Classic Format of a Briefing Note

Robert B. Parkinson

Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs. - Henry Ford

Classic Format of a Briefing Note

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Preface

A briefing note is a powerful tool of access to leaders and colleagues — to influence their decisions, their actions and their understanding of issues. In this regard, writers (and their managers) face a challenging task. They must deliver expert insight and strategic acumen with brevity, clarity and professionalism. Beyond that, they must present it all with an optimal organization, format and style.

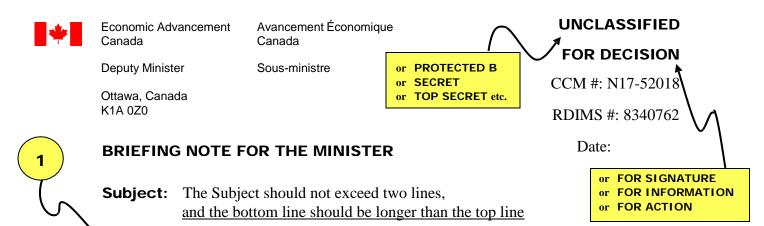
This guide aims to help you to excel at writing clear, crisp and compelling briefing notes. The following pages provide:

- the <u>classic format</u> of a briefing note, along with pointers on its content;
- tips on how to write efficiently and effectively;
- advice on <u>how to plan</u> the foundation of a briefing note to help avoid problems before they happen; and
- an outline of the <u>strategic concepts</u> that may be involved in writing a briefing note.

You will also find a detailed discussion of the hidden costs of briefing notes at this address.

Your feedback on this material is welcomed. Please do not hesitate to send an <u>e-mail</u> with any comments, suggestions or concerns that you may have.

Revised: October 28, 2017



Summary

- A well-crafted briefing note does not need a Summary. The Issue and the Conclusion or Recommendation(s) should be sufficient to summarize the briefing note.
- If used, the Summary should condense the key messages of the briefing note.
- Include a deadline for a decision, signature or action, if needed.
- Keep the Summary to three or four bullets.

Issue

The Issue entices the Minister to read on. It states what has happened, is happening, will happen or might happen that requires his or her attention. When appropriate, it states what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats exist.

3

Background

The Background section:

- provides history and other information to bring the Minister up to speed on the issue;
- should not be controversial or subject to dispute;
- sets the stage for considerations; and
- may include current status.

Considerations

ANNEX A and **ANNEX B** provide guidance on writing the briefing note as a whole. **ANNEX C** outlines the strategic thinking that underlies a sound briefing note and that may form a key element of the Considerations section.

Considerations provide the facts, arguments, opinions and analysis needed to show that the Conclusion or Recommendation is a sound response to the Issue.

The Considerations section may address the following as needed:

- current status and relevance to needs, desires and strategic priorities (e.g., Speech From the Throne, the Budget, your department's Report on Plans and Priorities);
- pros and cons of options, including feasibility, costs, benefits and risk;

1. Use an Arial

2

- Black 11point font for
 all headings.
 2. Use a Times
- 2. Use a Times New Roman 12-point font for all body text.
- 3. Left-justify the text (ragged right margin).
- 4. Set the line spacing to 1.1 all through the briefing note.
- 5. Note how this paragraph saved space by referring to annexes, rather than going into details here.

- 6. Close with a
 Conclusion in
 a briefing
 notes that is
 FOR INFORMATION
- 7. Close with
 Recommendation(s) in a
 briefing note
 that is FOR
 DECISION, FOR
 ACTION or FOR
 SIGNATURE.
- 8. Edit the check-box lines as needed, or delete this block if it is not required.

Use the <u>Step-</u> by-Step Model.

Ensure that the briefing note complies with its <u>Frame of Reference</u>.

Ensure relevance of the content to the Frame of Reference, and be alert to the

a. substance, vs. froth

impact of:

- b. positive vs. negative terms;
- c. <u>abstractions</u> vs. concrete details; and
- d. facts vs. opinions vs. arguments.

Use the principles of organization.

Use a clear and crisp style (short words, short sentences, active verbs), with a neutral tone.

Keep the note to two pages (plus annexes).

- implications for the portfolio (other agencies that report to the Minister);
- consultations conducted and horizontal management; and
- communications implications and plans.

Considerations will deal with SWOT matters as needed, i.e.:

- strengths (internal capabilities);
- weaknesses (internal vulnerabilities);
- opportunities (external circumstances that can be exploited); and
- threats (external circumstances that present a danger).

In addressing SWOT, the Considerations section will take account of PESTLE factors as needed, i.e.:

- political factors (e.g., public opinion, links to the Speech From the Throne);
- economic factors (e.g., budget considerations, financial impact on stakeholders);
- social factors (e.g., impact on education, culture, families, the elderly, employees);
- technological factors (e.g., technological capabilities and constraints);
- legal factors (e.g., requirements of law, regulations, treaties or contracts); and
- ecological factors (e.g., impact on wildlife, oceans, greenhouse gases).



