



## Envisioning the future to test your strategy

In a quickly changing world, it often feels like traditional strategic planning isn't quite covering all the bases. With an uncertain and shifting external environment, the UK's federation of not-for-profit legal practices wanted to test whether their new strategy would be robust enough to handle these changes. Find out how **The Management Centre (=mc)** used *scenario planning* with the **Law Centres Federation (LCF)** to move beyond the normal strategic planning box by getting them to think about multiple futures in which they would need to deliver their mission.

### The best-laid plans of mice and men (and women)...

For over 40 years, Law Centres in the UK have provided free legal advice and representation to the most disadvantaged in society. Although each of these centres is constituted as an independent organisation they work together in the Law Centres Federation (**LCF**). For the past 30 of those years, the **Law Centres Federation (LCF)** has successfully provided a range of support and services to the Law Centres to help them meet their mission. In the late-2000s, **LCF** found itself in the midst of a rapidly changing environment. Funding sources were shifting. Economic and government policy changes meant that the demand for legal services was increasing. Funding was becoming scarcer. And adding to the mix, past partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau were increasingly becoming competitors.

**LCF** needed a new strategic plan to help chart them through this period of change. Assisted by **The Management Centre (=mc)**, they developed a three-year plan designed to help them build independent, sustainable and effective Law Centres. To make sure that the plan was both easy to communicate and measurable, **LCF** adopted a strategy map and Balanced Scorecard approach which translated the overall intent into actions. We also worked over a period of several months on a programme of organisational change with the Board and senior management team

Half a year later, the forces of change were gathering strength, including the biggest tendering process ever undertaken in the history of Legal Aid and the potential decline of some Law Centres. **LCF** wanted to test the robustness of their strategy in the face of these changes and get its leadership to think about their implications on the organisation as a whole.

Again, LCF turned to their trusted advisor, **=mc**.

### Looking back from the future

**LCF** knew that if Law Centres were to survive and grow, they needed as a movement to explore what the future could look like and what changes and brave steps needed to be taken to ensure sustainability.

**=mc** consultants worked with **LCF's staff and Executive Committee** to take them through a *scenarios planning* exercise.

They adopted this planning approach since they realised that scenarios can get you outside the normal strategic planning box – thinking about multiple futures in which you would need to deliver your mission

LCF were attracted by the fact that scenario plans are often based on possible imagined futures – they are about foresight. You create a number of possible situations that you may have to deal with or a number of possible ways to structure or organise your organisation. Then you work *back from* these futures to establish:

- how credible the situations themselves are
- how you as an organisation would respond or change if they came true

Scenario planning has been widely used by governments and corporations, like Shell, to predict or anticipate possibilities. Not-for-profits are increasingly adopting the tool as well.

We worked with LCF to develop a range of scenarios looking at the impacts of two key dimensions: the **funding environment** (whether funds would be readily available or not) and the **political environment** (whether the government would be ‘hostile’ or ‘friendly’ to the Law Centres’ mission).

## Result – Validation of the Plan

Working together with =mc, LCF’s staff and Executive Committee developed four possible scenarios five years into the future based on these different political and funding situations. LCF senior leadership then discussed what these scenarios would mean for:

- how LCF would deliver its mission
- what they would keep doing – and what they would have to stop
- the implementation or adaptation of their new strategic direction

While LCF identified possible stress points in their strategy, the leadership found that the strategy was robust enough to weather the storms of the future as long as they were diligent in monitoring the situation.

The exercise also gave the Executive Committee a good sense of the key challenges that staff saw coming at them in the next few years, and vice versa. Everyone was pushed to discuss the really difficult “what if?” scenarios and think through how LCF would act. Now, LCF is strongly positioned to deliver their much-needed services in the future.

**“=mc’s consultants really worked *with* us to develop an approach that would meet our needs and help us think through the difficult strategic questions. After building and talking through the scenarios, we now feel more confident about our future direction.”**

**Julie Bishop**  
Director, Law Centres Federation

## About Law Centres Federation

Established in 1978, the Law Centres Federation is a charity that supports and promotes Law Centres® in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Law Centres champion free legal advice and representation to the most disadvantaged in society. Find out more about the Law Centre's Federation at <http://www.lawcentres.org.uk>.

### Further help.

**=mc** has a team of unrivalled management consultants able to assist with the most complex and challenging and organisational changes. Between us we share experience in a range of fields including international development, human rights, social enterprise, 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**.

To find out how we've helped these organisations achieve their big ideas - and how we could help you – call us on **+44 (0) 20 7978 1516** or visit [www.managementcentre.co.uk/consultancy](http://www.managementcentre.co.uk/consultancy).

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### About =mc

**The Management Centre (=mc)** is a management consultancy working exclusively for not-for-profit organisations worldwide. We provide help in management consultancy, fundraising consultancy and training.

To find out more about us, please visit our website at [www.managementcentre.co.uk](http://www.managementcentre.co.uk)