The challenge of strategic management and strategic leadership in the case of three New Zealand secondary schools.

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Abstract

In 2003, as part of the amended Education Act, the Ministry of Education mandated that schools submit a strategic plan as part of the revised charter requirements. The model used by the Ministry of Education uses corporate concepts of strategic planning that do not apply easily to the school environment. Strategic planning in the corporate sector is an integral part of a wider concept, strategic management. There is little research examining strategic management practices within a New Zealand secondary school setting.

There were four research questions that guided this study. What is the nature of strategic management and strategic leadership as conveyed by the literature? What are the expectations held of New Zealand secondary schools in relation to strategic management and strategic leadership? How do secondary schools practice strategic management and strategic leadership? What is the importance of leadership in the management of strategy?

Key issues from the literature focus on the corporate definitions of strategic management and the difficulties schools have in adequately resourcing strategic management. In addition, the strategic nature of leadership and the requirements from the Ministry of Education are also identified. Three schools were involved in this case study. Teachers and Heads of Departments completed questionnaires and Principals and Board of Trustees chairs were interviewed individually. The data collection was structured around the work of Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2006).

Results from the research indicate that the principal is the key person in leading and coordinating the strategic direction for a school. Each school has attempted aspects of strategic management displaying strengths and weaknesses in various areas. Schools dedicate a significant amount of time consulting key stakeholders in formulating and reviewing strategic goals.

The implications from this study indicate that schools are finding it increasingly difficult (through lack of financial and personnel resourcing) to plan with any certainty further than three years in advance. The Ministry of Education could review its current model regarding the inclusion of the strategic planning process to make it more realistic and usable and therefore more meaningful for schools. The use of strategic intent as an approach in this area would rectify this issue. Further professional development for school leaders is recommended in order to develop and explore the opportunities for strategic thinking that exist around strategic management.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

There is little research examining strategic management practices within a New Zealand secondary school setting. Yet, schools have always operated with some sort of “plan”. These plans vary from school to school and some are more effective than others. In some cases the plan may simply be to do everything they did the previous year and just change the date as a new year starts.

My interest in secondary schools has stemmed from my involvement in the senior leadership of a school as a deputy principal. In this position I have seen first hand from a number of schools the limited value strategic leaders place in the concept of strategic management. However I have seen some very good examples of schools that use strategic management principles as the core structure of their school. Strategic management drives the culture, shapes the vision and actions the day-to-day policies of the school.

School planning has been recognised as an important aspect of school management. The National Administration Guidelines (1999) are requirements that the Ministry of Education has put in place to identify education priorities and to ensure schools work in responsible ways (Ministry of Education, 2003a). Many schools have used these guidelines as a way of developing a framework on which to organise the management of their organisation (Ministry of Education, 2003b).

In 2001 the Education Standards Act mandated that schools formalise their planning and reporting procedures and incorporate them into their school charters, which are reviewed annually. Specifically the charter must include a section that refers to the long-term strategic plan of the school. In this section the school is required to provide information regarding the Board’s aims and purposes, establish for the next 3-5 years the Board’s aims, objectives and priorities for student outcomes, the overall performance of the

school and the uses of resources. The charter must also include the annual and long-term plans and a summary of each plan. Stating the charter requirements should mean that the broad concepts of strategic management are outlined in this document.

Strategic management in the corporate context has a far greater scope than the planning and reporting component as outlined by the Ministry of Education's model. Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2006, p. 16) offers a model in which three main elements encapsulate strategic management. These are the strategic position, making strategic choices and strategy into action. This model is comprehensive in detailing the requirements for the strategic management in the corporate sector. It has also been used in one education research paper by Fidler (1998) in his discussion about how schools can avoid failure using strategic management.

One of the few research studies reporting on planning in New Zealand secondary schools is by Hipkins, Joyce & Wylie (2007). In this case they only report on planning and reporting and do not investigate the wider aspects of strategic management. Davies, Davies & Ellison (2006) provide an insight from an English perspective. They identify five components they suggest are needed in order to develop the strategically focused school. These schools were selected as they were deemed to be "successful schools" and their success was attributed to the strategic management practices that were at the core of the school culture. The suggested recommendations made to schools that wanted to embrace strategic management in a far more effective way went beyond what is required by the Ministry of Education for New Zealand schools.

An introduction to the elements of strategic management

Johnson, Scholes and Whittington's (2006) model of the elements of strategic management has been used as the core focus in this research for analysing the strategic components in the three schools. As a corporate model, it provides a breakdown of sub-elements that can be used to describe what is happening and show how each sub-element and element contribute to the strategic management of an organisation.

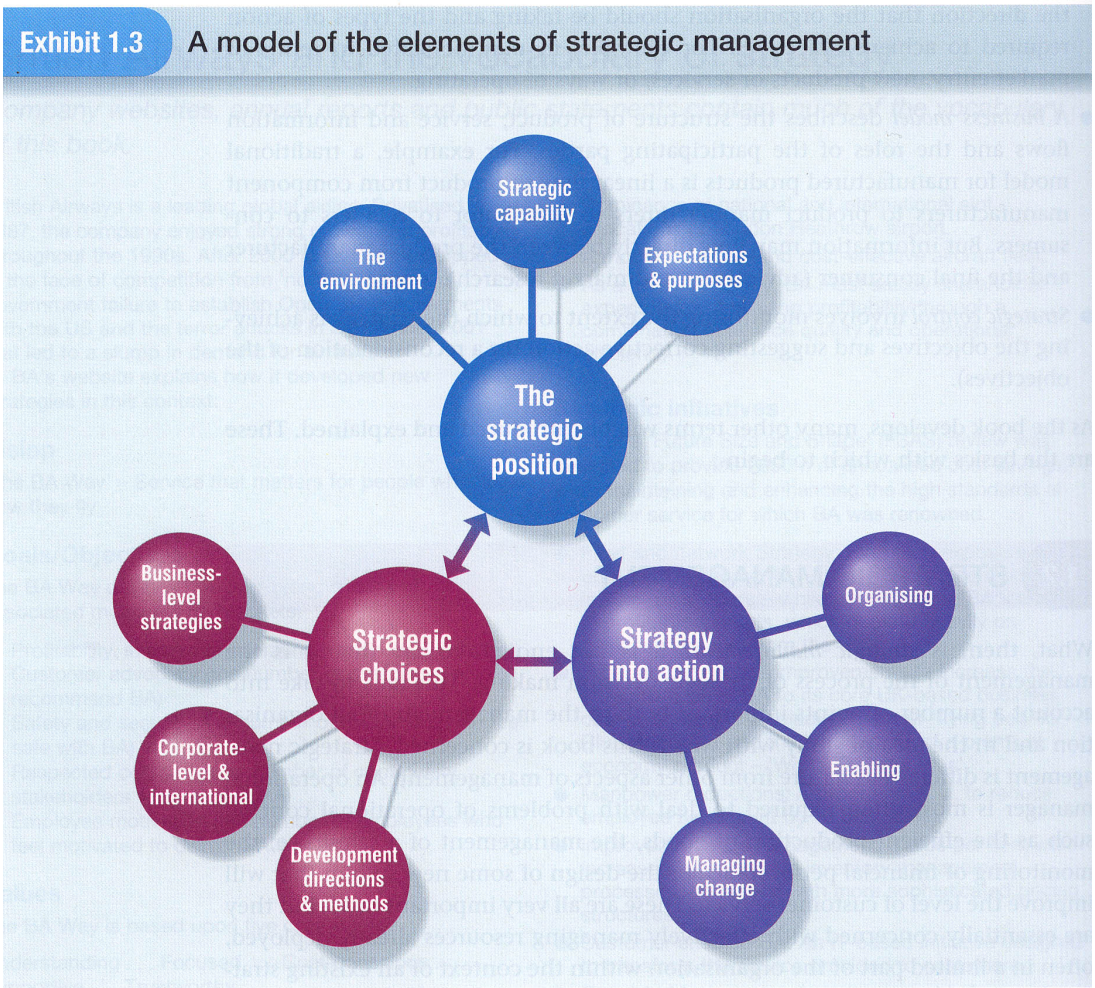

Figure *1.1* A model of the elements of strategic management.
Source*:* Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2006, p.16.

Parts of the strategic planning model developed by the Ministry of Education have been based around corporate concepts of strategic management. The Johnson et al. (2006) model provides a consistent means of comparison between the Ministry of Education documents and the research findings.

This model can be simplified further to assist identifying the main concepts of strategic management that are discussed in detail throughout the following chapters.

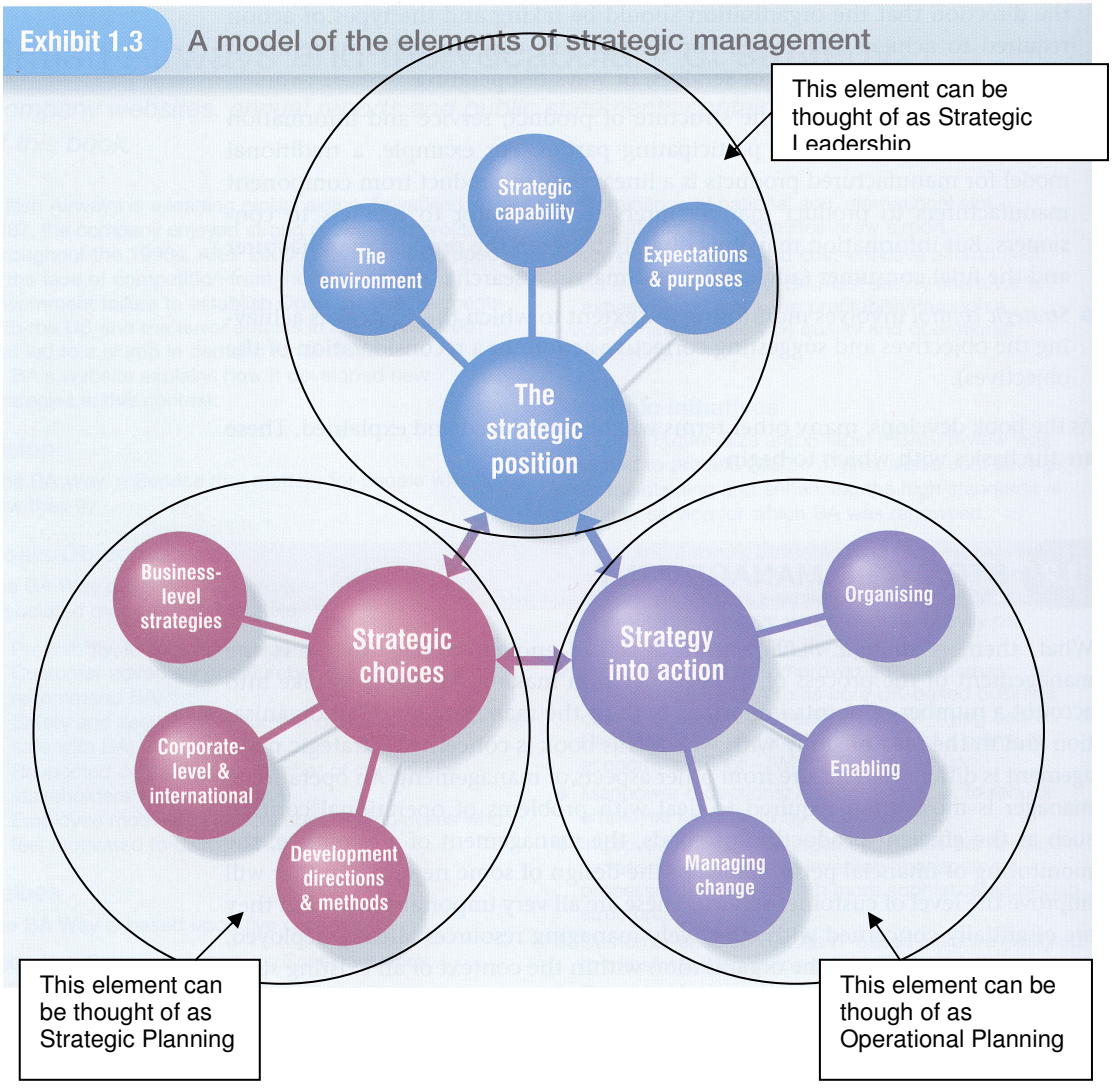

Figure 1.2 A model of the elements of strategic management.

Source*:* Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2006, p.16.

The elements of Strategic choices and Strategy into action are considered to be the management aspects of strategic management. The Strategic position is the leadership aspect of strategic management. Encircling this model is strategic thinking that takes place in the strategic process. The strategic thinking provides the intent that drives the leadership.

Leadership and strategy

The research problem I have explored is in relation to strategic planning in New Zealand secondary schools. There is limited research in strategic planning in a New Zealand context. Given the changes to legislation are still fairly recent there is an opportunity to research this concept. And this is only part of the wider scope of strategic management. Whilst the literature on strategic management and leadership (Robinson, 2007; Davies et al., 2006) refers to a number of elements that create effective strategic management and leadership, only a small and selective portion of this vast activity is required from New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, anecdotally many secondary school leaders refer to their role as strategic managers and leaders although we do not know exactly what this means in relation to school settings. What we do know is that a strategic orientation and planning involving goal and target setting is both recommended and required. There is a current gap in the research that reports the scope of strategic activity that schools engage in. I particularly want to investigate the strategic management and strategic leadership practices that occur in secondary schools.

New evidence from Robinson (2007) pinpoints the key practices that leaders of learning should engage in within schools. Several of these practices, such as establishing goals and expectations, and strategic resourcing and planning mirror the core components of strategic management. This leads to perhaps the most critical question; whether strategic leadership is

inextricably linked to successful leadership of learning. This link has not been made explicit within the literature and would provide valuable information and guidance for future school leaders.

A recent report to the OECD (2007) from the New Zealand Ministry of Education has reported on initiatives taken by our country for improving school leadership. One of the weaknesses highlighted in this paper is there are few procedures in place to ensure that the: “planning, reporting, self-review and appraisal processes are effective and aligned” (OECD, 2007, 9. 72). The report states further that there is a “wide variation across schools in the effectiveness of the systems individually and collectively” (OECD, 2007, p. 72). My rationale for undertaking this study is to explore the literature and policy documents to identify links between practices that are common to strategic management and the latest research on effective educational leadership. I believe that it is a worthwhile study as it could establish the extent to which secondary schools practice planning in a wider sense that meshes with the concept of strategic management and strategic leadership.

Aims and objectives

Research aim

The aim of the research is to explore the nature of the concepts of strategic management and strategic leadership as they apply to secondary school settings in New Zealand. To do this the expectations held of New Zealand secondary schools in relation to strategic management and strategic leadership must first be identified. Further aims include investigating the strategic management and strategic leadership practices in secondary schools and to critique the effectiveness of strategic leadership in the development of strategic management.

Research questions

What is the nature of strategic management and strategic leadership as conveyed by the literature?

What are the expectations held of New Zealand secondary schools in relation to strategic management and strategic leadership?

How do secondary schools practice strategic management and strategic leadership?

What is the importance of leadership in the management of strategy?

Thesis overview

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the concepts of strategic management and strategic leadership and an overview of how the research was implemented.

In chapter 2 the literature is examined to provide an overview of strategic management and then moves on to strategy in the corporate environment. There is a focus on explaining the concepts and terminology that surrounds strategic management and a detailed explanation of the model of the elements of strategic management from Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2006) are found in these sections. The next section discusses strategic leadership. This is followed by the policy development that has influenced New Zealand secondary schools and the communication from the Ministry of Education to New Zealand schools. The chapter is concluded by examining strategic leadership in schools.

Chapter 3 identifies the research approach and the rationale behind the research design. There is an explanation of the methods used and the

analysis design. Ethical issues are discussed and the chapter concludes with the identification of the limitations that influenced this research.

In chapter 4 the findings of the documentary analysis, questionnaires and interviews are presented. Each set of findings has been summarised and a simplified version of the findings has been transferred to table format for a generalised comparison.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings. The findings are discussed and compared to the Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2006) model of strategic management. The importance of strategic leadership is a key component of this chapter.

In chapter 6 the focus is on the conclusions and recommendations that can be made form the research. Included in this chapter is the recommendation that strategic intent is a method that may provide a realistic way for schools to use strategic management.

Chapter 2 Literature review: The nature of strategic management and strategic leadership

The literature is used to provide some clarity in the use of the term strategy. The use of this term has implications for organisations and in the first section of this chapter there is an overview of the concepts around strategic management. This concept is expanded further and specifically looks into corporate strategic management. These sections provide the base for further descriptions and comparisons of strategy in the school environment.

In addition there is a focus on strategic leadership. This is an important aspect of strategic management as it shows how leadership is closely related to the concepts of strategic management. The chapter concludes with a review of the policy development and the communication that the Ministry of Education used to implement the mandated amendments to the Education Act (2001).

Strategic management overview

The use of the term "*strategic"* has become increasingly common in the New Zealand education system since the evolution of Tomorrow's Schools (Parliament of New Zealand, 1988). The use of the term, "strategic" has been associated with many aspects of business and education, although it is most commonly aligned with strategic planning. However, strategic planning is only a small part of an organisation being strategic. Cardno, (2001) suggests that the Strategic *Management* concept encapsulates two wider areas of strategy and planning. Strategic management is different to other forms of management as it is characterised by complexity and ambiguity, espousing a vision for an organisation to aspire to (Johnson et al., 2006; Wheelen & Hunger, 2008).

The first aspect of strategic management is strategic planning. Strategic planning has a focus on the long-term macro-view of an organiastion,

typically between 3-5 years and is made up of a number of strategic components that provide the framework on which strategy is built. There is also a focus on a proactive stance rather than being reactive (Cardno, 2001; Foskett, 2003). The second aspect of strategic management is that of operational planning. The focus for operational planning is more refined, looking specifically at the short-term with a micro-view of the organisation. Operational planning is an important step in the implementation of strategy. It is also the process by which the wider staff of a school can demonstrate and articulate how they intend to be involved in the strategy Both the strategic and operational plans should be reviewed annually (Davies & Ellison, 1998).

Strategic planning is a business concept that has been imposed on the educational sector over the last two decades. As schools become more 'managed' there is a corresponding increase in the accountability of schools and this includes the way in which schools are required to plan and report (Codd, 2005; Middlewood, 1998; Van der Linde, 2001). Strategic planning is an essential tool in which schools prepare for the future and is an integral part of the management requirements for the school principal and a governance requirement for Boards of Trustees (Bell, 2004, Ministry of Education 2002). A recent OECD (2007) report into school leadership identifies the inconsistent nature of strategic planning and strategic management. This indicates that some schools may see the Ministry of Education planning and reporting requirements as mere compliance and for others a process the enables them to be what they view as being successful (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2006).