The Conclusion:

- answers the question "So what?"; and/or
- states the department's position; and/or
- tells the Minister what happens next and when he or she will be briefed again.

Recommendation(s) 7

The Recommendation(s) must do more than state a desired outcome. This section tells the Minister precisely what you would like him or her to do to bring about the desired outcome. Include a deadline, if needed (e.g., "A decision from you by March 21, 2017 would enable the project to remain on schedule."). Beyond this, do not introduce or restate rationale in the Recommendation(s).

Contacts:

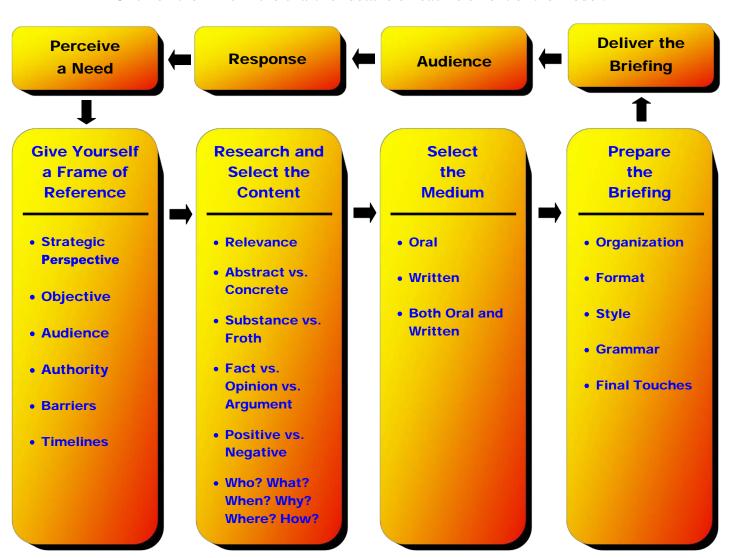
- John Doe, 613-990-0000
 Technology Division, Industry Branch
- Jeanne Cartier, 819-991-1111
 Economics Division, Industry Branch

☐ I approve.	☐ Please discuss
\square I do not approve.	with my staff.
	·
Catherine R. Kathiria, P.C.,	M.P.

Annex A

A STEP-BY-STEP MODEL FOR BRIEFING NOTES

Click on the links in the chart for details on each element of the model.



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Writing a briefing note can seem like a bewildering challenge at times. But as Henry Ford said, "Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs." The model above does just that for briefing notes. It sets out the tasks that we all deal with — consciously or not — in writing any briefing note. The model helps us to address those tasks methodically and with sound reasoning.

Home

<u>UNCLASSIFIED</u>

The step-by-step model is just a tool, however, and not a rule. No two people will use it entirely alike. In theory, you should first write a frame of reference, then develop the content, then select the medium, and finally prepare the briefing itself. In practice, you will probably find yourself jumping back and forth from one stage to another. Even so, the model provides important insights into what to think about, when to think about it and how to think about it.

For detailed guidance, visit <u>How to Use the Step-by-Step Model</u>.

Note the use of a table of contents. This is a lengthy annex. The table of contents helps the reader to grasp at a glance what is in it.

Annex B

Frame of Reference for a Briefing Note

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INTRODUCTION

A frame of reference is the foundation of your briefing note. It gives you sound guidance as you do your research and writing. It will help you to keep your work focused and will help you avoid spending time pursuing avenues that are not relevant to the task at hand.

A frame of reference has six elements:

- strategic perspective;
- objective;
- audience;
- authority;
- barriers; and
- timelines.

These elements are linked to each other. Changing one can mean changing one or more of the others as well. In light of this, a frame of reference is a valuable tool for making sure that the foundation of your briefing is viable before you devote a lot of time to research and writing. You can also use it to get buy-in and guidance from your supervisor, partners or senior management at an early stage.

Sometimes it is quick and easy to write a frame of reference. In such cases, there is nothing lost by taking the little time that is required. Other times, it will be difficult and time-consuming to write a frame of reference. This can be an important sign that you need to clarify what you are setting out to do before you spend a lot of time doing it.

Sometimes, you will draw a complete blank when you try to write your frame of reference. This may be one of those times when writing is a process of discovering what your thoughts are, rather than simply putting your thoughts on paper. In such cases, go ahead and start writing. Before you finish up, however, do go back and write your frame of reference. If you still experience difficulty at this point, it is a sure sign that your briefing note is in trouble.

The balance of this annex expands on each element of a frame of reference.

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Strategic perspective is vital to a successful briefing note. It has three components:

- triggers (drivers);
- strategic goal; and
- corporate perspective.

Triggers (Drivers)

What triggered the need for a briefing note, and what triggered the trigger? Review the triggers closely to ensure that you clearly understand what is driving the task that you are about to pursue. It is important to know not only what is required but also why it is required.

