We start Part One with a brief discussion of what strategic planning and strategy are. Then we show how visual strategy mapping (ViSM) is an extremely powerful method to support strategic planning. Throughout Part One (and subsequent parts of the workbook), icons are included that cross-reference other relevant parts of the workbook; point to additional useful information contained in John’s *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* or Fran and Colin’s *Making Strategy*; or guide the reader to other supplemental resources, as listed in Resource D.

**What Is Strategic Planning?**

Strategic planning is “a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 2011, pp. 7–8). Strategic planning is meant to help leaders, managers, and other key actors successfully address major organizational (or some other entity’s) issues or challenges, meaning those that are not amenable
to simple technical fixes. Deliberative strategic planning and ongoing strategic management can be helpful for purposes of

- Gathering, structuring, analyzing, and synthesizing information to consider its strategic significance and frame choices
- Addressing in effective ways key organizational issues or challenges now and in the foreseeable future
- Producing considered judgments among key decision makers about desirable, feasible, defensible, and acceptable mission, goals, strategies, and actions, along with complementary initiatives, such as new, changed, or terminated policies, programs, and projects, or even overall organizational designs
- Enhancing continuous organizational learning
- Creating significant and enduring public value

What Is Strategy?

A crucial aspect of strategic planning and ongoing strategic management (the linking of strategic planning and implementation) is developing effective strategies. But what is strategy, and why does it matter? Bryson (2011, p. 60) defines strategy as “a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, projects, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that define what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.” Similarly, Ackermann and Eden (2011, p. 5) say, “strategy is about agreeing on priorities and then implementing those priorities towards the realization of organizational purpose.” All three authors note that strategies can vary by level, function, and time frame, and by how well they perform against expectations or requirements. Typically, strategies are meant to deal with significant issues that require an organizational response. Strategies are important because they are the means for achieving organizational purposes (see Figure 1.1). Changes indicated by adopted strategies must be incorporated throughout the organization (or other relevant
system) if aspirations are to be realized in practice and real public value created. Otherwise, strategies remain good intentions, not good deeds—they will stay dreams, or even hallucinations, not facts on the ground.

For an existing or new strategy, ask the following questions (Bryson and Alston, 2011, pp. 159–161):

- Exactly what is the strategy?
- What issue or issues is the strategy meant to address?
- What goals is the strategy meant to achieve?
- How consistent is the strategy with the organization’s
  - Mission (and vision if there is one)
  - Mandates
  - Values and philosophy
  - Culture and belief system
- How acceptable is the strategy to key stakeholders?
- How acceptable is the strategy to the general public?
- How well coordinated is the strategy with other strategies, programs, and activities?
- Is the strategy technically feasible?
- Are necessary human, financial, physical (such as facilities), and other resources available, and can they be allocated to support the strategy?

Figure 1.1. An Effective Strategy Is a Robust Means of Achieving a Desired End.
• Are incentives aligned in appropriate ways or can necessary realignments be made?
• What are the short-term impacts?
• What are the long-term impacts?
• Is the strategy flexible and adaptable enough?
• Is the timing right?
• Have risks been adequately assessed, and can they be managed effectively?
• Overall, is the strategy cost-effective, when costs are viewed broadly?

The list of questions makes clear that an important premise behind the ViSM approach to making strategy is that there should be a strong connection between strategy and operations, or else the strategy is relatively useless. In other words, if the strategy cannot be put into practice, then it will have no effect on changing the organization, its relationships with its environment, or any part of the environment. The strategy, in other words, will be equivalent to the typical New Year’s resolution. In contrast, ViSM is designed to focus attention on coherence and consistency across what people say (rhetoric), what they decide (choices), what they are willing to pay for (budget), what they do (actions), and the desirable consequences of those actions in terms of mission and goals, as well as any likely undesirable or untoward consequences that need to be managed.