Strategy in the corporate environment

Strategy is simply a plan, and a plan is a way to think about the future, control aspects of the future, make decisions and integrate these decisions in a cohesive manner in a formalised process (Mintzberg, 1994). In its earliest form, strategic planning had its roots in the military, with corporate organisations mirroring its hierarchical structure (Lane, Bishop & Wilson-Jones, 2005; Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). Historically, in its purest sense, planning in the corporate environment was a budgetary exercise that tried to provide long-term forecasts during the 1950's (Lane, Bishop & Wilson-Jones, 2005). The implementation of planning and the enthusiasm from a large number of organisations led to the planning concept spreading quickly through corporate America during the 1960's (Cardno, 2001). This led to the topic being well documented and researched in the corporate environment from the early 1960's, predominately in the United States of America. As the theory and practice of planning developed, the overarching aim was to create an organisation that would achieve some advantage over its competitors, thus ensuring the organisation's future and growth (Johnson & Scholes, 2002; Bateman & Snell, 2002). In addition, strategy management identifies what needs to change in an organisation and how that will take place.

Bateman and Snell (2002, p. 118) have defined strategic management as "integrating strategic planning and management into a single process". They also define corporate strategy as the "set of businesses, markets or industries in which the organisation competes and the distribution of resources among those businesses" (Bateman& Snell, 2002, p. 125). They further suggest that for each business there is a specific type of strategy, dependant on the nature of their business. For example, a company that continually produces the most expensive products in its industry would be referred to as having a high-end strategy (Mintzberg 1994). This can also be referred to as their strategic position. This is where organisations create

something different in the market place to make them unique (Cardno, 2001).

A further definition of strategic management is that it is “a set of managerial decisions and actions that determine the long-run performance of a corporation” (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008, p. 3). Wheelen and Hunger (2008) suggest there are four phases involved in using strategic management. These are environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and evaluation and control.

Strategy is also seen as matching the resources and activities of an organisation to the environment in which it operates, leading to the creation of new opportunities (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Historically the corporate planning model emphasises a linear sequence of decision making by using strategic analysis which leads to strategic choices and strategic implementation (Richardson, 1994). The concern with this model is that decisions are made based around assumed perfect information. These decisions are planned usually by top management with developments very much pre-planned.

Johnson et al. (2006, p. 16) provide a more recent model that identifies the complex interaction of key elements needed in strategic management.

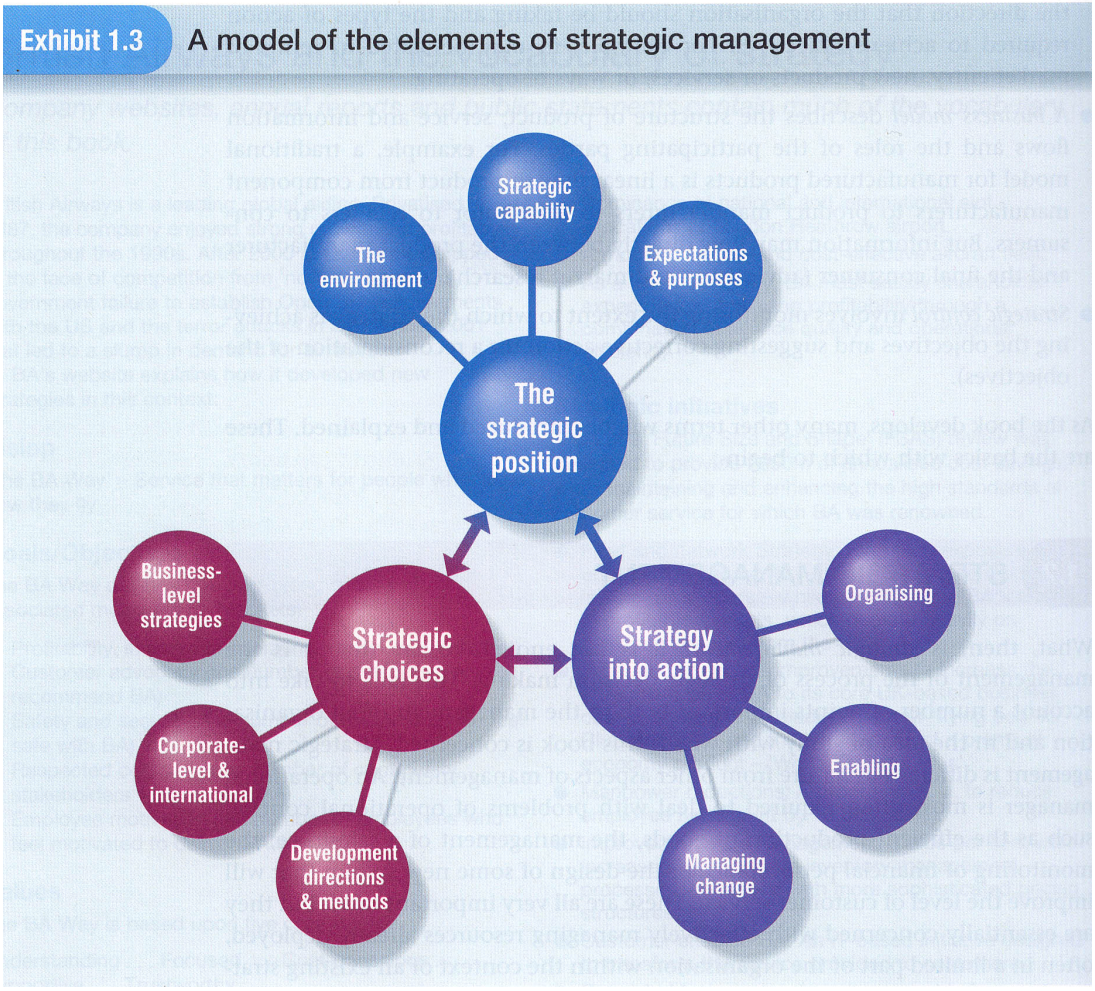

Figure 2.1 A model of the elements of strategic management.
Source: Johnson et al., 2006, p.16

This model of strategic management explains the elements that are required in the strategic management cycle (Johnson et al., 2006). As indicated in the model, the flow of information from each of the main strategic sectors (the strategic position, strategy into action and making strategic choices) assists in formulating decisions that are made in another sector.

Understanding the *strategic position* is made up of three sub-elements. Being able to identify external influences that impact on the current and future *environment* for the organisation is vitally important. This sub-element tries to identify what is happening externally in the future the organisation may or may-not need to respond to or cater for. The second sub-element is

that the organisations *strategic capability*. This sub-element focuses on the resources and competences an organisation have its disposal that could affect future strategic choices. This can also be thought as the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation. An important aspect of this sub-element is that of the organisations threshold capability. Does the organisation actually have the physical, financial, human and intellectual resources to contemplate a specific strategic goal. The third sub-element of the strategic position element is that of the *expectations and purposes* of stakeholders of the organisation.

The next element focuses on how *strategic choices* are made. Again, three sub-elements contribute and influence this element. At the highest level within every organisation (in of terms making decisions) is the *corporate-level strategy*. In the corporate sector this involves decisions on the nature and scope of an organisation, how value is added, not only the products, but also the organisation as a whole. This level of strategising also looks at how business unit performance can be improved. The second sub-element identifies what happens at the *business level*. These are business units that are unique within the organisation. While they are directly associated and are part of the organisation each business unit has different numbers of personnel, responsibilities and resources available. With this in mind, each business unit will have its own set of strategic needs. The third sub-element of the strategic choices is that of *development directions and methods*. This sub-elements looks at the available options for directional change and the methods that can be used to achieve this.

The last element is that of *strategy into action*. This element identifies how strategies are being implemented and how they are working in practice. How an organisation structures itself is described as *organising*. This includes hierarchical structures, processes and relationships within the organisation. The next sub-element focuses on how do organisations *enable* the implantation of their strategies. This includes resource areas such as people,

information, finance and technology. The final sub-element is that of *managing change*. An integral part of strategic management is that it is future orientated and therefore there is an underlying implication that “things” will from the current position.

There are vast arrays of associated components of *strategy* and *planning* that can be implied, characterised or be misinterpreted, often leading to confusion for researchers and organisations. For example, strategic planning, strategic analysis, strategic review, strategic thinking, strategic choice, strategic leadership, strategic conversations, strategic motivation and strategic capability can also associated with vision, goals, missions and charters. It is no wonder that organisations get confused with these concepts; let-alone the exact definitions surrounding strategic management (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004b; Davies et al., 2006). Hambright & Diamnates (2004a) found 15 different definitions in their literature review for the term *strategic planning*.

There are however common activities that are at the core of strategic management. Environmental scanning is one of these activities. This involves exploring the political, social, legal, financial and technological environment both locally and nationally (Fidler, 1996). Even brief consideration of each of those areas when developing a strategic plan would be a massive task. In the business world environment scanning is important as it is used to stay ahead of the competition and be aware of new and emerging business practices (Albright, 2004).

Another common activity to strategic management is conducting a strategic review or analysis of variance, so that an organisation can review its current practice and the success or failure of previous strategic decisions. Strategic review is seen as being very important as it asks key questions about the organisation. Cardno (2001) has identified three questions when completing a strategic review. Firstly, where are we going? Next, where do we want to

go and lastly, how will we be able to tell when we have arrived. These are essential questions in determining what the organisation is doing now, what do they want to change and how will they know if (the strategy) has been successful. In schools the predominant determination of “success” has been results based on formal qualifications and the improvement from year-to-year in these (Davies & Ellison 1998).

Making strategic choices is an essential part of strategic management. This is the point at which strategic direction and the influence that direction has at an operational level, meet (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). The choices should reflect the over-arching strategy of the organisation, provide some level of competitive advantage and allow for different directions in the future (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Fidler (1996) has identified a three step process in order to make a strategic choice. This would include generating a number of options to chose from, evaluating each one in turn and then finally making the decision. This process appears to be inherently obvious and based around a common sense approach.

Strategic implementation is concerned with making sure that the strategies that have been created and planned actually work in practice (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). This is the transition phase between strategic planning to operational planning. Details start to develop in which the plan could operate on a day-to-day basis (Mintzberg, 1994). Managers and smaller business units would use the implementation process to define how they could implement the strategy and the change that would need to take place within their scope of the organisation (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). An example of how a large business uses strategic planning is that of Inland Steel Company (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008, pg. 9). This company uses strategic planning as a way to drive organisational change. Managers at all levels are expected to be constantly analysing and reviewing processes throughout the year and compare their results against the strategic plan.

There is little literature comparing the corporate strategy compared with education (Tsiakkiros & Pashiardis, 2002). Perhaps this lack of research indicates the difficulties that education has in trying to adapt an essentially business model. However there is a growing need to identify what form strategic management is taking within in schools and the impact this has on the organisation. An example of these difficulties is the use of environmental scanning as a tool for schools. Bell (2004) questions the usefulness of environmental scanning in school strategic models. He suggests schools are unable to meet the requirements of environment scanning due to lack of resourcing and ability to shape future policy direction. Middlewood (1998) and Van der Linde (2001) supports this view by adding that given the constant state of change facing education it is difficult and frustrating for education managers to accurately look into the future and predict what is best for their organisation. Albright (2004) acknowledges the difficulties in successfully using environment scanning. She points out that at times the volume of information and the interpretation of information often leads to important information being missed.

Wheelen and Hunger (2008) suggest there are four reasons why strategic management is more complicated in not-for-profit organisations compares to the corporate sector. Firstly, goal conflicts interfere with rational planning. This means that since there is not a single, very clearly defined goal (such as profits to shareholders) that influences from a number of important stakeholders dilute the resources for multiple, often conflicting goals. Secondly, in some cases planning tends to shift from results to resources. In this case there is a focus on the resources rather than a focus on the results. Thirdly, ambiguous objectives may lead to increased tension in terms of internal politics and goal displacement. Lastly, the professional values and traditions, such as those held by school teachers and university lecturers, can prevent the organisation changing its culture and overall behaviour.

Davies & Ellison (1998) say that there is difficulty in using strategic planning due to the unpredictability and turbulent and dynamic environment due to the political nature of education. This view is also supported by Bell (2002). However in their most recent research (Davies et al., 2006) have modified their view and have found a number of successful schools that have implemented a successful strategic process, and that includes being able to *interpret* some aspects of environmental scanning. This ability to interpret and filter the information is increasingly being recognised as a key requirement for strategic leaders (Richardson, 1994).

Strategic leadership

Leadership is the ability to influence, change, motivate, communicate and set goals for an organisation (Raush, 2005). Strategic leadership is a form of leadership that uses the attributes mentioned but has the ability to establish the long-term direction of the organisation while effectively establishing the day-to-day operational aspects.

Leadership has been acknowledged as a key ingredient in the success of schools (Gronn, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that strategic leadership has been usually included as a critical factor in strategic management (Davies et al., 2006). One view of strategic leadership is offered by Richardson (1994) as seen in figure 2.2. He was one of the first researchers to emphasise the direct link between the strategic orientation of an organisation and the type strategic leadership style a particular leader demonstrates. In his model of The Strategic Configuration (he also terms this the Domain of Strategic Management) leadership is at the very core with all other factors surrounding and interacting around this core. He argues that while a particular leadership style will deliver a certain response to each of these factors, leaders must in fact be able simultaneously be able to employ a variety of styles.

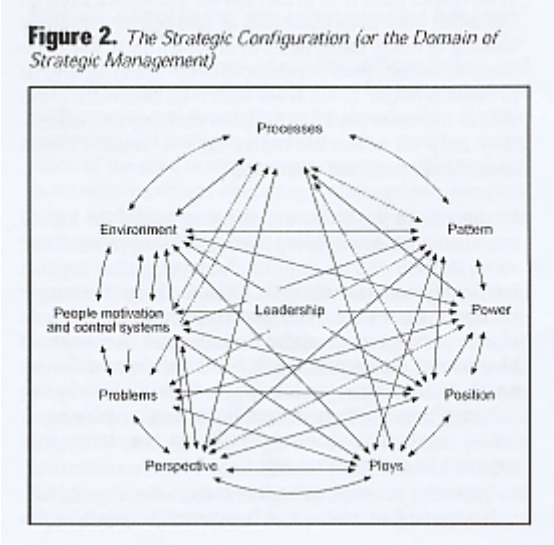

Figure 2.2 The strategic configuration (or the domain of strategic management).

Source: Richardson, 1994, p. 31.

Leaders also have an influence of the organisational culture. Organisations that champion the philosophy of strategic management have developed a specific organisational culture (Davies et al., 2006). This culture embraces the strategic process and utilises it to create an organisation that learns from its mistakes and collaborates to determine, as much as possible, its future direction. Before an organisation can effectively use strategy to enhance its current structure and direction, there has to be a move to *think strategically*. Strategic thinking requires a mind shift from being reactive to being proactive, making strategic choices, being able to differentiate from other organisations and developing a competitive advantage (Cardno, 2001; Middlewood 1998). Strategic thinking also involves being conceptual, creative, identifying opportunities and constantly examining the external environment (Middlewood, 1998). If strategic thinking is a key component then it must be inextricably linked with strategic leadership and in references to schools, the principal is the most influential leader (Warnet, 1994). Davies (2004) supports this view by saying that “strategic leadership is the central activity that facilitates and drives the strategic cycle” (Davies, 2004, p. 13).

This is an important comment as it clearly demonstrates that in order to have successful strategic management the leadership of this process is paramount to its success.

Davies et al. (2006) further identify the characteristic of successful strategic leaders. In their research, strategic leaders challenge and question as they constantly look for improvement, prioritise their own strategic thinking and develop these so that others can use it to frame their own ideas. Strategic leaders also display strategic wisdom based on a clear values system, have powerful personal and professional networks and have high quality personal and interpersonal skills.

Bonn (2005) offers a variation on the characteristics of a strategic thinker. However, there are clear similarities with the Davies et al. (2006) findings. Bonn (2005) suggests that strategic thinkers have the ability to process a large amount of data and interpret it in a meaningful way. She also suggests that strategic thinkers act as filters for the organisation and have the ability to make complex decisions. Interestingly Bonn (2005) adds a new dimension of strategic thinking by comparing strategic thinking as an individual with strategic thinking as a group. In the group setting there is more emphasis on shared meaning that are sustained and developed through common language. Again, this reflects the culture of the organisation. In addition, strategic thinking within a group setting is not only about individuals bring ideas together but more the ability for individuals to develop a “negotiated belief structure” for the decision making process (Bonn, 2005). This information could be used to support the different types of leadership a school would to have within its cultures.

By incorporating the strategic thinking concepts of Bonn (2001, 2005) and the strategic leadership approaches that Richardson (1994) identified, I would like to summarise these concepts with a new term. A leader needs to be able to make complex decisions based on information and directed by

future goals and incorporating what is happening the present. The ability to do this means that the leader is *strategically minded*. This disposition allows a leader to almost be all–things-to-all people, but not quite. It is more along the lines of having the wisdom and ability to be able to choose when and how to employ a particular tactic to achieve a desired strategy.

Strategic management policy development and strategic leadership in schools

Policy

In the corporate sector, those organisations that engage in strategic management generally out perform those that do not (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). With that thought the introduction of strategic planning and improved reporting requirements was brought in to assist schools developing a model for school improvement. The timing of this policy direction reflected the political trends in education in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia (McInerney, 2003). Essentially those governments were trying to replicate what happened in business to what they would like to see in schools. That is, those schools that engage in strategic management will out perform those that do not. This major policy development meant that there was move from central-government control to a more de-centralised local community decision making model. However, while decisions could be made at a local level regarding, staffing, resourcing and some aspects of finance, there was a much greater requirement in terms of accountability and reporting to central government. (Codd, 2005; McInerney, 2003). The implication is that whilst these governments were trying to replicate successful business practices, schools did not have the freedom, resources and ability to fully implement a strategic planning model (Bell, 2002).

Philips (2005) in his review of the policy process and policy on policy-making highlighted a number of key historical milestones that led to the mandating of

strategic planning and reporting of New Zealand schools in the Education Standards Act (2001). During the 1970's and 1980's the Department of Education was predominantly an administrative entity. Schools were governed by a multitude of rules and regulations. The Department of Education was responsible for the overseeing of schools through regional and local offices and an inspectorate was responsible for the reviewing and reporting of these procedures. Since 1989 the Ministry of Education has replaced the Department of Education. The Ministry of Education took on a much stronger policy making role, essentially creating a greater degree of central government control over national requirements. This approach meant that the Ministry of Education had much less control on how these requirements were to be implemented in schools. During this time the Ministry of Education was heavily influenced by Treasury policy which promoted an agenda based around neo-liberal economic principles (Codd, 2005). This alignment between economic rationalisation and policy direction was also seen in Australia by the federal government at a similar time reflecting the global change towards neo-liberal policies in education (McInerney, 2003).

During the 1990's the market based approaches to education were of significant influence in educational policy making (Codd, 2005). The neo-liberal reforms that took place in the United Kingdom and the United States of America were now seen impacting on New Zealand policy direction. As a result, this meant schools became more involved in managerial based activities placing increased pressure on principals to act as Chief Executive Officers rather than curriculum leaders. The role of the principal was changing from a leader to manager. The impact of this was that more emphasis was being placed on the implementation and accountability cycle rather than the visionary aspect of the role.