Strategic Goal

What strategic goal will the briefing note further? This is not the same as the objective of the briefing note. The strategic goal is a bigger purpose that validates the objective. Such a goal might be found, for example, in (see also "Sources" below):

- the law;
- the Speech From the Throne;
- the Budget;
- the Minister's mandate letter; or
- your departmental or branch business plan.

Corporate Perspective

What is the corporate perspective? This is the most challenging component of strategic perspective. This is where you anticipate and think through the big picture that will be on the minds of senior managers as they review your briefing note. Here, it is helpful to do a SWOT scan, using PESTLE as a guide.

SWOT stands for:

- Strengths (internal capabilities);
- Weaknesses (internal vulnerabilities);
- Opportunities (external circumstances that can be exploited); and
- Threats (external circumstances that present a danger).

PESTLE stands for:

- Political factors (e.g., public opinion, relevance to the Speech From the Throne);
- Economic factors (e.g., budget considerations, financial impact on stakeholders);
- Social factors (e.g., impact on education, culture, families, the elderly, employees);
- Technological factors (e.g., technological capabilities and constraints);
- Legal factors (e.g., impact of laws, regulations, treaties or contracts); and
- Ecological factors (e.g., impact on wildlife habitat or greenhouse gases).

Sources

Here are some internally produced documents that you might use to gain strategic perspective:

- mission, vision and values statements;
- Report on Plans and Priorities;
- Performance Measurement Framework;
- Departmental Performance Report;
- departmental business plan/human resource plan;
- program alignment architecture;
- internal audit and evaluation reports;
- departmental risk profile; and
- previous briefing notes.

External sources that you might want to review include:

- laws, regulations, treaties and contracts;
- Speech from the Throne;
- Budget;
- Clerk of the Privy Council's Web site;
- Treasury Board Secretariat Web site;
- Auditor General's reports;
- the governing party's election platform (but you can't refer to this in a briefing note, even though it can provide you with vital guidance);
- speeches by politicians (here again, though, you cannot cite them in a briefing note in most cases);
- news media reports; and
- public opinion surveys.

You may also need to go directly to sources. You might contact any of the following (possibly requiring your manager's permission beforehand):

- technical specialists (legal counsel, finance, communications, human resources, or other subject-matter experts) both internal and external;
- counterparts in other departments, other governments or other organizations;

- your director;
- your director general's staff;
- your assistant deputy minister's staff;
- your deputy minister's staff; and
- your minister's staff.

For Further Guidance

See <u>Annex C – Strategy, Execution and Results Measurement</u> for more guidance on strategic perspective.

OBJECTIVE

What Do You Want to Achieve?

In setting the objective of the briefing note, state it in terms of something you want the briefing note to achieve, as opposed to simply going through a process. Here's an example of a process: "To brief the Minister on our cost-sharing program." That raises the question: What do you want to be the outcome of that briefing? Instead, you might say something like this: "To ensure that the Minister is aware in advance of opposition that may arise to our cost-sharing program."

SMART Objectives

Here is a test of whether you have developed a sound objective. Ask yourself if it is SMART, i.e.:

- Specific;
- Measureable:
- Attainable:
- Relevant; and
- Time-bound.

Specific

• What exactly do you want the Minister to do, decide, know or understand after reading your briefing note?

• Does your objective embrace answers to these questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? How much?

Measurable

- How will you know whether you have achieved your objective?
- Can you use quantitative metrics (e.g., "How much did the Minister approve for spending on the new program?" or "How many mining communities did the Minister agree to visit in the next 12 months?")?
- Can you use qualitative metrics (e.g., "Did the Minister approve the new communications strategy for the program?" or "Did the Minister accept the invitation to speak at the conference?")?

Attainable

- What barriers stand between you and achieving your objective?
- Should you consider addressing each barrier in a separate initiative say, in separate briefing notes to the Minister, the Deputy Minister, etc.?

Relevant

• Does your objective fall within the parameters of higher goals that have been approved previously (e.g., goals set out in the Budget, the Speech from the Throne, the Minister's mandate letter, the department's business plan)?

Time Bound

• When must the objective be achieved in order to be useful (e.g., within six hours, within seven days, within two months)?

Being Strategic

In setting your objective, you have an opportunity to be strategic. You don't want to overreach — but neither do you want to aim for less than what you could reasonably expect to achieve.

Your manager can be helpful at this early stage in assessing the objective.

AUDIENCE

The audience is the star of the show. Without an audience, you cannot achieve your objective.

Being Strategic

Choosing your audience is another opportunity to be strategic. The first audience that comes to mind may not be the audience that is best-suited to furthering your strategic goal or achieving your objective.

Intermediaries

The ultimate audience — say, your minister — is just one of many audiences that your briefing note will encounter as it makes its way up through your bureaucracy. For a ministerial briefing note, the draft must be read, understood and endorsed by five managers and seven or more administrative assistants, executive assistants, briefings officers, policy advisors and chiefs of staff. — each of whom may delay your briefing note, edit it without consulting you, or even reject it outright if they misunderstand it.

