U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

2014 Environmental Scan:

"ESET" Methodology and Results

Discussion for Federal Foresight Community Roundtable

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History of VA/OOP/SSG environmental scanning

- **2011 Baseline Environmental Scan –** discovered the baseline trends that formed the foundation of the Goals/Objectives in the Department's 2014 – 2020 Strategic Plan
- **2013 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) –** captured the work of the 2013 Environmental Scan update
- **2013 Environmental Scan –** reviewed the 2011 baseline trends to either validate the trend or determine any change within the trend, assess the rate of change, and assess potential impacts
- **2013 SEA Update** – captured analysis of the 2013 Environmental Scan and identified Trends with Impact and Trends to Watch

In addition to continuous scanning, documented in FeedStrap and Weekly Reads

Innovation in approach in 2014 – designed to inform VA Annual Planning Guidance for FY17-21

2014 ESET Mission: help strengthen VA's 2014–2020 Strategic Plan execution by examining trends having an impact on the Plan's Strategic Goals and Objectives.

- Environmental Scan Execution Teams (ESETs) researched developments impacting VA's ability to achieve its three Strategic Plan Goals and their objectives.
- Results of their research and analysis were entered into a template summarizing the findings regarding whether the trends will have a near-term, mid-term, or long term (or all three) impact on VA's ability to achieve the Goals and Objectives.
- Three teams participated – each team assigned a goal and its supporting objectives.
- Participants were volunteers solicited from across the entire Department.
- The research phase lasted four weeks (starting February 12 – March 5, 2014).

Example of ESET team template

Goal 1: Empower Veterans and Improve Their Well-Being

Objective 1: Improve Veterans Wellness and Economic Security

Research Question: What are the trends influencing the Department's ability to achieve this objective? What is going on in the environment that will influence Veterans' wellness and economic security?

Helpful Focus Areas: Health and health consciousness trends, preventative health care trends and technologies

Trend: Emergence of IT-enabled preventative/predictive healthcare

- Mobile health applications will provide access to a constant stream of health care information, for example, wearable external sensors interacting with smart-phones

Impact: Potential for significant reduction in cost of providing healthcare to Veterans

Time Horizon: Near Term (< 5 years), Mid Term (Between 5 – 10 years) or Long Term (10+)

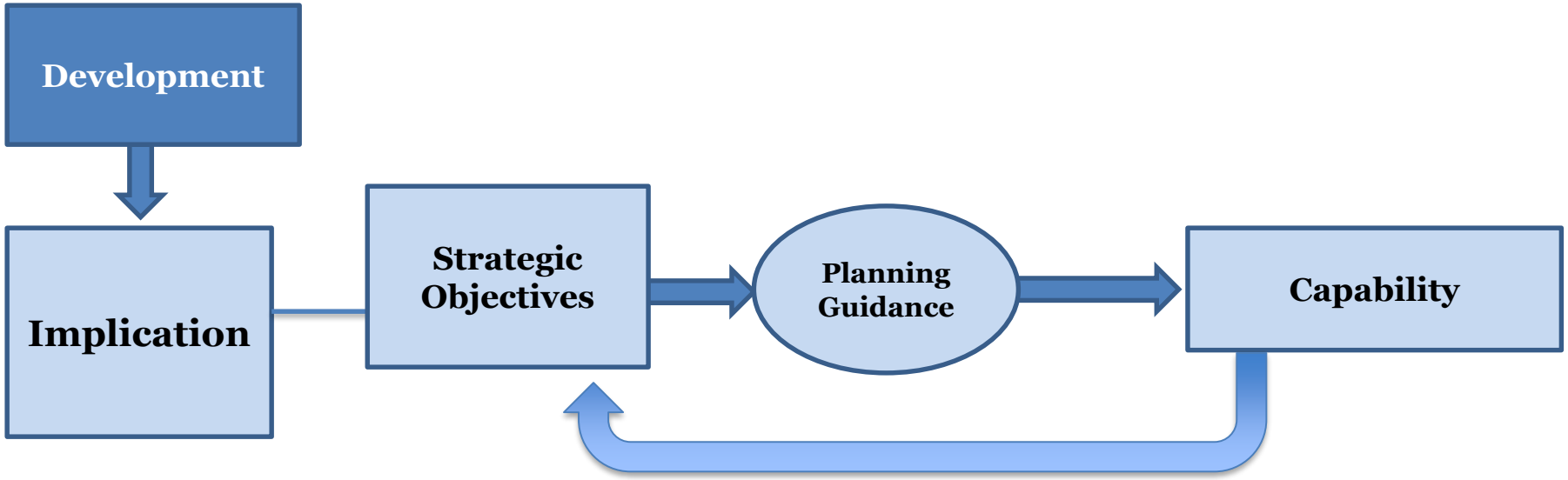
Sources: MacManus, Richard. "How Big Data is Improving Healthcare." Readwrite. SAYMEedia Inc. 2 Oct 20120

