



Scanning the Periphery

Are you aware of the distant signals that can make or break your organization?

By Terrence Fernsler

Peripheral Vision

By George S. Day and Paul J. H. Schoemaker. 255 pages. Hardcover. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, www.hbsp.harvard.edu.

If you don't want your organization to be left behind, it's important to scan the periphery of your environment to find new techniques, technology, and trends. This book explains how to hone peripheral vision.

It's common for organizations to be surprised by high-impact events. If yours is like most organizations, you lack enough peripheral vision to be aware of weak

signals—those on the margins that don't deal with your primary focus but might have an impact later. Nonprofit leaders tend to focus on programs and how to conduct them. Fo-

cus is important, but missing peripheral signals can be debilitating for an organization.

Leaders must somehow make sense of a scan of weak signals. The authors discuss how widely to scan and what issues to address. There are different scanning strategies for exploring the unknown and the reasonably familiar. The interpretation of signals can be strengthened through diverse viewpoints. Once important signals are found, organizations should probe and decide how to act on the information.

The authors explain how to build organizational capacities to better support scanning the periphery. Good leadership plays a pivotal role, and they show how to develop this leadership to foster organizational curiosity.

This book will help you avoid being blindsided.

Effective peripheral vision doesn't boil down to a standard recipe; it requires practice and judgment. This book can encourage your organization to look beyond its usual focused frames of reference, become more responsive to change, anticipate risks and opportunities sooner, and avoid being blindsided. ■

How to Hone Your Peripheral Vision

Methods for actively scanning the periphery include the following:

- **Monitor complainers and defectors.** Their frustrations offer insights into how you can solve people's problems and meet their needs.
- **Track the trends.** Keep an eye on broad trends outside your own industry.
- **Listen to channels.** Let vendors and other intermediaries help you see your organization through their eyes.
- **Create a phantom competitor.** Assign a team to design a competing organization that is ideally structured to succeed.
- **Take cues from complementors.** A complementor is any product or service that increases demand for what you offer.
- **Learn from influencers** and shapers — people and organizations with their finger on the pulse of public opinion. These include trade associations, analysts, media commentators, academic experts, think tanks, and consultants.

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Nonprofit briefs

Decision Screens Vital in Choosing Board Members

With the IRS and other agencies scrutinizing nonprofit boards and insisting on the highest standards of governance and stewardship, it's essential to use decision screens, also called due diligence procedures, in selecting board members. Examples:

- **Require that board candidates authorize you** to perform background checks, including a search of public documents for any legal judgments, IRS or state liens, negative media publicity, and a criminal check.
- **Ask candidates to sign a statement** disclosing any conflicts of interest.
- **Request that each candidate** provide three references.
- **Have several board members** interview each candidate.
- **Contact other organizations** on whose boards candidates have served, and ask about their performance as board members.

For more details, see "Do You Really Know Who Your Board Members Are?" by Frank L. Kurre, *ForwardThinking*, Grant Thornton, www.grantthornton.com, Frank.Kurre@gt.com. ■