Strategic invasion: response of the voluntary nonprofit to strategic processes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the encounter between the voluntary nonprofit organization (VNPO) and the strategic process in order to study how these organizations may harness strategic processes in a way that somehow does not threaten their cultures and social mission.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper adopts an exploratory case study approach.

Findings – The case study identifies a set of complex, multi-faceted behaviors that serve a dual role, functioning simultaneously as both inhibitors and enablers of the strategic process. As a framework for future research, the paper proposes a two-dimensional scheme which models the scope and mode of organizational behavior in a strategic process. The case study indicates that VNPOs may tend to adopt what is classified as a "sectional-organic" pattern of response. This pattern of response balances the organization's needs for continuity and change, enabling the execution of the process in a manner compatible with the specific organizational characteristics of the VNPO.

Originality/value – Previous studies of strategic processes in the VNPO have reported resistance and partial, stunted processes, stemming from the organization's need to protect its mission-oriented identity from the threats posed by a strategic process. However, the results of this case study, in which the subject organization managed to successfully develop an effective strategic plan, suggest that the behavior pattern of the VNPO in a strategic process may not be strictly defensive.

Keywords Strategic planning, Non-profit organizations, Organizational behaviour

Paper type Research paper

In this paper, we examine the way in which the voluntary nonprofit organization (VNPO) behaves in a strategic planning process. The uniqueness of the VNPO sector derives from its focus on fundamental values and social mission (Moxley, 2004; Brainard and Siplon, 2004; Moore, 2000; Salipante and Golden-Biddle, 1995; Bielefeld, 1994; Wolch and Rocha, 1993; Young, 1993). Since the role of values in the nonprofit sector is dominant, the organization must protect those values in order to maintain its identity and execute its social role (Kanter *et al.*, 1992; Schein, 1990; Klein, 1968). Given the dominance of values for the VNPO, we might expect that the strategic process, given its traditional association with the alien for profit sector, together with its mandate to ask fundamental questions and challenge underlying assumptions, will be perceived as a threat to the core values of the volunteer organization and, accordingly, will engender vigorous protective behavior manifested in resistance to the strategic process. Against this background, the authors were surprised, in the course of a case study of strategic processes in a large Israeli VNPO, to find a voluntary organization

that had generated and implemented a strategic plan, despite broad and high-profile resistance to the process. Subject to the limitations of an exploratory, albeit in-depth, case study, this paper seeks to offer an initial explanation of how the strategic process, despite the threat that it represents, successfully penetrates the defensive barriers erected against it by the VNPO.

Theory and background

The contemporary field of strategic management traces its roots to scholars like Andrews (1971), Ansoff (1965), Porter (1980) and Mintzberg (1991). Their models provided analytical frameworks, generic strategies, and models of strategy process that were incorporated into business school classes in the later decades of the twentieth century and have thus become pervasive in management thinking. More recently, we have also seen strategic concepts permeate the field of nonprofit management. Topics like performance measurement (Kanter and Summers, 1987; Hall, 2001; Zimmermann and Stevens, 2006), performance-based compensation (Carroll *et al.*, 2005), performance based on market orientations (Shoham *et al.*, 2006), quality management (Cairns *et al.*, 2005) and strategic planning (Unterman and Davis, 1982; Powell and Friedkin, 1987; Butler and Wilson, 1990; Koteen, 1991; Steiner *et al.*, 1994; Stone *et al.*, 1999; Kearns, 2000; Young, 2001; Courtney, 2002; Bryson, 2004) are increasingly on the lips of those concerned with nonprofit organizations.

Nonetheless, despite the rising profile of strategic processes in the VNPO, both among practitioners and scholars, research to date has focused primarily on the difficulties, constraints, and limitations of strategic managerial initiatives in this sector. Wolch and Rocha (1993) examined the response of the voluntary sector in London to extreme environmental changes in the political and funding arenas. As a result of these pressures, many organizations were forced to develop strategic planning, even though the equation of planning with capitalist enterprise raised a strong anti-planning bias among the VNPOs. Formalized planning processes were rare and the use of techniques, limited.

Stone *et al.* (1999) found that planning took place primarily when required by funders. In other words, the VNPOs plan only when they have to plan, and the process is often imposed on the organization. As a result, VNPOs tend to resist the formal strategic planning process and the process is often neither systematic nor fully integrated. The level of use and satisfaction of VNPOs from the use of strategic techniques is also not high. The level of consultation and participation of non-managerial staff and stakeholders is low, as is the level of communicating the final plan (Courtney, 2002).

Researchers have demonstrated that voluntary organizations exhibit a significant level of resistance and protective behavior in response to strategic planning (Feinstein, 1985; Wolch and Rocha, 1993; Salipante and Golden-Biddle, 1995; Stone *et al.*, 1999). The strategic planning process usually involves the questioning, examination or rewriting of the mission and vision of the organization. In the VNPO, the social mission is the reason for the organization's foundation and existence, and is a key motivating factor for volunteers. As such, the strategic planning process represents a threat to the VNPO. In order to maintain the set of values for which it was founded, and to protect itself from this threat, the VNPO resists the strategic planning process (Stone and Bryson, 2000). Some researchers argue that this conservatism is vital to the VNPO's continued pursuit of its social mission:

> Any nonprofit must be extremely careful about the desirability of regenerating and restructuring itself and about the ways in which it attempts to become more change oriented, lest it lose sight of its essence – its mission and core competencies (Salipante and Golden-Biddle, 1995, p. 4).

