

Strategic foresight

Know your opportunities



Business opportunity identification

Growth and success in the future are primary objectives for any business – hence the need for a far-reaching business strategy, including foresight about the future.

Considering the negative economic climate, it has become clear that South African businesses will need to unlock new opportunities to ensure success.

Opportunities should be identified within South Africa and beyond its borders.

Business strategy is about the looking to the future. Strategy formulation involves making decisions today and taking into account different strategic directions that could be taken in the future. Future events and conditions present both business opportunities and risks, but often appear disguised as weak signals, emerging issues and trends (collectively called environmental indicators) within the competitive (industry-related) and contextual environments of the business.

These environmental indicators could originate from the business' own industry or from the political, economic, social, or physical environments. New technology has also a disruptive influence on any business. Most important are the unexpected trends, which originate from other industries, but cut across all industries, and which are usually a blind spot for most businesses. These blind spots are then further amplified by the convergence of different trends, making it extremely difficult for a business – without proper environmental scanning, forecasting and scenario planning - to map its future strategy.



Trends

- Easier to identify than emerging issues and weak signals.
- The media and public are already aware and talking about trends.
- Their impact is already felt by business.
- The objective is to understand how they will evolve over time and their impact on business i.e.: cyclic, linear, seasonal, exponential, upward or downward trends.



Emerging Issues

- Not trends yet.
- Too radical for the majority at the time of emergence.
- Starts with a value shift or viewpoint change by an influential business leader or champion (mavericks of the business world).
- Slowly the emerging issue begins to move into public view (mainstream media not yet talking about it, only "maverick" media).
- Emerging issue identification is second prize.



Weak Signals

- These signals will not be expressed in public or the media (not even the "maverick" media).
- They reside in the hearts and minds of customers, clients or employees (e.g. resentment about a political establishment; the origin of a revolution – the 'birthplace' of an uprising such as the Arab Spring).
- Words spoken in privacy or perhaps not yet expressed verbally.
- Grant Thornton uses a specialized research tool to detect weak signals which provides a quantitative approach to what has traditionally been a qualitative domain.
- Weak signal identification is first prize, although difficult to determine.

Our services

INPUT

Initial research with the aim to identify new business opportunities and risks (i.e. environmental scanning) in- and outside South Africa.

Identification of trends, emerging issues and weak signals in the following areas:

- Contextual environment
- Competitive (industry) environment
- Internal organisational environment

We, in association with our partners, specialize in Africa and many African industries, and can assist you to ascertain how favourable the competitive and contextual environments of a specific African country are for your business.

FORESIGHT & STRATEGIC THINKING

Trend analysis and forecasting, with advanced data analytics, including:

- Trend-cross-industry analysis and trend-cross-impact analysis (these analyses tend to resonate with the question: “what seems to be happening?”).
- The analysis of the deep, structural forces behind identified trends, including:
 - Macro patterns in change.
 - Systemic causes.
 - Weight of history (“legacy baggage”) and pushes (trends) of the present.
 - Cultural / social causes (myths and metaphors, resulting in systemic issues and trends).

(Above analysis tend to resonate with the question “what’s really happening?”)

Scenario planning is about exploring different options and to inform the business strategy process:

- Normative scenarios: create your ideal future / business vision by managing the future from the present with back-casting methods (normative scenarios tend to resonate with the question: “what might we need / want to do?”).
- Explorative scenarios: exploring different and possible future events and their potential impact on your business’s normative vision (explorative scenarios tend to ask the question “what might happen?”).


STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT & ACTION

Strategy development is about making decisions and setting directions, based on the scenario planning results:

- A synthesis of explorative and normative scenarios are developed (as explorative scenarios will always impact on the desired future or normative vision / scenario).
- Based on the scenario synthesis, particular goals or objectives are set (this resonate with the question “what will we do?”).

Strategic planning is about breaking down goals or objectives into steps and actions:

- Including business model adjustment, and the articulation of the anticipated consequences or results of each step (strategic planning asks the question “how will we do it?”).



Foresight is knowledge or insight gained by looking into the future, by seeing the ‘dots on the horizon’. It is a perception of the nature of events before they occur.

How we can assist

Short term assignments (e.g. workshops)

Short term assignments typically exclude in-depth environmental scanning exercises and trend analysis, as well as forecasting. We normally rely then on a client's institutional knowledge regarding industry-related trends (instead of performing our own research). From a contextual perspective we would provide general background information on the political, social, economic, and physical environments as well as on technology trends, relevant to your business.

Grant Thornton can assist with short term scenario planning workshops to synthesize previously identified trends with normative and/or explorative scenarios.

Workshops could range from one to five days.

Long term assignments (i.e. in-depth research & strategic foresight development)

These in-depth research assignments cover the whole range of our services, from the Input phase to the Foresight and Strategic Thinking phase to the Strategic Development and Action phase.

Although Grant Thornton can assist by covering this whole range of strategic services, we are still flexible in our approach and can tailor our methodology to include only those services needed by your company.

Long term assignments could range from more than one week to several months.

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