needs assessment is done at that level.

## RESPONSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING STARTS WITH MEGA

Starting with Mega assures that every organization adds value to all stakeholders. Starting here is a proactive approach that allows for identifying and selecting purposes rather than assuming that which is in place requires improvement.

- Strategic planning identifies where you and your organization should be headed, justifies why you should get there, and identifies the building-block results required to get from *what is* to *what should be*. It has three phases: (1) scoping, (2) planning, and (3) implementation and evaluation/continual improvement.

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The safest and most practical starting place is with an Ideal Vision that identifies, in measurable terms, the kind of world we want to help create.

- Tactical planning identifies and helps select the alternative ways and means to accomplish the strategic plan. Operational planning identifies what must be done to implement the tactical plan successfully. Both must move the organization ever closer to the Ideal Vision.
- Using a Mega level as the basis for the Ideal Vision requires a shift in most current planning paradigms. It is the most practical unit of analysis to use.
- The Mega level is what is almost always missing from conventional approaches to strategic thinking, planning, needs assessment, benchmarking, best practice, and quality management.
- Strategic thinkers and leaders focus on the Mega level, executives typically focus on the Macro level, and managers focus on the Micro level.

## A USEFUL PLANNING FRAMEWORK: THE ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS MODEL (OEM)

The OEM identifies the five elements that characterize every organization:

1. Mega/Outcomes (the impact and payoffs of outputs in and for society).
2. Macro/Outputs (the results that can be delivered outside of the organization).
3. Micro/Products (building-block results that alone will not deliver organizational success).
4. Processes (methods, how-to-do-its, activities).
5. Inputs (ingredients, resources, and starting conditions). Inputs and processes identify resources and means. Products, outputs, and outcomes are three types of results.

The OEM may be arrayed in two levels to consider needs at each point—what should be and what is. Because there are three types of results, types of needs, and three types of needs assessments, the two levels also allow you to identify needs at the three levels of results, as shown

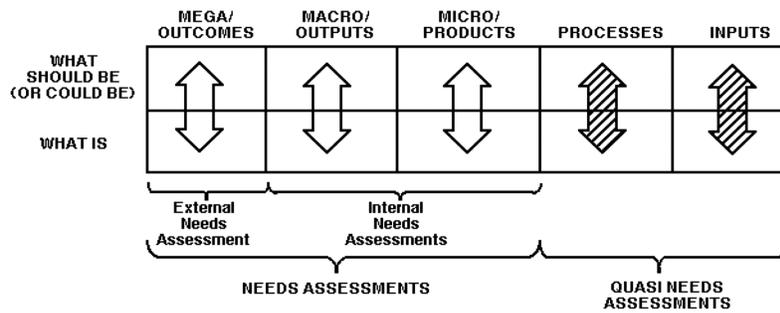


FIGURE 2. THE ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS MODEL (OEM) AND HOW IT MAY BE USED ON THE TWO LEVELS OF WHAT SHOULD BE AND WHAT IS

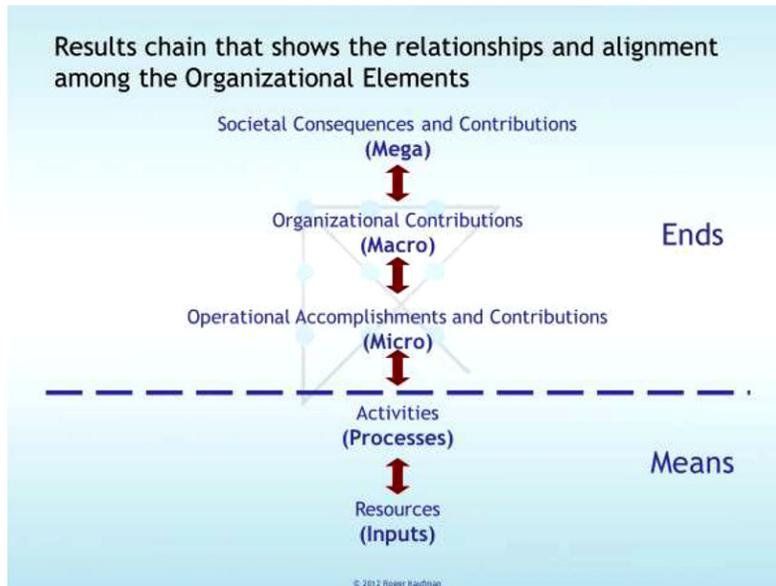


FIGURE 3. THE ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS SHOULD BE LINKED AND ALIGNED

in Figure 2. All levels should be linked and aligned (see Figure 3).