The Globe and Mail Test

Finally, there is *The Globe and Mail* test. Briefing notes, and even drafts of briefing notes, are subject to access to information legislation. Thus, another audience could be the general public, and your briefing note could end up on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* one day. This should not deter you from offering frank advice. It should, however, be an incentive to ensure that everything in the briefing note will stand up under intense public scrutiny.

AUTHORITY

Authority is the flip side of the audience. Your audience has to be matched with the signing authority for the briefing note.

Being Strategic

Here, you again have an opportunity to be strategic. If you or your upper managers do not have the authority to address the audience that is needed to achieve your objective, you will need to rethink your endeavour to identify an alternative objective and an audience that you do have the authority to address.

Specialist Approvals

Another dimension of authority is approvals by specialists — such as legal counsel, communications, finance, human resources and subject-matter experts. If you need OKs from people such as these, it will take time, and you will need to account for this when you write your timelines.

BARRIERS

Barriers are external factors that stand between you and achieving your objective with your chosen audience. Barriers could include:

- the audience's existing position on the issue (and if you don't know what it is, it is worth your while to work through back channels to find out);
- competing views conveyed by other stakeholders;
- the audience's lack of understanding of a complex issue;
- time pressures that could prevent the audience from reading or even seeing your briefing note; and
- PESTLE and SWOT factors.

Being Strategic

You have another opportunity to be strategic here. Do the barriers present too much of a challenge to overcome in a single briefing note? You may have to consider your options and develop a plan for overcoming thosbarriers — possibly:

- developing a series of briefing notes, each designed to overcome one or more of the barriers; and/or
- seeking an opportunity to deliver an oral briefing on a complex issue.

TIMELINES

Finally, we come to timelines, which have three components:

- deadline i.e., when the briefing note must be received by its ultimate audience in order for it to achieve its objective;
- schedule e.g., when your research and consultations will be done, when your
 drafting and revising will be done, when the briefing note will be translated (if
 needed), when approvals will be received from specialists and the formal line of
 authority; and
- personal time budget i.e., the number of hours of your own time that the project will require.

Being Strategic

Once again, you have an opportunity to be strategic here. Does your deadline permit you enough time to gather all the information that you want or need for the briefing note? If not, you must make a choice:

- You could plow ahead and hope for the best without the missing information.
- You could change other elements of your frame of reference as needed to match the available information.
- You could ask for an extension on the briefing note's deadline, if it has been requested by others.

If you need to ask for an extension, do so as soon as possible. Waiting until the last minute makes you look incompetent and complicates life for everyone else.

Cost Implications

As noted above, a ministerial briefing note must be cleared by 12 or more managers, administrative assistants, executive assistants, briefings officers, policy advisors and chiefs of staff. If you are tempted to cut corners in your personal time budget for research and writing, give some thought to what the consequences will be if any of those individuals:

- misunderstand your briefing note;
- send it back to you for revision or revise it themselves without checking with you; or
- reject it entirely before it reaches its intended audience.

You will find a detailed discussion of the hidden costs of briefing notes <u>here</u>. This case study uses real numbers from a real department (with its name changed).

Annex C

STRATEGY, EXECUTION AND RESULTS MEASUREMENT

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ISSUE

For your briefing note to succeed, you will need to locate yourself and your audience in the processes of:

- assessing your organization's value proposition and goals;
- assessing the internal and external environments;
- identifying options for action, assessing risk, setting priorities and setting objectives;
- choosing methods to measure progress in achieving objectives;
- developing execution plans to achieve objectives;
- executing the plans;
- measuring progress throughout the execution cycle and assessing whether a change course is needed; and
- assessing results at the end of the execution cycle (to serve as input to the next planning cycle).

Some of those items will not be in play in your briefing note, and you can ignore them. Others, however, will be very much at play and require close attention.

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGY

What is Strategy?

A strategy is a plan to bring about desired or necessary changes in:

- the internal environment (e.g., a government department, say, "XL Social Services"); and
- the external environment (i.e., the outside world, including the people XL Social Services exists to serve).

Different people have different ideas about what "strategy" means. What is a strategy in my eyes might be a matter of tactics for my manager, and so on up and down the line.

For purposes of a briefing note for your minister, strategy means:

Decisions by the Minister on either maintaining the status quo or:

- o significant changes that are desired or essential within the department and in the department's external environment; and
- o how to bring those changes about.

Why Do We Need a Strategy?

A strategy is needed to take action and deliver results on:

- the department's legislation, mission, mandate, vision, core values and ministerial decisions;
- objectives that are approved by the Minister and influenced by input from the Minister, senior management, staff and stakeholders; and
- SWOT scans i.e.:
 - o a scan of the strengths and weaknesses in the internal environment; and
 - o a scan of opportunities and threats in the external environment.

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning means defining:

- where the establishment is now;
- where you would like it to be or where it must be;
- how you plan to get there; and
- how you will know if we got there.