Ministry of Education communication

The new planning and reporting requirements were documented in the Ministry of Education - Education Circular (2001). This document was a report on the amendments made to the Education Act of 1989. The key message from this document was that school charters, in addition to having statements of mission and school values, were now required to include a section on the schools strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2001). The charter now had four sections that related to the strategic aspects of schooling. The first section is the school vision. In this a mission statement is to be developed to describe the:

"aims, or ideals, or school philosophy, or community values,"

(Ministry of Education, 2002a, p. 4). By describing the broad vision for the school this is by its very nature part of strategic management.

The second section refers directly to the strategic planning the school undertakes, one of two influences of strategic management as described by (Mintzberg, 1994). The third section is the annual or operational planning section. This is the second part of strategic management as described by (Mintzberg, 1994). The final section asks schools to discuss how it consults with the community in regard to the charter. This is part of the process for gaining stakeholder input and very much a part of the wider strategic management ideal. Therefore, it reasonable to suggest that all of the requirements of the charter process are part of strategic management. Furthermore, schools will need to be able to demonstrate how they achieve this.

The Ministry of Education launched a series of circulars and seminars to start the professional development required to fulfil this new task. As an introductory document, three broad statements of the main target areas were identified. Firstly, the goals for improved student achievement for the next 3 to 5 years; secondly, annually updated school improvement targets

for the current year; and thirdly, the activities the school plans to help it reach its strategic goals. At this stage the Ministry of Education assured schools that they were developing tools and guidelines to assist schools, with specific training provided during Term 3 2002. From 2003 the new planning and reporting standards were expected to be in place.

In April 2002 there were regional seminars (Ministry of Education, 2002b) that outlined the broad expectations of the new legislation. The finer details were expected via official documents. Two crucial guidelines arose from these seminars. Firstly, there was a clear message that the annual targets that were set around student achievement contained the following information. “What curriculum area is targeted; what year level of students are targeted and what particular group of students is targeted.” (Ministry of Education, 2002b)

The second crucial guideline from Ministry of Education was that they were keen to see the new planning and reporting requirements actually provide quality outcomes and genuine accountability as opposed just another compliance task (Ministry of Education, 2002b). The template that the Ministry of Education was planning to provide was not to be seen as a “tight template” as the Ministry of Education considered this to be constraining and there may be a temptation for schools to have a “filling them in mindset”. The emphasis is placed on information exchange rather than compliance. Therefore given this guidance in terms of using the template, there would be an expectation that the new charters would vary in style and to some extent content.

“*Planning for Better Student Outcomes*” released in July 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2002) was the first detailed information schools received regarding the new planning and reporting requirements and an example of a possible model for school use (Figure 3.1). Within this document the Ministry of Education (2002) set about describing the key elements of strategic

planning stating that “Strategic planning is a constant process of planning, monitoring and review. In consultation with the community, each school establishes its vision and sets both long and short-term goals”. This statement seems to be in accordance with the paradigm that Cardno (2001) suggested in that strategic management include strategic and operational aspects. In this document is the first version of a model to help schools develop their new charters. In these charters there are sections relate to strategic and operational planning. This model can be seen in figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 Model for charter development

Source: Ministry of Education, 2002a, p. 7.

The other key message to schools was that via the new planning and reporting measures schools needed to be much more deliberate and

purposeful in their approach to *ongoing* school improvement. To do this the document suggested focusing on setting priorities and establishing targets, gathering appropriate data sources, reporting and measuring progress and aligning resources. Schools that had little or no exposure to strategic practices may have found this introduction lacking the detail required to actually start the strategic process. There were a number of quotes from Principals of schools, however these were primary and intermediate schools, there was no representation form the secondary sector. A reason for this could be that at that stage of development the primary sector either had better strategic management practices or were more open to change and had developed a new process that they were willing to share.

The next supporting document the Ministry of Education released focused on where the reporting and accountability fitted into the National Education Goals and the National Administrative Guidelines. These areas are "the mechanism through which the government communicates it national education goals, policy objectives and priorities, and regulations to the school sector" (Ministry of Education 2003 p. 6). Within the New Zealand education sectors these are more commonly known as "NEGs" and "NAGs". National Administrative Guideline number one focuses on planning, teaching and assessment and reporting. It is therefore not surprising that the Ministry of Education aligned the new planning and reporting requirements to this guideline when school charters were to be sent in for evaluation.

Planning for better student outcomes (Ministry of Education 2003b) had a focus on reporting on student outcomes and an example of the analysis of variance when conducting a self-review. In this document minor alterations were made to the model for schools to use (Figure 3.2).

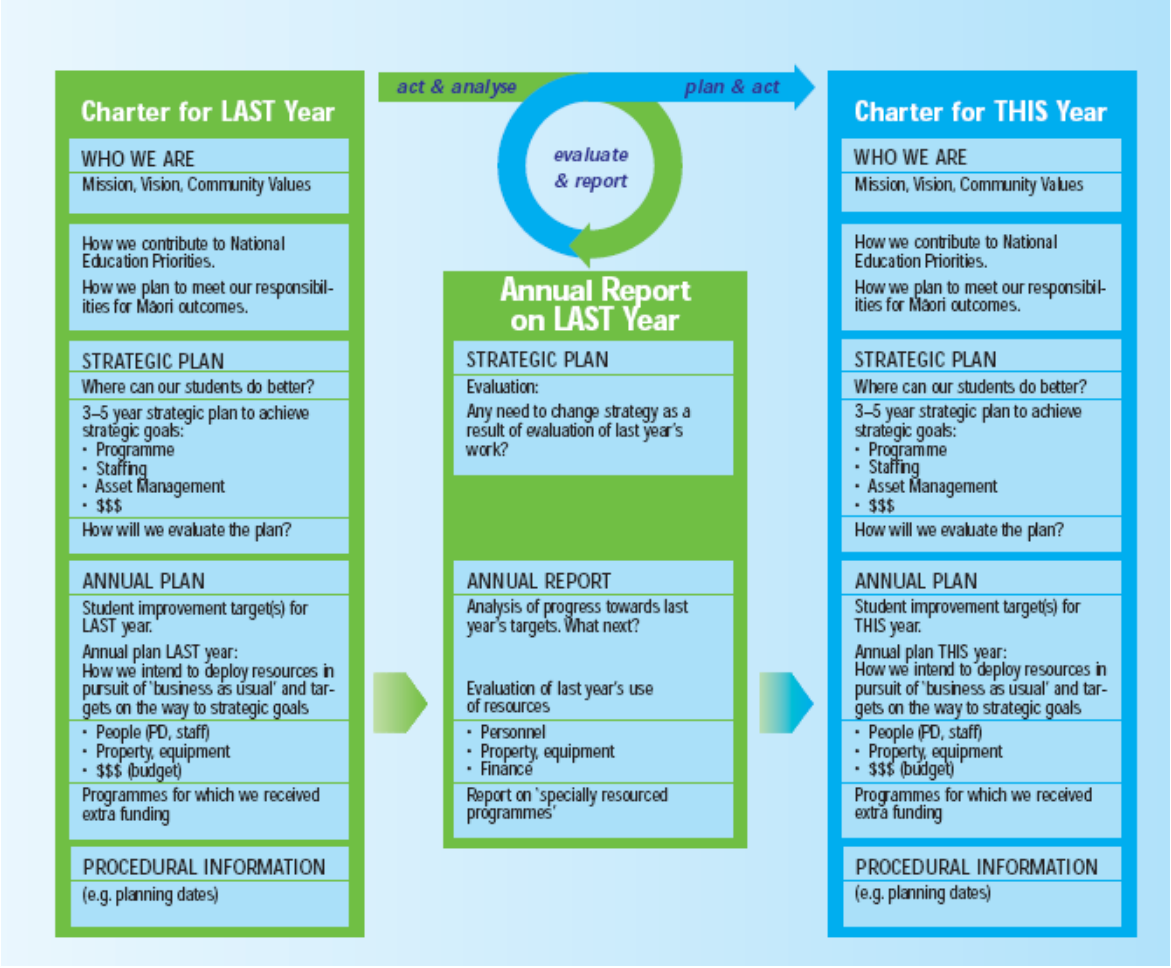

Figure 3.2 Model of charter development

Source: Ministry of Education, 2003b, p. 6.

In addition some further expectations arose from these documents. There is a clear message that teachers' performance is central to the success of students, an emphasis on quality data, a "bringing together" of school policies and the growing importance of a shared responsibility with the wider community. To aide schools in developing their planning and reporting requirements, the Ministry of Education (2003c) provided a template that Boards of Trustees and school management could use. The template is broken up into four sections as required by the Ministry of Education. The first section asks schools to outline their vision and in particular if they have any special character that would extend their charter beyond the expectations of most state secondary schools. The next section asks schools to identify its long term planning for six specific areas. The areas of student achievement, specific student achievement based upon the National Education Priorities, aspirations of the community, long-term curriculum and

implementation priorities, financial objectives and the development of the physical environment need to be outlined over a 3-5 year period.

The third section dealt with the annual plan. In this section six sets of annual details are asked for. The Board must describe;

- Maintenance and capital improvements,
- Personnel, appraisal and Equal Employment Opportunities,
- Financial plans and how that improves student achievement,
- The schools annual budget,
- Health and safety strategic for staff and students, and,
- Plans for any additional funding or special grants they may have received.

Also in the annual section is the suggested area to identify those specific targets for that year in the strategic plan.

The last section outlines the requirement for consultation with the community and the time frame that this will take place. In addition there are the regulatory requirements surrounding how and where to lodge copies of the charter.

In summary the key points that can be taken from these documents are:

- The Ministry of Education wanted a student focused approach to improving academic performance.
- Schools needed to be more deliberate and purposeful in their approach to ongoing school improvement.
- Schools strategic goals should align themselves with the National Education Goals and the National Administrative Guidelines.
- Schools should focus on their review processes.
- Schools should focus on teacher performance.
- Schools should identify how to improve school/community partnership.

By analysing these documents further a number of broader issues became evident. It is clear that the Government, via the Ministry of Education had some clear strategic policies that it wanted implemented in New Zealand society. Schools were the only means through which these policies could be deployed. While central government had clear strategic intent, the expectations of the implementation do not appear as clear.

To compare the New Zealand situation, events were unfolding in England at approximately the same time. In the year 2000, the English Government had identified improving classroom practice and pupil learning in literacy and numeracy in primary schools across England. As part of the way of investigating how that initiative was implemented the Department for Education and Skills (New Zealand equivalent of the Ministry of Education) commissioned an independent external research project focusing on aspects of strategic leadership as part of the strategic implementation process. Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin & Fullan (2004) investigated the strategic leadership demonstrated at all levels of the implementation process. This included The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom right through to Coordinating Teachers within schools. The researchers found that the literacy and numeracy initiative was “one of the most ambitious and successful examples of large-scale reform in the world to date” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 75). The key finding in terms of strategic management was that the key reason for its success was the “nature and quality of leadership”.

This is a significant finding as it outlines the processes and characteristics of a successful large-scale implementation of a national strategic policy. The main reason for its significance is that it is “real”. This is not a theorised implementation of a model based around a small sample of schools or organisations. Therefore, the development of strategic leadership should be one of the most critical aspects to investigate when developing strategic management practices.

Strategic leadership and strategic approaches in schools

With this changing role of modern principals Davies and Davies (2004) suggest four personal characteristics that enable a school leader to meet new challenges and develop a school to become strategically focused. The first characteristic is that of being dissatisfied or restless with the present. This is the visioning aspect of being strategically minded. The second is that strategic leaders must have absorptive capacity. That is, being able to absorb new information, assimilate it, filter it and use the information to form organisation direction. This aspect is similar to the environmental scanning aspect of strategic planning. The third characteristic is that of adaptive capacity. This characteristic is the ability for a leader to continuously learn and adapt. The last characteristic is termed wisdom. Wisdom in this context is being able to make the right decision at the right time. A further breakdown of this characteristic suggests that leaders need to bring together their practical, analytical and emotional intelligence skills.

While the concepts of strategic leadership sound good and are highly seductive, there is often criticism that strategy is unable to live in the real world. One of the most successful large-scale reform policies counters this and provides challenges in the way that current leadership perspectives are based around managerial or transactional forms of leadership. One of the major findings from Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin & Fullan (2004) was strategic leadership transcends *and* incorporates the ideals of transformational and distributed leadership styles.

Robinson (2007) in her address to the International Confederation of Principals identified five dimensions of how school leaders make a difference to their students. The five dimensions are establishing goals and expectations, strategic resourcing, planning, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. This establishes a direct link between leadership practices and

the impact on student learning. The surprising outcome is that the first three dimensions of leadership practice that had a particularly powerful impact on students, closely resemble the core principles of strategic management. As has already been demonstrated the degree of success of strategic management comes back directly to the leader being able to be strategically minded and think strategically. The challenge is to incorporate this strategic concept into principals professional development.

Professional development for aspiring principals or current principals is an important opportunity to expose leaders to strategic management concepts. An OECD (2007) report into improving school leadership in New Zealand identified that the only formal appointment requirement for a school principal is that they are a registered teacher. There is no mandatory requirement for leadership development for school principals. However, there are a number of voluntary programmes funded by the Ministry of Education that provide professional development for principals. These include the First Time Principals programme, The Principals' Development Planning Centre, the Principals Professional Learning Communities programme and a dedicated web site – Leadspace. It would be of interest to compare how much time and to what extent strategic management practices are being "taught" in each of these programmes.

It is becoming clear that the findings from these articles would challenge a number of models and concepts surrounding the notion of leadership. A truly strategic leader would have the skills, ability and wisdom to provide the vision, the motivation to formulate change and the charisma to influence the now as well as the future.

Davies et al. (2006) has identified four strategic approaches that schools have used to select and implement strategic goals. This is worth exploring as schools may be able to expand their "method" as it applies to their situation.

The four approaches are strategic planning, emergent strategy, strategic intent and devolved strategy. Strategic planning is the traditional method in approaching making strategic choices. Emergent strategy occurs when schools are required to take on a new initiative. It is a form of trial and error that is reactive (as opposed to proactive in the case of strategic planning) to a given situation. Devolved strategy is a method in which those personnel that had an expertise in a certain area would be responsible for developing the strategy, with the bounds of an overall strategic direction.

The last method is that of strategic intent. Strategic intent is about gaining a broad understanding of what the schools wants to achieve, developing the strategic capability and capacity in critical areas to accomplish the desired strategic direction and defining a limited number of intents. This method is best used in translating a vision into action and has been used in schools to implement the development of a new culture of success and high achievement. While some will argue that this sounds very much like the traditional strategic approach, the process that is required has subtle but profound differences. The strategic approach method is based around a four step process. The first is to articulate the intent (no more than 5), then to build capability (providing metaphors and experiences that help shape the strategy). This is followed by creating the strategic goal by using strategic conversations and developing a shared understanding followed by a process to define the strategic perspective, outcome orientations and the formal plans (Davies & Ellison, 2003).

In conclusion, the literature review has confirmed the significance of this study and the relevance of the research questions. The implication that all leadership activities involve some aspect of strategic thinking is an important link between leadership and strategic management. The use of strategic planning needs to be investigated in schools. Simply using the term strategic planning implies that schools have some degree of control and influence in

their future resourcing and direction. This area is debateable and in need of further research.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The research approach

The research approach used was an inductive inquiry based around the interpretive research paradigm, using qualitative data obtained from a case study of three New Zealand Secondary Schools.

The purpose of this research was to provide of snapshot of what is happening in terms of strategic management and strategic leadership in three schools. The findings will hopefully advance further knowledge in this area and provide some shared understanding based on the experiences described in the study (Bassey, 2003).

In order to examine each of the three schools I have endeavoured to gain an insight into the behaviours, attitudes and thinking behind strategic management practices. This type of research lends itself to the interpretive approach. As the literature has indicated one of, if not the most important component of strategic management practices is the role of the strategic leader. Leadership is made up of many facets however one key component is about influencing others (Sergiovanni, 2001). The manner in which a leader behaves, and what she or he thinks is an important aspect of strategic leadership and therefore the main influencer on strategic management. By obtaining qualitative data I was able to get an idea of the way in which these leaders identify and implement their respective strategic policies.

The qualitative approach to research has a number of defining characteristics. One characteristic is an emphasis on research generating or forming the theory, the emphasis on gaining an understanding of what is happening in the participant's world and then making interpretations based on the evidence (Bryman, 2004).

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher is the primary person responsible for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 1998). This means that the researcher is present during interviews and this can either be beneficial or an artificial influence on the data. By being present the researcher may have an impact on how the participant responds to the questions. This may be a positive aspect. The researcher can clarify questions, pick up on non-verbal language and can adapt to the conditions of the interview if needed. This happened on a number of occasions during the interviews.

The research design

The research design for this research is in the form of a case study. A case study primarily comes under the wider umbrella of qualitative research however case studies can also be used in quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). Case studies are best used when trying to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular situation (Merriam, 1998) or intensive examination of a particular setting (Bryman, 2004). Case studies differentiate from other forms of qualitative research as they focus on a singe unit or a bounded set of participants. The case study is best suited to my research for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a bounded study of three individual secondary schools. Each school has its own unique setting. However, the schools are similar in size (650-1000 students), type (rural co-educational) and general geographic location. The bounded nature of the study means that the results will apply directly to this particular case and are not intended to be used to generalise for the wider secondary schooling sector within New Zealand. Secondly, each school is its own particular case study. This allows for comparison between schools and provides the researcher with an opportunity to compare and contrast with possible explanations. Finally, the nature of the questioning also is more aligned to a case study approach. Yin (1994) suggests that by asking “how“ and “why” type questions the

researcher is looking for explanatory links within an organisation and this type of questioning is more suited to a case study approach.

In the course of this research there was a need for the triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to the use “of more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena” (Bryam, 2004, p. 275). The use of triangulation in qualitative research is to ensure that there is rigour associated with the research (Denzin, 1997). Triangulation was achieved by the use of a documentary analysis, interviews and questionnaires.

Methods

The data collection methods used in this research were documentary analysis, self-completing questionnaires and. one-to-one interviews

Documentary analysis provides an interpretation of documents that relate to the research. I have used qualitative content analysis as the basis for interpreting the documents. Qualitative content analysis is the most prevalent form of document analysis (Bryman, 2004) in qualitative research. This method allows for pre-defined categories to be used to analyse the documents. The categories used for the content analysis was based around the model of the elements of strategic management (Johnson et al., 2006, p.16).

This model identifies three elements that inform each other about the strategic management process. The elements are the strategic position, strategic choices and strategy into action. Each element has three sub-elements that feed into the main element. The sub-elements were used to generate the questions used in the questionnaires and the interview schedules. The use of this model has ensured that there was consistency between the structure of the data collection and the data analysis. From this model I used the following questions to analyse the documents;

Strategic position

- How did the school communicate their review process?
- How did the school present their strategic plan?

Strategic choices

- How were “corporate” goals presented, communicated and used?
- What time frame did the strategic plan cover?

Strategy into action

- In what ways was the operational plan evident?
- How was the strategic plan implemented?