The list of questions also makes clear another important premise behind the ViSM approach to making strategy: beyond any conceptual connection between strategy and operations, there must also be strong links between the strategy in question and the psychological, social, and political commitments on the part of key stakeholders needed to implement it. Again, without these linkages the strategy will be little more than hand waving on the part of the strategy formulators without any subsequent heavy lifting by the implementers. The need to create these commitments means that the process of developing strategies is typically as important—perhaps even more important—than the actual content of the strategies. The workbook will highlight how necessary commitments may be gained.
What Is Strategy Mapping?

As we noted in the Preface, ViSM is a causal mapping process. A causal map is a word-and-arrow (or statement-and-arrow) diagram in which ideas are causally linked to one another through the use of arrows. The arrows indicate how one idea or action leads to another in a means-ends relationship; in other words, an arrow means “might cause,” “might lead to,” “might result in,” or some other kind of influence relationship.

Causal strategy mapping makes it possible to articulate a large number of ideas and their interconnections in such a way that people can know what to do in an area (issue) of concern, how to do it, and why, since each chain of arrows (where the chain details a linked argument) indicates the causes and consequences of an idea or action (Bryson, Ackermann, Eden, and Finn, 2004, p. xii; Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p. 3) (see Figure 1.2).

ViSM as a part of strategic management prompts users to view strategy as focused on ways to change an organization, its relationship to its environment, and often important

Figure 1.2. Word-and-Arrow Statements.
Causal strategy mapping uses word-and-arrow statements to answer three questions: What should we do? How should we do it? and Why should we do it?
parts of its environment. For example, strategy might be focused on improving products and services or relationships with key stakeholders. Effectively managing strategic change necessarily requires an understanding of causal, or means-ends, relationships. Causal mapping—and specifically ViSM—therefore becomes an extremely useful strategic management tool. As Ackermann and Eden (2011, p. 10) point out, “a causal map graphically presents the basis for action and change.”

The statements in the map represent actions that, if taken, are presumed to cause a given outcome(s). Each action in turn is informed by actions that support it as explanations, whereby the former action becomes an outcome (consequence) of the earlier actions. As a result, each statement on a map can be both an action (explanation) and an outcome (consequence), depending on where it is located in a chain of arrows. Figure 1.3 shows how this works. The weight lifter on the left is beginning to lift a barbell, which results in the midway outcome of holding the barbell over his head while standing partway up. Continuing that action leads to the final outcome of standing all the way up with the barbell high overhead.

The chains of means-ends linkages (or lines of argument) represented visually on a map help make causal maps “an important vehicle for encouraging strategic conversations” (Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p. 3), as mappers consider in a deliberative way the many actions, outcomes, and linkages among them. Mappers use these lines of

Figure 1.3. Action-Outcome Sequences in Which an Action Produces an Outcome That in Turn Is an Action Producing the Next Outcome.
argument to explore answers to the three questions: What do we want to do? How do we want to do it? and Why do we want to do it?

As you will see shortly, a strategy map and a strategic plan have the same basic logic structure. By using a few simple rules for formulating statements and creating links, causal maps help reveal possible values, goals, strategies, actions, and underlying assumptions—and then focus dialogue, deliberation, and negotiation on which among the possibilities actually should be chosen. Depending on the situation, these maps may include anywhere from two dozen to hundreds of statements.

**An Example of a Strategy Map**

What does a strategy map look like? Consider a map we produced as a guide to writing this book. The first part of this map is presented in Figure 1.4 (we will build up the map in Figures 1.4 through 1.6). Look at the lower-left corner of Figure 1.4 and find *create a workbook about how to do strategy mapping*. That is *what* we set out to do. Said differently, “create a workbook” is a *strategy*, but a strategy to accomplish what? What are the purposes of such a strategy? In other words, what would our *mission* and *goals* be if we decided to create a strategy-mapping workbook? We had to get clear about that—about our purposes—in order to convince ourselves that writing such a workbook was a good idea. After all, each of us has written many books, so we knew generally how to do that. The actual writing wouldn’t be that hard. The real question was, *why this book?*