Results Measurement

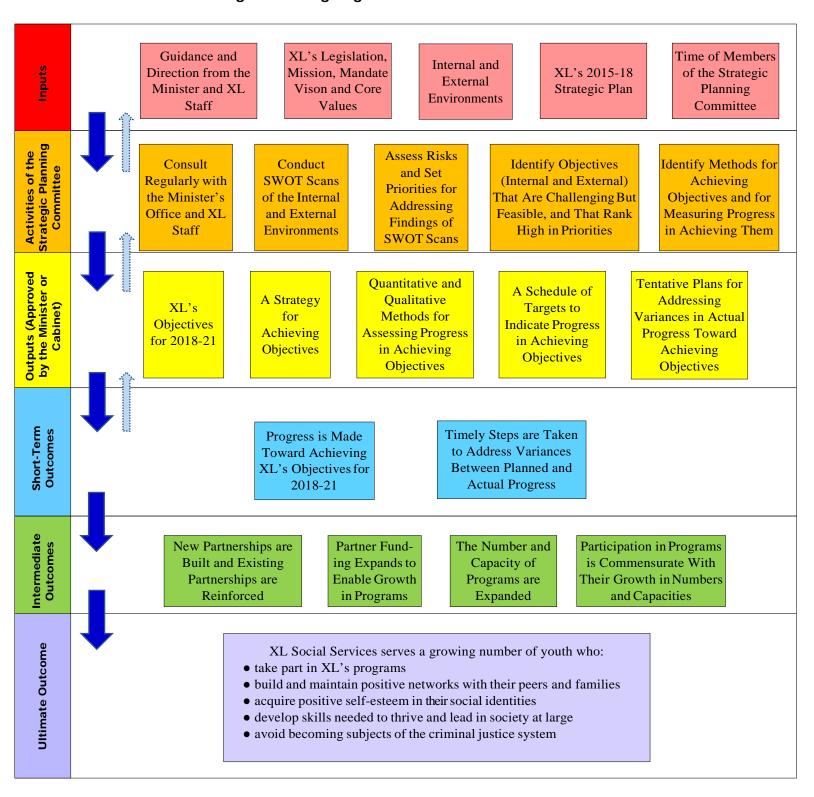
A strategy provides the foundation for measuring the results that the department achieves. Those results, in turn:

- enable you to monitor progress and take corrective action if needed;
- serve as a point of reference for the next strategic planning cycle; and
- help you to secure funding from the government and partners.

LOGIC MODEL

The diagram on the next page is a logic model for the strategic management process of our fictitious department, XL Social Services. Such a logic model can help to understand the steps involved in strategic planning and to evaluate what is done at each level.

Strategic Planning Logic Model for XL Social Services: 2018-21



Degrees of Control

In the model, you have direct control over activities and outputs, and close control over short-term outcomes. Intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes, however, are progressively more removed from your direct control.

Flows of Influence

Note the flows of influence in the model. Influence flows mostly from top to bottom. However, there is interplay in the first four levels. That is to say that feedback from the lower levels can provide input to the decisions made and actions taken at higher levels.

To illustrate, short-term outcomes result from the outputs of the strategic planners' work. They should review those outcomes regularly during the execution cycle (e.g., 2018-21). Are you making progress as expected towards the short- term outcomes? The findings of such reviews may indicate a need to revisit one or more of the inputs (e.g., SWOT scan) or the outputs, i.e.:

- the department's objectives for 2018-21;
- a strategy for achieving objectives;
- quantitative and qualitative methods for assessing progress;
- a schedule of targets to indicate progress toward objectives; and
- tentative plans for addressing variances in progress towards achieving objectives.

ENVIRONMENT SCANS

In strategic planning, it is vital to understand the internal and external environments and what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) they present.

Many tools exist to help to conduct SWOT scans. One such tool — the Diamond-E Framework¹ — is explored here. Strategic planning aims to change components of the internal and external environments for the better. The Diamond-E framework can help us to make sound decisions in that regard.

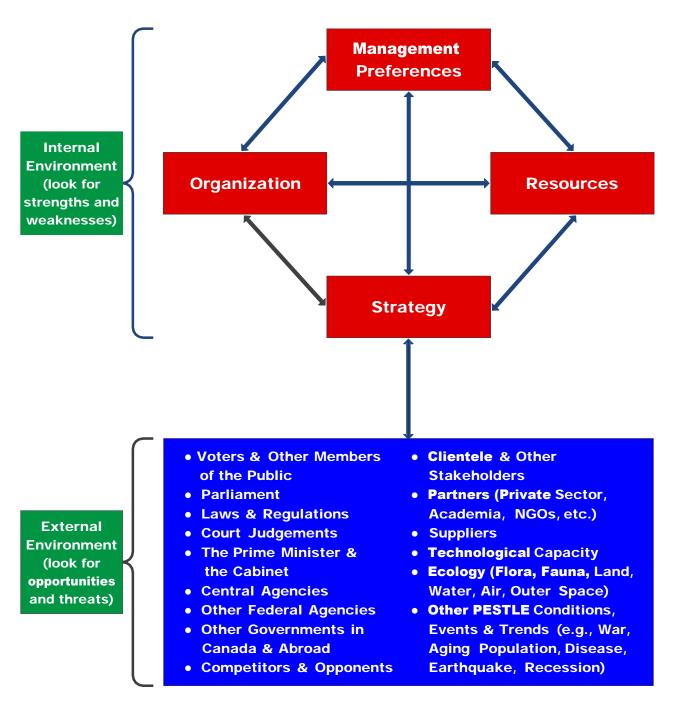
The diagram on the next page shows the elements of the framework (adapted for a federal government department).