1). Documentary analysis

The documents that were analysed were Ministry of Education circulars that were used as communication tools and a school charter from each of the three participating schools. Of prime significance, the school charters had within them the schools annual and strategic plan. These documents were analysed at different stages of the research. In addition to the framework developed by Johnson et al. (2006) the documents were also analysed using an eight question model by Wellington (2000).

2). Questionnaires

To gain a wider perspective on the strategic management practices within each school questionnaires from three Heads of Departments and three teachers were completed. The content of the questionnaires and the interview schedules was again based around the model of the elements of strategic management (Johnson et al., 2006). The teachers and the HoD’s responded to a request to volunteer in the research. The questionnaires will provide further qualitative data and potentially provide a different perspective on the data from principals and Board chair. The questionnaires were self-completing.

Questionnaires allow the researcher to collect large amounts of data over a relatively short period of time (Mills, 2003). Another advantage is that self-

completion questionnaires (through pre-paid self addressed return envelopes) negate many of the factors associated with a wide geographical spread of the participants (Hinds, 2000). This is also a cost effective means of gathering data (Bryman, 2004). Self-completion questionnaires are also quick to administer and there are no interviewer effects (Bryman 2004).

However there are a number of limitations and some pitfalls to avoid when developing and using self-completion questionnaires. Bryman (2004) outlines a number of these limitations. Some questionnaires use language that the respondents do not understand; this is a problem as the researcher is not present to explain what is meant by the question. An associated problem with not having the researcher present is that they cannot probe for further information; they cannot ask questions that are relevant to them. Other pitfalls are that some respondents will read the entire questionnaire before starting, this may influence the way in which they respond to questions. Some respondents may not know the answers to the questions and guess the answer. However the major problem with the self-completion questionnaire is that of response rate. If the response rate is too low then a great deal of time and effort will have been put into the project would have been wasted. One of the ways to try and avoid a low response rate is too clearly outline the reason for the research and the reason that these particular participants have been asked to be involved.

3) Interviews

Interviews have become embedded into our society (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Whether it is a one-to-one person-to-person interview, or a telephone conversation or an interview carried via an internet chat-room, interviews are commonplace and used for a wide variety of reasons.

The interview phase involved a series of 6 one-to-one interviews using a non-probability purposive sample. The participants were the principal and the Board of Trustees chairperson from each of the three schools, as they

are the people who theoretically are responsible for leading the strategic direction of the school.

Using one-to-one interviews is a good form of data collection when in-depth information is required. It is also more appropriate when the information provided is potentially sensitive and if the issue that is being examined would benefit from further clarification (Hinds, 2000). It is suggested that this is the case in this research. There is potential for some participants to feel threatened or embarrassed about a perceived lack of knowledge. By having the participants explain in their own words the process the data will be rich with detail about their experience and the way they respond to the planning and reporting policy. A semi-structured approach using a mixture of closed format questions with a number of open ended questions was used. Semi-structured interviewing is primarily used when there is certain information that is desired from all of the respondents as well as allowing for flexibility during the interview (Merriam, 1998).

All of the interviews were digitally recorded. The interview was transcribed and stored on computer. An important consideration in using interviews as a form of data collection is the time factor. Associated with each interview was setting up the interview schedule, the travelling time to go to the interview location and the time it took to complete the interview. The transcription process can be very time consuming. Hinds (2000) has estimated that for every hour of interview footage up to 10 hours will be needed to transcribe it. Bryman (2004) has suggested a slightly lower guideline of 5-6 hours. Using either recommendation still indicates a lengthy amount of time turning the audio footage into written data to be further analysed. Each interview took approximately six to seven hours to transcribe.

An important part of the qualitative phase is to ensure that there is an opportunity for respondent validation. Respondent validation is the process in which the researcher provides the participants an account of what has

been found (Bryman, 2004). This provides the opportunity for the participant to validate their contribution to the research and to acknowledge the importance of their input into the data. This process is essential in qualitative studies as it is another way to provide rigour and acknowledge the ethical responsibilities to the research (Bassey, 2003).

Analysis design

The data obtained from qualitative research is very detailed. The challenge for qualitative researchers is to draw out the themes and concepts that are embedded within that detailed information (Fonatana & Frey, 2005). Qualitative analysis in this research project will be focused on determining the best way to break down text into data that can best be analysed.

Once the data was collated it was coded so as it assign responses against a set of given criteria. This process transforms unstructured data into categories which are assigned tags to use later for statistical analysis (Bryman, 2004). The questionnaire will predominantly have closed format questions with a smaller number of open ended questions. The closed format questions will offer simple data to be categorised. The open ended questions will need key words for the coding system.

Ethical issues

Researchers have to take into consideration a number of factors prior to commencing their research. Ethics is one of these factors and is vitally important to maintain the credibility of the research. In educational research because the focus is on studying people there is considerable responsibility to respect the values and beliefs of those people participating in the project (Wellington, 2000). The intended research should be considered to see if it is justifiable. This means that by conducting the research and involving a group of people to study that there are tangible benefits for either for the

researcher directly or the wider community group where the conclusions from the research help inform practice (Wilkinson, 2001).

Diener and Crandaall (1978), as cited in Bryman (2004) identify four guiding principles that researchers should consider when identifying the scope of their research. The first examines if any harm could come to the participants. The harm could be physical, emotional or developmental. The second principle is ensuring that all of the participants participate with informed consent. The important part of this principle is the informed aspect. Covert research (where it is not possible to fully inform the participants) should only be used when other methods are impossible. The next principle is that of the respecting people's privacy and avoiding invading that privacy. Certainly most people want to keep certain areas of their lives private. The last principle is that of deception. Deception occurs when researchers represent their research as something that it is not (Bryman, 2004, p. 514).

It was essential to ensure that the participants are fully aware of the research objectives. It is assumed that the Principal of the school will responsible for the strategic leadership and as such will be providing the feedback. The Principals will not want to appear lacking in strategic knowledge or application and it will important to structure the questionnaire and interviews in a way that does infer or create this perception.

In order to preserve anonymity, some data was not used or masked so that a potentially distinguishing feature was not identified in the data analysis. This included aspects of school organisational structure, the use of strategic planning tools and the gender of the participants.

Research limitations

This case study has a number of limitations. Firstly was the number of teacher respondents. It would have been preferable to obtain a far wider

view of the impact that strategic management has for teachers. This may have provided a wider range of responses of a greater conformation of the existing responses. In addition the questionnaire would have been adapted to have included a greater focus on identifying more significant aspects the implementation phase of strategic goals.

Secondly, two of the interviews for the Board of Trustee's chairpersons had to be completed via the telephone rather than face-to-face. This occurred due to a shortened time frame available for the data collection. While regrettable, it does not appear to have significantly impacted on the data. In comparison to the face-to-face interview with the other Board chair, the overall length and depth of answering is approximately the same. The interviews were still able to be recorded digitally and transcribed in the same way.

Thirdly, the teachers and HoD's were asked to volunteer to participate in the research. They may have been influenced by how they were asked or who asked them within the school. The respondents may also be influenced by their disposition towards aspects of strategic planning and their general disposition towards post-graduate research (either for or against this type of research).

The fourth limitation relates to the authors prior experience in strategic management. The author has been involved in strategic planning and made every effort so that his knowledge did not impact on the collection or interpretation of the data.

The data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews provided a rich source of material to analyse. In most cases the questionnaires were answered fully and the interviews provided detailed insights into strategy and leadership. In chapter 4 the findings from the data collection are presented and summarised.

Chapter 4 Findings

The purpose of this research is to provide of snapshot of what is happening in terms of strategic management and strategic leadership in three schools. The findings will hopefully advance further knowledge in this area and provide some shared understanding based on the experiences described in the study (Bassey 2003).

Four research questions framed this study. The first research question was to explore the nature of strategic management and strategic leadership. The aim of this was to provide an overview of strategic management and strategic leadership in secondary schools. The second question focused on what expectations there are of New Zealand secondary schools in relation to strategic management and strategic leadership. The third question was to explore how secondary schools practice strategic management and strategic leadership. The final question focused on the importance of leadership in the management of strategy.

Three New Zealand coeducation rural secondary schools were used in the collection of qualitative data for this study. A documentary analysis was completed to examine the format, the specific strategic and annual goals and the general process the schools undertook. Each of the schools was very generous and made their strategic plans available. In each school, questionnaires and interviews were used as data collection tools. To gain a wider perspective on the strategic management practices within each school questionnaires were administered to three Heads of Departments and three teachers in each school. The questionnaire appears as appendix A.

The interview phase involved a series of 6 one-to-one interviews using a non-probability purposive sample. The participants were the principal and the Board of Trustees chair from each of the three schools, as they are the

people who theoretically are responsible for leading the strategic direction of the school. The interview schedule appears as appendix B.
Findings from the study are presented in the following order.

- Documentary analysis
- Questionnaire – Teachers
- Questionnaire – Heads of Departments
- Interviews – Principals
- Interviews – Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Documentary analysis

One of the research questions focuses on how secondary schools practice strategic management and strategic leadership that extend beyond the basic expectations of planning and reporting. I am grateful to the three schools that have provided their strategic plans as a means of answering this question. The results are discussed in general terms to preserve anonymity of the schools involved in this case study.

Charters

It is apparent that each school develops a charter that they feel best suits their school. None of the schools have followed the layout as described in the Ministry of Education template or appear to use the SmartCharter tool. This was expected given the general direction from the regional seminars (Ministry of Education, 2002b) that were part of the professional development program and the findings from the OECD review (OECD, 2007). While there is a significant difference in the philosophies and approach to formulating the goals, the goals themselves are very similar and there are some commonalities in terms of visual layout.

Each school has used a similar visual layout that has identified the specific strategic goal, what action is required to achieve that goal, who is responsible for realising/implementing the goal and a space where a review

comment or suggestions for improvements can be added later. The annual plan for each school is based around the goals as specified by the strategic plan.

One of the most significant findings from strategic plans was in regard to the time period the strategic plans covered. All of the strategic plans only covered a three time frame. While there was some intent for a broad outline for further years, there was not the detail expected as per the Ministry of Education model (2003a) from 3-5 years. This again supports the work of Bell (2002) in which he states that schools are unable to meet the requirements of strategic planning.

Goals

The actual goals themselves are specific to the ways and means that will enhance student achievement. Common examples of the types of annual goals that are developed from strategic goals are listed below;

- X% of Year 9 students to be achieving level 6 by the end of Year 9
- Evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities
- Explore interactive whiteboard strategies to support learning and teaching
- Develop teacher and leadership portfolios around school goals and targets
- Embed effective teaching practice for sustainability
- To ensure cross-curricular ICT is making a difference to student learning
- The analysis of variance is written and communicated to the College community

One of schools has based its charter around a visual (as opposed to purely written) representation of the school's vision and related that vision back to the six National Administration Guidelines (NAG's), (Ministry of Education, 1999). This visual representation is used by the school to provide a

reference point to reflect what happens on a day-to-day basis and the long term aspirations of the school. There is a further two components that provide the detail for strategic and annual plans. The NAG's provide the broad objectives for student learning and achievement, self review and documentation, personnel, finance and property, health, safety and welfare and administration and compliance. By using the NAG's as the basis for setting the broad goals, the school has gone beyond the expectations of the requirements from the SmartCharter template (Ministry of Education, 2003a). Within the annual plan there is a specific focus for each NAG and this is broken down further to a number (between 2-9) of detailed goals with specific actions assigned to them. While the strategic and annual plans are separate documents there is a clear link between them and it is easy to understand.

Another school has incorporated the annual and strategic plan in the same document; however they are clearly defined into separate sections. In this document there are nine broad goals for the three year time frame. Each goal has specific references for smaller key strategies that provide the focus for implementation. There is also an indication of what measures would indicate that the goal had been achieved. In the Annual section an added dimension provides a reference to the current strategic position and a very brief overview of the need for, or link to, the specific strategic goal.

Again this approach exceeds the requirements set out by the SmartCharter template and demonstrates the lengths schools go to; too ensure that they have developed a focussed approach to continual school improvement.

The third school has another variation in its strategic plan format. Six strategic goals are identified over a three year time frame with each of the goals broken down to form more detailed objectives. Targets are set for each year. Interestingly, there appears to be more targets for the first year of the objective with each subsequent year having a review process built into

the cycle and less new developments planned. This appears to provide a definite focus for an objective and allow time for reflection and evaluation for each of the objectives and not to be overwhelmed by new initiatives.

Using the Johnson et al. (2006) model to further analyse the charters it is once again quite clear to see the differences between each of the charters.

Each of the schools included aspects of communicating their strategic position in their charters. This is required as part of NAG 2 (Ministry of Education, 1999) however the depth and interpretation varies. One school had two separate strategic goals that influence the strategic position. These goals are:

> *"Promote XXXX through good communication and encourage an understanding of and participation in the XXXX's activities by members of the wider community"*
>
> *"Provide an environment which encourages the development of XXXX's character and that reflects the widely shared values of the community"*

These goals clearly align themselves to the expectations and purposes sub-element that contribute to the strategic position. By achieving these goals the schools current and future strategic position is enhanced. The environment and the type of community that they are in also provide background information (economic, cultural) to the strategic position. There was also an indication of how the school approaches the development of the strategic plan and how strategic choices (another element from Johnson et al.'s (2006) model of strategic management) are made.

Another school has a detailed outline (as one of its six strategic goals) of how the school review takes place and how that influences the other

strategic goals. The overall goal is “XXXX maintains implements and documents a programme of self-review”. There are a further eleven objectives that have targets for each year over a three year time frame. Three examples of the types of objectives appear below:

> *“To ensure a cycle of review is in place over the period of this plan”*
>
> *“To implement the recommendations of the School Review”*
>
> *“A departmental review process is implemented and maintained”*

All of the schools are very strong in detailing how they intend to put strategy into action. The annual plans are more detailed versions of the strategic plans with changes identified between from year-to-year and who is affected and/or responsible in the organisation.

While it is not easy to analyse information from the charters with the elements of strategic management model (Johnson et al., 2006) there are certainly a number of aspects that do fit and provide information that would be considered strategic management activities.

Questionnaire findings (Teachers)

The first group of participants were the teachers. There were nine questionnaires administered with five completed responses.

The first question asked was what did the participants understand of the term strategy? All of the teachers responded in saying that strategy involved the use of a plan that helped to achieve a goal. Some examples are:

> *The plan of action that is taken to achieve a particular goal.*

> *The path you take or the game which is played to help you achieve your goal.*

Only one respondent reflected that strategy incorporated some of the wider aspects such as vision and stakeholders input, resources and that strategy can be different at different levels. This person said:

> *Planning for an organisations activities, taking into account vision, goals, values, expectations, stakeholders and resources. It can exist at a number of levels, for example school wide versus departmental.*

Question two asked if strategy and vision mean the same thing. There was a clear indication from all respondents that they were not. All respondents said that the vision equated to the goal or target and that strategy was the method or way to achieve those targets.

> *No – vision is the overall ideal target or picture of where the organisation would like to go or be.*

> *No. Strategy is a plan, a vision is an at the moment, out of reach goal.*

Question three investigated the way in which strategy was implemented at their respective schools. Two of the respondents said that strategy was implemented directly by the principal and/or senior management. All respondents said that at some during the implementation phase staff were consulted.

> *Plan drawn up by the principal, BoT, HoD's, staff then consulted.*

> *Driven by the principal and BoT but in consultation with the staff and community, seeking views.*

> *By management: a) sometimes autonomously, b) sometimes cooperatively with the staff after discussions.*

> *A strategic plan is proposed, discussed and put in place for action over the next three years.*

Question four asked whether individual departments were required to incorporate the school-wide strategic plan into their departmental plans, all but one of the respondents indicated that this was the case.

> *Yes, their achievement targets must support the goals within the strategic plan.*

> *Yes, but it does not always happen. Sometimes "lip service" given to plan on account of personal beliefs/attitudes/busyness of HoD's.*

Question five asked whether they were aware of an annual operational plan. All teachers responded that there was an annual plan that facilitated the day-to-day running of the school.

> *Annual in the sense that someone will make some review; even minor each year. This may simply be a "are we happy with the status quo" examination.*

In terms of review the strategic plan, question six asked how often the strategic plan was reviewed. Three of the teachers said that the strategic plan was reviewed annually, while two teachers indicated that the strategic plan was reviewed every three years. Some teachers responded that additional reviews took place as well.

> *Annually, at least some review done.*

> *Every three years, but fine tuned as required.*

> *Annually, I think, reviewed with the annual plan.*

Question seven asked if the teachers felt involved in the review of the strategic plan three responded no and while two indicated yes. The timing of the strategic review varied greatly. Each respondent had a different response:

- *Don't know*
- *End or beginning of the year*
- *Usually earlier in the year*
- *End of year*
- *Ongoing process*

Question nine asked to discuss who was consulted regarding the strategic plan. All the respondents indicated that the principal and the board of trustees were involved. Three respondents said that all the teaching staff had input and that the wider community was involved. Some examples are:

> *Initially principal does the groundwork then consults with Board*

> *In terms of overall vision – all staff key community members, PTA. In terms of specific goals – HoD's and teachers as these goals are appropriate to them*

Question ten focused on the consultation process. Consultation of the strategic plans was communicated via staff meetings and in two cases questionnaires were used. One respondent indicated that news letters and information via the local newspaper was also tools that were used.

> *Staff meetings, HoD meetings, senior management meetings*

> *Staff meetings, discussions, occasional questionnaires, meetings with iwi, PTA.*

> *Newsletters, newspaper, meetings (staff, departmental, student council, parent council) parent/student/teacher interviews.*

Question eleven focused how the strategic plan was implemented. Strategy was reported to be implemented in a number of ways. Again, meetings were reported by all of the respondents. The comments below show other means of implementation. This included departmental meetings (2), principal directive (1) and delegated responsibility (1).

Principal gives direction to those immediately involved.

HoD's develop strategies through their departments. Departmental teachers implement them in their teaching and admin.

Implemented by persons designated responsible for each strategy supporting each goal.

In question twelve there was one clear point that was consistent from four of the five respondents in terms of the perceived benefits of strategic planning. That was that it provided a goal or vision for the school to focus on.

Clear direction. Appropraite and adequate allocation of funds. Not doing anything without a valid reason – overall goals must be supported by all activities.

Allows more global overview with maximum input from interested parties.

An ongoing focus on a limited number of goals every year

Setting the goal post high. Creating manageable relevant targets for the school community.

One respondent indicated that they did not see any direct benefits.

Can't see any direct benefit.

Question thirteen focused on the perceived limitations to strategic planning were none (1), difficulty including all stakeholders, some staff don't care, time consuming paper work, could be seen as a compliance exercise.

Some staff don't really care.

Difficult to involve all appropriate stakeholders.

Time consuming paper work.

Must have a vision and a deep philosophical learning path driving it otherwise it is a tick box device.

Question fourteen asked teachers in what ways does the strategic plan differ from the annual plan. All respondents indicated that the annual plan was a defined set of steps that detailed the strategic plan.

Annual plan deals with the all NAG's with directions but very few goals beyond the end of the year.

It supports the strategies we pursue. The operational plan details the day-to-day activities that are needed for the organisation to function and therefore be in a position to the strategic plan.