The answer to that question for us will be found by following the arrows out of *create a workbook*. As noted earlier, the arrows indicate possible *consequences* of creating a workbook—that is, what creating a workbook “might cause,” “might lead to,” or “might result in.” Four arrows lead from *create a workbook*. The first goes to *produce a useful book for students and practitioners*, while another leads to *provide readers practical guidance and step-by-step instructions in how to do strategy mapping*. A third goes to *help readers understand the rationale of strategy mapping*, and the final one
results in provide guidance in the facilitation of strategy-making teams. There is also a cross-link from help readers understand the rationale of strategy mapping to produce a useful book for students and practitioners. Note as well that there is both a direct link from create a workbook to provide readers practical guidance and an indirect link through provide guidance in the facilitation of strategy-making teams. Similarly, there is both a direct link from create a workbook to provide readers practical guidance and an indirect link through produce a useful book for students and practitioners.

Moving further up the map, it is clear that help readers understand the rationale and provide readers practical guidance will require us to facilitate learning through examples. In other words, providing examples will help enhance understanding of the “rationale” for mapping and help provide readers with “practical” guidance. In
turn, knowing the “rationale” and having “practical guidance” will help readers better understand strategic management. Finally, knowing the “rationale,” “having practical guidance,” and “better understanding strategic management” may lead to help make public and nonprofit strategic management easier and more effective, which would be our ultimate purpose in writing the workbook.

Figure 1.4 is what we call an overview map, meaning a map that shows a goal system and strategies. “Create a workbook” is a strategy, and the types of consequence described in the preceding paragraphs represent what our goal system would be if we chose to write the workbook. The goal system includes as its ultimate consequence what is in fact an important element of each of our personal missions as professionals: “help make public and nonprofit strategic management easier and more effective.” That statement captures our ultimate purpose—our mission—for writing this workbook. The map of the mission and goals helped persuade us that it was worthwhile to create a workbook. The mission and goals show us why we should take the time and put in the effort to create a workbook.

Before fully committing to doing the workbook, however, we did need to know that we actually could create a workbook that served the mission and goals. To this point we have answered two questions: What do we want to do? and Why do we want to do it? We are still left with the question, How would we do it? As noted, we have written books before, but what about writing this workbook? This was a strategic issue for us.

Figure 1.5 presents our answer to the question of how we would create a workbook. Starting about 8 or 9 o’clock, you will see that we needed to get a publishing contract as an “explanation” or “cause” of our being able to create a workbook. So how would we get a publishing contract? We would start by having John talk with his editor at Jossey-Bass, and by “writing a proposal.” In order to write a proposal, “John, Fran, Colin, and Ramon would need to agree to do it.” And in order to do that, they would need to discuss the need for the workbook, develop a rough idea of the
Figure 1.5. How to Create a Workbook About How to Do Strategy Mapping.

contents of the workbook, develop a rough idea of a work plan, figure out when we could do it,” and, in particular, figure out how we can write it when we live in three different parts of the world. Ultimately, John’s editor and Jossey-Bass accepted the proposal and agreed to publish the workbook.

Once we had a contract, we then needed to write the text, etc. for the workbook—get it done,” which is in the center of the map. And how would we do that? Well, we would need to develop a detailed work program and assign tasks. We would also need to meet face-to-face physically or virtually on a regular basis, since we live on three
different continents (John lives in the United States, Fran is in Australia, and Colin and Ramon live in Scotland). Some ways we could do this might be to meet periodically via Skype, meet for extra days before or after conferences, meet for a week at Colin’s cottage in England, and meet for a week in John’s apartment in Minneapolis.

