

Strategic Planning

Facilitator Guide

NOTES

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NOTES

Strategic Planning

Agenda

Activity	*Time
Ice Breaker	15 minutes
Welcome and Introductions	10 minutes
Agenda Review	5 minutes
What is Strategic Planning	60 minutes
Strategic Planning Models	45 minutes
Types of Strategic Planning	45 minutes
Planning to Plan	45 minutes
Strategic Planning Process	60 minutes
Strategic Planning Tools and Techniques	60 minutes
Parking Lot	15 minutes
Discussion/Summary	15 minutes
Evaluation	10 minutes

*** suggested times only – this may be modified by your facilitator**

NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Identify the various steps in the strategic planning process
- Initiate and manage a strategic planning process
- Determine appropriate tools for strategic planning
- Understand strategies for evaluation
- Initiate community support and involvement in the process
- Develop communication strategies to promote the strategic planning process
- Identify partners to be involved in strategic planning process
- Participate in the strategic planning process (if applicable)

NOTES

➤ **Review and Discuss**

1.0 What is Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process used by community groups, government departments, organizations, businesses and others develop a blueprint for action and change within their community, department, organization or business.

At the community level, strategic planning allows residents to participate in a process to develop strategies to enhance or improve their communities. At the organizational level, such as regional economic development boards, strategic planning provides the board's partners and stakeholders an opportunity to identify actions to address issues affecting their region.

Regardless of the type of organization, a strategic plan must be based on a realistic assessment of resources, include all stakeholders, include ways to evaluate the plan's success, and lead to long-term commitment.

Note to Facilitator:

An overview of strategic planning should be provided before starting any session – even if you are working with a group that has been involved in strategic planning. There may be new participants so it is always useful to provide a review of the process, as well as a background on the groups' work to date.

1.1 Benefits of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning serves a variety of purposes in a community or organization, including to:

1. Involve stakeholders so that everyone is involved in the planning exercise
2. Clearly define the community's vision or purpose of the organization – create a mission and vision
3. Establish realistic goals and objectives consistent with the mission
4. Identify strategies to be carried out in a defined time frame within the organization's capacity for implementation.
5. Communicate those goals and objectives to the organization's constituents.
6. Develop a sense of ownership of the plan,
7. Ensure the most effective use is made of the organization's resources by focusing the resources on the key priorities.
8. Provide a base from which progress can be measured and establish a mechanism for informed change when needed.
9. Bring together of everyone's best and most reasoned efforts have important value in building a consensus about where an organization is going.

Other reasons include that strategic planning:

10. Provides clearer focus of organization, producing more efficiency and effectiveness
11. Bridges staff and board of directors (in the case of corporations)
12. Builds strong teams in the board and the staff (in the case of corporations)
13. Provides the glue that keeps the board together (in the case of corporations)

14. Produces great satisfaction among planners around a common vision
15. Increases productivity from increased efficiency and effectiveness
16. Solves major problems

Sources: McNamara, C. (2007) *Strategic Planning. Authenticity Consulting, LLC. & A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities.*

NOTES



Exercise 1: Strategic Planning

Time 15 minutes

Objective

Introduce participants to strategic planning

Advance preparation

None

Exercise

Discuss your involvement in a strategic planning process and provide an example of one (government, business, non-profit).

Ask participants to relate some best practices and challenges they encountered as part of the process?

Note to facilitator

Prepare flipchart sheet with strategic planning on the page and then list the types of planning the group describes. The exercise will prepare you for discussion on exercise 2 which focuses on types of planning.

Some participants may have been involved in a strategic planning process with the same organization in the past so this should be acknowledged.

Facilitator resources

Flipchart

Participant resources

None

NOTES



Exercise 2: Types of Planning

Time

15 minutes

Objective

Explore the various types of planning and how they are carried out.

Advance preparation

None

Exercise

Provide examples from the previous exercise, or from their own experience, of the various types of planning that you have been involved in.

Facilitator resources

Prepare flipchart for each of the types of planning.

Participant resources

Refer to information sheet on various types of planning.

- **Review and Discuss Exercise 2**
- **Review additional material on planning**

1.2 Types of Planning

- **Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning determines where a community group or organization is going over the next year or more, how it's going to get there, and how it'll know if it got there or not.

- **Business Planning**

A business plan focuses on a product, service or program.

- **Program Planning**

A program plan focuses on an internal or external function

- **Project Planning**

A program plan focusing on a specific project

- **Municipal Planning**

A municipal plan is a document which outlines a municipality's policies for planning, use and future development of land.

1.3 Planning as a profession

Planning is generally referred to the profession associated with municipal planning.

Other professions incorporate “planning” as part of the management of an organization.

Strategic planning can be carried out as a specific job or can be the role of a trained facilitator who is experienced in guiding groups through the process so that they create their own plan.



Additional Material # 1

Planning Overview

Planning is traditionally considered to be one of the four major functions of management, along with organizing, leading and coordinating/controlling. Simply put, planning is identifying where you want to go, why you want to go there, how you will get there, what you need in order to get there and how you will know if you're there or not. The following are many of the types of plans generated in a business or organization.

How organizations carry out the *various steps and associated activities* in the strategic planning process are more a matter of the size of the organization.

Small nonprofits and small for-profits tend to conduct somewhat similar planning activities that are different from those conducted in large organizations. On the other hand, large nonprofits and large for-profits tend to conduct somewhat similar planning activities that are different from those conducted in small organizations. (The focus of the planning activities is often different between for-profits and nonprofits. Nonprofits tend to focus more on matters of board development, fundraising and volunteer management. For-profits tend to focus more on activities to maximize profit.)

Also, in addition to the size of the organization, differences in how organizations carry out the planning activities are more a matter of the nature of the participants in the organization -- than its for-profit/nonprofit status. For example, detail-oriented people may prefer a linear, top-down, general-to-specific approach to planning. On the other hand, rather artistic and highly reflective people may favor of a highly divergent and "organic" approach to planning.

In addition to the type of organization, there is also a difference in various types of planning as outlined below.

Types of Planning

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning determines where a community group or organization is going over the next year or more, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there or not.

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A program plan focuses on an internal or external function

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Adopted from [Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC](#). Copyright 1997-2007. www.managementhelp.org



Exercise 3: What is your type

Time

30 minutes

Objective

To introduce participants to some personality and learning types which will be helpful as they engage in the strategic planning process.

Advance preparation

None

Exercise

Complete the exercise to learn more about your personal flexibility skills and what you may expect from the strategic planning process.

(The nature of key participants will often dictate how a plan is developed. Detail-oriented people may work best with a linear, top-down, general to specific approach to the planning exercise. Artistic and reflective people may prefer a divergent and “organic” approach to planning.)