Strategic plan more "abstract" ie closely linked to vision… "where are we going" stuff, whereas operational plan = nuts and bolts.

Only one teacher chose to answer question fifteen, the last question. This was an opportunity for teachers to comment on any issue surrounding the strategic activity in their school.

To me it's just another ERO checklist!! "A paper way" of making a school accountable.

In summary, although the sample was small, the teachers were able to define a certain number of aspects that define strategy and the impact that this process has on a school. This is an important aspect of strategic management as it relates directly to determining and understanding an organisation's strategic position, specifically, the strategic capability of the organisation, as described in the Johnson and Scholes (2002) model of strategic management. Without certain knowledge about not only the process but also the types of components needed to develop a strategic plan, the teachers may not feel as comfortable as they appear to be in contributing to the development of the strategic plan.

Teachers could see that both short-term and long-term planning involved consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. Again this is an important part of strategic planning process as stakeholder expectations and organisations purpose influence the strategic position of the school. The principal was identified as the person responsible for leading the strategic planning process. This process involved the leading of consolation (with stakeholders) meetings and collecting information to use with the Board to establish the strategic plan.

There was also an underlying theme that strategic planning was an administrative requirement and in some cases, this had a negative impact on the way the strategic planning process was viewed.

Questionnaire findings (Heads of Departments)

The second group of findings came from the Heads of Departments (or Facultys). Each school had the opportunity for three Heads of Departments to complete a questionnaire. All nine questionnaires that were administered were completed.

Question one was asked to identify the number of years that an HoD had been in their current position in order to see if there was any link between experience and the level of involvement in the strategic planning process. One HoD had between 1-3 years, three had between 4-6 years experience. Two had between 6-8 years and three had 8 or more years experience. It appears there is no link between length in the position and the level of involvement in the strategic planning process. Involvement is related directly to the HoD position itself.

Question two asked if they were aware of the schools strategic plan. All of the participants indicated that they were aware of the schools strategic plan.

Question three asked how long a period their strategic plan covered. Five of the participants indicated that their strategic plan covered a 3 year time frame. Two respondents indicated that they thought that it covered a 2 year time frame, one respondent thought it was for a one year period and one was not sure if the strategic plan was for a defined period, rather it was a continually evolving policy.

Question four focused on what the participants understood by the term strategy. Three of the participants indicated that strategy is a plan, steps or procedures that were set to achieve a goal. Two participants indicated that it was a school's plan to address the National Administration Guidelines (NAG's).

> *The steps or procedures put in place to achieve the set of objectives and ultimate goal.*
>
> *Purpose planning with step-by-step targets to improve/grow long term.*

A way of solving a problem.

Limited, aim to improve running of the school.

Doing now what is required to move in the direction that we want to go. Into the future.

Forward planning, direction, where to allocate funds etc.

"Plan"

Compose 5 NAG's, 1) Curriculum, 2) Self-Review, 3) Personnel, 4) Finance/Property, 5) Health and Safety.

The strategic plan reflects the schools charter.

We can see that the participants had a wide range of strategic vocabulary. This infers that they are familiar with the broad concepts of strategic planning with a generalised understanding of what the strategic plan means in their respective schools. Those that were able to provide more detail indicates that they are either more involved or have a greater understanding of their schools strategy.

Question five asked how each school's strategy was evident. Four of the respondents said that meetings were the most common way that strategy was disseminated.

As a plan presented to the BoT. The plan is prepared after consultation with the staff, modified if necessary and approved. The strategic plan is reflected in all departmental year plans and in all schemes of work.

Now and then expressed to staff, HoD meetings where we were informed of our role to play.

Three respondents said that strategy was evident in the everyday aspects of their school.

Everyday running of the school, courses offered professional development, meetings, discussions, implementation of programmes and initiatives.

Very clear. The nine strategies in student learning and achievement follow the key competencies – deep experience, deep learning, deep support and deep leadership (NAG 1). All staff are given the annual plan.

In commenting that the strategy impacts on day-today events indicates that the strategic plan has a strong influence on the school.
Two respondents said that strategy was evident in the form of professional development sessions. However, they did not discuss how or to what extend the professional development was aligned with the strategic goals.

PD and programs in the school reflect the strategy.

Question six asked if the HoD's were aware of their school's operational plan. Six respondents indicated that they were aware of an operational plan which was the basis for the day-to-day operation of the school. Two were unsure and one was not aware of an operational plan. This is an interesting response. The operational plan is a key component in implementing the strategic goals. HoD's unaware of these plans may not engage in those strategic goals as other HoD's and abreak down from the paper planning to the implementation phase.

Question seven focused on the information they received to implement the strategic plan. There was a wide range of responses in terms of how the strategy was implemented. One responded did not answer the question. The remaining eight respondents provided detailed answers, often with multiple facets to the answer. Two respondents indicated that the staff manual (or handbook) incorporated the strategic plan.

> *Staff manual, staff assessment manual, information when required either hard copy or verbal meetings.*

> *A copy of the strategic plan, a copy of the annual plan, a departmental plan, a curriculum document to align objectives to key competencies.*

Three respondents indicated that it was part of on-going professional development sessions.

> *If relevant to the faculty: PD on teaching and learning strategies, PD to keep abreast of IT and best practice examples.*

Two respondents said that it was part of the general staff meeting. One respondent said that implementation came in the form of senior management directives. These directives related to the managerial/administrative aspects of their HoD positions.

> *Handouts and info in staff meetings and PD sessions.*

> *Via HoD and staff meetings.*

Question eight asked if HoD's were required to incorporate the school strategic plan into their departmental plans. Eight out of the nine respondents said that as Heads of Departments (or Faculty) they were.

> *Absolutely!! We are a critical part in the direction of our goal.*

> *We have a school wide achievement target on which we collect data through each curriculum area, eg might be developing strategies that raise the achievement of Maori students.*

This indicates an area of strength in terms of linking the schools (corporate level strategy) with the departmental (business unit level) strategy. Using this type of approach will lead to a greater alignment of strategic goals throughout the school.

Question nine asked how often the strategic plan was reviewed. Six respondents said that their strategic review was carried out annually. One said every two years, one indicated every fours years, however, sections were continually under review, and one respondent did not answer the question.

Question ten asked if the HoD's were involved in the review of the strategic plan. All respondents said that they were involved in the review of the strategic plan. However one HoD felt that was only because they were in an acting assistant principal's position not because of their HoD role.

> *HoD's are and staff also have input through departmental meetings and general staff meetings.*

Yes, through feedback and current professional readings given to HoD's by the Principal – we are made to feel that we are a part of that process and also aware of recent and current strategies and philosophies of Education.

Question eleven asked what time of year did the review take place. The time at which the strategic plan is reviewed varied between the beginning of the year (5) and the end of the year (3). One respondent did not answer the question. This raises an interesting point. If the schools set goals after the year has started then there is a chance that is part of a "tick-box" exercise. Part of the year has already gone. If goals are set in advance then there is greater opportunity for more meaningful goals to be developed.

Question twelve asked who was consulted regarding the strategic plan. Eight respondents indicated that the staff and the HoD committee (or similar representative group) all had the opportunity to be consulted as part of the strategic planning process. Two respondents said that the community was involved.

Presented and discussed at curriculum meeting, at staff meeting discussion on draft, staff submission to management team, ratified at another staff meeting.

One respondent commented that while they were able have input into the professional areas of the strategic plan, they were unable to in terms of financial and physical resources.

All staff via HoD for professional areas but none re: fiscal management, buildings

Question thirteen asked how this consultation took place. Consultation for the strategic review takes place via staff and departmental meetings with one respondent not answering the question.

Question thirteen and fourteen focused on the perceived benefits and limitations of using strategic planning. There was a wide range of responses. Table 4.1 identifies the benefits and limitations suggested by each respondent.

Table 4.1
Perceived benefits and limitations of strategic planning (HoD perspective)

Benefits	Limitations
Gives clear goal for direction of school and has some form of transparency in that most strategies require monitoring, assessing etc to see if they are achieving our goals.	*Trying to "achieve" too many nefarious activities that are not efficient – collecting data that is not followed up on or used for the benefit of the students.*
Always looking forward, looking for ways to improve. Reflect and evaluate what we are doing and why?	*Things change very quickly. A strategic plan should not look too far into the future.*
Forward planning, creating direction for the school.	*Unfortunately, due to the changing environment we are in, it is difficult to know what will be required in the future eg roll growth.*
Everyone should be working/planning in the same direction. Frequently breaks the picture into more manageable parts.	*Constant changes, ie demographics, curriculum, I.T., teaching process.*
The charter is a working document. The strategic plan shows how the school plans to implement the charter. The strategic plan demonstrates how the school is addressing the NAG's.	*If the charter is a working document then there is NO limitation to planning to meet the requirements of it. Strategic planning is about meeting the needs of students and strategic planning helps this.*
A vision is better than evolution!	*Some times Ministry of Education initiatives are not a school's priority and vice versa.*

Big picture look at the direction of our school. Having a say or a voice on that direction as well.	*Time constraints are the biggest. However, I personally believe there are NO LIMITATIONS.*
Sets goals and targets for staff and students. Unites the vision the school has for the upcoming year. Allows schools to identify areas of focus.	No answer
No answer	*All need to know what is happening.*

There is an interesting balance in the perceived benefits and limitations of strategic planning. While there is a general consensus that strategic planning allows for a greater alignment of goals and greater cohesion within the school it must not forced upon people and done for the right reasons. In addition there must be time allocated for the development of strategic planning and not be wasted administrative task.

The final question, question sixteen, invited participants to add any comment surrounding strategic planning in their school. Five respondents chose not to answer. Two respondents had this to say:

1) *The strategies evolve from the goals and outcomes. The targets for the year tie in neatly with the particular strategy. Goal > Outcomes > Strategy > Targets 2008.*

2) *The leadership is fundamental (principal) in implementing Strategic Planning as the Principal must direct the school and the staff (more importantly) must be willing to follow and also understand the purpose of the plan and the <u>value</u> of it. "Buy-in" is essential to a strategic plan and a great leader allows staff the input to feel a part of that process.*
   Schools should be given specific time to carry out the work associated with such important planning. Too much of this type of planning is being sandwiched into normal school time/after school meeting time.
   Probably needs to be simplified so that it is understood and <u>valued</u> by staff.

There are several important comments made here. Firstly, it appears the principal is a key component in leading the strategic plan. Secondly, while the principal must lead, they must also allow staff to have input and be allowed to shape the strategic direction. This is a complex task and requires careful planning to ensure that this can occur. And lastly and probably the most important comment is that it appears that the development of the strategic plan is an added task to an increasingly busy teaching load.

In summary it is clear that at the HoD level there is far more direct involvement in the implementation of the strategic plan than there is for teachers. This is because they are probably more involved putting the strategy into action and therefore have a vested interest in the types of goals and the nature of those goals.

Each school's strategic plan is used to state the desired goals. It is also evident that there is a great deal of potential to enhance a school's overall operation. This can be seen by the comments made in response to question thirteen in which the benefits of strategic planning allow greater organisational cohesion. However a counter feeling was evident in that, if the strategic plan is not taken seriously or collected data not used then it is seen as a compliance issue and not of value. The HoD's from school three appear to have a greater input into the strategic process and as a result seem more in favour of using strategic planning.

Interview findings (Principal's perspective)

The Principals from each of the three school's were interviewed. The questions were based around three elements of strategic management: the strategic position, making strategic choices and putting strategy into action. The principals have been referred to as P1, P2 and P3.

The first question investigated what strategy meant to them. P1 Indicated that (planning) was

> *…a course of action that we want to have to make progress in what we are doing as a school.*

P2 responded in a similar way.

> *Something that you use to get to an end point. Plus it is to do with the outcomes, so you use a strategy or a method.*

P3 indicated that it was:

> …*finding and setting direction with a view to the future.*

Question two focused on in what ways were principals able to plan 3-5 years in advance. P1 indicated that the New Zealand Curriculum would enable school s to better plan for them for this time frame. P1 also said that the substantial investment in technology would mean that they felt they were best placed to enhance the learning environment for students in the next 3-5 years.

> *I think we are very fortunate at the moment with the implementation of what was the new curriculum that is now the curriculum that we are doing a lot of work planning for how we develop and implement curriculum that is specific and meets the learning needs of the students...*

> *The other things that enable us to plan for 3-5 years in advance is a tremendous investment in technology and how we as a school can use technology to enhance the*

learning environment that is made available to our students.

P2 felt that while the school was able to plan quite well for the first and second year it became increasingly hard to plan as so many things change over a three – five year period.

I think initially you can plan quite detailed for the first year, the second and third year. The second year a bit more less detail and the final year not in a lot of details because so much changes over that time.

If the goals the school set within a three year period are not achieved, then they are added to the following year or need to be changed completely. This is because P2 felt that the Ministry of Education tended to force some things upon them and this did not always mix well with the schools long term strategy. This type mandating from the Ministry of Education appears to contradict it's very own planning process that it requires schools to complete.

P3 indicated that they have based a lot of strategic planning around a model of personalised learning. This has meant that they have an extended plan from 1-10 years.

…in that sense I guess we have set up a framework that does allow us to have a strategic direction that should hold us in good stead for 5-10 years. A broad one, a very broad one.

This model of personalised learning then shapes and forms the specific goals that are required to resource these goals.

Question three focused on how principal's felt they were able to determine their current strategic position. All the principals used a review and analysis process. The review used measured data against the goals and strategies from the previous year and depending on the level of success for each goal measured, the impact on the strategic plan. P1 commented that they have quite a detailed process.

> *We have very thorough school self-review programme that we start off with within in the school we have obviously our annual plan and our strategic plan. I review progress against the objectives of our strategic plan every year and report that to the Board and we discuss that with the board about where we have gone.*

P2 also used a review process that incorporated both the strategic and annual plan and what happens if some goals are not met. P2 used a tool developed by a tertiary institution that passed on to him by someone who had completed a post graduate qualification at that institution.

> *We will do an analysis at the end of each year. These are the goals that we have set in our annual plan which is straight from our strategic plan. We set some annual goals, we measure those, have we reached them. If we haven't reached them they go into the next annual plan.*

> *We have a school review every 3 years and our school review for our next plan is this year. We use a XXXX (tertiary education provider) tool, … brought that in here and used that.*

Question four focused on how the principals felt about trying to predict the current and the future educational environment. P2 and P3 felt that it was going to be increasingly harder to predict the future as trends things can change so quickly. P3 acknowledged that they were aiming to prepare students for a very rapidly changing world following the broad trends as outlined by Professor Hedley Beare in his book "Creating the Future School".

> *The only predictability about it is that it is unpredictable in one sense. So, to me strategic learning is largely about preparing our kids for a future that is difficult to know but having some broad trends about what it might look like.*

P1 felt that the student population were the greatest challenge in terms of trying to predict the future environment. In particular the increasingly transient nature of families and in some cases a decrease in family values that impacted on the school. P1 also felt that socioeconomic factors also had a major impact and being in a rural environment meant that families were exposed to the pressures of the export economy.

> *I think probably the greatest factor that we can't predict is the personnel or the personnel one which is the students. The impacts of transient society of family, decrease in family values all those sorts of things. That to me is probably the greatest thing that we can not predict and yet it's probably one of the things as we know in schools we potentially battle against the most.*

From this it appears that the New Zealand Curriculum (which is to be implemented from 2010) is providing a strategic framework on which the curriculum goals can be set against, there are social issues that are making it hard for schools to predict how to support students in their learning.

Question five asked how principals were able to determine their strategic direction. P2 used a three yearly review cycle. This involved using a community survey and meetings with the community and the students and then in conjunction with the Board set about a direction they felt to move in.

> *We have a school review every 3 years and our school review for our next plan is this year.*

> *Really the Board stand and say what is our plan and I give it to them and they input as well.*

P1 said that they spent a lot of time consulting about the direction the strategic plan should take. They spend a lot of time with the staff, dedicating a day to complete a strategic review. Also in this school a community questionnaire is sent out to gain input from the wider community.

> *We have spent a lot of time. We consult widely with staff, we have a strategic review day with the staff and although this year we are not doing that because we are spending a lot of the time working on the curriculum so as I said we review our own progress against it, we ask for community feedback and how think we are performing as a school,*

P1 mentioned that to aid them in setting their direction they used a model from another organisation.

> *…we had someone on the Board who had a lot to do with the XXXX and also the XXXX have both re-done their strat plans and so it came up with a model which we have actually adopted which has clearly identified strategic objectives, who*

it's there for but it's also got the facility to report on progress made towards it each year

P1 also comments on some of the results from the community consultation.

We do, but I fortunately tend to get two extremes. The ones who want to come along and what you are doing a great job, they are really grateful for what you do and then the ones that want to come and have a grizzle about the fact your car parks are too narrow or something like that.

P3 indicated that they way in which they developed their charter approximately five years ago has meant that everything they do in terms of strategic planning is related back to that charter. The direction is altered slightly each year and they try to avoid ad-hoc initiatives being added to the strategic plan.

What we did was we asked ourselves one real question about five years ago. And our question to ourselves and our community was 'what sort of people do we want our students to be when they go out of our gates for the last time?

In Question six, the principal's were asked if resources had an impact on the nature of their strategic direction. P1 indicated that they set the direction first and then go about trying to find the financial, physical and human resources that are needed to follow that direction.

I'm a firm believer in that you set the direction and then you get the resources. You cannot let the resource dictate.

Similarly P2 said that the direction was important and the resourcing of the strategic direction was less important. The major resource to consider however was the human resources.

> *When we do our direction, just thinking back when we did the last one it didn't play a big part at all. This is just where we want to go and we rallied the resources around where we wanted to go.*

P3 felt that they didn't have a lot of financial resources so they had to get smart about how the resources were used. However, P3 did indicate that the priority is the students' needs and if it (the strategic goal) is important enough then they will find a way to resource it.

> *I have got this saying in my head that we haven't got a lot of money so we have to get smart. But it shouldn't interfere if we think this is what we have to do with our kids. That sort of comes first and we find a way.*

Question seven asked who was involved in strategic planning. All three principals indicated that staff, the wider community, students and the BoT all played a part in the consultation regarding the strategic direction. P1 said that more and more the student voice was being incorporated into individual teachers own review.

> *We are doing a lot more work with our staff. We are saying 'what do we want our students to be?, What are we doing well and what do we need to improve on? We have bought in a lot more of questioning of feedback from the students so teachers are actually seeking student voice about what is happening*.

P3 said that the HoD team was an important think tank because their central focus is on student learning and they are the leaders of learning. P3 also mentioned the voice of other teams from within the school such as the guidance team.

> *I guess I use our HoD team as a think-tank because the central focus is on student learning and they are leaders of learning in here so it's really important that, you know, I am bouncing off them all the time in terms of strategic direction. I think they are the key and of course senior management team, the leadership team. I think those two are really really important but you have other groups like the guidance team, it's interesting listening to them too. I think it's listening, all the time, it's about a lot of conversations and what a lot of people say, and pulling it together but the key group would be the senior leadership team, the curriculum leaders.*

Both P1 and P2 indicated that for some staff there was a mentality of "just tell me what to do" and reluctance to get more involved in the strategic planning process.

