

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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INCREASING ENROLMENTS AND DIVERSITY IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

From the Executive Director

Enrolments in the Queensland independent schooling sector increased by 2.3% to 123,647 students in 2019¹. This is a record number of students and the highest annual percentage growth in the sector since 2010.

Prior to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2007/2008, the Queensland independent sector consistently grew by around 4% per annum. The GFC had a significant impact with enrolment increases declining to around 2% per annum in the years 2010 to 2013. Other factors such as a series of natural disasters, a downturn in the mining industry and a slow down in demographic growth took a further toll on enrolments in the period 2014 to 2016 with growth dipping below 1% in 2016 and 2017.

Improved economic and demographic trends over the past two years have underpinned the improved enrolment environment for independent schools since 2017, along with increasing diversity and choice in independent schooling options.

All sectors in Queensland schooling recorded enrolment increases in 2019, however, for the first time in the past ten years, as indicated in Figure 1, the independent sector had the strongest growth².

As a result of the improvement in independent school enrolment increases, the sector's market share in 2019 has increased to 14.8% (returning to the same level as in 2014).

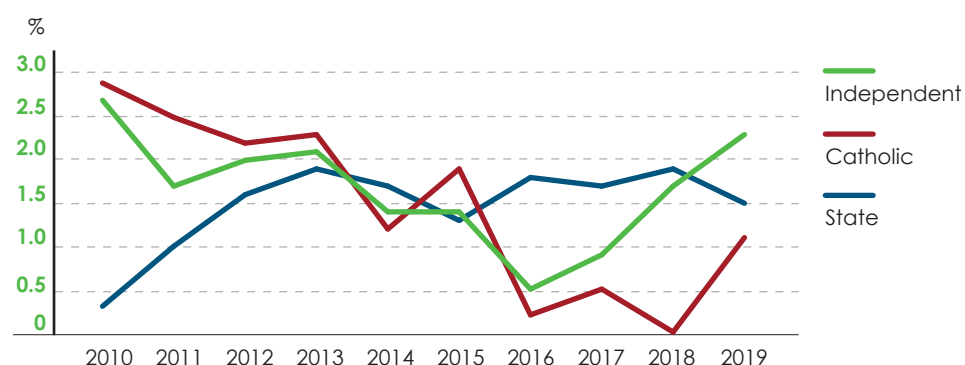
Detailed independent sector enrolment information from the 2019 Non-Government Schools Census (State) February Collection is available in a comprehensive series of [ISQ Snapshots](#)

available on our website. This includes data on different cohorts of students such as boarding, students with disability and overseas students.

A contributing factor to increased enrolments is an increasing diversity of schools within the sector. Thirty-one new independent schools have commenced operation in Queensland since 2012, as well as several additional campuses of existing schools. Most of these new schools are characterised by their diverse nature ranging from Special Assistance Schools (12 in total) to Special Schools, small community schools and industry-based schools.

In 2019, the sector has welcomed the Carbrook Animal Assisted Learning Centre, The Rainforest School (Mission Beach), Enkindle Village School (based at James Cook University), the Australian Industry Trade College (Toowoomba) and the Silver Lining