Note to Facilitator

You can opt to use this exercise to get participants thinking about how one’s personality can affect the strategic planning process. You can ask participants to complete and discuss it during the session or to do it a later date.

Facilitator resources

Worksheet

Participant resources

Worksheet

NOTES

Exercise #3 Continued

Welcome to Your
Personal PBA
Experience!



Test Your Personal Flexibility Skills

Are You Ready for Change?

These sample questions come from one of several tools that we use in our assessment and development programs. The focus of this particular tool is on development. Each of the questions represent different types of actions you must take in your career and/or job, and relates to the business situation you might use. Within each section (A, B, C, and D), read the questions and choose the one response which most closely describes your behavior. To receive results, you must respond to every section (a total of four sections). Your feedback results will be more accurate and helpful if you are as truthful as possible. If you rate yourself at or beyond the midpoint, "a 3, 4 or 5", on any section, you should be able to describe and document an example of how and when you performed the activity. We at AIMM Consulting hope you enjoy your personal moment of reflection and hope you learn something from the experience.

Maximum score of 20: (4 sections) x (5 points per section)

SECTION A: Willingness and Ability to Change your Position on Issues

Points

- 1 I am usually willing to change my mind when the majority of the group disagrees with me.
- 2 I modify my stance on issues when doing so would benefit others with whom I am associated.
- 3 I stay informed of various positions and scenarios and make changes as they are needed.
- 4 I quickly modify my stance when there is new and valid information.
- 5 I maintain or alter my position by considering how information and resources apply to situations.

SECTION B: Willingness and Ability to Initiate Action

Points

- 1 In most situations I seek additional information before choosing a course of action.
- 2 I insist on finishing all currently scheduled tasks before initiating action on additional work.
- 3 In unfamiliar situations, I readily seek assistance before taking action.
- 4 In most situations, I initiate action with just the immediately available information and resources.
- 5 I willingly consider and examine different methods to accomplish objectives.

SECTION C: Willingness and Ability to Make Decisions

Points

- 1 In unfamiliar situations I reach conclusions only after thoroughly studying the available information and resources.
- 2 I reanalyze all available information when presented with new, valid perspectives.
- 3 In new situations, I act only after considering possible outcomes and preparing to deal with contingencies.
- 4 I readily seek alternatives to ensure that I can make valid decisions.
- 5 I maintain or alter decisions by considering how information and resources apply to situations.

SECTION D: Willingness and Ability to Work with Others

Points

- 1 In difficult situations I almost always find that it is best to take the path of least resistance.
- 2 I consider others' views once they can provide me with all possible information and resources.
- 3 I seek others' input to support my decisions or suggested changes.
- 4 I actively seek opportunities to neutralize or turnaround difficult challenges.
- 5 I frequently offer effective ideas to others despite possible resistance or risks.

By totalling your points using the form below you can determine your overall Personal Flexibility and "readiness for change." Being ready for change is a **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR** and is recognized as important for success in today's challenging and re-engineered work environment.

POINTS:

Section A **Willingness and Ability to Change your Position on Issues**

Section B **Willingness and Ability to Initiate Action**

Section C **Willingness and Ability to Make Decisions**

Section D **Willingness and Ability to Work with Others**

TOTAL POINTS **Your Readiness for Change Score**

Based on your responses, your current readiness for change appears to be:

17-20: Congratulations! You are ready now to deal with all expected and most unexpected changes. This score places you at the **Expert Level** meaning that you are extremely effective at managing change and leading individual, team, and organization change processes. At this level you are quite capable of helping individuals and teams effectively respond to change. Although you have few development needs, you will benefit from efforts to find additional opportunities to extend your Personal Flexibility strengths. We hope that you will continue your self-guiding and learning process.

12-16: Solid Performance. You are ready now to deal with routine, expected changes. This score places you at the **Experienced Level** meaning that you are good at managing change and working effectively with individuals and teams to incorporate new processes within your area of responsibility or expertise. At this level you work confidently with others to adjust to new situations and to improve individual and team performance. You have some development needs but, with a persistent and focused developmental effort, you will see marked improvement and you will be ready to advance to the next level when the opportunity arises.

4-11: Significant Development Needs. You are ready now to learn more about dealing with expected and unexpected changes. This score places you at the **Entry Level** meaning that you have a ways to go before you are considered effective at managing change and working effectively with individuals, teams, and organizations in new programs and situations. At this level you work hard and focus on ensuring current work procedures are followed. However, you are more reactive than proactive in dealing with your work environment and market changes. Although you have many development needs, you will benefit from pinpointing one or two areas for development which will help you focus and achieve better results faster.

Note: If you scored yourself particularly high or low in any one of the four sections, you may want to validate this finding by asking your coworkers or staff to evaluate and document your performance using this same assessment tool. For example, if you scored yourself low in "Working with Others", ask your staff or team whether or not they perceive you as slow or unwilling to seek and consider

their input when experiencing change. If they do not validate your self-evaluation, ask them to explain their evaluation or to give you more information.

We encourage you to continue to seek developmental opportunities (e.g., on-the-job activities, training seminars, workshops, books, journals) to maximize strengths and to improve in less effective areas. We want to help you increase your chance for success!

Bottom of Form

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Source: http://www.managementhelp.org/prsn_dev/assess.htm

Review and Discuss Exercise 3

➤ Review and Discuss

2.0 Strategic Planning Models

2.1 Type of Organization

The type of organization usually dictates the strategic planning exercise or model that will be followed. For instance, there is usually a difference in the type of planning that is carried out by a non profit and for profit organization:

- **Non Profit**

Non-profit organizations will likely focus on board development, management, fundraising, and policies.

- **For Profit**

For-profit organizations/businesses will likely focus on profit and/or strategic directions.

- **Review/Discuss Exercise 3**
- **Review and Discuss**

2.2 Type of Strategic Plan

Regardless of the type of planning you engage in, it is important to remember that not all participants are the same so the exercise has to incorporate processes and activities that generate and keep interest of everyone involved.

The organization's staff or board often know much of what will go into the strategic plan. For instance, your organization may already have a mission, vision and values, and due to the nature of the organization may have clearly defined goals and objectives. In such instances, the strategic planning process becomes important so that participants can work together and have ownership of the strategic plan. "Far more important than the strategic plan document, is the strategic planning process itself" (Carter McNamara, 2006).

There are several models of strategic planning and the type your organization follows may be one of the models, but will usually incorporate aspects of various types. It is important to remember that there is perfect type of model and each organization will develop one and modify it to suit their needs or integrate a variety of aspects of the various models.

The following reviews the basic strategic planning, issue-based or goals-based strategic planning, the alignment model, scenario planning, and organic or self organizing planning.