P1

> *For too long I think staff have gotten to that 'just tell us what to do and we'll do it' mentality.*

P2

> *A lot of the staff don't' want to be involved in it. I am just here to do my job.*

Question eight asked each principal to identify what they thought were the key components of long-term planning. Table 4.2 displays the responses.

Table 4.2

Key components of long-term planning (Principal's perspective)

Principal	Key components
P1	• *People, the right people doing the right job. Student focused, we are doing it with the students.* • *Having a joint vision.*
P2	*Inclusiveness, everyone has got to have a say.* • *The ability to change direction if something significant happens.* • *Communication, communicating with the staff and the community.*
P3	• *Scanning the horizon all the time and being right ahead in saying where does look like it is moving. Looking at research from leading researchers.* • *Considering operational commitments.*

Question nine asked how their annual plan was different from their strategic plan. P1 said that aspects of the strategic plan would be a particular focus for a particular year, in accordance to the priorities a set down by the strategic plan.

> *What we tend to do is we take an aspect of our strategic plan. Our strategic plan is a five year plan, we take one aspect of it and we focus on that as part of our annual plan so we have, so we can actually relay it back so over the period of time that way we will address all the components of the strategic plan.*

P2 indicated that the strategic plan has the generalised direction; the strategic plan is very general. The annual plan is very specific but still using the objectives of the strategic plan.

The strategic plan has the generalised direction of the four areas we want to go in. The strategic plan is very general. The annual plan is very specific so that's it really.

P3 stated that annual planning involved putting in the detail, describing what the next steps will be plus some operational "stuff" that might be a new legal compliance.

So, it's more detailed for the yearly plan and included in that annual plan is some operational stuff so they might be new legal compliance comes in like Mission On and so just tacking that in there. That's not our biggie because in one sense it's a compliance issue but it's in there to make sure that we satisfy ERO and etc. Which you have to.

Question ten focused on how strategic choices were made. P3 indicated that there was a continual focus back to their charter and used one of techniques suggested by Peter Senge in his book *Presence*. He describes one way of working is to observe, observe and observe all over the place and then to sit quietly and the thinking about those observations, allowing the right way forward to emerge.

And I think personally I do a lot of that, just listen, talk, observe, for a while and then you just sit quiet and then you say oh, I know what we need to do, rather than, rather than jump in or rather than worry because the school next door is doing some great stuff, something else and just not listening to that noise and not worrying about the fact that every other school says this is the way to go.

P3 also indicated that they tried not to be worried about what other schools are doing because if they tried to add it in ad-hoc it wouldn't be done in the right way.

P2 said combining and analysing all the data that comes in to identify trends and problem areas is the main way that their strategic choices are made. Human resources were often one of the components that held back an initiative.

> *We have a look at the data that comes in, all that data is put together and we try and look for things like if there is a problem with our discipline…. then that might be our strategic goal that we're looking at.*

P1 said that the review process of the annual and strategic plans, and the overall performance as a school provided information for making strategic choices. When making strategic choices the goals have to be obtainable and this is how you get greater buy-in from staff. The choices that are made must be of benefit and you be able to enjoy the success before you can move on to the next initiative or goal.

Question eleven started to explore the implementation phase of the strategic planning process. Principals' were asked how they put their strategy into action. Initially they were asked how they implemented strategic direction. P3 said that as the strategic plan and annual plan are written, various people are given responsibilities for various sections and each team picks what belongs to them. Departments are responsible for incorporating the school goals into their departmental plans, aligning the department's goals and targets to the school's plan so that staff are not confused.

> *So they are implemented I guess through various roles of responsibility, which people write into their own annual*

plans. For example each department they know what goals, what targets are set, what we have got in the strategic and annual and how does it relate to them and they are expected to come up with their own plan that reflects what the whole school is trying to do instead of going off on another tangent again which is confusing to staff.

P2 said that implementation occurred through staff meetings, Board meetings and community consultation. Every year three major goals are decided upon and staff incorporate them into departmental goals and into their personal goals as part of the appraisal system.

Every year we set goals, three major goals.. Goals and what happens, is that staff, the staff have input into those and levels of achievement in those three things, they have input into them, that goes in their appraisal booklet.

So that is where strategically those three things are the important things and one of our strategic goals is raising the levels of achievement. So each department has to set a goal based on that and then it feeds backward through the appraisal system. Even, all the office staff set goals around, they don't think that they affect those raising levels of student achievement but they do. If they are efficient in here it makes our job easier.

P1 uses the senior management team and Heads of Department committee to identify the main areas coming from the strategic plan. Once identified, it is up to the faculties to implement these throughout the school.

Again it comes down to, as senior management we discuss them with the Heads of Faculty which is our middle management group. We tend to identify what are the main areas coming out of our strat plan or whatever it is that we think we need to.

Question twelve asked for further comment about putting strategy into action. The principals were asked to identify who the key people were in implementing these strategic plans. P1 said that without doubt the staff were the most important, as their actions affected classroom practice the most.

Without a doubt I'd say the staff…the classroom teacher is sort of at the chalk face so to speak, is the most influential because they are the ones who have got the kids and can make the difference to the kids and so I think, to me, it's the teachers in the classroom that become really important.

P1 also mentioned the students as being important, as they should be aware of what was happening and trying to get their buy-in as well.

I put the kids there as well, because they should be aware of what is happening because then they have got buy-in.

One key aspect P1 thought was important was that the key people who were responsible for implementing policy needed to feel well-resourced and well-supported.

And it also comes back to key people in the staff and the key thing is to make sure they feel well-resourced and well-supported and that they have got a clear direction to work through.

P2 thought that the Principal was responsible for setting the initial direction of the strategic policy and to offer the strategic leadership. The Heads of Department's were key people in the implementation.

> *HoDs are a very very important group of people to implement. I call them the engine room and they see it as that. The strategic direction through curriculum through discipline through that but also our Dean structure*.

P3 said that the curriculum leaders are key to policy implementation. As P3 puts it:

> *I guess the key people I believe are the curriculum leaders because if you are talking about learning and teaching, nothing changes, there is no real change in the school until it meets kids in the classroom.*

Question thirteen asked about change management. The Principals were asked how the dealt with organisational change as a direct result of their strategic plan. P3 said that change is something you have to be very aware of. People get emotional when it comes to change. Some people like having a broad picture with scope for adaptation and others need everything planned to the very last detail. In addition P3 said that change needs to have the right resources in place, a set review schedule and a very clear idea about the purpose.

> *You have always got to be aware of, people get quite emotional when it comes to change and how it affects people and sometimes you just take the brunt of backlash and stand strong because you know that's, you believe that that is the right thing to do and understanding that change is difficult for people.*

P1 indicated that change need to managed well. Like P3, P1 said that there must be a very clear purpose for the proposed change. P1 commented on some recent history in regards to educational change;

> *I think that New Zealand education went through a period of where there was a lot of change and some people questioned or could not see what it was for so I think that for us we see change a necessity, something we have to do.*

P1 also commented that change needs to be rewarded. P1 often felt that New Zealand schools were not good at rewarding staff for making changes to their teaching practice or their professional duties.

> *I think the other thing about change that sometimes as schools that perhaps we don't do as much that it's also got to be rewarded. Staff that make considerable shift in their practice need to be recognised and rewarded for it.*

P2 focused on a review-implementation-review cycle to guide change. This helps "feed-forward" potential problems and offers a range of opportunities for staff input. P2 also felt that change must be supported by the staff and then supported by the students.

> *… but every time we do something we review it then we feed forward and feedback to the staff.*

> *I would never implement a change in here strategically if the staff weren't behind it, if I'm just pushing, shovelling hill.*

Question fourteen provided an opportunity for the principals to talk generally about strategic planning.

P1

I just think that you know change and what is happening in schools has been possibly a little bit haphazard at times. It turns, we've been reactionary, and we have been reacting to the new qualification system. We have been reacting to the impact of technology and the fact the kids are coming to school now with more knowledge than quite a few of the teachers and so I think that we have got this wonderful opportunity to actually plan.

I think we are into probably what is the most exciting time that education in New Zealand has had for a long, long time. You know I just think that it's up to us; we can make a difference to get in and do it.

P2

When first got this job I thought strategic planning was just a waste of time. I thought 'god'. But I think it's really important and it's a learning curve really and once you get into it, it's quite easy to see that OK, this is where we are, this is where we want to go, how are we going to get there and it's the way I talk to the staff and how are we going to get there and when we do our appraisals we do that. 'What are we doing?, what is your goal, what worked what didn't how can you improve' so, it's all of those, just those simple questions.

I know that one of the things that I do realise that my strategic plan, my annual plan is too detailed and I need to

just cut it back because I spend hours on it….. It's quite detailed and it's about 15-20 pages and it's too much. It's too much for me because every time I go and review that again. So, I have got, in terms of a time we spent on it I need to just highlight the specific goals that we are going to be doing this year and fit it back somehow to the strategic plan. So, it's a bit of a learning curve for me. But of course now it has been compulsory that I have to do this.

P3

I think in terms of the whole managing change it's not to underestimate the power of strategic conversations and just knowing, just keeping tapping people on the shoulder and just planting seeds and just stepping back and you know just keeping looking for opportunities right across the school to just connect up and plant little ideas and be patient with them.

In summary there is a great deal of responsibility placed on principals to not only lead, but coordinate the entire strategic planning process. Principals are aware that the expectation from the community is to be consulted in the process however successful that may be in actual numbers of stakeholder involvement. This is evident by the wide range of stakeholder involvement which takes place in order to formulate the strategic direction. The most common form of consultation is via meetings. All of this information forms the basis for the strategic plan for these schools.

While there are variations of the strategic process, there is a consistent theme of review, consultation (with stake holders), draft plan, Board input and implementation, with the annual operational plan being vehicle to

provide the detail on a year-to-year basis to implement the strategic plans. In accordance to the expectations from the Ministry of Education, Principals prioritise strategic goals so that they are student focused. The focus is on resources, physical, financial and human to try and move the school towards long term vision.

Interview findings (Board of Trustees chairperson perspective)

The final group to be interviewed were the Board of Trustee's chairpersons (BoTC). Board chairs will be referred to as BoTC 1, BoTC 2 and BoTC 3.

The first question asked was to gain their initial understanding of their strategic plan. BoTC 1 indicated that they had a 5 year strategic plan. Input into the strategic plan came from various stakeholders in the community with a wide range of views. The school also added recommendations from Education Review Office (ERO) reports and information from teaching staff.

> *We initially went out to various stakeholders in the community, um, and asked for input, basically I think to get inspiration from them as to what could they dream of for School 1. Like, how big our goals should be. Um, unfortunately they weren't well supported these meetings.*
>
> *Looking what ERO had said we should improve on, what the staff had identified as perhaps shortcomings in terms of achievement so that we could build that in to our strategic policy.*

BoTC 2 said that the aim was ensure that the students were achieving well and to their potential and to provide the environment for them to do so.

I guess at the end of the day it's there that students are achieving well and their potential and I guess providing the environment to allow them to do that.

BoTC 3 gave a similar response.

…it's everything to do with what we think is necessary for all our children to either go on to further education or worthwhile employment.

Question two asked Board Chairs to identify the people involved in the strategic planning process. All three BoTC's said that without doubt the Principal was the key person to lead the strategic direction of the school. BoTC 1 also indicated that the Heads of Faculty played an important part as it was clear that they were the "hands-on" people.

BoTC 1

I think the key people would perhaps be P1 and the heads of faculty because they are the hands on and they also the team leaders. The board tend to have backup supporting role more than an inspirational role.

BoTC 2

P2 usually puts a plan down on paper and then we all I guess discuss it and then the you know sort of basically agree with it as far as it is pretty right.

BoTC 3

Basically it's the principal comes to the Board with what P3 thinks we should be looking at and we adopt or arrange from there.

Question three then asked the Board chairs to describe what they thought the key components of long-term planning were. Table 4.3 displays their responses:

Table 4.3

Key components of long-term planning (Board of Trustees chairperson perspective)

BoT Chairperson	Components
BoTC 1	• *Identifying where you want to go* • *Do the big picture because if you don't know where you want to go then you can't start going there.* • *Look at your resources*
BoTC 2	• *Having a reasonable idea of where you want to the school to go, rather than obviously just sort of months or year-to-year.* • *As a Board, I hope, I guess all pointing in the same direction at board level and just making sure the teachers are working in a good, happy environment where they get on and we provide them with the majority of the resources.*
BoTC 3	• *Everyone has got to buy into it. The principal has got to buy into it to get the staff to buy into it.*

Question four asked in what ways they were able to plan 3-5 years in advance. BoTC 2 suggested that in trying to plan for the next 3-5 years it was essential to get the right senior leaders appointed. In addition BoTC 2

felt that the Heads of Departments were also critical appointments “to get right”.

> *I guess it would be, sort of at the real high level and I think the most important job that I believe that we do is finding the right senior managers and heads of department. We have a bit of input into that. Obviously the principal and the deputy and the assistant principal are critical. You have got to get that right and then the heads of department I think that is critical too*.

BoTC 3 felt that the property plan was the easiest to plan long-term for. This is driven by staff needs and continual improvements.

> *Obviously you do with your property, which is driven by staff, what they think is going to be required and the budget is always a yearly thing isn’t it so no you can’t plan that one too much further in advance than that.*

BoTC 1 said that looking at future demographics and roll trends was the main point of focus. This was used to identify curriculum needs, human resources (including new recruits and long-term staffing aspirations) and physical resources.

> *I guess looking at demographics, so that we can look at what the roll trend will be so whether physically we can cater for that, whether we want to implement new curriculum areas so we have to look at staff resources, looking at the long term staffing aspirations and identifying key players, if we you know, someone might be moving on and who could we blood on underneath them either internally or externally.*

BoTC 1 also said that careful development of the annual plan was essential to ensure that the keep on track with the 3-5 year plan.

> *And once again just make sure that we address, plan each year to make sure we are heading toward those same goals that you are not eventually just getting a few degrees off track and end up too far from the 3-5 years out*.

Question five asked to identify what they thought were the factors that influenced their strategic choices. BoTC 3 clearly stated that the information and the data provided by the Principal was the major factor. The plan was developed:

> *Off the data we are given by the principal. That is where we target.*

BoTC 2 said that guidance and recommendations came from the principal and the senior management team.

> *As a Board we are really, really guided by the Principal and by the senior management and when you have sort of been on the board long enough you get to know them pretty well. You are really guided by them because that's their job, education compared to what we sort of do…, just guided by the senior management.*

BoTC 1 said that their strategic choices tried to identify what would give the most benefit to the most number of students, whether it is a curriculum or staff resource.

How to benefit the most students from each choice and whether any students would perhaps needing extra input so whether that's in a curriculum area or extra staffing resource or extra facilities.

Question six and seven moves into questioning how the strategy is translated into action area, looking specifically at the implementation phase of strategy and the key people involved in the implementation. BoTC 2 said that based around their annual plan goals are set and results are measured against those goals. The key person in implementing the strategic plan is the principal in conjunction with the senior management team and the Heads of Department.

Well each year we have had goals, sort of set each year and you know it's more professional development or it's to increase student achievement or you know increase that. You know you should measure those things in some way just by whether your school is going in the right direction or professional development whether you are actually doing it and doing worthwhile professional development.

Obviously the principal is a key person and the once again I think the senior managers in the school, senior management team and heads of department.

BoTC 1 indicated that as a Board they felt that they do not need to have a lot of input into the implementation of the strategic plan. There is a lot of confidence in the principal and the role that the Heads of Faculties have in implementing the strategic plan into the classroom.

As a board, I don't think we have sat down and said this is how it would work. P1 talks us through what the heads of faculty have brainstormed and then the heads of faculty bring it down to the classroom level. We have a head of faculty report every board meeting and so they give us the practical what they're doing, plus where they are going.

BoTC 3 felt that they approve the goals in the strategic plan and then the management team implements them and then departments will report to them at meetings, depending on the schedule. The key people involved are obviously the principal and the management team.

The board sets them and then the management, which is the principal obviously, tries to implement them and report.

Question eight investigates how the school dealt with organisational change. BoTC 1 said the constant review cycle provided a lot of feedback and this information was used to make sure that they did get "*out-of-sync*" with the strategic plan.

I guess the annual review of our strategic plan. We make sure that we aren't out of sync again.

BoTC 2 said that, while no one likes change, getting those staff members on board that were able to accept change was crucial. They have had some pretty major changes over the last 4-5 years and this has provided valuable information about how to go about change in the future.

No-one likes change and it is hard to move people but I once again I think if you have got the staff, if you've got them sort of .. and if you've got them willing to take the school in the right direction I think things flow on.

BoTC 3 said the he felt that was a senior management issue and that the Board tries to concentrate on the governance aspects of the school.

Question nine asked if they had anything else they would like to discuss about strategic planning in their school.

BoTC 1

- *Only in that it is easy when you have an inspirational Principal for the board to be in agreement with. I mean we challenge and we ask for reporting so that we know that we are on track but because P1 is inspired. It is easy for us to be inspired as well and so we have to make sure that after every meeting or periodically we say what could we keep doing better and as a Board I think we are OK there because P1 is enthusiastic. It makes us look beyond just 'is this the report that we wanted today' it's where can this report take us at the next meeting, what have we achieved each time.*

BoTC 2

- *I have seen sometimes get done to death and they have … I dunno and every year when P2 sets out the goals and that for the school, oh you know it's pages and pages and pages and I meant it gets done once and no-one ever reads. I think sometimes it gets taken too far and too deep and I think you are best off, as I think we do from year to year we just have 2-3 yearly goals and we try and reach those. And overlaying the … we have the strategic direction that we want the school to go and I just think sometimes we …*

BoTC 3

- *If I had a criticism. Things get dumped on you at very short notice. The Government doesn't give you any forewarning. Some of the planning at the moment is just in relation to tuck shops, they decide on policy and we are meant to put it into place and really I'm not being horrible it's just not workable.*

This question raises some interesting responses. Firstly, the principal is seen as the driving force in leading the school. This is expected as it is a core responsibility of a leadership role. Secondly, there is a lot of documentation that is associated with strategic planning. In some cases it can be excessive and make the process to complicated. Thirdly, the relationship with the Ministry of Education is a tricky one. As one of the key stakeholders they can mandate policies without a great deal of consultation. If this occurs then they risk not having "buy-in" or support from schools. Another interesting aspect that came from the final question is that all of the responses from the Board chairs focused on a different aspect of strategic planning. This would indicate that they are responding to different areas of difficulty or weaknesses in the strategic planning process. This is expected given that schools can approach strategic planning in any way the want to.

In summary the perspectives from the Board of Trustee chairpersons reflected many of the findings from the other three groups. The Principal provides the strategic leadership in terms of driving and coordinating the strategic planning process and the middle managers are the key people in implementing the strategic plans. The Board of Trustee chairpersons appear to have more of an interest in structure and establishing the direction of the school. This is evident from the responses to question four, in which they describe setting a clear direction and managing resources as some of the key components of strategic planning. Both of these factors are part of the information required in determining the strategic position for an organisation (Johnson & Scholes, 2002).