Figure 1: Change In Enrolments By Sector

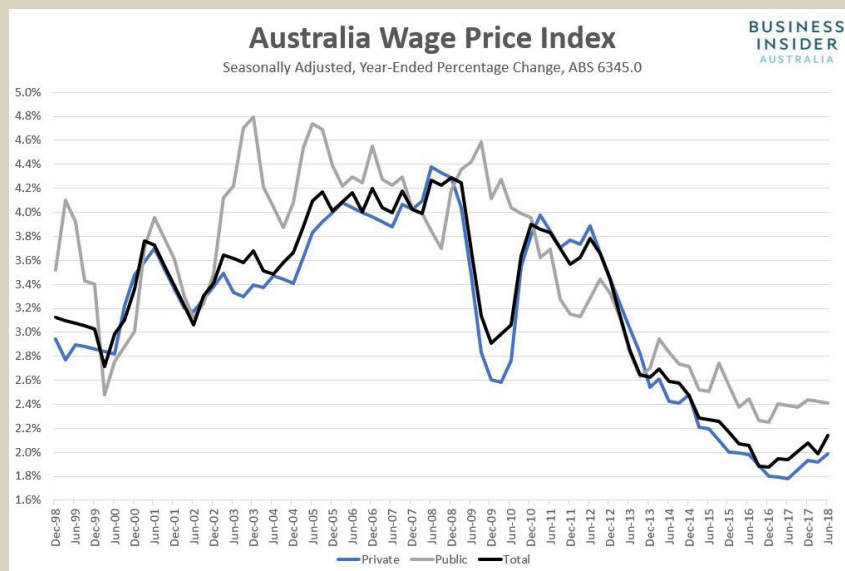


¹ Based on the 2019 Non-Government Schools Census (State) February Collection

² The data for state schools is based on Day 8 figures – available at <https://qed.qld.gov.au/det-publications/reports/earlyyears/Documents/day-8-fte-enrolments-by-region.pdf>

INCREASING ENROLMENTS AND DIVERSITY IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR CONTINUED

Figure 2: Australia Wage Price Index, December 1998 – June 2018



School (west of Townsville). In addition, Autism Queensland has opened a new campus in Cairns, Carinity Education has established a new school on the former Shalom Christian College in Townsville, and the Faith Christian School of Distance Education has opened a Special Assistance site in Logan City.

These new schools and campuses reflect the increasing diversity of schooling options being provided in the independent sector.

Many of the new independent schools established in recent years will, because of their location or educational provision, be small schools. However, collectively new schools have added more than 3,000 enrolments to the sector over the past seven years.

The trend towards more diversity in the independent sector has been apparent for some years and is likely to continue whilst economic and demographic conditions remain favourable and parents continue to seek schooling provision that best meets the needs of their children.

A look at the most recent report from *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey*³ is useful in considering some of the trends in Australian society that might impact on overall enrolment patterns.

The HILDA survey provides longitudinal data on the lives of Australian residents. The same households have been interviewed each year since the commencement of the survey in 2001.

In terms of household types, HILDA shows that the distribution of household types has been relatively stable over 17 years with households containing a couple with dependent children remaining the most common (at 41% to 42%). The number of single parent households with dependent children has declined over the period (in 2017 it was 6.6%).

The HILDA survey reveals 53% of couple parents and 41% of single parents were using child care for their children not yet at school, compared to 18% of couple parents and 15% of single parents using child care for their school children. The extensive use of paid child care has significant financial implications for many households, which may have an influence on decisions about paying fees for schooling, not only when the child enters schooling but also for siblings.

As parents generally pay school fees from their disposable income, the survey's information on household economic wellbeing is of interest. Mean and medium household disposable income grew very strongly over the eight-year period from 2001 to 2009, however, since 2009 growth in both the mean and medium household income has been much weaker. For the period 2009 to 2017, the mean household disposable income grew by only 3.5%. The medium declined by some \$500 during this eight-year period⁴.

The slowing of growth in household disposable income from 2009 is consistent with a slowing of growth in independent sector enrolments.

These income trends are confirmed by movements in the Australia Wage Price Index. As previously discussed in the May 2019 *Briefings* (Vol 23 Issue 4)⁵, the Australia Wage Price Index has been increasing at a lower rate than the Consumer Price Index in recent years (see Figure 2).

3 Available at <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>

4 The mean household disposable income in 2017 was \$93,734 whilst the medium was \$80,095 (see page 30 of the HILDA report for further details).

5 Available at https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_Briefings/ISO%20Briefings%2023-4.pdf

Many of the new independent schools established in recent years will, because of their location or educational provision, be small schools. However, collectively new schools have added more than 3,000 enrolments to the sector over the past seven years.