As a result, only a limited number of VNPOs have formal strategies, strategic processes are typically forced on the nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and, where undertaken, the conduct of the process is characterized by partial execution, manifested in the application of only a limited set of strategic tools and managerial systems.

The challenge and risk that the strategic process represents to the VNPO is also reflected in the compromise such processes engender in the organization's adherence to its value system. The VNPO's value system is generally democratic and participatory (Gidron *et al.*, 2003; Courtney, 2002). However, the strategic planning process challenges these characteristics. Stone *et al.* (1999) identify the impact on egalitarian and participatory values when stakeholders, employees, and volunteers are excluded from strategic planning process. Courtney (2002, p. 117) notes that:

> [. . .] the lack of participation of various stakeholders is despite the literature which suggests that participation enhances commitment to the goals agreed and that it is generally considered to be a particularly strong value in the nonprofit sector.

Cairns *et al.* (2005) report a similar pattern, noting a situation in which employees are not involved in the process of introducing a quality system.

In summary, the focus of existing research, and the weight of empirical evidence, suggests that the behavior of VNPOs in strategic processes is characterized by the avoidance of strategic process, the application of defensive and protective measures, and the partial or selective execution of planning and implementation. In the current paper, we suggest that the focus of research needs to be broadened, in an attempt to identify mechanisms and patterns of behavior that enable the strategic process in the VNPO, despite the well-documented tendency of such organizations to reject or inhibit the threat posed by a "strategic invasion" from the foreign for profit sector.

Research questions
This study will attempt to characterize the response of the VNPO to a strategic process. Moving beyond the focus of existing research, which focuses on defensive behavior, the current study seeks to identify functional behaviors that facilitate the strategic process. The study examines the following questions:

Q1. In dealing with a strategic process, does the VNPO behave defensively, inhibiting the strategic process?

Q2. Does the VNPO invoke behaviours that enable the strategic process?

Method
The research comprises a single case study of a leading Israeli voluntary organization, Yad Sarah. Yad Sarah is a VNPO providing a spectrum of free or nominal cost homecare services for sick, disabled and elderly people, and their families. Yad Sarah was originally established in Jerusalem in 1976, operating as a single home station for lending medical equipment free of charge for the local neighborhood. In 2007, Yad Sarah had over 100 branches throughout Israel. The workforce consists of about 6,000

volunteers and 230 salaried employees. Aspects of the organization's mission and vision statements are presented in Appendix.

The organization was chosen for the case study due to its dominance and leadership position among Israeli VNPOs and its high profile in Israeli society. The status of the organization reflects the breadth of services that it provides, the extent of its involvement throughout Israeli society, and the respect it engenders through its dependence on voluntary work. The choice of this organization was supported by management's willingness to participate, and moreover, their active interest in learning from the results of the study.

The case study was conducted using an interpretivist, or social constructionist, approach. Social research based on the interpretivist approach focuses on the meaning of actions in the context of socially constructed interpretations and meanings (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). In this study, personnel within the Yad Sarah organization describe and help interpret the strategic process that the organization has undergone. This approach is in line with Jarzabkowski (2005) and Whittington (2006) who view the practitioners who conduct the strategic process as skillful and knowledgeable interpreters of that process.

The case study methodology is chosen because it allows for the collection and analysis of large quantities of detailed data: "there is simply no way to get a richer account of what is occurring than through a case study" (Salkind, 2003, p. 213). The case study facilitates an in-depth view of the organization, allowing the researcher to "listen" to different voices (Shkedi, 2003) regarding the same issues. The use of the case study technique in the present paper enables an understanding of the strategic process in its specific organizational framework. Josselson and Lieblich (2003), add that the application of a qualitative approach extends conceptualization and sensitizes practitioners to the existence of complexities, in this case the complexities of decision making in the context of the organization's strategy. More specifically, within the qualitative method, we have applied a form of discursive analysis, relating to texts of interviews and written data as sources of explanations of how changes took place (Hirsch, 1986).