¹ Adapted from *Strategic Analysis and Action* (6th Edition), by Mary M. Crossan, Joseph N. Fry, J. Peter Killing, Michael J. Rouse. Toronto: Prentice Hall/Pearson, 2005.

The Diamond-E Framework

Do a SWOT* scan of factors that may influence your strategy and action plan.

PESTLE** can help you to identify relevant factors.



- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- ** Political, economic, social, technological, legal and ecological factors.

SWOT scans scan can inform important decisions on:

- the establishment's value proposition;
- the establishment's goals and objectives;
- the establishment's strategies and execution plans; or
- all of the above.

In brief, the elements of the Diamond-E Framework are:

- external environment; and
- internal environment:
 - o strategy;
 - o management preferences;
 - o organization; and
 - o resources.

External Environment

"External environment" means all that is external to your establishment. If in doubt about the external environment, have a look at the audience of your briefing note. That can provide a useful guide. The chart on the next page offers examples.

Internal Environment

The other elements of the framework are internal to the establishment: organization, resources, management preferences, and strategy. There is interplay among all of these elements. However, only strategy provides a link to the external environment for planning purposes.

The following describes each element of the internal environment.

Organization

"Organization" means the structure of your establishment, including:

- the way resources are deployed in the establishment;
- the systems and processes that are in place; and
- the organizational culture(s) that prevail.

The External Environment is Defined by the Audience of Your Briefing Note

Audience of Your Briefing Note	The Establishment	The External Environment		
Your Manager	Your Unit	Other units, divisions, directorates and branches of your Organization — plus the outside world.		
Your Director	Your Division	Other divisions, directorates and branches in your Organization — plus the outside world.		
Your Director General	Your Directorate	Other directorates and branches in your organization — plus the outside world.		
Your Assistant Deputy Minister	Your Branch	Other branches in your organization — plus the outside world.		
Your Cabinet Minister	Your Government or Your Government Department	The world outside your department or government, including: Iaws and regulations court judgements parliament the Prime Minister the Cabinet central agencies other jurisdictions at home and abroad voters other members of the public stakeholders competitors competitors suppliers academia non-government organizations industry opinion leaders (e.g., news media) the economy other deconomy the ecology infrastructure		

Resources

"Resources" comprise:

- the human resources available;
- the financial, material and information resources that are available;
- the intangibles, such as goodwill, that are available; and
- the status of those resources.

Management Preferences

- "Management preferences" define the establishment's programs, products or services, how they are to be delivered, how resources will be deployed, and how the establishment should operate as expressed in:
- the establishment's governing authorities, such as:
 - o legislation and regulations; and
 - o contracts, memoranda of understanding, letters of agreement and other such documents;

- statements of mission, vision and core values;
- statements of priorities and objectives;
- directives to staff such as policies, job descriptions, standing orders,
- procedures, budget allocations or delegations of signing authority;
- decisions reached by senior executives (e.g., the Minister, the Deputy Minister); and
- direct orders to subordinate levels of the department.

Strategy

"Strategy" is a plan to bring about positive change in response to the findings of a SWOT scan. Strategy links:

- the internal environment with the external environment; and
- the elements of the internal environment with each other.

Strategy defines how the department will align itself to:

- foster and exploit:
 - o selected opportunities in the external environment; and
 - o selected strengths in the internal environment; and
- eliminate, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, adapt to and/or recover from:
 - o selected threats in the external environment; and
 - o selected weaknesses in the internal environment.

PRIORITY-SETTING

The Need

SWOT scans will identify more matters than can possibly be addressed in a strategic plan. This means that your establishment will need to set priorities by:

- comparing issues/events/conditions with each other; and
- assessing how much effort to devote to one or another.

The Method

Each issue/event/condition (whether positive or negative) should be assigned:

- the likelihood of its occurrence; and
- the impact it would have should it occur.

To this end, the likelihood and the impact of a given issue/event/condition will each be assigned subjective values of:

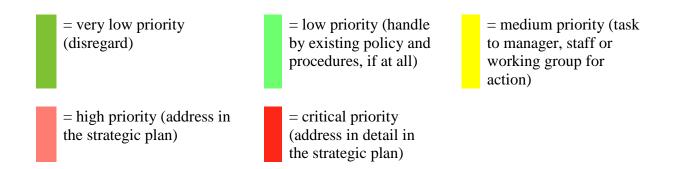
- very low;
- low;
- moderate;
- high;
- very high.