A strong economy, including high employment and growing disposable income, continues to be a key factor in the growth of the independent sector. Despite some uncertainty in the global economic outlook as a result of current trade tensions between the USA and China, the Queensland economy has shown signs of improvement in the past twelve months. Steady economic growth is predicted in the next few years. This, along with improved demographic growth driven by increasing interstate migration into Queensland, presents a positive outlook for the sector. One risk however is that growth will be centred on the south-east of the state, with regional areas continuing to “do it tough”.

There are other factors which will see continuing increases in enrolments in the independent sector. In 2019, the

Prep half cohort graduate from Year 12. This cohort of students entered Prep in 2007 in association with a change in school starting age meaning that for the past thirteen years, there has been less than the normal number of students in this year level. From 2020, all Queensland schools will have a full cohort of students at every year level. The independent sector could expect to see an increase in overall numbers of up to 2,000 students as a result.

Further, a large independent distance education school will be recognised in the Non-Government Schools (Commonwealth) for the first time in 2019⁶. Rightfully, some 700 additional students will be recorded as independent sector enrolments.

All indications are that the strength of the independent sector in Queensland

will continue to grow providing choice and diversity for an increasing number of Queensland parents and their children.



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⁶ The students have not previously been recorded in the Non-Government Schools (Commonwealth) Census as the school only provided distance education. The Commonwealth Census only funds distance education students enrolled in a day schooling provision.

HOW WELL IS YOUR SCHOOL PERFORMING AND HOW DO YOU KNOW?



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“Without data you’re just another person with an opinion”

W. Edwards Deming
(1900–1993)

A tension often exists between what is governance and what is operational management in many schools. For directors, the adage “eyes open, nose in, fingers out” provides some guidance in navigating this tension. For boards, understanding what questions to ask the senior management is fundamental to sound governance and navigating the tensions of the adaptive space.

Such questions might include:

- Is our school performing well?
- Are we achieving our strategic goals?
- Are we delivering on the promise we made to parents when they enrolled their child?
- What are the areas we should be focusing on?
- What evidence do we have for our responses to the above four questions?

Tracking Performance

For senior management, tracking performance in all areas of the school is a basic requirement in meeting the accountabilities of their leadership role.

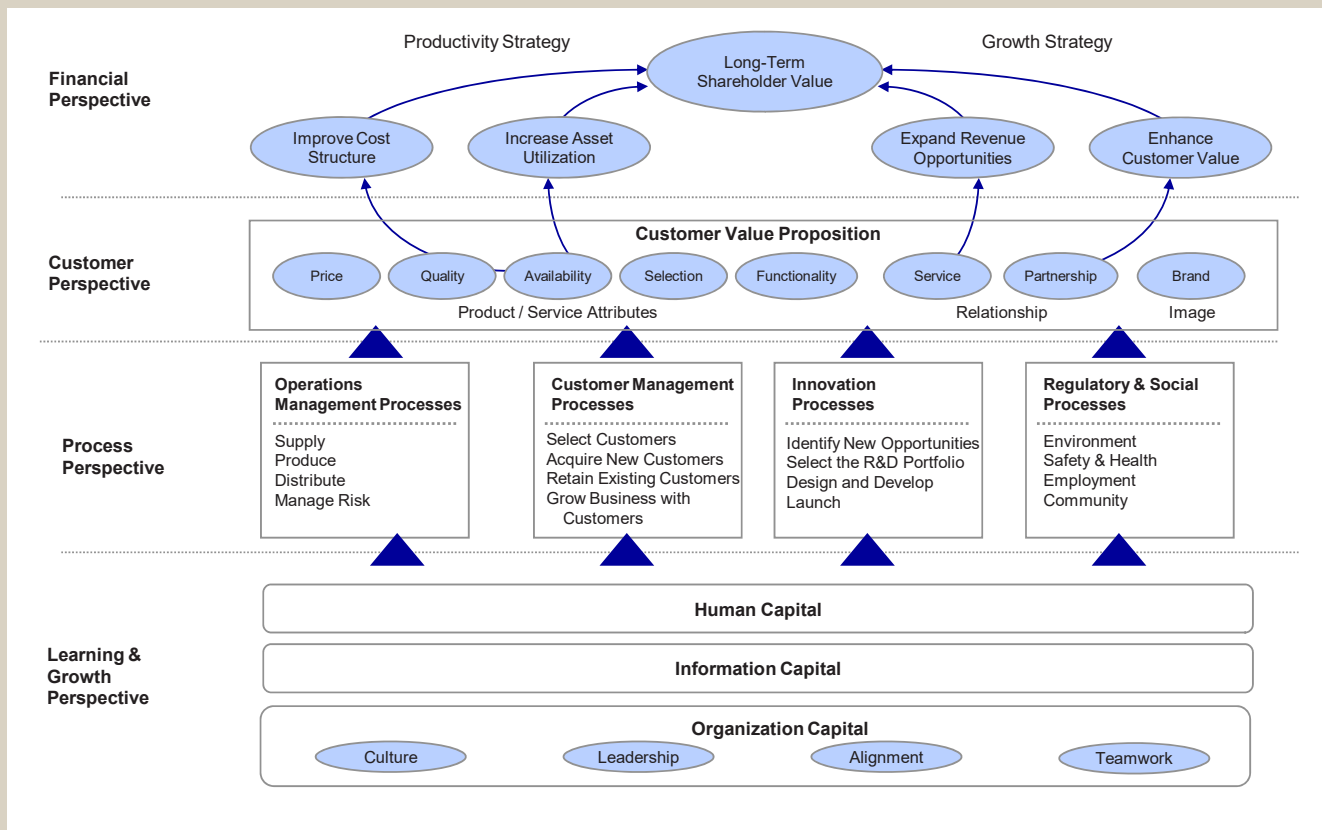
Schools tend to be data rich and information poor because seldom is this data gathered, analysed and utilised at a strategic level. Often the data is viewed in isolation thus reducing the effective creation of a school-wide picture. There exists a danger of developing a misleading view of a school's performance if the data gathered and analysed is not school-wide. The challenge is to ensure the school has measures that:

- reflect and relate directly to the school's strategic goals;
- are quantitative and qualitative; and
- are used to measure achievement of success.

Performance within all areas of operations for a school are quantifiable in a quantitative and/or qualitative manner, and performance can then be tracked against baselines the school establishes. The development of the metrics and the tracking of data must be focused on measuring the level of achievement of agreed success for each articulated goal. Whilst a schedule of possible metrics will assist a school in establishing their specific measurements, the suite of metrics for a school must be individualised and directly mapped to the strategic plan.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) has developed a resource to support schools to navigate this environment; the Strategic Monitoring and Review Tool (SMaRT). ISQ is currently trialling SMaRT with three member schools with very different contexts, in order to see how the process needs to be varied and the metrics differentiated.

Figure 1: Kaplan and Norton's Strategy Map



Source: Kaplan, 2010, p. 22

Background to SMaRT

Conceptual Foundations

Strategy maps are a one-page visual description of a school's strategic objectives and balanced scorecards are the measures, targets and initiatives that deliver to the objectives; these are time-proven tools for effective strategy implementation.

Robert Kaplan and David Norton (1992) introduced the balanced scorecard in a 1992 *Harvard Business Review* article. This was the result of their research into performance measurement of intangible assets.

Companies practised significant financial management, as these were relatively easy to measure, but most intangible assets were not so easy to measure as they do not have a physical presence. For example, tangible assets within a classroom could include the building, furniture and physical resources whilst the intangible could include learning and caring. The value from intangible assets is indirect and depends on organisational context and strategy.

Kaplan and Norton (as cited in Kaplan, 2010) maintained that effective management systems required three further perspectives to the existing Financial perspective (see Figure 1) – these were: Customer; Process; and Learning & Growth.