Background to the strategic process in Yad Sarah

The strategic planning process was initiated in 2001 by the then Vice President of Yad Sarah, shortly before being promoted to Managing Director. The Managing Director's motivation for this initiative stemmed from her belief that a voluntary organization "should be managed as professionally as any business organization." The senior managers cited various reasons for undertaking the strategic planning, including the growing size of the organization, the expanding demand for services (for example, more and better equipment to lend for the sick), and the position and maturity of Yad Sarah in the life cycle of an organization. The chronology of the strategic planning process at Yad Sarah is shown in Table I. The key actors in the strategic planning process included the Managing Director; senior managers, including staff managers and regional managers (employees); branch managers (volunteers); organizational consultants (one is an employee and one used to be a volunteer); and external experts. These experts were a selection of professionals (e.g. academic professors and physicians) in fields relevant to Yad Sarah (such as management, geriatrics, and community health). The planning phase continued through 2001 and 2002, and since

Period	Activity	Who involved	Outputs
Summer/Autumn 2001 Autumn/Winter 2001-2002	Pre-planning phase, meetings of top team Departmental discussions and preparation of departmental plans	Managing Director and senior managers All managers[a] and their direct reports	Presentation of basic initial paper with central issues Departmental plans or responses to the basic paper listing central issues or concerns in the department
	Presentation of plan or response	Senior managers and managing director	Planning documents (not standardized in structure or content; for example, some presented strengths and weaknesses, while others did not)
Winter/Spring 2002	Two brainstorming meetings	Top team and external experts	Discussions of wide variety of professional issues relevant to Yad Sarah
	Interviews[b]	Top team and external experts	
	Gathering of material from all sources, editing, and writing	Managing Director	Final planning document[c]
Summer 2002	Discussions Final review	Senior managers Founder	Final planning document Founder's final feedback
End of Summer 2002	Conferences	Branch managers	Oral summary of the document

Notes: [a]All levels in the organization were approached. However, the branch managers were not responsive. From this point on, they did not participate in the strategic planning process; [b]interviews were held with each expert separately, and took place between the two meetings with the experts; [c]this document focuses on five major issues: services, human resources and volunteers, fundraising, managerial, logistics, and technical infrastructure and development

then has been the focus of implementation efforts. This process was significant in its duration, scope, effort, and implications for the organization. The authors conducted the interviews and collected the archive data for this research project during 2004.

Data sources and analysis
We used two kinds of data, interviews, and documents. The interviews emphasize the personal viewpoint, providing a retrospective interpretation and perception of the strategic planning process. Interviews were conducted with sixteen people at three levels of the organization: the Managing Director, eight members of the senior management team, a volunteer organizational consultant (who had left Yad Sarah following the strategic process), an employed organizational consultant and five volunteer branch managers. The five branch managers are part of a group of over a hundred volunteer managers. These branch managers were chosen for the interviews because they manage medium-sized branches, each representing a different geographical area. The interviews were conducted in face-to-face format. The Managing Director was interviewed twice face-to-face, and on a few additional occasions over the phone for clarifications.

The documents were used to survey and understand the process. The organization willingly provided all the records and documentation relating to the strategic process for the purposes of the research. These records are from the years 2001-2002. The records represent a rich source of data, including consultancy papers, memos summarizing internal discussions, notes from brainstorming sessions, interviews with external experts, the initial set of strategic proposals generated in the process, and the final strategic document. The documents were analyzed, enabling triangulation of the same set of research questions (Yin, 2003).

The material was analyzed using three primary methodologies: mapping analysis, involving categorization of documents by date and subject matter; thematic analysis to detect dominant voices; and structural (linguistic) analysis, comprising document analysis at the level of individual keywords, focusing on meaning and frequencies of appearance (Shkedi, 2003). Examples of the interview questions used to analyze the strategic process are presented in Table II.

Findings

Strategic plan overcoming resistance

The strategic process at Yad Sarah encountered strong resistance as reflected in the following three comments from senior manager (each quote is from a different manager):

> There was cynicism. I remember when I went back to my people (with the initial draft of the plan) they laughed a bit. They could not relate to the process.

> I don't think there was a crisis, but naturally the very change causes resistance and crisis.

> I did not understand why it was necessary, what's its contribution.

Moreover, managers opposed the potential for change heralded by the strategic process. The process was oriented to the expansion and change, with a focus on the

Type of process	Interview items
Method	Was the process complete in terms of the stages and flow typically expected in a strategic planning process?
Structure	In managing the strategic planning process, was the process structured systematically and rigorously and managed rigidly, or was a more adaptive, free-flowing approach utilized? In this context, we examined the level of formality in the process, and the extent to which procedural and quantitative methods, techniques, and tools were applied
Participation	To what extent did the strategic planning process involve only the Managing Director, or did it also involve executive management and branch management? To what extent was there resistance to the process and how was this resistance dealt with?
Communications	To what levels of the organization was the plan communicated? Was the plan communicated in "campaign" style, or was a more "hesitant" style adopted allowing for feedback, monitoring, and modification?
Environment	To what extent did the process involve and draw on the environment? Did the organization act in the strategic process as a closed entity, driven by internal considerations and inert to the environment, or as an open entity, interacting with or imitating its external environment?

Table II.
Interview items to explore "mode" dimension of strategy

development of new services and branches. The managers resisted this developmental direction, preferring to concentrate on preservation of existing services and operations. Given the opportunity to propose their vision of the organization in five years time, managers attempted to derail the process by focusing on operational issues. This negativism is reflected in the following quotes from various senior managers:

> People wanted to ensure that the basics are strong. Don't do anything. Just make sure we have enough equipment to lend, because this is our most important contribution.

