



## Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration

The reference for understanding government action

# PLANNING (STRATEGIC PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING)

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A “plan” is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), a “formulated or organized method according to which something is to be done; a scheme of action.” With this, “planning” is defined as the “the forming of plans; the making or delineation of a plan.” By extension, “to plan” (the verb) is to project and decide what should be done (goals, objectives), when it should be done (timeline), the means and resources required to meet objectives and, finally, who should do it (sharing of responsibilities). All in all, planning is a function of management that was given prominence by the classic authors (Fayol, 1916; Gulick and Urwick, 1937) and that, notwithstanding the criticisms that this process has encountered over the years, continues today to be omnipresent in the literature and practice of organizational management.

A distinction can be made between at least two types of planning on the basis of either the object of the planning process or the timeline – namely, strategic planning and operational planning (i.e., action plans).

“Strategic planning” concerns the general directions of an organization as well as its mission, target objectives, values and management philosophy, the products and services it will be offering, and the means it intends to use to achieve its objectives in the coming years (i.e., three to five years). In certain types of organizations, including armies and businesses operating in a competitive environment, this type of planning and the ensuing action plans are, on account of the strategic dimension, generally shrouded in secrecy, with only the main decision-makers having a part in it. In contrast, in the public sector, strategic plans oftentimes are public documents. Thus, for example, under the provisions of Quebec's *Public Administration Act*, the provincial ministries and agencies must produce three-year plans that are easily accessible for citizens, particularly via official government Websites.

Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998) are among those authors who have suggested that while a strategic plan<sup>1</sup> can be developed according to a formal process, it is also possible to base planning on other processes that are rooted in, for example, design, analysis, vision, cognition, learning, etc. Furthermore, while a strategy may take the form of a plan (i.e., a series of deliberate measures to deal with a situation), it can, in certain cases, be viewed in terms of a ploy or maneuver (to outwit an opponent or competitor), a pattern (a series of actions – deliberate or emergent – that nevertheless constitute a coherent whole), a position (in a given environment or market, in relation to competitors) or a perspective (the particular way an organization perceives itself or conceives of its environment). Mintzberg is also recognized as having shed light on the notions of deliberate strategies (which contain a formal plan), emergent strategies (which are unplanned or unintended

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<sup>1</sup> Bryson (1988, p. 51) offers an illustration of the steps in this type of process.

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and which arise in response to circumstances) and realized strategies (which are often the result of a combination of deliberate and emergent strategies). (p. 21)

Operational planning, as its name suggests, covers the operations or actions that should lead to the accomplishment of a short-term objective (i.e., within one year's time). The rationale behind using operational planning is to ensure respect for deadlines as well as to coordinate and communicate administrative and technical measures in order to meet objectives (Villemain, 1991, p. 2). Tools to support this type of planning are numerous. They started with the chart proposed by Henry Laurence Gantt (1861-1919) (Wren, 1987, pp. 136-137) and benefited since from the power of the computer.

Several authors have pointed out differences between the private sector ("for profit" and non-profit entities alike) and the public sector. Depending on the sector involved, strategic planning and operational planning are not implemented the same way, particularly on account of the legal framework (which is stricter in the public sector), the extent of competition (which is less present in the public sector), the pressures exerted by citizens and the government in power, and the systems of management and organization in effect in the public sector (Bernier, 1998; Charih and Paquin, 1993).

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