

Keir Starmer's 'template-based strategy' is strai...

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:20 am

I admit that after a week in which I wrote at least 25,000 words, I feel like a Saturday off. However, yesterday long-term commentator on this blog, Ivan Horrocks, [posted a comment](#) in response [to my post](#) on Keir Starmer's new 'mission-based' approach to Labour campaigning that I thought worth sharing, and which coincidentally gave me the great I want for today.

This is Ivan's analysis of what he thinks Starmer is going, which seems spot-on to me:

Reading reports of Starmer's speech and reading the document Labour released in which they set out Starmer's 'missions' I was reminded of some material I wrote for an OU Masters course on strategy back in 2016.

One of the approaches to strategy I discussed was 'template based strategy', which I noted at the time, had become the most popular approach to strategy/strategic management by then (at the time there were over 76 million 'hits' on Google). The approach was the result of the merging of strategic management and vision-led leadership, which led, in turn, to the emergence of what I referred to as an 'industry' producing template-based or styled systems of strategy/strategic planning, not least because it was 'a money-spinner for a significantly sized army of consultants and experts (including academics).'

A typical template designed for a variety of entities consisted of the following:

The Vision: a unique vision of what the organisation/nation will be like in the future.

The Mission: a high-sounding politically correct statement of the purpose of the organisation/nation.

The Values: a statement describing the organisation/nations values. Make sure they are noncontroversial.

The Strategies: describe some aspirations/goals but call them strategies.

Later in the module I drew on the work of Richard Rumelt ('Good Strategy, Bad Strategy', 2011) who noted that, 'To detect a bad strategy, look for one or more of four major hallmarks:

Fluff. A form of gibberish masquerading as strategic concepts or arguments. It uses "Sunday" words (words that are inflated and unnecessarily abstruse) and apparently esoteric concepts to create the illusion of high-level thinking.

Failure to face the challenge. Bad strategy fails to recognise or define the challenge. When you cannot define the challenge, you cannot evaluate a strategy to improve it.

Mistaking goals for strategy. Many bad strategies are just statements of desire rather than plans for overcoming obstacles.

Bad strategic objectives. A strategic objective is set by a leader as a means to an end. Strategic objectives are "bad" when they fail to address critical issues or when they are impracticable.' (Rumelt, 2011:32).

It struck me that there are quite a number of similarities between Starmer's 'visions' and Labour's current attempts at strategic thinking, and template-based and 'bad strategy'. Maybe some of the members of the 'industry' of consultants and experts that I noted existed at the time are now members of Starmer's advisory team.