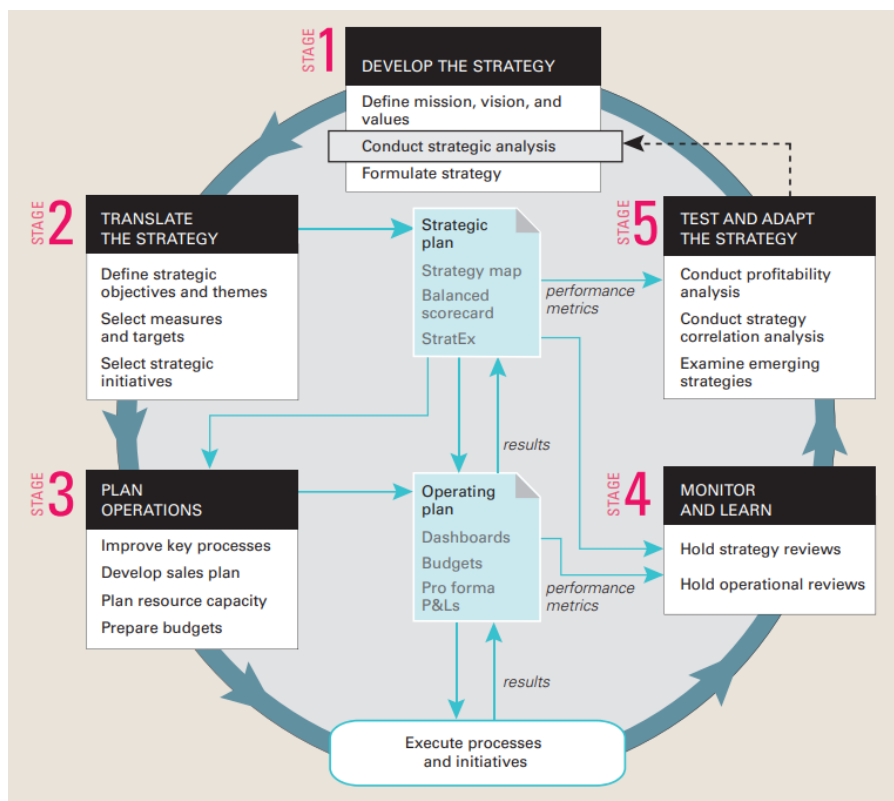
- How do we look to shareholders?
- How do customers see us?
- What must we excel at?
- How can we continue to improve and create value?

There is a logical connection between these perspectives – learning and growth improve business processes, which in turn lead to increased value to the customer, which leads to improved financial performance.

The balanced scorecard is a measured summary of all four perspectives that places strategy and vision as the focus. This is achieved as the balanced scorecard must include objectives, measures, targets to know we have achieved the objectives, and initiatives to take to achieve these objectives.

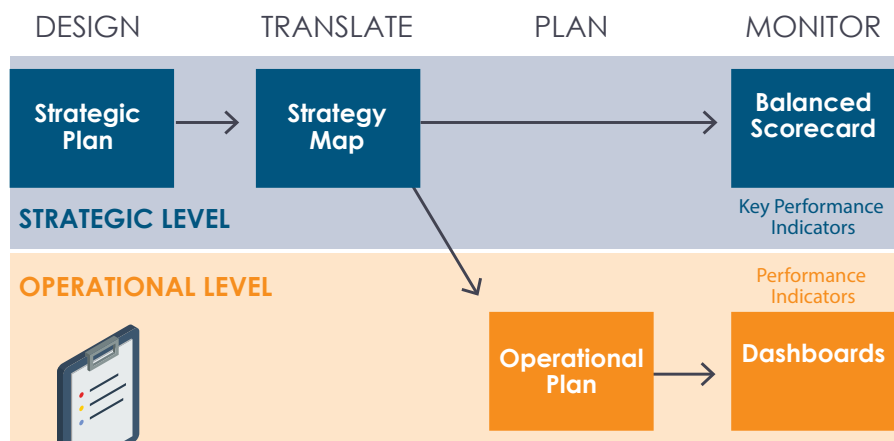
HOW WELL IS YOUR SCHOOL PERFORMING AND HOW DO YOU KNOW? CONTINUED

Figure 2: How the closed-loop management system links strategy and operations



Source: Kaplan & Norton, 2008, p. 65

Figure 3: Functional differences between strategic and operational plans



The starting point to create a balanced scorecard is not selecting measurements of the four perspectives; it is instead identifying the objectives within the four perspectives. Building a strategy map of strategic objectives is the precursor to decisions on how to measure each objective. Organisations need to describe what their strategies are attempting to achieve as only then will the four balanced scorecard perspectives provide a robust structure to express strategic objectives.

