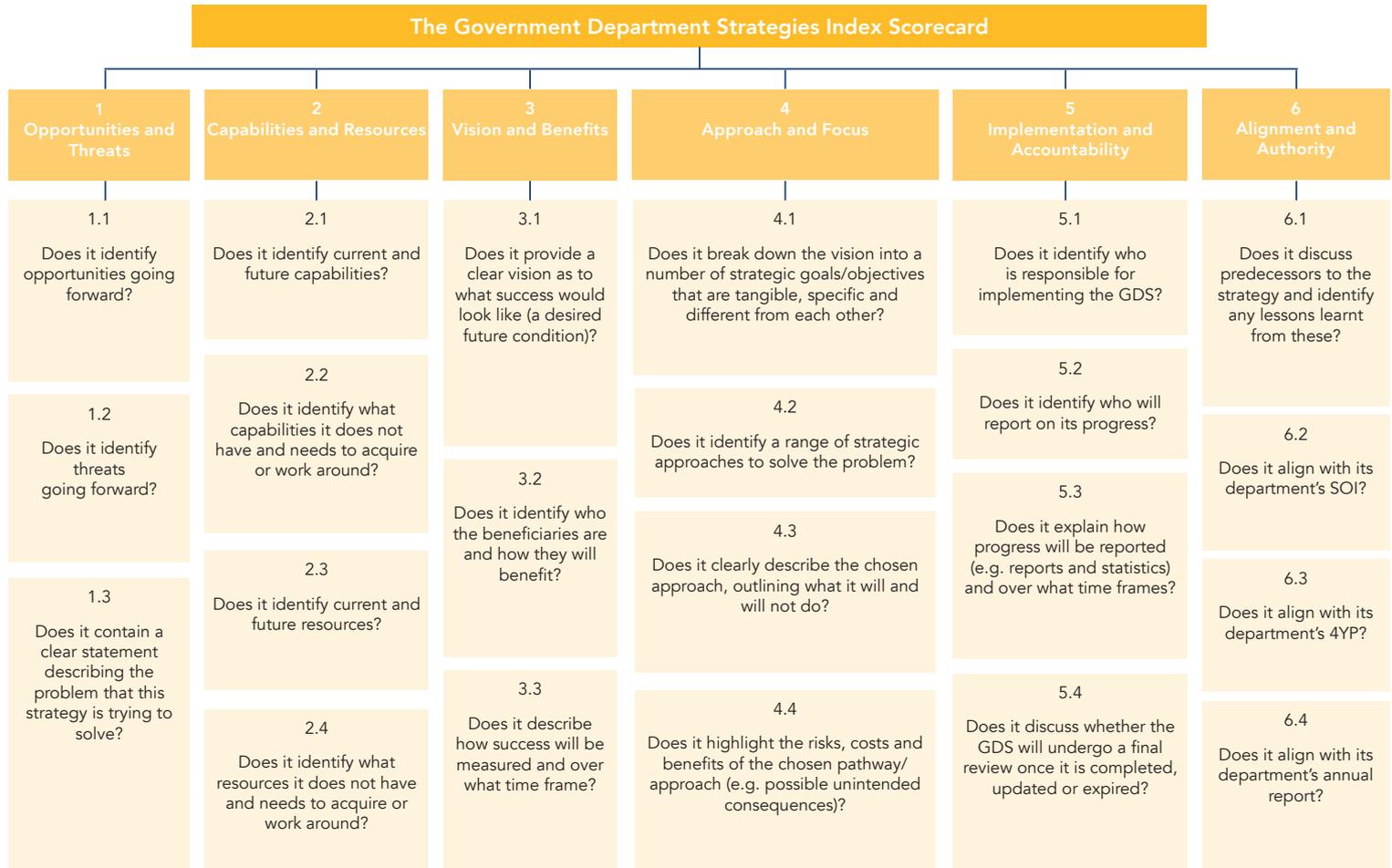


HOW TO ASSESS THE CONTENT OF A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT STRATEGY (GDS) DOCUMENT



STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Strategy concerns choice. What we choose to focus on, as individuals, communities and a nation, indicates the direction we are likely to travel.

Depending on the intensity of our focus and the quality of our strategic instruments, we might drift slowly on a fixed trajectory, only changing direction in response to a disruptive event, or we may move rapidly and purposefully, working hard to be proactive, agile and open to emerging opportunities and challenges.

The cone of plausibility (Figure 1) illustrates the connection between hindsight, insight and foresight. It helps distinguish between the preferred, possible and probable futures.

Improved strategy development can contribute to better stewardship in terms of publishing better strategy documents, improving transparency, delivering better public engagement and critical assessment, and developing a deeper understanding of trade-offs and the way forward.

Figure 1: The cone of plausibility



GLOSSARY

Foresight

The ability to anticipate and assess future events as well as to strategise to avert future dangers and grasp future opportunities.

Government Department Strategy (GDS)

A government department strategy must:

- (i) be a publicly available statement or report;
- (ii) be generated by government departments with a national rather than a local focus;
- (iii) contain long-term thinking in such a way that the strategy links to a long-term vision or aim, and ideally provide clarity over the factors that may impinge on the attainment of that vision or aim; and
- (iv) guide the department's thinking and operations over the long term (i.e. contain a work programme to achieve change over two years or more).

Hindsight

Hindsight is the knowledge gained from analysing past events and trends.

Insight

Insight is the ability to explore the impacts and consequences of current events.

Plan

A plan is operational in nature; it focuses on who will do what and when. It does not explore tensions/trade-offs in the external environment or the strategic options in any detail.

Possible Futures

Possible futures are the wide range of potential outcomes (including probable and improbable futures). Possible futures speak to the idea of 'what we know,' 'what we know we don't know,' and 'what we don't know we don't know.'

Preferred Future

A preferred future is a description of a future that is most desired by an individual or group.

Probable Future

The probable future is the most likely outlook.

Strategy

A strategy maintains a balance between ends and means. Professor Lawrence Freedman, in his book *Strategy: A History* suggested that strategy is 'about identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives. This balance requires not only finding out how to achieve desired ends but also adjusting ends so that realistic ways can be found to meet them by available means'.