A. Basic Strategic Planning

The basic strategic planning process is usually followed by a small organization or one with little or no experience in strategic planning. The process may be implemented in the first year to get a sense of the planning process and then expanded in future years. The basic strategic planning process includes:

1. Identify purpose/mission statement

- Describes what organization does
- Outlines what you do for clients or customer and how
- Describes the community

The management and/or board of directors must endorse the mission. The mission may also change with the organization.

2. Select the goals to accomplish mission

- Goals are general statements about what you need to accomplish to meet your purpose, or mission, and address major issues facing the organization.

3. Identify specific approaches or strategies to reach each goal

4. Identify specific action plans to implement each strategy

- Details specific activities for department or organization to ensure implementation
- Develops work plans for committees or staff to achieve objectives
- Details how objectives will be met

5. Monitor and update the plan

- Identify ways to monitor
- Build in updates

6. Communicate the Plan

- Identify who will receive copies of the plan
- Identify how you will circulate and promote the plan

B. Issue-Based or Goals-Based Strategic Planning

Issue-Based or Goals-Based planning is probably the most common and starts with focus on the organization's mission (and vision and/or values), goals to work toward the mission, strategies to achieve the goals, and action planning (who will do what and by when). Organizations that start with Basic Strategic Planning will often evolve to this more comprehensive type of planning.

Issue-Based (or Goal-Based) Planning

1. External/internal assessment to identify SWOT (Strengths and Weaknesses and Opportunities and Threats)
2. Strategic analysis to identify and prioritize major issues/goals
3. Design major strategies (or programs) to address issues/goals
4. Design/update vision, mission and values (some organizations may do this first in planning)
5. Establish action plans (objectives, resource needs, roles and responsibilities for implementation)
6. Record issues, goals, strategies/programs, updated mission and vision, and action plans in a Strategic Plan document, and attach SWOT, etc.
7. Develop the yearly Operating Plan document (from year one of the multi-year strategic plan)
8. Develop and authorize Budget for year one (allocation of funds needed to fund year one)
9. Conduct the organization's year-one operations
10. Monitor/review/evaluate/update Strategic Plan document

C. Alignment Model

The overall purpose of the model is to ensure strong alignment among the organization's mission and its resources to effectively operate the organization. This model is useful for organizations that need to fine-tune strategies or find out why they are not working. An organization might also choose this model if it is experiencing a large number of issues around internal efficiencies. Overall steps include:

1. The planning group outlines the organization's mission, programs, resources, and needed support.
2. Identify what's working well and what needs adjustment.
3. Identify how these adjustments should be made.
4. Include the adjustments as strategies in the strategic plan.

D. Scenario Planning

This approach might be used in conjunction with other models to ensure planners truly undertake strategic thinking. The model may be useful, particularly in identifying strategic issues and goals.

1. Select several external forces and imagine related changes which might influence the organization, e.g., change in regulations, demographic changes, etc. Scanning the newspaper for key headlines often suggests potential changes that might effect the organization.
2. For each change in a force, discuss three different future organizational scenarios (including best case, worst case, and OK/reasonable case) which might arise with the organization as a result of each change. Reviewing the worst-case scenario often provokes strong motivation to change the organization.
3. Suggest what the organization might do, or potential strategies, in each of the three scenarios to respond to each change.
4. Planners soon detect common considerations or strategies that must be addressed to respond to possible external changes.
5. Select the most likely external changes to effect the organization, e.g., over the next three to five years, and identify the most reasonable strategies the organization can undertake to respond to the change.

E. Organic (or Self-Organizing) Planning

Organic-based strategic planning might start by articulating the organization's vision and values and then action plans to achieve the vision while adhering to those values.

Traditional strategic planning processes are sometimes considered “mechanistic” or “linear,” i.e., they’re rather general-to-specific or cause-and-effect in nature. For example, the processes often begin by conducting a broad assessment of the external and internal environments of the organization, conducting a strategic analysis (“SWOT” analysis), narrowing down to identifying and prioritizing issues, and then developing specific strategies to address the specific issues.

Another view of planning is similar to the development of an organism, i.e., an “organic,” self-organizing process. Certain cultures, e.g., Native American Indians, might prefer unfolding and naturalistic “organic” planning processes more than the traditional mechanistic, linear processes. Self-organizing requires continual reference to common values, dialoguing around these values, and continued shared reflection around the systems current processes. General steps include:

1. Clarify and articulate the organization’s cultural values. Use dialogue and story-boarding techniques.
2. Articulate the group’s vision for the organization. Use dialogue and story-boarding techniques.
3. On an ongoing basis, e.g., once every quarter, dialogue about what processes are needed to arrive at the vision and what the group is going to do now about those processes.
4. Continually remind yourself and others that this type of naturalistic planning is never really “over with,” and that, rather, the group needs to learn to conduct its own values clarification, dialogue/reflection, and process updates.
5. Be very, very patient.
6. Focus on learning and less on method.
7. Ask the group to reflect on how the organization will portray its strategic plans to stakeholders, etc., who often expect the “mechanistic, linear” plan formats.

The models discussed above illustrate that a multitude of perspectives, models and approaches can be used in strategic planning. The approach to strategic planning depends on the nature of the organization – its leadership, culture, size, budget, environment, partners, and expertise of staff and facilitator – and of course the purpose of the planning exercise.

Source:

Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC. Copyright 1997-2006.

*Adapted from the Field Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning and Facilitation.
Basic Overview of Various Strategic Planning Models*

www.managementhelp.org

NOTES



Exercise 4: Planning to Plan

Time

15 minutes

Objective

Discuss the “planning” phase of strategic planning.

Advance preparation

Exercise

Participants will brainstorm some pre-requisites or conditions that need to be present to undertake a strategic planning process.

Note to facilitator

Prepare a flipchart sheet “Planning to Plan” so that responses can be recorded on the flipchart for easy viewing by all participants.

This exercise is useful as well if you are doing a strategic plan exercise so that participants can think about what they need before deciding on the depth of the planning exercise

Facilitator resources

Flipchart

Participant resources

NOTES



Additional Material #2

Basic Overview of Typical Phases in Planning

Whether the system is an organization, department, business, project, etc., the basic planning process typically includes similar nature of activities carried out in similar sequence. The phases are carried out carefully or -- in some cases -- intuitively, for example, when planning a very small, straightforward effort. The complexity of the various phases (and their duplication throughout the system) depends on the scope of the system. For example, in a large corporation, the following phases would be carried out in the corporate offices, in each division, in each department, in each group, etc.

NOTE: Different groups of planners might have different names for the following activities and groups them differently. However, the nature of the activities and their general sequence remains the same.

NOTE: The following are typical phases in planning. They do *not* comprise the complete, ideal planning process.