> We ought to focus and invest in existing services rather than on the continuation of development.

> Stop developing new services and stop building new branches.

> Insufficient organizational resources are directed towards existing services and to the management and training of volunteers.

Relatively few initiatives were proposed by managerial staff. Such initiatives that were proposed were typically minor and related to operational aspects. Perhaps, the clearest indication of this inherent protectionism and defensiveness was expressed by one of the senior managers, in his statement that, "We felt we were losing control when developing new services." The managerial staff expressed fear of the change entailed in a development orientation (e.g. establishment of new services or branches) and preferred to focus on strengthening existing services. In their opposition to the development approach, managers related to their concern for the possible collapse of the organization and its effect on the organization's ability to contribute to society.

Nonetheless, despite this opposition, Yad Sarah did manage to complete the strategic planning process successfully, generating a strategic plan, with a strong developmental orientation, which was still serving the organization as a point of reference five years later. At this point, the question becomes: how did the organization succeed despite the resistance? In seeking to identify the behaviors and techniques that allowed the organization to overcome the inherent resistance to the strategic process, we distinguish between the scope (or content) and mode (or method) of the process. "Mode" represents the manner in which the organization goes about the strategic process. "Scope" represents the breadth and depth of issues encompassed in the strategic process.

Mode
The findings from our analysis of the mode of the strategic planning process are organized under the following parameters: structure and method, participation, communication, and interaction with the environment.

Structure and method. In order to analyze the structure and method parameter, we mapped the behavior of the Yad Sarah organization against Bryson's (1988, p. 48) model of strategic planning in an NPO. Bryson's model was used because it represents a widely-accepted methodology for strategic processes in the public and NPO sectors (Kearns and Scarpino, 1996). As a tightly ordered and systematic approach, the Bryson model can serve as a yardstick to measure the formalism of the methodology applied by the organization.

Bryson (1988, 2004) describe the strategic process as highly structured, involving, for example, evaluation of the organization's mission, formulation of a vision, and the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. In our case study,

a more informal approach was applied. The process of planning was not planned or structured in advance. A time frame for the process was not defined. Rather, the process evolved over time, and was highly reactive to organizational responses and the level of resistance encountered. Informal feedback from the organization was a key factor in managing the process. Similarly, planning was non-systematic and unstructured, and did not involve the use of traditional strategic methodologies, such as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis. Rather than the systematic use of quantitative or qualitative organizational data, initiatives, and ideas were based on subjective impressions and intuition.

The final deliverable of the strategic process, the strategic plan, also differed significantly from the Bryson model. According to Bryson, the strategic plan should consist of actions with a clear time frame for the entire future period under consideration, and a detailed work plan for the short term. It should also provide tools or indices for monitoring and evaluating the successful implementation of the plan. Similarly, the process did not impose discipline in terms of the planning window, with the plan referring to both short-term and long-term initiatives. The strategic plan created by Yad Sarah was also characterized by substantive vagueness and ambiguity. Critically, with some minor exceptions, the plan contained no detailed translation of the proposed initiatives into concrete actionable steps with a defined time frame. The plan also left open the question of criteria for measuring the success of implementation. Similarly, no means were determined for monitoring progress.

Participation. Participation was confined to senior managers only, and even that was limited. The lack of participation is illustrated in the following quotes from a number of senior managers:

I did not feel at all a part of it; I could not "connect" to any of it.

It was a process of the senior echelon; that is, we did not manage to connect everybody (to the process). There was a will, in terms of will, for sure there was.

Generally it was intended for the whole organization, but there were people who stood aside.

The organization was cut off.

The Managing Director involved the senior managers in the first stage, which involved an internal process of discussions and preparation. The second stage was a process of gathering information, knowledge, and opinions from external experts, and the formulation of the final strategic document. These experts were a selection of professionals (e.g. academic professors and physicians) in fields relevant to Yad Sara (such as management, geriatrics, and community health). The senior managers were only involved in a peripheral manner in the second stage. The branch managers did not participate in the planning process at any stage.

A central issue in the strategic discussions was the organization's approach towards the development of new services. The Managing Director was convinced that this is the direction that the organization should take. In early discussions, the senior managers were very negative on this direction. In fact, the developmental strategy proposed by the Managing Director was unlikely to have emerged as the dominant theme of the strategic plan had she vested more power, in the plan development phase, in the hands of the "conservative" senior managers. According to one of the senior managers:

> In our meeting we reviewed all the issues and kept repeating to ourselves that since the
> organization cannot invest its resources in so many areas simultaneously it ought to focus and
> invest in existing services rather than on the continuation of development.

Following the initial phase of discussions, the Managing Director initiated the involvement of the external experts in the process. Subsequently, the input of senior managers was even more limited. These experts provided the strategic plan with dominant developmental content that substituted for the absence of developmental planning input from the senior managers. The Managing Director was concerned with the lack of participation: "The partial involvement was frustrating for me." However, her efforts to implement a participatory model were not successful. Indeed, a high level of participation was liable to increase objections and expose the entire strategic process to risk.