### Planning Must Design and Deliver Useful Results and Consequences

A six-step process is useful for defining the results to aim for and designing how best to achieve them (see Figure 4).

### Guidance for Going from Planning to Payoffs

There are six critical success factors for successful Mega planning:

1. Don't assume that what worked in the past will work now. Get out of your comfort zone (today's paradigms) and be open to change.
2. Differentiate between ends (what) and means (how). First identify the results to be achieved, and then and only then select the means to achieve them.
3. Use all three levels of planning and results: Mega/Outcomes, Macro/Outputs, Micro/Products.

4. Use an Ideal Vision (what kind of world, in measurable performance terms, we want for tomorrow's children) as the underlying basis for planning and continuous improvement.
5. Prepare all objectives, including the Ideal Vision and mission, to include precise statements of both where you are headed as well as the criteria for measuring how you know when you have arrived.
6. Define "need" as a gap in results (not as insufficient levels of resources, means, or methods).

### PUTTING MEGA THINKING AND PLANNING INTO ACTION

Start with the Mega level of strategic planning. It identifies what an organization may do to contribute to its external clients and society by moving ever closer to the Ideal Vision. It provides criteria for any organization's vital

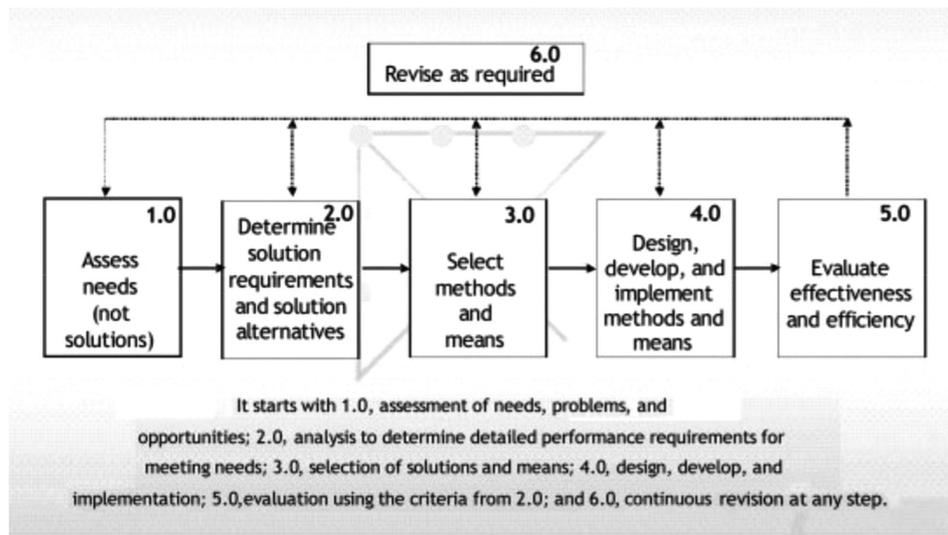


FIGURE 4. A SIX-STEP PROBLEM-IDENTIFICATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

signs—the indicators for long-term organizational health and value to our shared society.

- The OEM, the organizational elements model, is a template or guide for identifying what an organization uses, does, produces, and delivers along with the pay-offs for internal and external clients and society.
- Needs assessment identifies the gaps between current and desired results at the Mega, Macro, and Micro levels of planning and places them in priority order based on the costs to meet the needs versus the costs to ignore them.
- The six-step problem-solving process is useful any time you want a need eliminated or reduced to get from what is to what should (or could) be for results and consequences.
- The six critical success factors may guide you to “keep on track” as you continually design, develop, implement, and improve the process of planning and the consequences of it. The steps (functions) for getting from the identified *what is* to *what should be* are based on the identified needs at the Mega, Macro, and Micro levels. 🌅

## Recommended Reading

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