Overview of findings

All three schools fulfil the mandated requirements of planning and reporting as required by the amended Education Act 2001. There are a number of similarities between each of the three schools and a number of differences.

It is clear that the planning process is similar between the three schools. Each school has an annual review that measures achievement against the goals that have been set for that year in the annual plan. A strategic plan is in place in each school and the school-based stakeholders are aware of it and have various levels of input into its formulation.

Within each of the groups there is a clear understanding of the link between the school's charter, strategic plan and annual plan. All of the stakeholders from school three tend to have a more positive attitude towards their strategic plan.

In table 4.4 I have summarised the findings.

Table 4.4 Overview of findings (multiple perspectives)

	Strategic awareness	**Strategic process**	**Strategic leadership**	**Implications on practice**	
				Benefits	**Limitations**
Teachers	Plan, future, goals/visioning,	Staff consultation, meetings. Strategic plan proposed discussed	Principal, staff	Provides goals, direction and overview of school.	Must have sound philosophical grounding with associated ownership to ensure not just a compliance action or staff will not take seriously.
HoD	Plan, future directed, allocation of resources	Ownership "buy-in" essential. HoD assist in setting direction.	Principal and middle managers	Focus on limited number of goals. Reflect and evaluate ensuring all going in the same direction.	If data is collected and not used and/or goals not acted on then becomes a compliance task.
Principals	Outcomes based plan that sets a direction for the future.	Review, consult, draft, BoT input. Middle managers key to implementation	Principal in consultation with middle managers, community, Board. What skills, knowledge and attitudes do students need to have when the leave school.	Daily conversations about school direction and focus. Being able to plan new technologies. Provides opportunities when nationwide change occurs.	Staff complacency, not wanting to get involved. Tend to be reactionary. Steep learning curve doing it for the first time.
Board chair	Strategic plans that best enable the students to succeed.	Principal consults with staff and community, presents draft, some BoT input, senior management and middle managers implement.	Reliant on Principal for direction and coordination	Identifying where the school wants to go. Easiest to complete for property plan.	Staff ownership and "buy-in". School goals versus Ministry of Education initiatives. Short notice on initiatives impacts on strategic plan.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

This study has provided a snapshot of how three schools approached their strategic planning process. The amended Education Act (2001) mandated that schools from 2003 onwards complete formal planning and reporting procedures to enhance school improvement. From 2001 to 2003 the Ministry of Education provided resource material to give guidance in how schools go about this task.

The data confirms the dedication of each of the principals in facilitating the strategic planning process. A significant amount of time and effort goes into the development of the strategic plan. There is a large amount of time involved in consultation and meetings to ensure that those stakeholders that want to be involved, have the opportunity to express their opinions.

However, it appears that each of the three schools uses their strategic plan in different ways and for slightly different purposes. This is consistent with the OECD report on improving school leadership in New Zealand (OECD 2007) in which it states that there is a wide range of variance between schools in the effectiveness of their planning and reporting practices. All of the schools have had their charter approved; therefore it must be assumed that they have met the Ministry of Education requirements.

This case study has been based around the Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2006, p 16) model. They believe three main elements identify the framework for successful strategic management. While their focus has been primarily on the practices in the corporate sector this model has been used in a previous investigation into strategic planning in schools (Fidler, 1998). The three main elements (the strategic position, strategic choices and strategy into action) that Johnson et al. (2006) have identified are inter-linked and inform each other constantly on a day-to-day basis and are essential to long-term direction of the

organisation. Each main element has three sub-elements that feed into the main element.

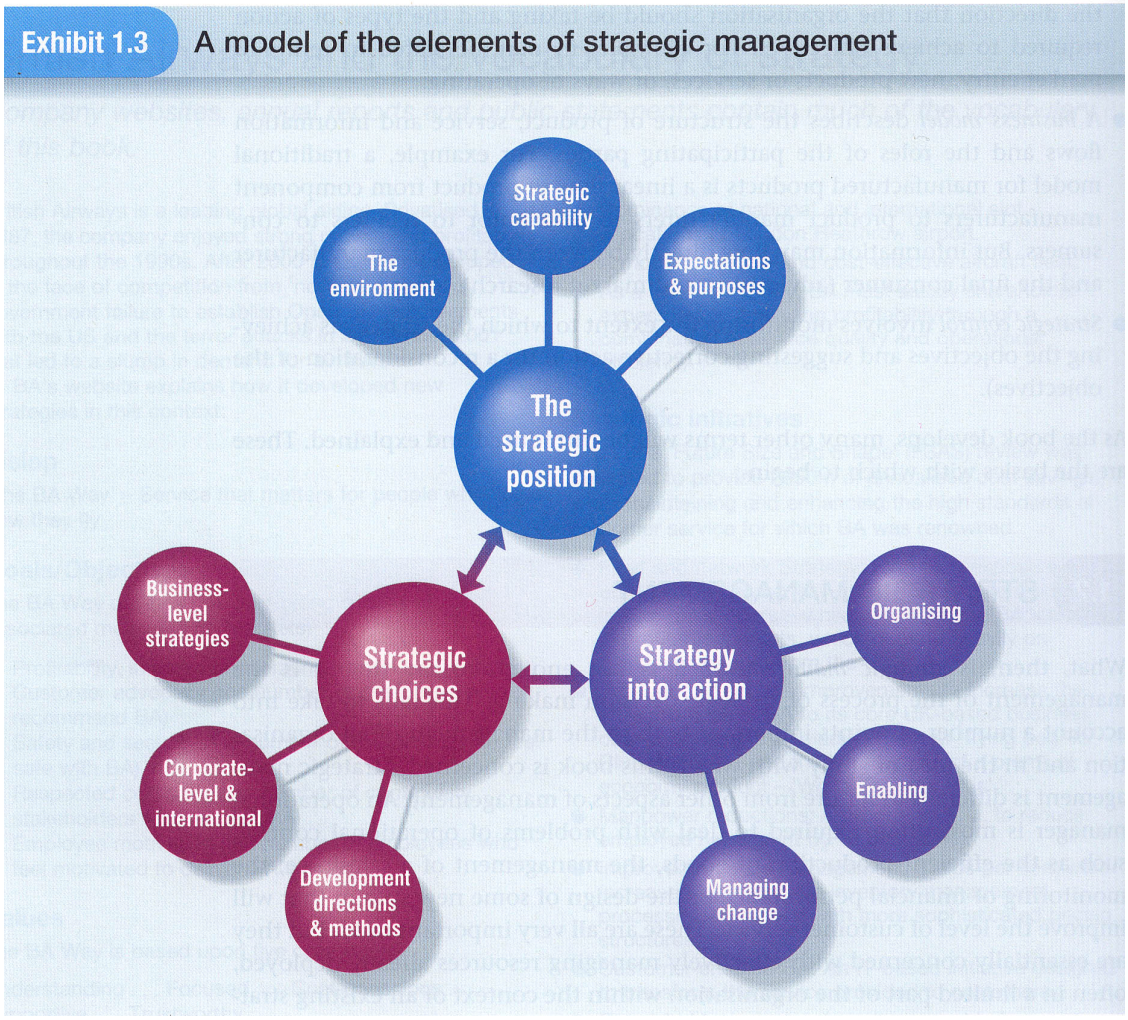

Figure 5.1 A model of the elements of strategic management. Source: Johnson et al., 2006, p 16.

In this chapter I have organised the discussion around the Johnson et al. (2006) model (figure 5.1) to provide consistency with the data collection. I have also integrated two of the research questions and the findings from the data analysis. These questions are:

- How do secondary schools practice strategic management and strategic leadership?

- What is the importance of leadership in the management of strategic management in schools?

There is currently a gap within the literature that examines these questions, especially within a New Zealand context.

Three schools were selected via purposive sampling using qualitative data collection techniques. Four groups were then identified as the focus for obtaining data. These are teachers, Heads of Departments, Principals and Board of Trustee's chairpersons. The teachers and Heads of Departments completed questionnaires and the Principals and Board chairs were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. The questionnaires appear as appendix A and the interview schedules appear as appendix B. The questionnaires and the interview schedules were based around the work of Johnson et al. (2006) as the model provided a clear way to identify the complex, often ambiguous nature of strategic management within organisations.

Determining the strategic position

The strategic position element contains three sub-elements, strategic capability, the environment and expectations and purposes. Determining the *strategic position* of a school provides the opportunity to identify what the school has achieved and at what stage of preparedness they are for change in the future. It is a fundamental part of answering the question, "where are we now?" and an essential part of the review process.

In trying to determine a schools strategic position, the sub-element of *strategic capability* determines whether a school has the physical, financial, human and intellectual resources to undertake a specific strategic objective. This sub-element covers a number of leadership and management areas that are needed within the strategic management process. The first area discussed is human and intellectual capability. If a school has personnel that are capable and aware of how to think strategically then there is a higher probability that a

more purposeful and effective approach would be undertaken in the strategic planning process (Davies et al., 2006).

Based on the findings two distinct groups arose. The first group all used terms such as “vision”, “future” “step-by-step targets”, “forward planning”, “course of action” and “self-review”. This group included the teachers, HoD’s and principals. An example of one teacher’s response:

> *Planning for an organisations activities, taking into account vision, goals, values, expectations, stakeholders and resources. It can exist at a number of levels, for example school wide versus departmental.*

I was encouraged by this result as it indicated that this group were comfortable using these terms and had a clear idea that strategy is future orientated. The use of these terms is also essential if strategic planning is to be effective (Davies et al., 2006). In addition the teachers and HoD’s were clearly able to distinguish between the strategic plan and the operational/annual plan. This would indicate that the two plans are distinct and the strategic plan is not perceived as a “super-operational (annual) plan” as is the case in some schools (Davies et al., 2006).

The second group, the BoT chairpersons had a far broader understanding of the term strategy and looked at the “bigger picture” which included involving the community, information from ERO and an expression of concern for the students to ensure that they are achieving to their potential. This result is not surprising as it may reflect how much direct involvement they have in the strategic process. As far as the BoT chairs are concerned the principals and HoD’s are seen as the main contributors to strategic planning and implementation. It is therefore natural to assume that they were able to use a wider range of terminology.

Another factor involved in this sub-element is that of resourcing. The principals were the main group that discussed resourcing. Below are three comments that reflect their approach to providing resources.

P1

> *I'm a firm believer in that you set the direction and then you get the resources. You cannot let the resources dictate.*

P2

> *When we do our direction…. This is just where we want to go and we rallied the resources around where we wanted to go.*

P3

> *I have got this saying in my head that we haven't got a lot of money so we have to get smart. But it shouldn't interfere if we think this is what we have to do with our kids. That sort of comes first and we find a way.*

This highlights the comments made by Bell (2002) that schools do not have the resources to adequately fulfil the requirements of strategic planning compared to the corporate sector. The implication of this is that when schools start to develop their strategic plans there is a continual compromise between resources and strategic goals (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). This poses a significant problem for schools. If schools are being asked something they do not feel confident in or unable to do then there should be an evaluation of the worthiness of this activity.

In terms of developing individual's ability to enhance their own strategic thinking, only the principals indicated that they sought or had access to professional development that focused on future planning. Influences included information from educational research and publications, professional networks and advisors. While this is a positive avenue for the principals it may be worthwhile while identifying additional people in the school to undertake some form of strategic professional development. This would widen the circle of strategically-minded thinkers within the school.

The *environment* sub-element proved the most difficult for respondents to describe accurately. Scanning the environment is a corporate term used to try and identify the future environment in which organisations will be operating. The assumption that is associated with environmental scanning is that it is presumed to be a predictable linear exercise that allows for rational outcomes (Wheelen & Hunger, 2006, Bell 2002). The task of environmental scanning in schools again falls to the principal. It is assumed they have the time available and are the main source of information from the Ministry of Education. As part of the Ministry of Education's planning model for charter development (Ministry of Education, 2002a) there is a requirement for a set of objectives and goals over the next 3-5 years. These include information about the teaching programme, staffing, asset management and financial analysis. Principals were asked whether they felt they were able to predict what the future environment would be like. All three principals indicated that while there are some aspects of certainty, it is becoming increasingly harder.

P1 felt certain about the implementation of the New Zealand curriculum, with the timeline for implementation being published with the first draft providing a guide for development and implemenetation. The other aspect of certainty is the investment in information and communications technology (ICT's). P1 *"The other things that enable us to plan for 3-5 years in advance is a tremendous investment in technology"*. However P1 went on to say that one of the factors that they can't predict is around the social aspects of students. The impact of increasing numbers of transient families and a decrease in family values has meant they find it hard to plan long term for these students, however, it was probably the most important aspect. P3 said that *"the only predictability about it is that it is unpredictable in one sense"*. P2 echoed this view saying that they were able to *"plan quite detailed for the first year… the second year a bit less detail and the final year not in a lot of details because so much changes over time".* P2 also indicated that they did have a 1-10 year strategic direction however this was *"A broad one, a very broad one"*.

At an HoD level one of the perceived limitations of strategic planning is that it shouldn't look too far to the future.

> *"Things change very quickly. A strategic plan should not look too far into the future".*

Another HoD commented that:

> *"..due to the changing environment we are in, it is difficult to know what will be required in the future".*

Again this idea is supported by another HoD:

> *"Constant changes, ie demographics, I.T., teaching process."*

As previously mentioned, the Ministry of Education requires a section in the charter that schools plan for 3-5 years in advance yet none of the Principals felt comfortable in being able to that other than some aspects of curriculum and some very broad strategic directions. Again, this supports the ideas present by Bell (2002) which say that schools are unable to predict external environmental factors and should not be expected to. His reasoning for this is that schools do not have adequate resources to respond to these changes if they even did know what they were. He also states that in order to predict factors that will influence the future environment then there is a presumption that schools have some form of control about this and that is clearly not the case. An example of this surrounds a school canteen issue that arose in 2007. A BoT chair commented that schools expected certain levels of profit from their canteens. Recent policy changes from the Ministry of Education regarding healthy eating options has seen a sharp decrease in operating profits and therefore a shortfall in the financial resources that the school has to budget for the next 3 years.

BoTC 3

> *"Things get dumped on you at very short notice. The Government doesn't give you any forewarning. Some of the planning at the moment is just in relation to tuck shops, they decide on policy and we are meant to put in*

place and really I'm not being horrible, it's just not workable".

This is an example of the conflict that not-for-profit organisations have in terms of setting and achieving strategic planning and is an area of weakness in developing strategic planning. The social policies that are dictated by a major stakeholder affect the implementation of the strategic goals (Bell, 2002; Wheelan & Hunger, 2006). While schools have no (or very little) control in terms of the degree of influence from the Ministry of Education, these imposed strategic changes may actually benefit the school. In some cases however these suggested change that would be unpopular but necessary. Increasingly governments are imposing strategic direction on the public and private (through compliance legislation) sectors (Johnson et al., 2006).

Another example of the difficulties principals have comes from P2. P2 felt that their schools strategic and annual plan was too detailed, highlighting the large amount of time devoted to the strategic planning process.

"..is too detailed and I need to just cut it back because I spend hours on it….it's quite detailed and it's about 15-20 pages and its too much. It's too much for me because time goes on and I go and review it again".

This again raises the questions about the level of detail that is needed for the annual plan and for the plans beyond 1 year. Davies et al. (2006) are highly critical of the idea of a super-operational plan as it tends to indicate that future orientated planning does not take place. However this is contrasted by Bell (2002) in which he states that schools are only able in reality to plan up to 3 years at a maximum (this is discussed further in a following section). What is evident from this research is that schools have found a compromise between these to viewpoints. They are very much future orientated (as much as possible) but are realistic in terms of what they confidently plan and expect from the school community.

The BoT chairs all responded in similar ways when asked how they felt they could predict the environment for the next 3-5 years. Their focus was primarily on resourcing. BoTC 2 was unable to directly pinpoint what they were able to predict but felt that appointing key personnel was the key in trying to plan for the next 3-5 years especially senior leaders and Heads of Departments. BoTC 1 and 3 indicated that property was one area they could predict and this was due to the 7 or 10 year property plan.

Another aspect in determining the strategic capability is some form of self-review. Self-review is an important aspect of establishing strategic position and informing strategic planning (Hipkins et al., 2007). All schools reported that they completed some form of self review. Formally, this leads to the analysis of variance that is also part of the planning and reporting requirements. The analysis of variance measures the variance between the quoted goal and the result of the goal. It is important therefore that the data that is collected is valid and that there is some use for it. As one HoD commented, gathering data that is not followed up on creates an inefficient process and creates a level of discontent amongst the teaching staff.

The third-sub element that influences a schools strategic position is that of the *expectation and purposes*. The influence of the stakeholders and the need for accountability appears to be a major area in schools strategic plans. Stakeholders are “those individuals or groups who depend on an organisation to fulfil their own goals and on whom, in turn, the organisation depends” (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 179). Schools have a dichotomous and tricky relationship with its two main stakeholders, the Ministry of Education and the community which is represented by the Board of Trustees. The Ministry of Education determines the resourcing level, the curriculum to be used and the regulations to which schools must adhere to. The other key stakeholder is that of the school’s community and the community’s representative, the Board of Trustees, which are entrusted to provide the governance over the school.

Essentially the Board of Trustees determines the way in which the school is run (Varnham, 2001). This acknowledgement of the stakeholders is important as it clarifies who the school is accountable to and in what ways.

In determining the communities expectations and the school's own purpose viewed through the community, all three schools go to exhaustive lengths to provide opportunities for community consultation. This consultation also includes obtaining feedback and information from the teaching staff. Parental feedback is also included in this process. This level of community consultation is different from the findings of Hipkins et al. (2007) in which they report there is a general lack of parental involvement in this process. Increasingly the student voice was also taken into consideration in developing strategic direction. Information from consultation includes the data for reporting against the goals set and specific data on student achievement. The majority of the consolation took place via traditional after-school meetings for teaching staff and evening meetings for community groups. The exception to this was one school which dedicated a teacher-only-day when it went through its 5 yearly cycle and was established the vision and major strategic direction. This process of consultation is a strength in the strategic planning process. Each school is trying to genuinely include the stakeholders in the formulation and direction of the strategic plan to provide distributed ownership so that the strategic plan is meaningful (Bell, 2002).

However, while the intent is to be applauded the results are mixed. Some teachers responded saying that "*some staff don't really care*" and that it is *"difficult to involve all appropriate stakeholders".* There is also measured success in terms of the community consultation. An example came from P1:

> *"The ones who want to come along and say you are doing a great job, they are really grateful for what you do and then the ones that want to come along and grizzle about the fact your car parks are too narrow or something like that".*

A staff perspective on the expectations and purposes of strategic planning provides some interesting insights. There was considerable support for some aspects of strategic planning. At a teacher level there were comments about providing a clear direction, appropriate and adequate allocation of funds, allows more global overview with maximum input from interested parties, setting the goal post high, creating manageable targets for the school community. This highlights the positive and genuinely productive aspects of strategic planning.