1. Reference Overall Singular Purpose ("Mission") or Desired Result from System

During planning, planners have in mind (consciously or unconsciously) some overall purpose or result that the plan is to achieve. For example, during strategic planning, it's critical to reference the mission, or overall purpose, of the organization.

2. Take Stock Outside and Inside the System

This "taking stock" is always done to some extent, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, during strategic planning, it's important to conduct an environmental scan. This scan usually involves considering various driving forces, or major influences, that might effect the organization.

3. Analyze the Situation

For example, during strategic planning, planners often conduct a "SWOT analysis". (SWOT is an acronym for considering the organization's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats faced by the organization.) During this analysis, planners also can use a variety of assessments, or methods to "measure" the health of systems.

- 4. Establish Goals**
Based on the analysis and alignment to the overall mission of the system, planners establish a set of goals that build on strengths to take advantage of opportunities, while building up weaknesses and warding off threats.
- 5. Establish Strategies to Reach Goals**
The particular strategies (or methods to reach the goals) chosen depend on matters of affordability, practicality and efficiency.
- 6. Establish Objectives Along the Way to Achieving Goals**
Objectives are selected to be timely and indicative of progress toward goals.
- 7. Associate Responsibilities and Time Lines With Each Objective**
Responsibilities are assigned, including for implementation of the plan, and for achieving various goals and objectives. Ideally, deadlines are set for meeting each responsibility.
- 8. Write and Communicate a Plan Document**
The above information is organized and written in a document which is distributed around the system.
- 9. Acknowledge Completion and Celebrate Success**
This critical step is often ignored -- which can eventually undermine the success of many of your future planning efforts. The purpose of a plan is to address a current problem or pursue a development goal. It seems simplistic to assert that you should acknowledge if the problem was solved or the goal met. However, this step in the planning process is often ignored in lieu of moving on the next problem to solve or goal to pursue. Skipping this step can cultivate apathy and skepticism -- even cynicism -- in your organization. Don't skip this step.

Adopted from: Carter McNamara, 2006. www.managementhelp.org

- **Review and Discuss Exercise 4**
- **Review and Discuss**

3.0 Planning to Plan

Before embarking on any strategic planning exercise there must be organization and community commitment to the process as well as organizational readiness, capacity, and resources. The various partners need to agree on the scope, context and concept of planning in order to maintain support throughout the process. The planning must also be based on realistic objectives, meaningful stakeholder input and utilization of professional resources and services.

The various basic requirements to begin a strategic planning process are discussed below.

3.1 Organizational Readiness

In order to be effective, the strategic planning process should be undertaken when the organization recognizes that it is necessary to undertake the process to address a community or organizational need. Planning should be carried out:

- when organization is starting out
- when organization's mandate has changed or is about the change
- on an annual or regular basis

3.2 Organizational Commitment

While an organization may be ready to get involved in the strategic planning process, the board or community must also be commitment to engaging in planning.

Planning also requires:

- Board/Volunteer commitment
 - Do the board and its members understand and support the process?
- Staff commitment
 - Does staff understand and support the process?
- Community commitment
 - Does the community understand and support the process?

3.3 Organizational Capacity

Strategic planning involves time and resources so before embarking on any plan, the organization must ensure that it has the capacity to complete the project and that includes human resources, financial resources, and time.

- **Human Resources**
 - **Staff**
 - Is staff available and committed to the project?
 - Does staff have knowledge of process?
 - Can staff lead the project?
 - **Volunteers**
 - Board members available
 - Other volunteers available for committees
 - **Board committees**
 - Are board committees in place?
 - Are they active?
 - Can they take on the role?
 - **Special/standing committees**
 - Are there people to serve on special or standing committees
 - Develop terms of reference which outlines organization's expectations and reporting mechanisms
- **Financial resources**
 - Identify budget for strategic planning exercise
 - Budget may be available in core funding
 - Funding may be available from various government programs
 - Determine cost of staff, facilitator, volunteer activities, facilities, copying, communications, etc.
- **Time**
 - Allocate organizational time for strategic planning
 - Determine deadlines that are realistic

3.4 Reasons for Planning

Some of the common reasons for strategic planning include:

- Change
- Renewal
- Funding requirement
- Financial forecasting
- Mandate
- Build consensus
- Improve staff and board relations
- Develop ownership
- Build community support
- Other?

NOTES



Exercise 5: Why do you want to engage in strategic planning?

Time

20 minutes

Objective

Identify the reasons to get involved in the strategic planning process.

Advance preparation

None

Exercise

Identify some reasons to engage in a strategic planning process.

Note to Facilitator

Prepare flipchart sheet in order to record responses so that you can refer back to list later in the process (if you actually start preparing a strategic plan).

Facilitator resources

Flipchart

Participant resources

NOTES

Review and Discuss Exercise 5

➤ Review and Discuss

4.0 Strategic Planning Process

This section contains an overview of the strategic planning process from the planning or initiating phase to the monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan.

A Strategic Planning Template is attached as an Appendix which can be adopted for the planning process.

4.1 Initiating the Planning Process

Once decision is made to initiate a strategic planning process, it is important to think about who will be involved, establish the budget, hire a facilitator, think about partners, etc.

- **Strategic Planning Team**
 - Board - identify board key board roles and responsibilities, committees, etc.
 - Staff - identify staff that will be involved in the process
 - Community volunteers – identify how they will or may be involved

- **Strategic Planning Budget**
 - Establish a budget for the project
 - Identify source of funding for project (core, project funding)

- **Strategic Planning Facilitator(s)**
 - Identify/arrange a facilitator for the planning exercise
 - Arrange meetings with facilitator with staff and board members to get preliminary information

- **Strategic Planning Partners**
 - Internal
 - Board and committees
 - Which staff will be involved and identify their roles and responsibilities
 - External
 - Community groups or individuals
 - Government departments or officials
 - Education – college, university, secondary schools
 - Others

➤ **Review and Discuss**

4.2 Developing the Plan

Following the model of a basic strategic plan, an organization or community group's first step is to identify its purpose with a mission statement, vision statement, and may also chose to develop values. The various steps and components of a strategic plan are discussed below. A variety of templates are included to guide you through the various steps.

It is important to note that some strategic planning facilitators prefer to identify/update the mission, vision and values statements before conducting a strategic analysis, which includes an Environmental Scan and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and are discussed below. Others prefer to identify/update the mission, vision and values after the strategic analysis.

NOTE: Worksheets for these components of the plan are available at the end of this section.

1. Mission

- Core purpose of your organization
- Presented in a clear, short statement that focuses on attention in one clear direction by stating purpose of the group's uniqueness.

