

Chapter 38

Scanning for Blind Spots

Barbara Jane Holland
Brooklyn Public Library, USA

ABSTRACT

The environmental scan provides a systematic overview of the external factors that are important to the organization (or sector) and indicates whether the organization can influence them or not. Scanning promotes an active response to positive (opportunities) and compliant factors and leads to insights on how to live with the “hard facts.” The more organizations utilize a systemic approach, the more likely they will avoid blind spots during a scan. Managers have instinctive attitudes and assumptions about the external environment. They pay attention to what is most immediate. They may have blind spots that ignore or overlook certain market trends. Environmental scanning and analysis aims to gather evidence and reduce uncertainty. This chapter examines environmental scanning blind spots, analysis, and emerging trends.

INTRODUCTION

Many research studies indicate that when reality and conviction are at odds with each other conviction often win. Companies and nonprofit organizations are often blindsided when faced with demographic, political, environmental, technological changes and new rivals . The most talented and best prepared leaders face complex, ever-changing, and often unpredictable challenges. The more an organization utilizes a systemic approach, the more likely they will avoid blind spots. Environmental Scanning or ES, provides a view of community needs by detecting pertinent economic, social. cultural, environmental, health, technological and political trends, situations and events.

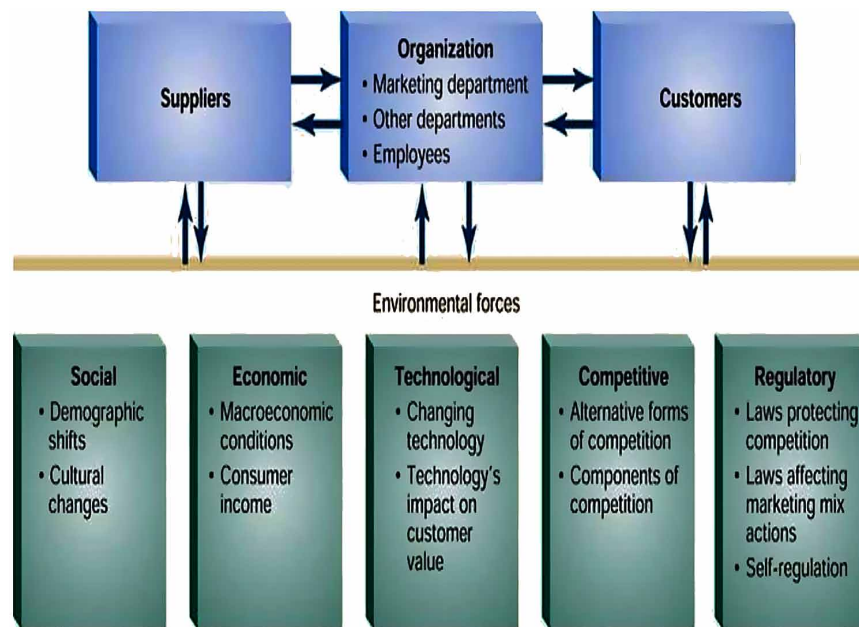
Frank Aguilar’s classic book “Scanning the Business Environment”, exemplify some of the factors involved in determining what external information is strategic or relevant. The managers studied by Aguilar were mainly interested in the news of the market, including competitors, customers, pricing, market structure and change...

To be effective in a complex and changing world, decision makers must look ahead to anticipate emerging trends, issues, opportunities, and threats. Developing and applying strategic foresight must come into play. A well conducted scan results in a new management and marketing style that is more

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Figure 1. Environmental scanning



forward thinking. Scanning has long been standard practice in the military, the intelligence community, and the business world and is a core method in futures research. In recent years, horizon scanning has been used in a growing number of fields in the public sector, such as human health (Douw and Vondeling 2006) and education (Munck and McConnell 2009). This chapter defines environmental scanning, examines Blind spots, weak signals, and effective tools used for discovering emerging trends beneficial to a company's or organization's strategic planning.

BACKGROUND

The lack of diversity in information sources may contribute to blind spots in environmental scanning. If organizations get their information from acceptable, conservative or authoritative sources, they may not see the changes taking place in their external environment. A large amount of pertinent information comes from face to face discussions, rumor, gossip and conjecture.

Moreover, it keeps the organization informed of current trends and challenges of the future.

Companies find it demanding to identify and include basic signals about their future developments and challenges in their existing, and often static strategic planning processes. Environmental scanning helps corporations, and nonprofits to understand external threats and opportunities leading to change. When an organization has undergone significant changes the knowledge discovered by an environment scan is intrinsic.

Aguilar (1967), in his study of the information gathering practices of managers, defined scanning as the systematic collection of external information in order to (1) lessen the randomness of information flowing into the organization and (2) provide early warnings for managers of changing external conditions.

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