This chart shows how these values can be depicted and quantified:

QUANTIFYING LIKELIHOODS AND IMPACTS

e e	Very High 5	5	10	15	20	25
Likelihood of Occurrence	High 4	4	8	12	16	20
	Moderate 3	3	6	9	12	15
	Low 2	2	4	6	8	10
	Very Low	1	2	3	4	5
		Very Low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very High 5

Impact of Occurrence



The likelihood value is multiplied by the impact value to yield a priority value. For example, if the likelihood is moderate (3) and the impact is high (4), the priority value would be $3 \times 4 = 12$.

What This Enables You to Do

By quantifying a priority value for each issue/event/condition, you will be able to:

- compare issues/events/conditions relatively objectively;
- assess the relative importance of issues/events/conditions; and
- decide how much attention (if any) to devote to each issue/event/condition.

For example, let's say you would like to expand programs by 75 percent, which would have a very high impact (5):

- Achieving this by seeking a 75 percent increase in the establishment's budget from the government might be assessed as having a low likelihood (2). Therefore it would be assigned a priority value of 5 x 2 = 10.
- Achieving this by seeking contributions from public-private partnerships might be assessed as having a moderate likelihood (3). Therefore it would be assigned a priority value of $5 \times 3 = 15$.
- Achieving this by securing donations from the general public might be assessed as having a very low likelihood (1). Therefore, it would be assigned a priority value of 5 x 1 = 5.

By comparing these scores, we can see that our best bet is to work on public-private partnerships. With a priority score of 15, this would likely be:

- 50 percent more fruitful than seeking a budget increase from the government; and
- three times more fruitful than working on getting donations from the public.

Matters That Are Linked to Each Other

SWOT scans can enable us to do more than just set priorities. They can also help to identify and decide how to deal with issues/events/conditions that are at odds with one another or that complement each other.

Competing Issues

A SWOT scan might help us to assign a high priority to increasing the public's purchase of program memberships by 50 percent. However, a SWOT scan might also tell us that a severe economic recession is expected over the period covered by the strategic plan. That, in turn, would indicate that:

- securing increased program funding will be a major challenge;
- as a result, you may not be able to subsidize membership purchases to the extent you did before:
- meeting the objective of increasing memberships by 50 percent becomes significantly less likely, even though its impact remains very high; and
- you might decide to:
 - o assign a lower priority value to securing increased funding for the program;
 - o devote less effort to raising funds; and
 - o assign a higher priority to improving the experience of program participants in ways that do not cost much money; and
 - o devote more effort to improving the program experience in that fashion.

Complementary Issues

A SWOT scan might tell you that some of your managers feel they lack the experienced staff needed to fulfill their mandates. However, a SWOT scan might also tell us there are talented members of the community who feel they do not have access to job openings in your establishment.

This might tell us that these segments of the community should be targeted with ads for job openings.

Risk

Every option available will have risks — for better or for worse. A sound strategy will be preceded by a sound risk assessment, which is a key element in priority-setting.

What are the Risks?

What risks do the options present — specifically:

- What positive outcomes could be achieved?
- What negative outcomes could result?
- What is the likelihood of each outcome?
- How great would be the impact if each outcome occurred?

Risks should be quantified and compared with other issues/events/conditions in the same way as priorities are set from a SWOT scan (see <u>above</u>).

Response to Risk

What steps can you take to:

- enhance positive outcomes and increase their likelihood; and
- prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, recover from and/or adapt to negative outcomes?

What investments would be needed to take those steps? Do the potential returns on investment justify the expense?

WHAT DRIVES US?

To succeed, a strategy must be anchored in:

- a strong value proposition; and
- sound goals.

Before doing SWOT scans, it can be useful to ensure that those anchors are in place and that they remain valid. Conversely, however, SWOT scans can help to redefine those anchors in some cases. For example, a SWOT scan may reveal a new funding opportunity. That, in turn, might make it feasible to expand programs.

Value Proposition, Goals and Objectives

Let's return to our fictitious department, XL Social Services. Its value proposition and goals are the foundation that validates its 2018-21 objectives. If there is doubt about them, everything that follows will be fraught with difficulty. Here are key questions to ask:

- What value does XL Social Services offer the external environment?
- Is that value clear to all?
- Is it still relevant?
- Is it unique?
- Do others offer services or programs that detract from, compete with or complement XL Social Services'?
- Is there a need to revamp the value proposition before pursuing the goals and objectives that support it?

Results of the SWOT Scan

As noted above, a key step in understanding strategic issues is to do a SWOT scan of the internal and external environments.

A SWOT scan can inform decisions on:

- the establishment's value proposition and goals;
- the establishment's objectives and execution plans for the planning period; or
- both.