2. Vision

- What is your organization's vision of excellence
- Has to be realistic and not something impractical

3. Values

- What are the principles, standards, and actions considered worthwhile in the organization
- Includes how people treat each other, how groups conduct business and what is most important to the organization

Sample Mission, Vision and Values

▪ **Mission**

- Core purpose of your organization
- Presented in a clear, short statement that focuses attention in one clear direction by stating purpose of the group's uniqueness.

Sample Regional Economic Development Board Mission Statement

Identify and maximize the potential of the Regional Development Board of Avalon through the facilitation and promotion of Regional, Social, and Economic development. This will be achieved through consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders.

▪ **Vision**

- What is your organization's vision of excellence
- Has to be realistic and not something impractical

Sample Regional Economic Development Board Mission Statement

Our vision is one of people committed to life long learning, community well-being, and personal excellence through individual and collaborative efforts. Ours is a vision of a vibrant region with a supportive entrepreneurial and investment climate which fosters equal opportunity while preserving its cultural and natural heritage.

▪ **Values**

Values are also known as guiding principles.

- What are the principles, standards, and actions considered worthwhile in the organization
- Includes how people treat each other, how groups conduct business and what is most important to the organization

Sample Regional Economic Development Board Values (Guiding Principles)

Guiding Principles

The Regional Economic Development Board of Avalon agrees to the following guiding principles in coordinating, integrating, and prioritizing economic development initiatives and linking these activities to various government partners.

We believe that:

- A cohesive, integrated, and coordinated approach should be undertaken to achieve sustainable economic development, based upon the cooperation of our stakeholders, built upon the strengths of the region, and committed to the well-being of our residents;
- The projects and activities planned, prioritized and supported should be directed towards sustainable development of the region,
- Development in the region should be facilitated around mutual respect and concern for all persons, stakeholders, organizations, and agencies;
- We should foster the creation of a dynamic, sustainable and progressive environment that will attract people and industries;
- We should provide an objective assessment of development opportunities based upon our commitment to the long term sustainability of the region and equitable access to the benefits of development; and
- Government departments and agencies should work in cooperation and consultation with Avalon on all projects relating to the region.

Adopted from strategic plans of regional economic development boards:

Mariner Resources Opportunities Agency – www.baccalieu.nf.ca
Humber Economic Development Board Inc. – www.humber.nf.ca
Capital Coast Development Alliance – www.cdda.nf.net

4.2 Developing the Plan (continued)

Depending on the approach to the strategic planning session you will use a variety of tools to identify your goals, objectives and strategies. An Environmental Scan and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis are commonly utilized tools to conduct a strategic analysis.

4. Strategic Analysis

A. Environmental Scan

Once you have your vision and mission statements in place, you have a picture of where you want to go. The next step is to understand where you are now and this involves examining the internal status of your organization or community and the external context in which it is situated.

An environmental scan is the:

- **gathering of information** that concerns the organization's environments
- **analysis and interpretation** of this information
- **application** of this analyzed information in decision making.

Environmental Scan

Below are some components of an environmental scan that are completed as part of a strategic analysis.

- Review of mission, vision, values
- Review of business processes
- Review of departments
- Analysis of clients/customers
- Review of technology
- Health and well being
- Labour relations
- Human resources
- Relationships with community
- Business and volunteer community
- Review of other regions/partners
- Review of organizational structure and mandate
- Review of past strategic plans, reports, and other relevant material
- Review of minutes, constitution bylaws
- Literature review
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Questionnaires/surveys
- Focus groups
- Public consultation/meetings
- Review of communications and other plans

4. Strategic Analysis

B. SWOT Analysis

This component of your plan may also be conducted following an identification and/or update of the vision, mission, and values. The SWOT analysis is a basic tool for auditing an organization and its environment, and provides direction and a basis for development of a plan.

The SWOT does this by assessing an organizations strengths (what an organization can do) and weaknesses (what an organization cannot do) in addition to opportunities (potential favorable conditions for an organization) and threats (potential unfavorable conditions for an organization).

SWOT analysis is an important step in planning and its value is often underestimated despite the simplicity in creation.

The role of SWOT analysis is to take the information from the environmental analysis and separate it into internal issues (strengths and weaknesses) and external issues (opportunities and threats).

Once this is completed, SWOT analysis determines if the information indicates something that will assist the organization to accomplish its objectives (a strength or opportunity), or if it indicates an obstacle that must be overcome or minimized to achieve desired results (weakness or threat).

- **Strengths**

- What are some internal positive things about your organization?
- What does the community see as your strengths?

- **Weaknesses**

- What are some weaknesses in organization?
- What does the community see as your weaknesses?

- **Opportunities**

- What are some opportunities in your community or region?
- What are some emerging trends?

- **Threats**

- What are some provincial or national issues facing the organization?
- What are some technology issues that face the organization?

4.2 Developing the Plan (continued)

5. Goals

What does the organization or community want to achieve in the next five or 10 years?

The strategic plan will include goals which are long-term outcomes to provide focus for the planning process. Establishing goals will then lead to identification of objectives and strategies to achieve the goals.

Goals are identified from having taken a wide look around the outside of the organization (an external analysis) and careful look inside the non-profit (an internal analysis), and then identifying what are the most important issues to address.

Goals may refer to the entire organization, such as those concerning operating the organization, such as staffing and office space. You may also have goals that arise from providing products or services to your clients and stakeholders, such as volunteer training, community information sessions, etc.

6. Strategies

Strategies outline how you will achieve your goals. Strategies are usually what change the most as the organization eventually conducts more comprehensive strategic planning, particularly by more closely examining the external and internal environments of the organization.

7. Objectives

Objectives are the specific activities that each major function (for example, department, etc.) must undertake to ensure it's effectively implementing each strategy. Objectives should be clearly worded to the extent that people can assess if the objectives have been met or not. Objectives are specific, measurable results produced while implementing strategies.

Goals and Strategies should be SMARTER-

- Specific
- Measurable
- Acceptable
- Realistic
- Timeframe
- Extending
- Rewarding

Goals and Strategies Should Be SMARTER

SMARTER is an acronym, that is, a word composed by joining letters from different words in a phrase or set of words. In this case, a SMARTER goal or objective is:

Specific:

For example, it's difficult to know what someone should be doing if they are to pursue the goal to "work harder". It's easier to recognize "Write a paper".

Measurable:

It's difficult to know what the scope of "Writing a paper" really is. It's easier to appreciate that effort if the goal is "Write a 30-page paper".

Acceptable:

If I'm to take responsibility for pursuit of a goal, the goal should be acceptable to me. For example, I'm not likely to follow the directions of someone telling me to write a 30-page paper when I also have to five other papers to write. However, if you involve me in setting the goal so I can change my other commitments or modify the goal, I'm much more likely to accept pursuit of the goal as well.

Realistic:

Even if I do accept responsibility to pursue a goal that is specific and measurable, the goal won't be useful to me or others if, for example, the goal is to "Write a 30-page paper in the next 10 seconds".