Communication. The communication of the strategic plan through the organization was limited. The plan was communicated in writing only to the managers responsible for implementing the plans. Volunteer branch managers were given an oral presentation of the plan in a volunteers conference. Moreover, it was not communicated in full. Only the summary of the document was explained in the Managing Director's speech to the volunteers. Since the communications were not sufficiently concrete, the branch managers did not remember anything of it, nor were they even aware of the existence of the process. Among the senior managers, there is a wide divergence in the answers regarding the level and procedures of communication adopted around the strategic plan.

Environment. Having encountered internal resistance to the strategic plan, the Managing Director of Yad Sarah used the input from the two internal organizational consultants to help build the strategic plan. In so doing, the organization was able to leverage the environment, through the use of external knowledge resources, to import up-to-date knowledge and ideas into the strategic plan.

Scope
The scope dimension of the strategic planning process was examined by an analysis of the breadth and depth of questions and issues addressed. Specifically, the study sought to identify to what extent the planning phase related to the fundamental assumptions and issues confronting the organization, or whether it dealt with only specific limited areas.

The scope of issues addressed in Yad Sarah was limited. The final document related to five key subjects: services (e.g. develop at least three rehabilitation centers in five years; establish homecare and community centers in 50 branches nationwide), human resources, and volunteers (e.g. establish a nationwide pool for volunteers and volunteer roles), fundraising (e.g. create a realistic fundraising plan overseas), managerial (e.g. strengthen organization's control system), logistics and technical infrastructure and development (e.g. professionalization of services; build 30 branches in five years).The process was used more as an opportunity to compile the key ongoing issues confronting the organization, rather than stepping out of the box and asking more "existential" questions about the organization. As such, the process sidestepped the sensitive core issues which would normally be addressed, confronted, and crystallized in a strategic planning process and which go to the heart of the organization's role, focus, and mode of operation. The process did initially touch on a few key issues, and this "rocked the boat," resulting in strong resistance by the senior managers to the

process itself. While the subjects discussed were strategic, many other strategic issues that were no less strategic but more sensitive were not included – for example: the question of payment to volunteer branch managers and the overall paid employees versus volunteer mix, organizational transparency, centralized versus decentralized structure, the approach on payment for services, competition with other organizations, and the policy on donor funding versus commercialization of activities.

In sum. the issues addressed represent a subset of the core elements of the organization's strategic assumptions, and left other important issues, that could be expected to be addressed in a systemic planning process, untouched. In this, we follow Peterson and Albrecht's (1999) suggestion that the analysis of organizational discourse should include an examination of silences and absences, considering not only what was said, but also what was not said.

In addition, the level of granularity in the plan is inconsistent: micro-level and macro-level plans are interwoven throughout the document. Often, details of specific subjects are presented at the same level, even though one is the direct derivative of the other. In one case, for example, a general initiative for "creating umbrella services for the elderly population" is listed side-by-side with a very specific target of "encouraging the elderly to use helpful 'activity of daily life' technologies."

Discussion and conclusions

In this section, we will attempt to frame the case study findings within a broader theoretical context, drawing from and building on existing concepts in the strategy literature. The aim of this analysis is to provide a theoretical and empirical framework for hypotheses that, it is hoped, may facilitate future research into strategic processes in the VNPO.

Sectionality

In line with Stone *et al.* (1999), the findings of the case study suggest that the scope of the strategic process in the VNPO tends to be sectional. Sectionality can be contrasted with a "systemic" approach to strategic planning which would relate, in a comprehensive manner, to the fundamental assumptions and issues confronting the organization. Based on the case study findings, it is posited that the VNPO will tend to adopt a sectional approach to strategic planning, reflected in the narrow scope of issues addressed and in the avoidance of key questions and assumptions that a systemic strategic process would typically address. The absence of the application of standard strategic planning methodologies also contributed to the narrow scope of issues addressed in the strategic planning. We would argue that sectionality is a functional enabling force, allowing the organization the flexibility to avoid and sidestep sensitive issues and questions that harbor risk and endanger the strategic process, and enabling the strategic process to exist and progress through the VNPO.

Organic

The findings of the case study suggest that the strategic process at Yad Sarah aligned with the organic mode of behavior, as described in the distinction, developed by Burns and Stalker (1961), between mechanistic and organic approaches. The mechanistic perspective emphasizes the rational and systematic aspects of the strategic process. Progress is viewed as linear and sequential. According to the mechanistic approach,

the more formal and structured the strategic planning, the better for strategic output and performance. The strategic process is discrete and methodical, with clearly defined time boundaries and well-defined stages. The mechanistic perspective applies systematic, proactive managerial methods, focuses on quantifiable data and "objective facts," and uses standardized analytical tools.

The organic perspective, in contrast, views the strategic process as a dynamic process. As in an organism, progress is characterized by cyclical, interactive flows, and integration within and across organizational constructs. The organic mode is expected to proceed in an ebb and flow pattern: the organization might make one step forward, followed by two steps backwards, in order to enable a leap forward. The organic perspective recommends using creative, flexible, eclectic and integrative methods, and sources of information. In contrast to the mechanistic approach, where the strategic process is a discrete event, under the organic approach, the organization undergoes a continuous process of learning and is constantly adjusting to both internal and external environmental changes.