As you do a SWOT scan, PESTLE can help you to identify factors in the internal and external environments that will influence strategy and its action plan. For example:

- political factors might include public opinion or government policy;
- economic factors might include budget considerations or financial impact on stakeholders:
- social factors might include impact on education, culture, families, the elderly or employees;
- technological factors might include technological capacities, constraints or potential;
 and
- ecological factors might include climate change or impact on flora and fauna.

Strategy links the elements of the internal environment with each other and with the external environment. It is a tool for changing elements of those environments for the better.

Options

The findings of your SWOT scan and the anchors that drive your establishment should lead you to conclude that many options are open to you for responding to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist. In assessing options and setting objectives, ask yourself:

- What do you want to influence, what can you influence and what must you influence in the external environment?
- What do you want to change, what can you change and what must you change in the internal environment in order to:
 - o bring about change in the external environment; and
 - o achieve other desired ends with respect to the internal environment?
- How urgent are those wants and needs?
- What options could be pursued to bring about change internally and externally?

- Do you have the management preferences, resources, organization and strategy needed to pursue each option?
- Do those affected (internally and externally) have the management preferences, resources, organization and strategy required to respond to each option the way you need them to? If not, what can you do about it?

Objectives and Priorities

In refining options to produce sound objectives, it is valuable to ask a number of questions:

- Are all the objectives validated by a higher goal?
- Are the objectives mutually compatible?
- Are the objectives SMART i.e., specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and time-bound?
- Do the findings on validation, SWOT, SMART and mutual compatibility tell us that anything must be done with the objectives?
 - o Do we need to set priorities (see <u>above</u>)?
 - o Do we need to change the objectives?
 - o Do we need to change the way objectives are pursued?

EXECUTION

To succeed, a strategy must have a sound execution plan. Here are matters to consider.

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

In order to pursue our chosen objectives:

- What must be done?
- What will this cost?
- Who must do it?
- Who will pay for it?
- When must it be done?
- Where must it be done?
- Why must it be done?
- How must it be done?
- How much of it must be done?

Note that the answers to these questions may lead to a need to revisit the priority-setting process.

Communications

How and when will this be communicated to those affected or who are expected to act:

- within XL Social Services; and
- in the external environment?

EVALUATION

What Does Evaluation Mean?

In developing objectives, it is vital to ask:

- How will you know if you have succeeded?
- Are there indicators that will warn you when corrective action or a change of course may be needed during the execution cycle?

Therefore, it is important to attach targets and measurement methods to each objective.

Measurement Methods

The targets and measurement methods used in assessing progress and success could be either:

- quantitative for example, XL Social Services might count:
 How many children took part in its programs for how many days this year?
 or
- qualitative for example a question in a post-program survey might ask:

How much did you enjoy XL's program in general — using a rating scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 meaning that you enjoyed it a great deal, and 1 meaning that you did not enjoy it at all).

Periodic Reality Checks

The evaluation process is more than just an assessment of success at the end of the three-year execution period. Rather, it is used throughout that period to do reality checks. Those checks, in turn, can feed back into the inputs level of the logic model, leading to new actions and outputs, where needed, to adapt to realities.

Fundraising

Concrete, measured results can be a strong tool for:

- arguing in favour of budget allocations (in a government context); and
- raising funds from major partners.

Both are attuned to making evidence-based decisions on what funds to allocate to whom.

Subsequent Planning Cycle

As results are measured from the execution cycle, this information will feed into the next three-year planning cycle. For example, results measured during the 2018-21 execution cycle will provide part of the input for the 2021-24 strategic planning process.

CONCLUSION

What This Annex Has Done

This annex has outlined:

- tools for understanding the nature and context of strategy;
- elements of the internal environment and the external environment;
- a method for setting priorities in the strategic planning process; and
- factors to bear in mind in working to bring about change in those environments.

Why It Matters for Your Briefing Note

For your briefing note to succeed, it is important to situate yourself and your audience. Where are you and your audience in the processes set out above, i.e.:

- assessing the value proposition;
- conducting SWOT scans of the internal and external environments;
- analyzing the findings from the SWOT scan, setting priorities and deciding what to change in the internal and external environments;
- developing a strategy, i.e., a plan for pursuing those changes;
- executing that strategy;
- measuring progress as you execute the strategy;
- assessing whether a mid-stream change in course is needed; and
- measuring the strategy's success in achieving its objectives.

In doing so, ask:

- Is your establishment or the external environment in the midst of one or more of those processes?
- If not, should it be?
- Are you a player who is taking action on one or more of those processes?
- Are any of those processes unfolding under the direction of other players? Is your audience one of those players?

Once you have situated yourself and your audience in those processes, ask:

- Will one or more of these processes will be the key focus of your briefing note?
- Whether the answer is yes or no:
 - O What impact will the key focus have on those processes?
 - o What impact will those processes have on the key focus?

If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else.
- Yogi Berra