In addition, “get it done” meant make use of lots of graphics. This included figure out where graphics of various kinds are needed, develop caricatures of John, Fran, Colin, and Ramon, and develop caricatures of actors from The Loft, an organization whose strategic management story features prominently in Part Two of this workbook. Getting it done also meant we needed to arrange for readers to acquire Decision Explorer software at a reasonable price, if they decide they want computer support for strategy mapping. Beyond that, getting it done meant facilitate learning through examples. This entailed, use lots of examples, which in turn called for us to provide example cases from a range of settings and use The Loft’s strategic planning story as an important part of the book. This last required us to find ways to involve Jocelyn Hale [The Loft’s executive director] and others at The Loft in a case to show the process, which also meant, as already noted, we needed to develop caricatures of actors from The Loft. Finally, getting it done meant we needed to link the book to John’s strategic planning book and Fran and Colin’s strategic management book.”

In creating the map, we also realized there were more personal, as opposed to professional, goals that we wanted to achieve as a result of the book project. Working on the bottom part of the map helped clarify what these goals were.

Figure 1.6 presents the more personal side of our goal system. Meet face-to-face physically or virtually on a regular basis would be necessary to get it done, which we must do if we are to create a workbook.” But doing so also would allow us to enjoy one another’s company, which in turn helps us continue and reinforce a long-term, pleasurable, productive relationship. Creating a workbook also helps us enjoy one another’s company and learn from one another, which in turn is another important pathway to continue and reinforce a long-term, pleasurable, productive relationship.

The final map is presented in Figure 1.7, which includes our answers to all three questions concerning what we want to do—“create a workbook about how
to do strategy mapping”—how we would do it, and why. In the final map, you will notice that not all chains of arrows from the bottom part of the map pass through create a workbook. Some go straight into the goals system without passing through create a workbook. These include meet face-to-face physically or virtually on a regular basis, which we already discussed; facilitate learning through examples, which has two arrows leading to provide readers practical guidance and help readers...
Introduction to Strategy Mapping

Figure 1.7. Why and How to Create a Workbook About How to Do Strategy Mapping.
understand the rationale, respectively; and link the book to John's strategic planning book and Fran and Colin's strategic management book, which goes directly to help readers better understand strategic management.

The map is fairly simple and straightforward, but it gave us significantly greater clarity of purpose as well as a plan for achieving our mission and goals. In terms of strategy formulation, the “upper” part of the map—the mission and goal system—is the most important part because it directly speaks to what we value. It is the most enduring, value-laden part of the map. Said differently, “create a workbook” is simply one way among many strategies for achieving the goals and mission. The lower part of the map is more about strategy implementation. Given the relative simplicity of creating a workbook, the bottom part of the map is mainly about project management or, more generally, about strategic programming.

In more complicated cases—which are more typical of organizational or multiorganizational strategic planning efforts—there almost certainly would be more ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion. The uncertainty would be revealed as part of the dialogue, deliberation, and negotiation concerning what should be in the upper part of the map—meaning those parts of the map devoted to statements articulating possible mission and goals, as well as likely performance indicators to help monitor whether goals are being achieved.

In more complicated cases, there also would be more ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion during the early stages of developing the bottom part of the map, where categories of actions and possibly even very specific actions might be detailed. This would be especially true in fairly turbulent environments, in which it is not possible to develop detailed action plans well in advance of when the actions must be taken.

We will present more complicated mapping situations in Parts Two and Three of the book and show how the participants involved used the technique to help understand and manage the complexity they faced. In such cases, strategy mapping is worth its weight in gold when it comes to helping teams of leaders, managers,
and other stakeholders make sense of their situations and figure out what to do about them, how to do it, and why.

The Logic Structure of a Strategy Map

Strategy maps have a characteristic structure and logic, which is the same as that of a strategic plan. The structure and logic are presented in Figure 1.8 (Bryson, Ackermann, Eden, and Finn, 2004, pp. 36–38).

Consider the map we just presented. In this example, we began by asking ourselves, “What do we want to do?” This is the middle question in the left-hand column in Figure 1.8. Once we answered that, we had identified a possible strategy, namely, “create a workbook about how to do strategy mapping.” The next step in developing the strategy’s implementing actions (as opposed to the goals of the strategy) was dealing with the strategic issue of exactly how to create such a workbook. Addressing that issue required developing an as yet unarticulated set of possible action options that we might take to address the issue. We explored these various options by asking ourselves, “How would we do that?” or “What would it take to do that?” The answers to these questions involved laddering down from the possible central strategy and yielded the statements with arrows leading into create a workbook. The answers to the question “How would we do that?” were presented in Figure 1.5.