Time frame:

It may mean more to others if I commit to a realistic goal to "Write a 30-page paper in one week". However, it'll mean more to others (particularly if they are planning to help me or guide me to reach the goal) if I specify that I will write one page a day for 30 days, rather than including the possibility that I will write all 30 pages in last day of the 30-day period.

Extending:

The goal should stretch the performer's capabilities. For example, I might be more interested in writing a 30-page paper if the topic of the paper or the way that I write it will extend my capabilities.

Rewarding:

I'm more inclined to write the paper if the paper will contribute to an effort in such a way that I might be rewarded for my effort.

Source: www.managementhelp.org

4.2 Developing the Plan (continued)

8. Implementation

After the goals, strategies and objectives are identified, the work plan and implementation schedule has to be included in the plan.

- Tasks – assigned to various board and staff responsible for specific items
- Timelines - established for implementation of the plan for implementation

9. Funding the Plan

The resources you will need to achieve the goals in the strategic plan and what it will cost to obtain and use the resources should be incorporated into the plan. The plan may need to address funding sources or budgets if necessary.

10. Communicating the Plan

It is important to consider how to communicate the plan with various partners and stakeholders. The following are some ways to ensure that the plan is communicated:

- continuous review with partners
- publicize through media
- add to website
- make regular presentations to partners and stakeholders
- copy and make available

Communicating the Plan

Certain groups of stakeholders might get complete copies of the plan, including appendices, while other groups (usually outside of the organization) might receive only the body of the plan without its appendices.

1. Every board member and member of management should get a copy of the plan.
2. Consider distributing all (or highlights from) the plan to everyone in the organization. It's amazing how even the newest staff member gains quick context, appreciation, and meaning from review of the strategic plan.
3. Post your mission and vision and values statements on the walls of your main offices. Consider giving each employee a card with the statements (or highlights from them) on the card.
4. Publish portions of your plan in your regular newsletter, and advertising and marketing materials (brochures, ads, etc.).
5. Train board members and employees on portions of the plan during orientations.
6. Include portions of the plan in policies and procedures, including the employee manual.
7. Consider copies of the plan for major stakeholders, for example, funders/investors, trade associations, potential collaborators, vendors/suppliers, etc.

This plan will be widely communicated including through use of the following approaches:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Source: Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document

Written by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC. Copyright 1997-2007.
http://www.managementhelp.org/np_progs/sp_mod/sp_frame.htm

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

The strategic plan needs to identify how the status of the implementation will be monitored and evaluated. Will there be regular written status reports to the board chair, chief executive, or stakeholders from employees, and monthly written reports to board members?

The status reports will address whether goals and objectives are being met or not, current issues and any resources needed to implement the plan.

Monitoring and evaluation are:

- Critical to plans success and credibility
- Must be built into the plan
- Critical for continuous improvement

12. Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement, in regard to organizational quality and performance, focuses on improving customer satisfaction through continuous and incremental improvements to processes. The organization's strategic plan, through the process of monitoring and evaluation, will be regularly improved through the changes or modifications to unnecessary activities and variations.

➤ Summarize and Complete Exercise 6

(You may also wish to complete this exercise or a variation of it, following completion of the next section – Tools and Techniques).

NOTES



Exercise 6: SWOT Analysis

Time

30 minutes or more depending on group

Objective

Prepare a SWOT analysis as part of the strategic planning process.

Advance preparation

Exercise

Depending on the group and its size, the facilitator will select one of the following options:

Option 1

Generate the four parts of the analysis with the large group and record responses on flipchart.

Option 2

In four small groups, each one discusses one component of the plan and reports back to the group so that there is a full SWOT analysis. The group assigns a recorder and presenter.

Option 3

The entire group completes the other parts of the plan – environmental scan, mission, vision, values, etc either as a large group or in small groups.

Note to Facilitator

You can use the various other worksheets (mission, vision, values, etc if you opt to complete more than the SWOT analysis with the group.).

You may also wish to wait until you review the next section on tools and techniques to complete this exercise.

Facilitator resources

Flipchart

Participant resources

SWOT information sheet/other information sheets



Exercise 6 Worksheet

SWOT Analysis Worksheet

Strengths (internal issues)

Weaknesses (internal issues)

Opportunities (external issues)

Threats (external issues)

Worksheets for Strategic Planning Exercises

NOTES

Worksheet

Mission Statement

The mission statement is a concise description of the purpose of the organization. It answers the question: Why does our organization exist? When answering this question, include the nature of your services, groups of clients that you serve and how you serve them. The mission statement should provide continued direction and focus to your plans, programs and services from your organization. Post your mission statement throughout your organization, on all stationery, in your plan documents, etc.

Example: "To support individual and community development in Avalon by ensuring all adults between the ages of 18 and 65 achieve gainful employment in the community."

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Worksheet

Values Statement

The values statement depicts the priorities in how the organization carries out activities with stakeholders. The board and chief executive should regularly reference the values statement to provide guidance to the nature of how the organization and its programs should operate.

Example: "We believe that:

- Employment provides opportunity for adults to develop community and themselves.
- Every person deserves opportunity for gainful employment.
- Gainful employment of all citizens is a responsibility of all citizens."

NOTES

Worksheet

Environmental Scan may include these areas. Complete as required by your organization.

- Review of mission, vision, values
- Review of business processes
- Review of departments
- Analysis of clients/customers
- Review of technology
- Health and well being
- Labour relations
- Human resources
- Relationships with community
- Business and volunteer community
- Review of other regions/partners
- Review of organizational structure and mandate
- Review of past strategic plans, reports, and other relevant material
- Review of minutes, constitution bylaws
- Literature review
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Questionnaires/surveys
- Focus groups
- Public consultation/meetings
- Review of communications and other plans

NOTES

Worksheet

SWOT Analysis

Strengths (internal issues)

Weaknesses (internal issues)

Opportunities (external issues)

Threats (external issues)

NOTES

Worksheet Goals

Sample Goal:

Increase the membership of the regional economic development board by 50% in the next year.

Strategies: Promote the benefits of membership through community forums
Offer a discount for businesses with at least two employees
Provide discounted membership for seniors, students, and low-income individuals

Goal # __ (*Write them to be "SMARTER"*)

Strategy # __. __ _____

Strategy # __. __ _____

Strategy # __. __ _____

NOTES

Worksheet

Developing Objectives and Timelines

1. Objectives are specific, measurable results produced while implementing strategies.
2. While identifying objectives, keep asking “Are you sure you can do this?”
3. Integrate the current year’s objectives as performance criteria in each “implementer’s” job description and performance review.
4. Remember that objectives and their timelines are only guidelines, not rules set in stone. They can be deviated from, but deviations should be understood and explained.
5. Consider the following example format for action your plan.

