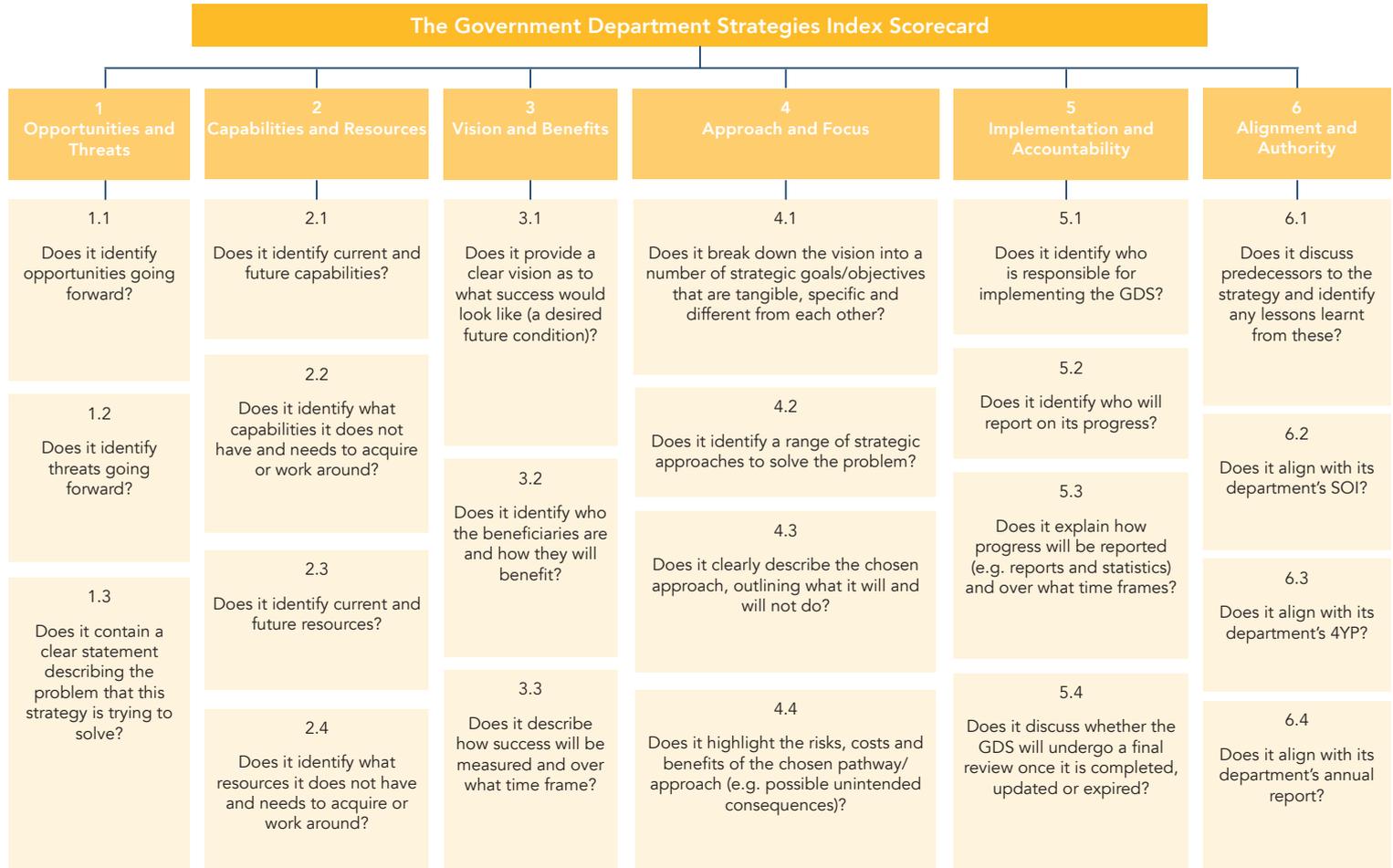


HOW TO ASSESS THE CONTENT OF A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT STRATEGY (GDS) DOCUMENT



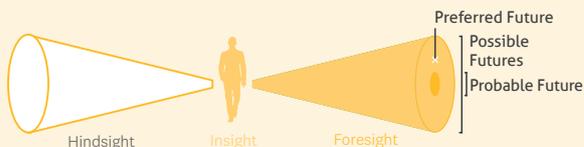
STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

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.

A strategy maintains a balance between ends and means. The cone of plausibility (Figure 1) illustrates the connection between hindsight, insight and foresight. It helps distinguish between the preferred future (the desired end) and 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

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. Demonstrate long-term thinking presented 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 high-level work programme to achieve change over two years or more).

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 future most desired by an individual or group.

Probable future

The probable future is the most likely outlook.

Strategic approach

Describes the agreed means to achieving the desired vision.

Strategy

A strategy maintains a balance between ends and means. Professor Lawrence Freedman suggests that strategy is to do with determining objectives and 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'.

Strategy maps

Strategy maps provide 'the visual framework for integrating the organization's objectives [and] illustrates the cause-and-effect relationships that link desired outcomes'.