Strategic choices

Making strategic choices is influenced by many factors. In this element Johnson et al. (2006) use three sub-elements to describe this process. These business-level strategies made up of business units (department in school settings), corporate-level strategies (senior leadership) and the development, directions and methods are necessary to make those decisions. As discussed in the strategic capability section schools have limited resources. The process of deciding on what strategic goals are most important and to what extent these goals are supported is an important decision.

Business level strategies represent what happens within curriculum, pastoral care or administration departments. Each department is unique and as such has unique needs to meet in addition to the schools strategic goals. Variations in terms of staff numbers and the subject area of the department mean that resourcing requirements can be quite different. The financial resources to fund photocopying for example will differ between subjects. Some smaller departments are required to complete the same administrative tasks as a larger department without the option of delegating responsibilities to staff within the department. Physical resources also differ; the needs of Physical Education and Technology subjects vary greatly compared to Mathematics and English. Each department therefore is unique in determining what strategic resources it needs and how to make those strategic choices.

Corporate level strategies involve looking at the wider aspects of the school. This also includes how improvements can be made at the business level (departments). There is no question that the principal is responsible to lead and coordinate the entire strategic management process. However, there is a great deal of support from the senior management teams (Associate, Deputy and/or Assistant Principals), that assist in many of the management and leadership tasks that are associated with strategic planning.

All of the principals said that they have tried to create a culture that embraces new ideas and the potential for change. This is seen as part of their leadership functions and the relationship with the staff is very important. An example of this is from P3. P3 has worked very hard to develop a certain culture over a number of years. This includes appointing key staff members before embarking on significant organisational change. P3's approach is based around having strategic conversations with staff over a long period of time and trying to align people with areas of interest that could form future strategic goals.

> *"….not to underestimate the power of strategic conversations and just knowing, just keep tapping people on the shoulder and just planting seeds and just stepping back and you know looking for opportunities across the school to just connect up and plant little ideas and be patient with them*".

The use of strategic conversations is a key method in linking the motivation of staff and their participation in the process. As a result, overall strategic capability of the school is increased (Davies et al., 2006).

Developing *directions and methods* to this builds on an understanding of the schools strategic position. This takes into account the strategic options that are available and the best method to develop the strategic goals. The review process that is part of determining the strategic position should identify where the school is "at". Feedback from this review will provide information that can

be added when trying either to consolidate the school current strategic direction or to identify new strategic directions (Johnson et al., 2006).

All schools used community surveys as part of the review process. This information was used to help set the future direction. An example of this comes from P3:

> *"What we did was we asked ourselves one real question about five years ago. And our question to ourselves and to our community was "what sort of people do we want our students to be when they go out our gates for the last time?"*

P3 also used the HoD team as a way of setting the strategic direction.

> *"…I am bouncing ideas off them all the time in terms of strategic direction".*

After the direction has been set, the method (or means) is developed which any strategic direction will be pursued (Johnson et al., 2006). Essentially, the "how" when making strategic choices. In the corporate sector, one tool that is often associated with strategic planning is the SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). This analysis is used to identify a preferred strategic choice from a range of ideas. While no school specifically used a SWOT analysis, two schools identified specific review tools that they had used from other organisations that assisted in making strategic choices. P2 provides this example using an education specific tool:

> *"We use a XXXX (tertiary education provider) tool, … brought that in here and used that."*

P1 has this example using corporate based tools:

> *"…we had someone on the Board who had a lot to do with the XXXX and also the XXXX have both re-done their strat*

plans and so it came up with a model which we have actually adopted which has clearly identified strategic objectives".

Although the schools are not aware of it, the methods they used to make a number of strategic choices are methods that have been developed in the literature.

The findings suggest that the respondents from one school in particular have almost followed this strategic intent process. As a result, there appears to be a wider sense of strategic purpose and a shared understanding of the schools goals than respondents from the other schools.

Strategy into action

Strategy into action combines three sub-elements that contribute to the implementation of the strategic goals. Those sub-elements are organising, enabling and managing change. The implementation of strategic goals is a critical phase in this process. Regardless of how fantastic the goal, the preparatory work or resourcing, if it is not actually implemented then no change will occur. Hipkins et al. (2007) support this by view by saying that while there is a general acceptance now in the use of strategic planning, making the changes that influence student achievement in classroom is more problematic.

One aspect of implementation is that of *organising* the structure, processes and relationships that ensure the successful implementation of strategic goals. The use of an annual plan is part of the structure and processes schools use to implement the strategic plan. The annual plan provides the detail that the strategic plan does not. All of the teachers responded that the annual plan facilitated the day-to-day running of the school. Annual plans as part of the charter are required to be submitted to the Ministry of Education. In each case specific strategic goal had objectives and/or targets, timelines and people

responsible for overseeing the implementation. School wide goals were discussed via staff meetings, and to the community via newsletters. As one Head of Department commented:

> *"The annual plan identifies the actions, responsibilities, research and revision provisions of the strategies".*

However, while the annual plan provided the framework of implementation there were additional ways in which the strategic goals are implemented. Targeted professional development, staff meetings using newsletters and other forms of communication were also used.

It is very clear that the HoD's within each school have an important role in the development of the strategic goals and the implementation of those goals. P2 described them as the *"engine room"* that do the work to implement the strategic goals. P3 reinforced this view with *"I guess the key people I believe are the curriculum leaders".* Each of the schools had a committee of HoD's that met on a regular basis. In this forum ideas are discussed and informal reviews of strategic goals take place. The HoD's as a group have the opportunity and expertise to develop and implement the strategic goals. As one HoD commented:

> *"…we are made to feel that we are a part of that process and also aware of recent and current strategies and philosophies of Education".*

Enabling people to implement the strategic goals is another important aspect and one the Principal's especially pay particular attention to. The most common way to achieve this is through professional development (targeted to specific goals) and providing leadership opportunities to be more involved in the strategic process. This was confirmed in this HoD comment.

> *"…PD on teaching and learning strategies, PD to keep abreast of IT and best practice examples".*

Each of the Principals again clearly identified that the HoD's and the classroom teacher were the most important people in implementing the strategic goals as they were the ones who interacted directly with the students. To enable the teachers to do this they must be a part of the decision making process, feel they are well supported in terms of resources and part of the shared vision of the school. Part of this is the use of professional development as a way of implementing the strategic goals. All of the teachers, HoD's and principals identified professional development as one of the ways that strategic goals are implemented. The types of professional development include the specific use and development of ICT in relation to teaching practice, improving general teaching practice, and a focus on literacy and numeracy developments.

The last sub-element that enables the implementation of the strategic goals is *managing change.* Change is a fundamental result of strategic planning because it reflects that there has been movement from one practice to another after a given time frame (Johnson et al., 2006). Organisational change is made up of two factors that affect the type of change that occurs (Johnson et al., 2006). The first is the nature of change. Is change going to be incremental or instantaneous? ("big-bang"). The second relates to the scope of the change, is it realignment or a major transformation? In answering these questions, the method of change becomes apparent, and therefore the method for strategic implementation.

All of the principals commented that change needed to be managed well. By this they have said that people will get emotional about change and understand that change can be a difficult process. A reason for this may be explained by P1. P1 said that this (level of distrust or emotional fragility) may be because historically there was a period where a lot of change happened without adequate resourcing or consultation, just something everyone had to do. In some areas change can occur incrementally. For example the use of ICT teaching strategies has been continually refined. However at times,

transformation change is need. P2 had this example. There was a general level of dissatisfaction with the overall behaviour of students and the Deans found it difficult under a horizontal year level form class structure to deal with some issues. The principal had a great deal of experience from a previous school changing from a horizontal to a vertical form class structure. This means that students from all year levels were in the form class. However making this type of strategic choice takes quite a lot of preparation time if it is to be implemented successfully. P2 describes the process:

> *"This term last year I was talking about going into vertical forms for the following year. we had a staff meeting on it, you have feedback on it, what do you think about this happening … all that sort of this, they feedback, I feed forward, I collate it, feed forward to them and then we go to another staff meeting, I want to go … what do you think. Yep, that is fine so it just goes ahead."*

The importance of strategic leadership

One aspect this model does clearly identify is the importance of strategic leadership. As discussed in chapter 2, strategic leadership is a form of leadership that uses the attributes of influence, motivation and communication but has the ability to establish the long-term direction of the organisation while effectively establishing the day-to-day operational aspects (Rausch, 2004). Strategic leadership is needed in each of the elements and cannot be defined solely into one of the elements or sub-elements.

The link between strategic leadership and strategic management was very clear in the findings. The integral role that the principal must play in the strategic process is evident from nearly all of the groups. The principal is relied on by the Board of Trustees to lead, coordinate and oversee the strategic process. This is consistent with the findings of other studies that have investigated strategic management and leadership (Davies et al., 2006; Morden, 2007). Each of the principals approached this task in slightly different

ways, although the consultative nature in the development of the strategic direction from key stakeholders is an activity that all of the principals used. Significant strategic leadership was also evident from the middle management level. The HoD's were key people in leading strategic direction and then responsible for the implementation of the strategic plan. Their input was facilitated by the principal, and it was clear that principals valued the important part they played in the strategic process.

The principals are seen as they driving force of the strategic plan. They were seen by all groups as the person leading the strategic process. Interestingly, the principals did not see themselves as being the person "owning" the strategic plan. They commented on the input from various stakeholders as shaping the strategic plan in some way rather than being "their" plan. One HoD provided this description of the principals role in strategic planning.

> *"The leadership is fundamental (principal) in implementing strategic planning, as the principal must direct the school and the staff (more importantly) must be willing to follow and also understand the purpose of the plan and the value of it".*

Bell (2002) has described this type of approach as The Leadership Fallacy. This approach has the principal as the "individual who carries the burden of responsibility for planning". The principals themselves do not see it this way and genuinely attempt to get staff to suggest strategic directions and implement strategies. In two of the schools this approach was very clear. However, in one case there was an apparent absence of direct influence by the principal in leading the strategic direction. In this school it appears that the strategic process, plan, charter and operational plan are almost combined, very much like the elements of strategic management model by Johnson and Scholes (2002).

The constant influences that shape and change the day-to-day running of school via the operational plan are always related back to the overarching

strategic plan. The teachers and HoD's feel like they are genuinely shaping the direction of the school. The charter was described by one HoD as a working document. An important part of this process is the preparatory work the principal has done. Making key appointments is a key leadership task that determines the strategic capability. These appointments were made with an eye to the future and "planting seeds" or an idea with specific staff members empowers these individuals when a similar strategic goal or direction is proposed. The principal commented that in this process there is an emphasis on not underestimating the power of strategic conversations. Again, this a key leadership task that clearly involves influencing others and facilitating change. These conversations engage the wider staff group in discussions about core issues in the school. This is seen as a crucial step in engaging people to become more involved in the strategic planning process (Davies et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007). An HoD form this school made this comment:

> *"Buy-in is essential to a strategic plan and a great leader allows staff to feel part of that process".*

Principals by the nature of their role have a greater ability to rise above the day-to-day operational activities and provide the broader longer-term concepts (Davies et al., 2006). This "big-picture" thinking is a key component of strategic thinking as is part of the process that allows the vision to be developed. The ability to do this is essential in the strategic management process (Davies et al., 2006). Two of the principals mentioned an external influence that was seen as an important link or inspiration that helped form their thinking. This trait would be an example strategic thinking and important aspect of developing an effective strategic plan.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and recommendations

My study has enabled me to answer the questions initially posed in chapter 1. The nature of strategic management in these three schools resembles organisations that are able to plan clearly and confidently in their operational plans. However they are less able to plan with any certainty beyond three years and therefore in realistic terms, unable to meet the expectations of the Ministry of Education.

The inclusion by the Ministry of Education to include a 3-5 year component with the amount detail required is not realistic. Schools should and do plan for the future however there needs to be a balance between what is ideal and what is achievable and truly useful for the school.

Conclusions

There are four key conclusions that can be made from this research. Firstly, the principal is the key person in leading and determining the nature of strategic management within these schools. They are responsible for creating the environment in which strategy is developed and as a result, the strategic direction for that school. They are able to do this by acting as filter that selects and disseminates information. Their aim is to generate discussion amongst the teaching staff in the first instance and then the Board and wider school community to identify the strategic direction. An element of leadership "wisdom" is needed in doing this successfully and as Richardson (1998) suggested "being all things to all people". Bell (2002) also states that it is the principal that is responsible for developing a strategic plan that will meet performance targets based on student achievement data.

One principal in particular used (without consciously knowing it) strategic intent as a method to implement strategic management. This proved to be very successful. Strategic intent has the potential to offer some schools an

alternative to the current recommended approach and is a more realistic model of what is happening in practice. This principal was able to think long-term about a desired direction and set about developing key personnel before engaging in the change process. This has meant that the staff have developed a shared vision for the future and are aware of what is needed on daily basis to manage the school efficiently.

The second conclusion is that as part of the strategic review process, all of the schools undertake a genuine effort to consult widely with the school community. I see this as an area of strength in all of the schools. This process takes a significant amount of time and is an indication of the commitment the principals have to try and "get it right". The teaching staff has a number of opportunities to contribute to the development of the strategic plan. Schools provide numerous meeting opportunities for the community to provide feedback based on their perceptions and to suggest new strategic directions. Unfortunately, those members of the community that do not choose to be involved in the process have little or no sense of ownership in the school vision and as such are not working in partnership with the school as was the goal of Tomorrow's Schools (Parliament of New Zealand, 1988).

The third conclusion is the importance of the middle management. HoD's are clearly identified as one of the key components of strategic management. They provide a number of ideas in formulating the strategic direction and are essential if the implementation of a strategic goal is to be successful. This is important as it signals the need for middle management to be "hands-on" in all aspects of the strategic development process.

The final conclusion is that schools do not have the resources to successfully plan 3-5 years in advance. All of the principals indicated that it is getting harder to predict the future educational environment. One of the factors is the changing nature of the family unit. This includes a change in family values, the transient nature of some students and the additional needs students bring to

school. These impacts not only the learning needs of the student but also the health and well-being of students as well. Also identified is the rapid change of ICT's and the impact this has on student learning. These factors heavily influence the nature of resourcing for schools and given the volatile nature of some of these factors there is a possibility that schools may be further under-resourced.

Schools have detailed annual plans. There is less confidence in what is able to be planned further than two or three year period and yet, there is a significant amount of time devoted to this task. There are many reasons for this. For strategic planning to be of use, there needs to be a predictable environment so that the various strategies that have been developed can be applied in a steady rational way (Davies & Ellison, 1998). That is not possible. For one thing there is a general election every three years and potentially a change in ideological policy if a government changes. State education is heavily influenced by the policies set by the current government in power (Bell, 2002). These influences can drastically change the priorities and resources that a school has planned for.

Recommendations

Further research

I would encourage a longitudinal study to take place to identify how and when the strategic process takes place in a school over one-year. This could be completed using Internet (online) technologies completed weekly. This would detail what decisions were made, how and when these decisions were made and the impact on the strategic goal.

Practice

I would suggest further professional development opportunities for senior leaders and HoDs. This would focus on the wider concept of strategic

management, the terminology used and additional methods to develop strategic management. The expectation from the Ministry of Education is that schools identify what type of strategic process is best suited to their community. If there is not sufficient information or examples of best practice available then little progress may occur until there is contact with someone that either has experience (of another method) or has been exposed to strategic professional development.

I would further suggest that Ministry of Education revise part of its charter model, specifically the part that relates to strategic planning 3-5 years. This seems an increasingly difficult task and the time and effort required to complete does not appear to be a worthy investment. Alternatively I suggest using a strategic intent approach using a four step model that allows for a broad view and focusing on process that enables school wide change to occur.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Questionnaires

HoD/HoF Questionnaire

1) Number of years in current position
   1-3 4-6 6-8 8+

2) Are you aware of the schools strategic plan? Yes No

3) What time frame does your strategic plan cover?

   1 year 2 years 3 + years

Strategic position

4) What is your understanding of strategy?

5) In what ways is the schools strategy evident?

6) Do you have an annual operational plan which is the basis for the day-to-day running of the school?
   Yes No

Strategy into action

7) What information do you receive to implement the schools strategy?

8) Are HoD's required to incorporate the school wide strategic plan into their respective departmental plans?

Yes No

Strategic choices

9) How often is the strategic plan reviewed? (please circle)

Every 6 months
Annually
Every two years
Every three years

10) Are you involved in the review of the strategic plan?

11) What time of year does the review take place?

12) Who is consulted regarding the strategic plan?

13) How does this consultation take place?

14) What do you see are the benefits of strategic planning?

15) What do you see are the limitations of strategic planning?

Any other information

16) Is there any other aspect of strategic activity that you wish to comment on?

Teacher Questionnaire

1) What is your understanding of the term strategy?

2) Is strategy and vision the same thing?

3) How is strategy implemented at your school?

4) Are HoD's/HoF's required to incorporate the school wide strategic plan into their respective departmental plans?
   Yes No

5) Do you have an annual operational plan which is the basis for the day-to-day running of the school?
   Yes No

6) How often is the strategic plan reviewed? (please circle)

Every 6 months
Annually
Every two years
Every three years

7) Are you involved in the review of the strategic plan?

8) What time of year does the review take place?

9) Who is consulted regarding the strategic plan?

10) How does this consultation take place?

11) How is the strategic plan implemented?

12) What do you see are the benefits of strategic planning?

13) What do you see are the limitations of strategic planning?

14) In what ways does the strategic plan differ from the annual operational plan?

Any other information

15) Is there any other aspect of strategic activity that you wish to comment on?

Appendix B – Interview schedule

Interview schedule for Principal interview

February 2008
To gain an initial understanding, what is your view of the term strategy?

The strategic position

1. In what ways are you able to plan 3-5 years in advance?
2. In what ways are you able to determine your current strategic position?
3. In what areas do you feel you are able to predict the educational environment?
4. How are the expectations and purposes of the strategic direction determined?
5. In what way do resources effect the nature of you direction?

Strategic choices

6. Who is involved in your strategic planning?
7. What do you see as the key components in long term planning?
8. In what ways does your yearly plan differ from the strategic plan?
9. How do you make strategic choices?

Strategy into action

10. How is your strategic policies implemented in your school?
11. Who are the key people in implementing the policies?
12. As a result of your strategic plans and policies, how do you deal with organisational change?
13. Is there anything further you wish to add?

Interview schedule for BoT Chair interview

February 2008

To gain an initial understanding, could you please describe in general terms your strategic policy.

1. Who is involved in your strategic planning?

2. What do you see as the key components in long term planning?

3. Are you (or a sub-committee) involved in the annual operational plan?

The strategic position

4. In what ways are you able to plan 3-5 years in advance?

5. Has the school used an educational consultant to assist you in the development of your strategic planning process?

Strategic choices

6. How do you make strategic choices?

7. What factors influence you strategic choices?

Strategy into action

8. How is your strategic policies implemented in your school?

9. Who are the key people in implementing the policies?

10. As a result of your strategic plans and policies, how do you deal with organisational change?

11. Is there anything further you wish to add?