

Case study

Consumers International



Strategic Planning

Consumers International (CI) is the global federation of consumer groups. Founded in 1960, the organisation has changed a great deal. Over time, the focus became fragmented, practices of regional offices lacked consistency and alignment with the international strategy, the finances became unstable and by early 2005 the organisation had come to question whether it was fit for purpose in a modern context.

Like many organisations, CI was split by two primary issues. 1. balance between member services and campaigning. 2. tension between centralisation and decentralisation (the control of a central headquarters over the country offices). The result of the two schisms was lack of ability to unify the organisation around common issue and goals. In late 2005, under the new Director General, Richard Lloyd, CI closed country offices, consolidated the international presence into 4 regional offices and reduced the overall staff by 50 per cent. In April 2006 **Action Planning** was engaged to lead the strategic planning process.

Consultation and facilitation were key. Director of Management Consultancy, Cynthia Hansen, began with the facilitation of two strategy awaydays for the SMT and international executive board. In such a contentious environment, the underlying focus was change management and the winning of hearts and minds. Action Planning's involvement provided both a forum for debate and a check on the rehashing of old battles. This allowed differences to be aired, acknowledged and more or less set aside. The outcome was general consensus which unified the staff and board. The awaydays were followed by a member survey which set an important precedent for inclusion and participation.

Out of the consultation and planning phase came a set of four strategic objectives. The establishment of these made it possible to make strategic decisions regarding programming, types of support for members, expectations, and allocation of resources. It allowed the organisation to clearly state what it does and does not do, diffusing earlier turf wars. The summer and autumn involved intensive work by the SMT to take the strategic objectives set by the board and transform them into a practical operational plan. Action Planning provided templates for department level operations plans, and offered feedback and guidance. The strategic plan for 2007-2011 and operational plans for 2007-2008 were approved by CI's Board in November 2006.

By the end of the strategic planning process, most participants seemed happy with the progress made, but some were fatigued. The organisation weathered massive change and emerged stronger, with a clear new strategic direction and a structure to deliver it. However, without some quick wins and ways to boost morale, there is a danger that people may start to revert to old patterns out of scepticism or uncertainty.

The key to sustaining the momentum lies in CI's plans for continuing to demonstrate change and accomplishment, spreading the accountability and make it visible, translating the overarching strategy down to the project and personal level to create relevance, and cultivating a culture of strategic thinking, engagement, inclusiveness and innovation.



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Cynthia Hansen – Director of Management Consultancy, Action Planning

“Action Planning gave sound advice which has enabled us to move faster than we had hoped. The right level of support focused on the right outcomes was what we wanted and that's what we got.”

Richard Lloyd, Director General, Consumers International

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