Results – four developments, and implications for Planning Guidance

- **Affinity-grouping analysis of 160 resulting ESET papers**
  - Collaborative effort: Strategic Studies Group, Strategic Policy Service, and Policy Analysis Service
- **Four developments identified of primary interest and impact:**
  1. **Partnerships** - Increasing number, type, complexity, benefits, and risks of cross-sector partnerships
  2. **Big Data** - Increasing disruptive impact of multi-dimensional, multi-source data
  3. **Workforce and Workplace Expectations** - Demand for workplace flexibility leading to organizational friction and vulnerabilities
  4. **Work/Education Divide** -Widening disconnect between work and education
- **Implications of the four developments identified and then "mapped" to the Strategic Plan Objectives most impacted and VA capabilities most important to contend with the implications**

Method for applying ESET results to inform Planning Guidance

Application Method – how SSG applied the developments and their implications to VA's Strategic Goals/Objectives and Capabilities.



Method for applying ESET results to inform Planning Guidance

Goal: Improve Veterans Wellness and Economic Security

Development

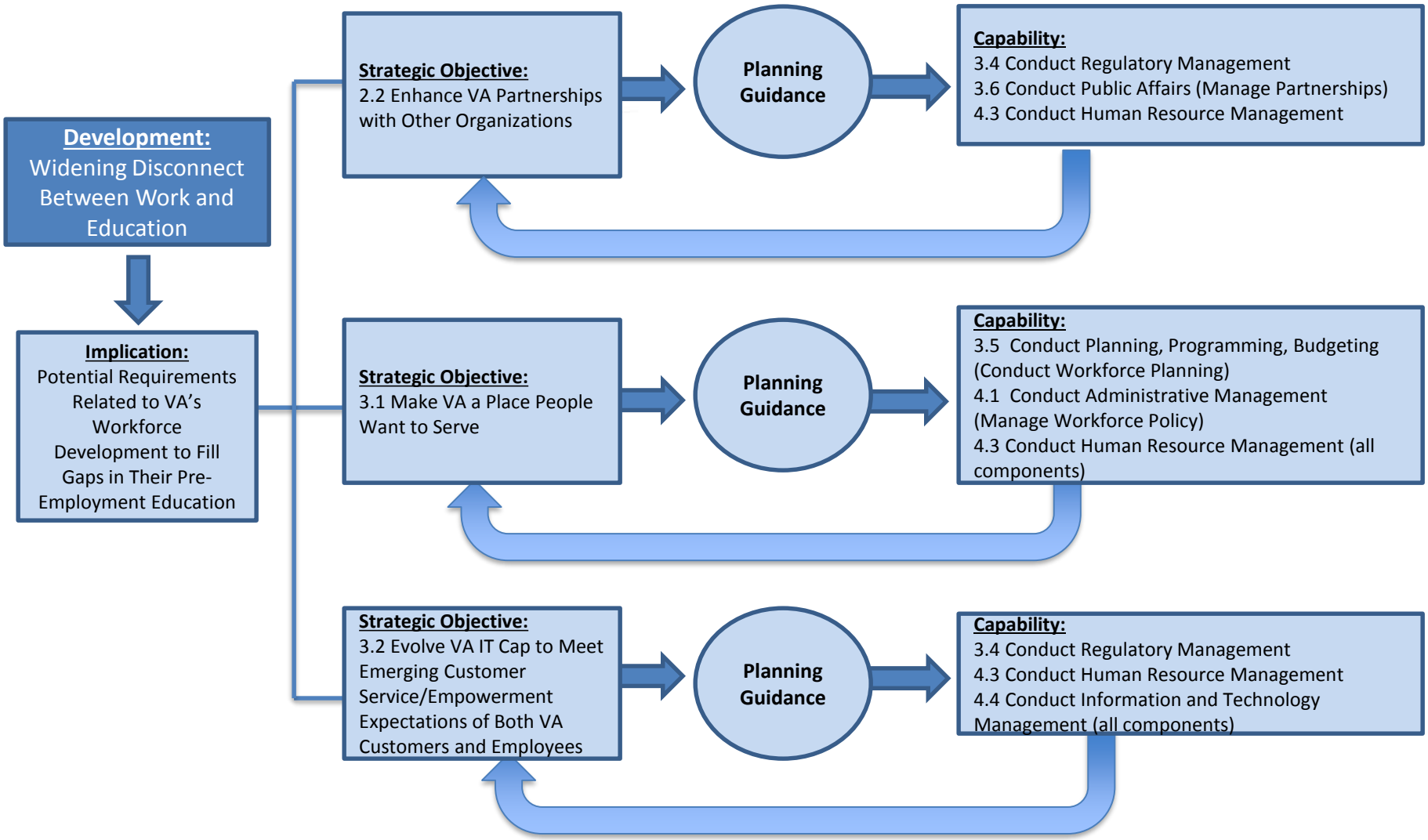
Implication

Objective

Planning Guidance

Capability

Example – Work/Education Divide – implications and their relationships to Strategic Plan Objectives and VA Capabilities