Strategic Goal	Strategy	Objective	Responsibility	Timeline
1. (Goal #1)	1.1 (first strategy to reach Goal #1)	1.1.1 (first objective to reach while implementing Strategy #1.1)	(who’s going to accomplish that objective)	(when the implementer is going to be accomplish that objective)
Strategic Goal	Strategy	Objective	Responsibility	Timeline
Strategic Goal	Strategy	Objective	Responsibility	Timeline
Strategic Goal	Strategy	Objective	Responsibility	Timeline

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Worksheet

Action Planning – who is doing what and when,

Goal # __

(Write them to be "SMARTER")

Strategy # __ . __

<i>Objectives for Strategy</i> __ . __	<i>Date of Completion</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Status and Date</i>

NOTES



Exercise 7: Tools for Strategic Planning

Time

15 minutes

Objective

Discuss and select some of the tools that the organization will use for its strategic planning.

Advance preparation

None

Exercise

Participants will brainstorm the various components, tools and techniques for strategic planning.

Note to facilitator

Develop list on flipchart and then review list below. Encourage pros and cons of each.

You may wish to review the various strategies before deciding which ones the group will use. Your approach will depend on whether you are providing information for a later decision, or working with the group at the present time to facilitate a strategic plan.

Facilitator resources

Flipchart

➤ Participant resources

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➤ **Review and Discuss Exercise 7**

5.0 Strategic Planning Tools/Techniques

The previous sections have reviewed and discussed the components of a strategic plan and the following will focus on some tools and techniques that are used by strategic planning facilitators to get information for the plan.

(See the Appendix for further information on some of these tools and techniques).

▪ Appreciative Inquiry

The Appreciative Inquiry approach is often worked out in practice by using the ‘4-D’ model:

- Discover—people talk to one another, often via structured interviews, to discover the times when the organization is at its best. These stories are told as richly as possible.
- Dream—the dream phase is often run as a large group conference where people are encouraged to envision the organization as if the peak moments discovered in the ‘discover’ phase were the norm rather than exceptional.
- Design—a small team is empowered to go away and design ways of creating the organization dreamed in the conference(s).
- Destiny—the final phase is to implement the changes.

▪ Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) is a new method for working effectively with large groups (10 - 1000 participants), particularly with complex issues concerning the future.

In OST there are 4 principles:

- whoever comes are the right people
- -whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
- -whenever it starts is the right time
- -when it’s over, it’s over

- **Public Consultations**

Public consultations can be used to solicit support, input and feedback from the various strategic planning process stakeholders. Types of public consultations can include:

- Organizing meetings with municipal councils and other stakeholder groups
- Soliciting feedback following release of a discussion or draft document

- **Public Meetings**

Public meetings are also useful ways to get input, support and feedback and may include:

- Open houses to allow public viewing of the document
- General meetings open to the public to review and discuss the document

- **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are an effective way to get input from a representative sample of your stakeholders. For instance, a focus group of education representatives can help you identify some of the educational needs in your region.

- **Website feedback**

Posting a draft or final strategic plan on your website with a request for comments or feedback can be effective. Ensure that you provide an online form or email address that is regularly checked to obtain the feedback.

- **Surveys**

Surveys can be utilized as part of the planning process, but ensure that you are aware of some of the limitations (does it ask the right questions, how will it be administered, how will you ensure a reasonable response rate, etc) before using the tool. A professionally designed and administered survey is the best option but can be costly for some organizations with limited resources.

- **Research**

- Primary – focus groups, questionnaires
- Secondary – literature review, best practices

6.0 Parking Lot

Review any items that arose during the workshop or planning session.

7.0 Discussion/Summary

Summary of the session, any follow up discussion, or action items.

8.0 Evaluation

Circulate evaluation form.

9.0 Appendix - Additional Resources

Appreciative Inquiry
Open Space Technology
Focus Groups

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Appendices

NOTES

Appreciative Inquiry

Source: <http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/Appreciative.htm>

Visit website to get links to resources listed below.

At New Paradigm we have found 'Appreciative Inquiry' to be a very effective approach to changing organizational culture. It offers an effective and exciting way to re-think the way organizations make sense of the world and the basic interactions between individuals.

Appreciative Inquiry (often known as AI) was developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s. (The key article is Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life by David L. Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in Research in Organizational Change and Development, 1987, Vol.1, pages 129-169.) The approach is based on the premise that 'organizations change in the direction in which they inquire.' So an organization which inquires into problems will keep finding problems but an organization which attempts to appreciate what is best in itself will discover more and more that is good. It can then use these discoveries to build a new future where the best becomes more common.

Cooperrider and Srivastva contrast the commonplace notion that, "organizing is a problem to be solved" with the appreciative proposition that, "organizing is a miracle to be embraced". Inquiry into organizational life, they say, should have four characteristics. It should be:

- Appreciative
- Applicable
- Provocative
- Collaborative

David Cooperrider's "Positive Image, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of organizing". In Srivastva and Cooperrider et al Appreciative Management & Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1990 gives some examples of what is rather more than simply 'the power of positive thinking'.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach is often worked out in practice by using the '4-D' model:

-Discover—people talk to one another, often via structured interviews, to discover the times when the organization is at its best. These stories are told as richly as possible.

-Dream—the dream phase is often run as a large group conference where people are encouraged to envision the organization as if the peak moments discovered in the 'discover' phase were the norm rather than exceptional.

-Design—a small team is empowered to go away and design ways of creating the organization dreamed in the conference(s).

-Destiny—the final phase is to implement the changes.

"What is Appreciative Inquiry?" by Joe Hall and Sue Hammond offers a reasonably brief and readable introduction to the principles and practice of AI.

Diana Whitney & Carol Schau's "Appreciative Inquiry: An Innovative Process for Organization Change" (Employment Relations Today, Spring 1998, (pp 11-21) is a readable account of the 'classical' appreciative inquiry method.

A more comprehensive account can be found in Jane Magruder Watkins & Bernard Mohr's *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

In many ways Appreciative Inquiry is a curious mixture of old and new paradigm approaches to organizational change. Its underlying principles can be very empowering and energizing but some of its implementation can be very 'change management' in style.

Richard Seel: "We use AI principles quite a lot in our work – for instance, when a team I was working with suddenly had the plug pulled on their project they were very angry and depressed. I encouraged them to undertake a brief appreciative inquiry into the times when they had worked really well as a team. The results were extremely positive. It didn't change their disappointment at the cancellation but it added a positive and realistic dimension which could easily have got lost otherwise."