We could have laddered down even further by asking ourselves another question—though we chose not to—and that is, “What are we assuming about the world?” In other words, what do we believe or assert about the world that provides
**Figure 1.8.** The Structure and Logic of a Strategy Map.

A basic platform on which we are building and scaffolding up our argument? Had we asked this question, we might have said things about the importance we attach to our roles as academics with deep connections to, and appreciations for, the world of practice—an appreciation not all academics share. We might have made
assertions about our need as academics to publish because we live in “publish-or-perish” environments. We might have said something about our simple pleasure in each other’s company. Each of these statements went unsaid, in part because they are simply a part of our “assumptive worlds” or “world-taken-for-granted” and didn’t need to be said (Eden, Jones, and Sims, 1983). We didn’t ask these questions because we know each other so well. In other situations, however, when strategy-mapping participants do not know each other so well, or come from different cultures, the “taken-for-granteds” should probably be made explicit because often differences there explain fundamental disagreements about strategies, goals, and in general how to proceed. These disagreements can have negative effects on strategy formulation and can undermine strategy implementation if they are not acknowledged and agreements negotiated about how to handle them.

In our case, however, instead of exploring the question further (through developing action options) of how we might pursue the central strategy, we asked “What would result from creating a workbook?” or “What would the consequences be of doing that?” Answers to these questions involved laddering up. The answers helped us be clear about (1) the personal gains and pleasures we hoped would result from the project, including our goal of continuing and reinforcing our relationships; (2) our professional goals related to the workbook; and (3) how the workbook project linked to both our personal goals and our professional goals and mission in the world. See Figures 1.4, 1.6, and 1.7.

Figure 1.7 presents our complete map. Figure 1.9 shows the same map, but this time mission, goals, strategy, and related actions are highlighted. You will see that the logic structure is the same as that of a strategic plan. Indeed, this map was our strategic plan for producing the workbook. When done for organizations, the maps can be used to develop coherent, aligned, adequately resourced, and sustainable strategies that can and will be implemented. Note that the answers to the why question lead to identifying mission and goals, answers to the what question is a strategy or strategies, and answers to the how question are actions to implement the strategies.
Figure 1.9. Strategic Plan for Why and How to Create a Workbook About How to Do Strategy Mapping.
At the center is a single strategy.
The Benefits of Strategy Mapping

In the Preface we asserted that visual strategy mapping was the most powerful method (technique and tool) we know of for helping an individual, and especially a group, figure out what to do, how to do it, and why. Now that you have been introduced to strategy mapping, let us explore in more detail why we made that assertion. Exhibit 1.1 presents a list of process, content, and jointly process and content benefits of strategy mapping. We will discuss the list briefly and then map the items on the list to show how mapping adds information that wouldn’t otherwise be available.

On the process side, mapping allows everyone to be heard, which can stimulate excitement and allow people to think smarter. This in turn helps build strong commitments to action. On the content side, mapping provides a visual,
two-dimensional display of causal sequences, which helps people think about relationships and patterns in the data. There are also benefits that are both strongly process and content benefits. These include engaging people with more information, which facilitates systems thinking, which in turn facilitates social and psychological negotiation among participants. That helps create a usable product more quickly, which facilitates a move from thinking to acting, and from strategy formulation to strategy implementation.

Clearly, the list of benefits is quite substantial. Presenting them in an exhibit, however, hardly does them the justice they deserve, nor does it show the intimate interconnections among the benefits. Presenting them in map form does, which we do in Figure 1.10. The map shows how the eleven benefits of strategy mapping are connected via eighteen separate links that simply do not show up in Exhibit 1.1.