The distinction between two approaches to strategy – the mechanistic versus the organic approach – is widely used in the literature on strategy. Scholars supporting a mechanistic approach to strategic processes include Unterman and Davis (1982), Webster and Wylie (1988), Kearns (2000), Steiner *et al.* (1994) and Siciliano (1997). Scholars supporting the organic concepts, though not necessarily using identical terminology, include Feinstein (1985), Beer *et al.* (1990), Wolch and Rocha (1993), Mintzberg (1994), Weick and Quinn (1999) and Moxley (2004). Drawing on terminology derived from the work of scholars who have used the organic-mechanistic distinction, Table III presents a summary of key dimensions contrasting these two approaches.

The strategic process at Yad Sarah was organic. The process was evolutionary: slow and gradual. The planning methodology was informal and materials used for analysis were subjective. The "softness" of this approach, which was evolutionary, cyclical, and informal, reduced risk by ensuring that the impact of the process can be monitored and damage minimized, and where required, the organization could "retreat" or mitigate the emerging threat. Similarly, this slow, iterative process allows time for the absorption, acquisition, and acceptance of the strategic process and concepts.

	Mechanistic	Organic
Type of process	Revolutionary	Evolutionary
Tempo	Episodic	Continuous, processional, and constant
Direction of progress	Linear	Cyclical
Method	Methodical, technical, rational, and differential	Creative, flexible, eclectic, and integrative
Participation and communication	Limited participation – board and management; communication to inform	Widespread participation – employees and various stakeholders; communication to build consensus
Role of resistance to change	Defense mechanisms are to be shaken to allow implementation of change	Defense mechanism to protect identity and values

Table III.
Comparison of modes
of strategy

The organic approach assumes that the organization behaves as an open system, interacting intensely with the external environment. Our case study shows that Yad Sarah indeed behaved as an open system, and the environment was a very influential factor in the process, particularly in the developmental aspects of the plan. The external experts functioned as the "content carriers," a concept presented by Zilber (2002). The environment in Yad Sarah was a key actor, importing the knowledge and spirit of global, state-of-the-art trends into the organization.

The lack of clarity adopted in the communication of the strategic plan is also in line with the organic approach. The diffusion of information allows the organization much more flexibility and opportunity for feedback and adaptation, relative to a more direct announcement in which there is no room for dialog. In addition, the top-down, centralist mode in which the strategic plan was formulated did not stem from a lack of participatory values nor from an unwillingness on the part of the Managing Director to involve broad sections of the organization in the process. Rather, the top-down approach was adopted out of disappointment, as a second-best compromise given the failure of the branch managers to respond to management's request for their active participation. This approach threatened the success of the process because it meant that the support of the field could not be ensured. Thus, a gradual approach, allowing room for feedback and changes, was required. It may have been risky to hand down a clear, well-defined dictate, and hope that the entire organization would simply fall into line. In VNPOs, the volunteers, after all, can simply walk away.

According to the organic paradigm, we can expect a high level of participation in the strategic process. However, in the planning phase, as we have seen, this was not the case at Yad Sarah. The participation of senior managers during the planning phase was at best technical, and was neither committed nor highly motivated. Their influence on the content was minimal. The volunteer branch managers did not participate at all. Thus, it can be said, in contradistinction to the standard organic model, participation was limited during the planning phase.

We posit that the VNPO's of the organic approach, as observed in our case study, may not be a random phenomenon, but may reflect an inherent matching of this mode of strategic behavior and the VNPO. The organic approach is cautious and respectful of the organization's existing values and mission, and is oriented to ensuring the maintenance of organizational identity. As such, the organic approach accepts the protective role of defense mechanisms. Its pace is evolutionary: slow, gradual, and continuous. This is in sharp distinction to the mechanistic approach. The mechanistic approach is revolutionary. It aims at achieving deep and significant change. It will break down defense mechanisms in order to facilitate top-down enforcement of the "revolution." In this top-down process, the role of management is dominant, progress is linear, and the role of communication is functional and informative. In the organic strategic process, in contrast, progress is cyclical and iterative, avenues of communication among stakeholders are open, and feedback is encouraged to help secure consensus. The organic approach to the strategic process is aligned, it seems, with the needs of the VNPO because it allows progress and change while preserving the constituent elements of the organization.

Proposed integrated model
We will now introduce a theoretical construct that models an organization's range of options in managing and responding to a strategic process. The construct draws on the

distinction between organic and mechanistic strategic processes (Farjoun, 2002), but goes beyond the current literature in the field, with the aim of creating a framework for comparative analysis of the strategic process in different organizational typologies.

