



Case study: transforming organisational strategy at Sightsavers International

Sightsavers International needed a clearer strategic direction, but any successful strategy would have to truly engage staff across the organisation. In this case study we reveal how =mc worked with **Sightsavers International** over two years to develop a new global strategic direction and achieve record levels of understanding and engagement across the organisation.

Sightsavers International

Sightsavers International is a UK-based INGO working in the fields of disability and healthcare – specifically on sight-related challenges. Established 60 years ago, it has played an outstanding role in reducing sight-based disability in Asia, Africa and Central America.

Background

Sightsavers' work has historically been focused on the provision of *healthcare solutions* through a range of sight-related programmes – such as providing operations for cataracts, or medication to tackle parasites that cause blindness. This practical work was successful, but increasingly there were internal and external voices calling for a wider awareness of disability issues, and a focus on building capacity in partners and governments. The pressure was on to give **Sightsavers** a clear direction and work out how it could make the biggest impact on its beneficiaries.

The senior team, led by CEO Caroline Harper, decided to undertake a radical review of how **Sightsavers** worked, including fundamentals like vision and mission. Initially they worked with **The Management Centre (=mc)** to carry out a governance review. They decided to maintain a branch structure rather than create a full federal structure with autonomous local offices. However, to help them with their strategic review they embarked upon a global consultation programme, taking existing staff and partners along with them.

The consultation programme involved online surveys, telephone interviews and meetings with partners, staff, board members and donors from around the world. These were designed to identify the key issues that needed to be taken into account when planning a new strategic direction. **Sightsavers** also commissioned a number of quantitative and qualitative research projects to establish emerging trends in demographics, disability, and other key factors in the external environment. This balance of internal and external research took time – but it ensured that the strategic review was rigorous and disciplined, providing a firm foundation for the process of strategy creation and alignment that would follow.

Challenge

The consultation and research generated a range of different opinions and possibilities, which were clustered into four *change themes*. These ‘change themes’ set out what Sightsavers wanted to change in the world – a more urgent and externally focused sort of strategic priority. Each of these themes had associated aims and measures of success, but the challenge was how to draw together these threads into a coherent strategic plan.

=mc’s brief

Sightsavers asked **=mc** to work with them on three main projects:

- Enabling the cross-functional staff project team to develop a radical new strategic direction, using the balanced scorecard strategy map methodology
- Rolling out the strategy map methodology across the organisation through a cross-cultural training programme, involving workshops with senior staff in India, Africa and Asia
- Help key staff members to develop aspects of the programme by providing coaching

Solution

Working with the CEO and the strategic planning working group, **=mc** designed a series of integrated processes to help structure and manage the strategic change and its implications over two years. We also worked to ensure that there was a robust and transparent process.

We helped the UK team in a number of facilitated sessions by:

- Providing strategic advice on how to frame specific challenges
- Sharing best practice from elsewhere in the sector
- Advising on organisational structure to enable cross functional and global working
- Analysing responses to change and change processes

Finally, once the strategic outcome was clarified, we helped staff at **Sightsavers** to develop an integration and implementation strategy, which would ensure that the great ideas and principles were turned into concrete action.

=mc carried out workshops with each country team to enable them to create their own ‘Strategy Implementation and Monitoring Card’ or ‘SIM card’ – their name for the balanced scorecard. Each team and department involved *all* members of staff in the creation of the SIM card, and then aligned their own SIM card to the organisational one. The SIM card now drives the work of each country team and department.

Result

Staff, board and partners are now fully aligned with the new programme and the SIM card workshops achieved radical levels of engagement: a worldwide employee survey showed that 92% of staff said they understood the new vision and mission, 87% understood the SIM card, and 81% felt engaged and enthused about the future.

Sightsavers is now working on how to measure the impacts of this new direction and new ways of working. They have implemented an online dashboard that monitors global progress against the strategy. They are now working on aligning reporting, resource allocation and risk management processes with the SIM card.

“Our work with =mc has really exceeded our expectations. They helped us to create a new groundbreaking strategy which achieved astonishing levels of alignment and engagement amongst a diverse international organisation.”

Caroline Harper, CEO, Sightsavers International

Further help

Visit http://www.sightsavers.org/about_us/strategic_framework/default.html for more information about Sightsavers' strategic framework.

=mc has a team of unrivalled management consultants able to assist with the biggest and smallest organisational changes. Between us we share experience in small and large charity work, international development, arts and culture, disability and the environment. =mc consultants have worked with many of the UK's major charities on their strategy. We're proud to have helped **Oxfam, WSPA, Wateraid, UNICEF, Concern Worldwide, Greenpeace International, NSPCC** and the **British Red Cross**.

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