Kaplan and Norton (2008) further developed a closed-loop management system to link strategic planning with operational execution (see Figure 2). The closed-loop management system is as follows:

- Develop the strategy;
- Translate the strategy;
- Plan operations;
- Monitor and learn; and
- Test and adapt the strategy.

It embeds the original balanced scorecard framework as a component within a comprehensive management system that integrates strategy and operations. This requires a fundamental understanding of the organisation as a system.

Kaplan and Norton (2008) also note the need to embed risk management in the strategy map and, for not-for-profit organisations, the significant objectives relating to social impact and mission.

Strategic Plans and Operational Plans

It is important to clarify the different functions of strategic plans and operational plans, and balanced scorecards and dashboards (visual representations of the status of performance indicators) (see Figure 3).

Time issues are often cited as the explanation for strategic plans and operational plans being treated as non-dynamic documents that have limited day-to-day relevance for most employees of a school. Unfortunately, this scenario is unlikely to result in the successful implementation of a school's strategic plan.

Strategy maps and balanced scorecards combine to provide an effective management system to implement strategy. Operational plans and dashboards are dynamic translations of the strategy map that makes the strategic plan relevant at all levels of an organisation. They all combine to form a management system. However, it is leadership that translates strategy into linked objectives on a strategy map; it is leadership that utilises the strategy map and scorecard interactively; and it is leadership that generates the dynamic relevance through operational plans and dashboards.

Adapting for use in schools

Profit is not the ultimate objective for most schools, hence ISQ's need to adapt the strategy maps and balanced scorecard to not-for-profit organisations. This adaption is not something new and untested but has been constantly evolving and improving from the well researched core work by Kaplan and Norton. It should be noted that not-for-profit organisations must excel at bringing in funds and employing those funds efficiently and effectively or else they will struggle to remain viable. The *financial* perspective is of fundamental importance to all schools.

A strategy map for a school would include an additional perspective, Governance: vision & mission (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: ISQ's School Strategy Map



Figure 5: ISQ's Strategic Monitoring and Review Tool (SMaRT)

<p>Governance IS THE BOARD ACHIEVING THE GOVERNANCE PLEDGE? Extent of achievement of the agreed ideals of school success</p> <p>Roles & Responsibilities Clarity Commitment to school success Accountable for school success Professional engagement in role Future orientation Succession and renewal</p>		
<p>Customer (Student, Parent/Carer) HOW DO OUR CUSTOMERS VIEW US?</p> <p>Parent Satisfaction Student learning outcomes Quality of customer service and Value for money</p> <p>Student Learning Academic progression and achievement Wellbeing Engagement Parent engagement in learning</p>	<p>Financial Health HOW WOULD WE LOOK TO AN OWNER?</p> <p>Financial Indicators Efficiency Return on investment Financial risk tolerance</p> <p>Enrolments Current Future trends</p>	
<p>Internal Capabilities WHAT MUST WE EXCEL AT?</p> <p>Communications Customer (parents) Customer (students)</p> <p>Employee quality Skills/competencies Professional Engagement in role Satisfaction</p> <p>Leadership Is leadership approached with a growth mindset within the school?</p>		<p>Educational infrastructure Curriculum architecture (policy documents) Pedagogical framework (policy documents) Industrial framework (policy documents)</p> <p>Continuous teacher practice improvement Do you have an effective teacher performance development framework?</p> <p>Monitor individual student learning Individual student learning plan</p>
<p>Learning & Growth CAN WE CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND CREATE VALUE?</p> <p>Does the school have a culture that supports school success? Does the school have effective feedback and goal setting mechanism operating to ensure continuous school improvement? Does the school value its customers?</p>		

ISQ has utilised this theory to develop SMaRT (see Figure 5). It helps to ensure a comprehensive management system that integrates strategy and operations. The starting point for the cyclical model is to conduct a strategic analysis. All forms of strategic planning require a scan of the current environment. SMaRT will provide the information required for the scan. In addition, SMaRT can also provide the template for Stage 4 – Monitor and Learn (see Figure 2).

