



Strategic Planning in the Military

The US Naval Security Group Changes Its Strategy, 1992–1998

William Y. Frentzel II, John M. Bryson and Barbara C. Crosby

This is an account of the US Naval Security Group Command's (NSG) search for strategic management during a time of unprecedented change. In response to dramatic shifts resulting from the end of the Cold War, Congressional pressures for cross-service co-operation, and the emergence of new technologies, the NSG engaged in a six-year strategic planning process. The process helped the group refocus and develop strategies better suited to new demands for military preparedness. The process was incremental and eclectic; early leadership came from middle managers, rather than top officials. The process began with a 'quick and dirty' planning session initiated by department heads to deal with an immediate crisis and gained momentum and top-level involvement as the first session and subsequent strategic planning efforts showed results. The process was guided by a strategic planning framework specifically designed for public and non-profit organisations and relied on a variety of strategic planning tools and techniques, including stakeholder analyses, SWOT analyses and capturing the insights gained from scenario planning using the newer cognitive methods such as cognitive and oval mapping. This article provides a chronology of events over a six-year period, explores some of the strategic planning tools and techniques used, details results achieved and discusses some of the major lessons learned. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Captain William Y. Frentzel, II, US Navy (Retired), is Team Leader for Booz Allen Hamilton's national security consultancy. Before that he was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans, Programs, and

Introduction

The management of change in large organisations is discussed extensively in the literature. Most of these discussions have dealt with situations where the chief executive is providing the strategic intent and is driving change from the top down. Change is difficult enough even with clear strategic intent; but what happens when middle level managers recognise the need

for change, but cannot easily enter into a dialogue with the chief executive, or are not receiving clear strategic intent? This article presents a case study of one such organisation, the US Naval Security Group (NSG), and its six-year effort to create strategic change. This case study is applicable in many ways to all large organisations (business, government or non-profit), especially those that are large and bureaucratic with a hierarchical control structure. The case should be particularly interesting to middle level managers trying to foster change in their organisations, especially those in public and non-profit organisations that operate in a politically charged atmosphere. Furthermore, as Kanter stated in a recent article, “Organizational change has become a way of life as a result of three forces: globalization, information technology, and industry consolidation”.¹ NSG had to contend with these same forces, although much earlier than many corporations. Thus the lessons learned are still relevant today.

The overall framework for analysis of the case study will be a model for organisational transformation proposed by Gouillart and Kelly. The model conceives of an organisation as a living organism.² There are obvious limits to the analogy, and other analogies are possible,³ however, their model is a useful framework with which to present the case and analyse the results. The process that actually guided the strategic planning efforts was Bryson’s Strategy Change Cycle.⁴

While obviously not to be taken literally, the Gouillart and Kelly model does provide a holistic framework for organisational transformation that covers more than just strategic direction. The model views the organisation as a living, volitional being with ‘mind’, ‘body’ and ‘spirit’, emphasising four dimensions, each of which consists of three sub-dimensions. Most of our analytic emphasis will be placed on Gouillart and Kelly’s dimension of *reframing*, or determining the strategic direction of change. The dimensions are:

- *Reframing Corporate Direction* (which addresses the corporate ‘mind’)
 1. Achieving mobilisation (mental energy for change)
 2. Creating the vision (sense of purpose)
 3. Building the measures (sense of commitment)
- *Restructuring the Company* (which addresses the ‘body’ of the corporation)
 4. Constructing an economic model (cardiovascular system)
 5. Aligning physical infrastructure (skeletal system)
 6. Redesigning work architecture (muscular system)

Budget, Comptroller for the Naval Security Group.
Corresponding Address: 7505 Buena Vista Terrace, Rockville, MD 20855-2654, USA; E-mail: Wfrentzel@aol.com.

John M. Bryson, Ph.D., is a Professor of Planning and Public Affairs in the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of the best-selling and award-winning book, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (1995), and co-author, with Barbara C. Crosby, of the award-winning book *Leadership for the Common Good* (1992).
Corresponding Address: 245 Humphrey Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; E-mail: jmbryson@hhh.umn.edu.

Barbara C. Crosby, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Reflective Leadership Center in the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Leadership for Global Citizenship* (1998) and co-author, with John M. Bryson, of *Leadership for the Common Good* (1992).
Corresponding Address: 55 Humphrey Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; E-mail: bcrosby@hhh.umn.edu.

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