**Figure 1.10.** A Map of the Most Important Benefits of Strategy Mapping.
In Figure 1.10 the preeminent benefit—and indeed, a major reason for doing strategy mapping—is that it facilitates a move from thinking to acting, from strategy formulation to strategy implementation, which is what strategic management is all about. This ultimate benefit joins process and content in an intimate way. Achieving this benefit depends on three penultimate benefits, two of which are process benefits and one of which is a content benefit. The process benefits include allows people to think smarter and builds strong commitments to action, while the content benefit provides a visual, two-dimensional display of causal sequences. All three are important, but it is commitment to action that really results in desirable change—see Figure 1.11.

“Allowing people to think smarter” is made possible by five benefits, which are a combination of content and process and content benefits. Similarly, “building strong commitments to action” is made possible by a combination of five benefits, which are a combination of process and content and process benefits. In other words, there are two main interconnected streams leading to facilitates a move from thinking to acting, from strategy formulation to strategy implementation.” One stream emphasizes enabling people to think smarter, while the other involves building strong commitments to action. Said differently, one stream involves coming up with good ideas that can be implemented (thinking smarter), while the other involves creating the coalition of, and commitments among, people needed to do the implementing. This is the essence of good strategic management—the joining of hearts and minds in desirable ways—see Figure 1.12. Precisely because strategy mapping has
all these interconnected process and content benefits, we believe that strategy mapping is an incredibly powerful technique for helping individuals and groups figure out what to do, how to do it, and why.

Figures 1.13a, b, and c help make the case for the added power of combining process and content in a rich way. Figure 1.13a shows a choir without a shared score and no conductor. This illustrates that process alone without agreed-upon content is quite discordant. Figure 1.13b shows a conductor and score, but no choir. The result is content alone—a score, but no singing. Figure 1.13c shows what happens when process and content are combined in productive ways.
You get the conductor, score, and choir making enjoyable music together. That is what mapping does. It helps everyone be on the same page doing something they think is worth doing because they know how and why they are doing it.

**Summary**

In this part of the workbook we have introduced you to strategic planning, strategy, and strategy mapping. Strategic planning is a general approach to producing
fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. Strategic planning is meant to help leaders, managers, and other key actors successfully address major organizational issues or challenges. Strategies are the ways in which these actors agree to address these issues and challenges in such a way that organizational purposes are served; strategies are the means for achieving organizational purposes.

Strategy mapping is a causal mapping process. A causal map is a word-and-arrow diagram in which ideas are causally linked to one another through the use of arrows. The arrows indicate how one idea or action leads to another in a means-ends relationship. A strategy map is thus a word-and-arrow diagram that shows the causal linkages among mission, goals, strategies, and actions. Causal mapping makes it possible to articulate a large number of ideas and their interconnections in such a way that people can know what to do in an area of concern, how to do it, and why, since each chain of arrows (where the chain details a linked argument) indicates the causes and consequences of an idea or action.

We have presented a simple example of a strategy map—the map we produced as a way of helping us figure out what our real purposes were in writing the book and how we would write it. We then discussed the many content and process benefits of strategy mapping and showed how mapping integrates both kinds of benefits in such a way that effective strategic management of public and nonprofit
organizations is more likely to occur. When they do, important public purposes are more likely to be served and the chances the world will be made a better place are increased.

Note, however, that strategy mapping is clearly not all there is to effective strategic planning and management, which is a major reason why we provide cross-references in several places in the workbook to *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* and to *Making Strategy: Mapping Out Strategic Success*. There are other tools and techniques that can help in various ways in particular circumstances, including, for example, stakeholder analyses, analyses of existing or potential competitors and collaborators, various internal and external environmental analyses, identification of existing and needed competences, and so on. One must think strategically about strategic planning and management and draw on the repertoire of available tools and techniques as necessary to understand what to do, how, and why. Strategy mapping is an incredibly useful place to start and can offer continued support along the way, but it is not the only tool or technique that may be necessary.

*Figure 1.13c.* Process and Content Working Together in a Productive Way.