Development: Increasing number, type, complexity, benefits, and risks of cross-sector partnerships

SUMMARY:

- Blurring of organizational boundaries, authorities and responsibilities
- Risks to data integrity, personal privacy, security, quality, and brand management become shared across partners
- Managing partnerships is moving beyond purview of contracting officers, PM's, "liaisons," other traditional relationship-management constructs
- Senior-most leadership of organizations will be engaged continuously in assessment and decision-making related to multiple partnerships
- Access to partners' capabilities becomes an uncertainty, potential vulnerability

IMPLICATIONS:

- Changes to infrastructure requirements – some VA facilities and assets become less or more needed, role in operations changes, new facilities may be needed
- Comprehensive information needed by VA about partner organizations' capabilities – how will it be acquired, kept current, communicated, etc?
- Data sharing and data security requirements – tools and systems for data sharing; potential changes to internal processes for managing access to data
- Communications requirements – standards and means for aligning; execution of communications activities becomes more distributed
- Changes to rules and processes for establishing and managing partnerships

Proliferating partners and blurring organizational boundaries will be a senior management juggling act

Development: increasing disruptive impact on multi-dimensional, multi-source data

SUMMARY:

- Exponential increase in the amount/complexity of data will require organizations to develop tools, processes, technologies, strategies to better harness the data
- The dynamics of Social Media, which will play an increasingly important role in the future, resist the paradigms of organized data
- Tension between efforts to derive value from big data and efforts to quickly/gingerly extract value from widespread connectedness/sharing of the mobile and social networks
- Making near real-time resource allocations/decisions based on big data while buffeted by the influx of hard-to-grasp fluid data will cross organizational functions/hierarchies
- Organizations will need to consider changes to business models, practices and process, customer/supplier relationships, workforce skills, allocations and strategies in order to manage the tension associated with different ways of harnessing big data/social media
- A more explicit understanding of customer needs and impacts of VA programs implies more specificity and more frequent adaptability of VA to ensure mission success

IMPLICATIONS:

- Requirements across the VA mission for tools, systems, and workforce competencies to conduct/use sophisticated data analytics
- Data sharing, security/integrity requirements will make/break many VA partnerships
- Potentially massive changes to communications and outreach
- Potential changes in organizational structure and in job classifications

Taming disruptive data is an increasing mission imperative

Development: demand for work flexibility leading to organizational friction and vulnerabilities

SUMMARY:

- The competition for jobs in this economy acts as somewhat of a check on employees' demands but many employees are increasing their expectations for workplace flexibility
- Mobility and other technologies are enabling work from virtual/varied locations
- Workers cite the benefits of increased workplace flexibility to include more effective use of time and better work-life balance
- Still, some workers prefer the predictability of the traditional workplace
- Organizations slow to embrace flexible-workplace struggle to attract employees accustomed to autonomy, customization, and sophisticated Information and Communications Technologies

IMPLICATIONS:

- Changes to infrastructure requirements – adaptations to potentially many VA facilities and equipment to facilitate collaboration/flexibility
- Data and information sharing requirements – networks, networks accesses, cybersecurity in support of telework/mobile work
- Changes in requirements for continuity of operations, disaster management, physical/personal security with distributed workforce
- Potential changes in organizational structure/job classifications – integration of some functions and work processes, fragmentation of others
- Communications requirements – potential changes in communication/outreach activities
- Requirements for management competencies to supervise/lead remote workforce

Escalating flexibility in workforce and workplace is an emerging test of leadership

Development: widening disconnect between work and education

SUMMARY:

- Rapid changing technology substitutes for labor except for where the worker can harness technology and apply knowledge to increase the value of the product or service
- Work is changing nearly at rate of technological change and increasingly applies science, engineering and math, but the pace of change in the educational system lags farther behind
- Employers are requiring higher basic, academic/technical skills, adaptive learning abilities and critical thinking in their workforce
- Much of the content and many modalities of how education is offered and received produce an output that mismatches today's and tomorrow's work

IMPLICATIONS:

- Potential challenges to scope, substance and administration of education-related benefits to Veterans/eligible beneficiaries
- Potential requirements related to VA workforce development
- Changes in role of VA in the interface between employers, educ. institutions and Veterans
- Potential changes in job categories/classifications and in hiring practices

VA Faces New Roles, Responsibilities and Challenges to "Mind the Gap"

Lessons learned – Methodology and Results

- Varied methods bring new perspectives to environmental scans
- Collaboration is essential to success
- Allow for sufficient time to examine the environmental scan results
- The four Developments are not independent of each other, rather they are interconnected with each other.
- Results can inform multiple processes/products (ex: Strategic Environmental Assessment, Strategic Policy Agenda, Agency Priority Goals, Planning Guidance, Senior Leader offsite, etc.)