SMaRT is a viable scan tool that can then be further individualised and refined by a school to accommodate the traditional roles provided by both balanced scorecards and dashboards. It is a tool that can span the strategic and operational procedures and assist to align and simplify the processes.

HOW WELL IS YOUR SCHOOL PERFORMING AND HOW DO YOU KNOW? CONTINUED

In addition, the use of SMaRT, with related metrics, provides a school with valid performance data for the required Non-State Schools Accreditation Board Cyclical Reviews against the prescribed accreditation criteria of the school's:

- administration and governance arrangements;
- financial viability;
- educational program;
- student welfare processes;
- resources; and
- improvement processes.

Descriptors

SMaRT uses single words or just a few words – descriptors – under the major headings to provide scope and focus. The support material to SMaRT provides a definition for each descriptor and, hopefully, an understanding of how the developers of the template define the phrases used. For each descriptor, a question or series of questions have been developed to again provide further refinement of both the scope and focus. These should be checked by the school, perhaps adapted to ensure there is agreement with the meaning of the phrases utilised and the questions asked. Agreement is required for the development of both success factors and indicators.

A strategically focused school must consider strategy at the core of the school's operations... SMaRT is the 'navigator' for the school's operational undertakings.

What Success Looks Like

Too often the vital discussion and agreement on what success looks like are missed in schools. Unless there is an agreement on what success is, alignment within any organisation is unlikely to occur. This applies at the organisation-wide (macro) level through to the micro level between two people. Clarity of goal includes a statement describing the achievement of this goal. However, success statements must be realistic. It is appropriate to set the bar high but success must be attainable else the detrimental effects of unattainable goals will perpetuate a sense of failure. The support material to SMaRT includes examples of success statements.

Indicators (possible metrics)

Advocating the use of performance indicators in Australian education is not new. Indeed, the late Dr Ken Rowe was writing and presenting on this topic in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Rowe and Lieslesley's work (2002) outlined the essential features of useful indicators.

The indicators need to be:

- relevant;
- cost-effective;
- timely;
- reliable; and
- valid

if they are to inform the strategic decision-making process and "measure improvements to desired outcomes". The indicator must provide useful information, be cost-effective (otherwise there will be limited use), and be available to assist the decision making. It must also be accurately measured and have value.

Data that is not contextualised by indicator construction and purpose may be misinterpreted and/or misused. The data gathered must be targeted with clarity of purpose and perceived as assisting the school to provide the best possible outcome for their students.

Final Challenge

Independent schools, through their governance activities, need to be proactive with respect to the significant accountabilities expected of them. The strategy formation, strategy alignment and strategy monitoring will be better informed through the effective use of SMaRT, with the related definitions and metrics, so that schools can exhibit sound internal accountability that is verifiable.

Without robust internal strategic measurement mechanisms, independent schools will continue to be reactive to external measures only, which is neither a desired position nor one that leads to effective strategic governance.

A strategically focused school must consider strategy at the core of the school's operations. This requires a clearly defined strategy with the application of SMaRT to help describe and communicate, and to receive any changes as feedback. SMaRT

is the 'navigator' for the school's operational undertakings.

Next Steps

In the trials conducted to date, the importance of the facilitated conversations among the board and school leaders cannot be overstated. For some schools, this has been the first time that all members have had the opportunity to articulate what success looks like to them; for example, effective communication with parents.

Time spent reaching consensus on what success means for a school in *these* areas has been invaluable in ensuring alignment between and among the board and the school principal. Once this alignment is attained, the work to select appropriate metrics can be relatively straightforward.

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