The construct revolves on the distinction, introduced earlier, between scope and mode. The scope axis is defined by the continuum drawn between "systemic" and "sectional." The mode axis comprises the continuum that stretches between "mechanistic" to "organic." As shown in Figure 1, the organization's response to a strategic process can be conceived as varying across the scope and mode axes, respectively, creating a two-dimensional matrix for classification, analysis, and mapping of organizational behavior in a strategic process.

For example, the mechanistic-systemic quadrant would be characteristic of a revolutionary strategic process involving a structured, all-encompassing process across the organization. Diametrically opposed, the organic-sectional quadrant would involve a more cautious, evolutionary approach, which deals only selectively with key issues facing the organization. In the context of the proposed mode-scope construct, the current study suggests that VNPOs tend to adopt the organic-sectional model in responding to strategic processes. The organic-sectional approach suggests a flexible, integrative process, dependent on specific environmental and organizational circumstances, and implemented selectively within the VNPO. Planning and implementation are processional, evolutionary, and participatory. This line of thought can support the group of scholars of the voluntary sector who regard the sector's need to proceed cautiously, applying a flexible approach that maintains, or at least minimizes the threat engendered by "business like" strategic processes to the identity and value system of the VNPO. Support for this proposition comes from the work of Feinstein (1985), Wolch and Rocha (1993), Salipante and Golden-Biddle (1995), Stone et al. (1999), Courtney (2002) and Brainard and Siplon (2004). Stone and Bryson (2000) and Wolch and Rocha (1993) suggest that planning in voluntary organizations should be different. "Better – but
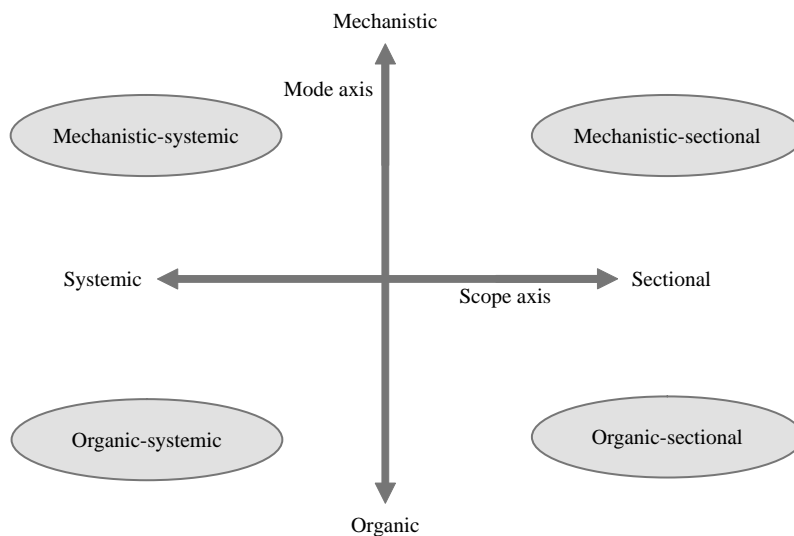
Figure 1.
Strategic process
modeling construct

different" suggest Wolch and Rocha (1993, p. 390). Based on the case study, the suggested location of the VNPO in the sectional-organic quadrant sets the stage for broader, quantified analysis to verify this proposition.

Functional duality

Scholars have noted the adoption of complex, multi-faceted behavior patterns in VNPOs. Maranville (1999) exposes the complexity of traditional, spontaneous, and dialectical modes of strategic management necessary for the VNPO during the strategic process. York and Zychlinski (1996) provide an example of dual roles from the external environment. They found that competing voluntary organizations were more likely to cooperate with one another. Brown and Iverson (2004) discuss the complexity of the governance role, ensuring consistency while considering strategic innovation. Powell (1991, p. 194) refers to the dual roles of constraints:

> Each form of constraint is, in varying ways, also a form of enablement. Constraints open up possibilities at the same time as they restrict or deny others.

Powell (1991) refers to a general meta-principle, using socialization as an example. In the context of the present case study, we have been able to observe this complex pattern of behavior in the specific context of the strategic process in a VNPO, demonstrating a mechanism that serves the VNPO in accepting and adopting the strategic process.

The exploratory study identified complex behaviors in the context of the strategic process. These functions have a paradoxically dual role, simultaneously acting as both defensive and enabling mechanisms. This dual function mechanism can be illustrated through the functional roles of participation or, more specifically, non-participation. In the case study, it was observed that the intention was to include at least the management level in the process, but in practice virtually the entire organization was excluded, most pertinently the volunteer managers. This behavior clearly served as a defense mechanism, preventing unmediated exposure to the potentially undermining and subversive effects of the strategic process. Non-participation prevented exposure to contrary or rejectionist viewpoints, and protected the stability of the organization and the commitment and motivation of its people. However, and this is a key point, non-participation also served an enabling role. Non-participation isolated the organization from the conceptual and ideological turmoil generated by the process itself. While the non-participation of the senior and volunteer managers had the bi-product effect of impacting commitment and generating alienation, resulting subsequently in inhibition of the implementation of the plan, non-participation also functioned as an accelerator because it allowed the planning process to bypass the conservatism and oppositionist tendencies that were clearly expressed by these groups in initial iterations of the planning phase.

Similarly, the activation of the environment was paradoxically the result of the inhibiting behavior of the senior managers. The use of the external experts and the leveraging of their knowledge was a direct result of the resistance of the senior managers. Thus, the very resistance of the senior managers triggered the enabling force of the environment.

The sectionality of the strategic plan also seems to fulfill a double role in Yad Sarah. On the one hand, partiality protected the organization from the disruptive effects of the

probing and fundamental, all-encompassing questions characteristic of a systemic strategic process. Indeed, even the initial discussions on the developmental direction proposed by the Managing Director generated alienation, resentment, and negativism. This suggests that any further expansion of the scope of the strategic plan could have undermined and threatened the underlying foundations and core assumptions which drive and motivate the VNPO's cadre of employees and volunteers. As such, partiality served as a defense mechanism. On the other hand, this very partiality is also an enabler. Many of the interviewees emphasized that formulating the strategic plan represented a significant organizational struggle in Yad Sarah. One can only surmise what would have been the fate of a full-scale plan, raising threatening issues, and using new and foreign methodologies. Such a plan would have been buried before it was born. Thus, sectionality also served as an enabling force that allows the strategic process to exist and progress through the organization.

Conclusions

We are fully aware of the limitations of a single, exploratory case study. The primary value of the case study is in the generation of hypotheses that must be subjected to broader, quantitative analysis. Nonetheless, the findings are informative. First, this paper supports earlier work that the VNPO will tend to resist the strategic planning process. However, despite this resistance, the case study has shown that the VNPO has successfully executed the strategic planning.

Using the two-dimensional construct that we have proposed for categorizing strategic management behaviors, our single case study findings along with our qualitative analysis suggest that the organic-sectional pattern may be better suited to the needs of the VNPO than more mechanistic planning modes. Organic-sectional behavior facilitates a more cautious approach, allowing the VNPO to balance the drive for strategic change against the organization's need to protect its social mission and volunteer spirit. The legitimacy of the claim will require further research. In addition, we identified complex behavior mechanisms that leverage the dual functionality of organizational behaviors in both facilitating the planning process, while avoiding potential risks to the VNPO. This claim also requires verification in subsequent research.

The study can alert practitioners to the particularity of VNPO behavior and organizational sensitivities in processes of change, especially where strategic methodologies are being imported from the business sector. Practitioners can also benefit from the exposure of complex, but effective, mechanisms in VNPO behavior. This may help the practitioner in decoding and even encouraging such complex behaviors, especially counter-intuitive behavioral duality and the sectional-organic syndrome. Behaviors appearing as negative forces may in fact fulfill a constructive need, well-tuned to the VNPO environment, and acting as agents of positive change. Finally, the study's focus on the phenomenon of limited strategy might enable the development of more realistic and customized tools for measuring the success of a strategic process in the VNPO.

Future research will seek to verify the theoretical propositions generated by this case study project. The generalization of our findings is dependent on broader-based empirical research of the rapidly expanding set of VNPOs that aspire to build their organizations by encouraging the use of strategic processes and other techniques from

the "foreign" world of for profits. Such research has the potential to help transform a hostile invasion into the effective importation and adaptation of business techniques into the unique environment of the voluntary non-profit organization.

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Appendix: Yad Sarah's vision and value statements
Yad Sarah's vision is stated by the organization as follows:

Yad Sarah strives to enhance the quality of life for people who are coping with difficulties in functioning. At the core of Yad Sarah's existence as a volunteer organization is a commitment to mutual social responsibility. Volunteers and contributors from every part of the social and communal fabric share this commitment. Together with the Yad Sarah staff, they create and provide an array of home and community services for anyone who needs a helping hand, whether temporarily or for an extended time.

These home care support services evolve and develop to meet the changing needs of a multi-aged and diverse population. They are services that rest on advanced technology and human warmth, and are reliable and available to all.

Yad Sarah is committed to providing the very best service, with personal attention, a sympathetic ear and wholehearted giving to every applicant, making it a hub of warm humanity and encouragement to the people being helped and their families.

Based on a review of Yad Sarah's guiding vision and printed material, the key values of the organization are:

· *Quality of life.* Yad Sarah strives to enhance the quality of life for people coping with difficulties in functioning.

· Volunteers-based organization.

· *Home care.* Yad Sarah's mission is to keep the ill and the elderly in their homes and out of institutions as long as possible.

· *Not just lending equipment.* Yad Sarah is committed to encouraging the people it assists, as well as their families.

· *Availability.* Available to all – Yad Sarah helps everybody, without discrimination, without bureaucracy, and without charge.

· *Mutual social responsibility.* At the core of Yad Sarah's existence as a volunteer organization is a commitment to mutual social responsibility.

· *Flexibility and innovation.* The home care support services evolve and develop to meet the changing needs of multiple age groups in a diverse population.

· *Quality and excellence.* Providing the very best possible service.

· *Personalized service.* Assisting with personal attention, a sympathetic ear and a commitment to wholehearted giving to every applicant.

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