Although AI is often presented as an organizational intervention it can be very useful for facilitators working with small groups or teams. Gervase Bushe has written a useful article ("Appreciative Inquiry with Teams" - *The Organization Development Journal*, 16:3 (1998), pp.41-50.) on his experiences of using AI with teams which offers some interesting and practical approaches and gives some more information.

Gervase Bushe has written a number of other articles worth reading:

Advances in Appreciative Inquiry as an Organization Development Intervention (Published in the *Organization Development Journal*, Fall 1995 Vol.13, No.3, pp.14-22)

Five Theories of Change Embedded in Appreciative Inquiry (Presented at the 18th Annual World Congress of Organization Development, Dublin, Ireland, July 14-18, 1998.)

Meaning Making in Teams (A version of a paper in Fry, R., Barrett, F., Seiling, J. & Whitney, D. (eds.) *Appreciative Inquiry and Organizational Transformation: Reports from the Field*, pp.39-63. Westport, CT: Quorum, 2001.)

The Appreciative Inquiry Commons has up-to-date articles and comments on the theory and practice of appreciative inquiry together with news of workshops and courses.

The Taos Institute in New Mexico is one of the centres of Appreciative Inquiry, with both David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva on its board. It runs workshops and courses.

Ann Radford publishes the AI Practitioner and has other AI resources. There is also an Appreciative Inquiry e-mail list where people can swap ideas and information.

Case Studies

AI & Strategy

Nick Heap offers an outline of a one-day Appreciative approach to Strategy. It runs through the whole 4D process in a very simple way. JP Consultants offer a brief account of an Appreciative intervention they made to help the Muncie Children's Museum develop their strategy.

Send mail to richard@new-paradigm.co.uk with questions or comments about this web site.

Last modified: April 30, 2005

NOTES

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Open Space Technology (OST) is a new method for working effectively with large groups (10 - 1000 participants) which has already used in 81 countries to date, particularly with complex issues concerning the future. A simple, but very powerful framework creates the right conditions for a dynamic process of discussion and cooperation. Every single participant who contributes with his knowledge and experience influences the end result. Because participants in an Open Space Conference all participate actively, and talk to others regardless of function or background, OST creates a high level of commitment among participants and much networking across boundaries, usually resulting in a much deeper understanding of the issues as stake well as new ideas about the way forward

In OST there are 4 principles:

- whoever comes are the right people
 - whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
 - whenever it starts is the right time
 - when it's over, it's over
- and one law, the Law of the Two Feet: If, during the course of the gathering, any person finds him or herself in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their two feet and go to some more productive place.

History

OST was first described by Harrison Owen in the 80-'s. Meanwhile there are several thousand facilitators who have been trained to use the method. When he found that participants to a conference he had organized found the coffee break by far the most interesting part of the program, he perfected a meeting method where the "coffee break" became the key element.

The capacity of an organization to solve problems is only in part concentrated in its leadership. Often it is spread over the whole organization, or indeed across organizational boundaries: suppliers, clients and others have key knowledge relevant to identify the way forward. This is why OST has quickly become popular, as an effective way to solve complex problems with many stakeholders in limited time.

Philosophy

OST is based on the belief that participants will contribute effectively in solving problems, if the problem is clear and important to them, and if there is an "Open Space" to organize themselves within the given framework.

Conditions for using OST

Other methods to work with large groups have been developed, and it is important to select the right one. OST is by far the most effective if four conditions are in place - but only then

- there is a clear and important problem/question
- which is complex, either contentwise, there are different views/interests - or both
- the solution is unknown
- there is a certain time pressure.

Results

There are 3 types of results of OST

- contentwise, all relevant issues are identified and discussed - as many groups work in parallel, many can be dealt with in a short time. All conclusions are processed and copied to all immediately, which makes follow-up easy and quick
- intensive networking takes place, participants talk to others they normally would not connect with
- participants feel very responsible for the results, and motivation and energy to carry on are created.

How does it work ?

The central issue is identified in a preparation meeting. Both the issue as well as the invitation are formulated in such a way that those who are invited are inspired and focused. The invitation also clearly signals that the meeting will be unlike other meetings.

At the start of an Open Space, participants sit in a circle without tables. The host, usually the highest ranking person, makes a brief opening statement indicating the focus of the meeting and asking participants for their help. The facilitator then creates the Open Space and explains the framework.

Participants then make the agenda, posting those items which they feel are most important to them personally. These can be ideas, proposals, problems, questions, solutions, hopes and worries, technical and practical issues and so on.

When the agenda is ready, participants decide what issue they want to discuss, sign up and start. After all discussions have been finished, the report is handed out to all, a report which provides a good basis for later decision-making and follow-up. After the Open Space this report is analyzed and follow-up actions are planned, as far as this has not been done yet during the Open Space itself.

When the Open Space lasts more than one day, prioritization and action planning are done by the whole group.

Gerard Muller
Open Space Institute Denmark gm@openspace.dk, phone: (0045)21269621
Literature Harrison Owen, Open Space Technology, a User's Guide.

NOTES

Focus Groups

Basics of Conducting Focus Groups

Written by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC. Copyright 1997-2007.

Source: www.managementhelp.org

Sections in This Topic Include:

Focus groups are a powerful means to evaluate services or test new ideas. Basically, focus groups are interviews, but of 6-10 people at the same time in the same group. One can get a great deal of information during a focus group session.

Preparing for the Session

1. **Identify the major objective of the meeting.**
2. **Carefully develop five to six questions (see below).**
3. **Plan your session (see below).**
4. **Call potential members to invite them to the meeting.** Send them a follow-up invitation with a proposed agenda, session time and list of questions the group will discuss. Plan to provide a copy of the report from the session to each member and let them know you will do this.
5. **About three days before the session, call each member to remind them to attend.**

Developing Questions

1. **Develop five to six questions** - Session should last one to 1.5 hours -- in this time, one can ask at most five or six questions.
2. **Always first ask yourself what problem or need will be addressed by the information** gathered during the session, e.g., examine if a new service or idea will work, further understand how a program is failing, etc.
3. **Focus groups are basically multiple interviews.** Therefore, many of the same guidelines for conducting focus groups are similar to conducting interviews.

Planning the Session

1. **Scheduling** - Plan meetings to be one to 1.5 hours long. Over lunch seems to be a very good time for other to find time to attend.
2. **Setting and Refreshments** - Hold sessions in a conference room, or other setting with adequate air flow and lighting. Configure chairs so that all members can see each other. Provide name tags for members, as well. Provide refreshments, especially box lunches if the session is held over lunch.
3. **Ground Rules** - It's critical that all members participate as much as possible, yet the

session move along while generating useful information. Because the session is often a one-time occurrence, it's useful to have a few, short ground rules that sustain participation, yet do so with focus. Consider the following three ground rules: a) keep focused, b) maintain momentum and c) get closure on questions.

4. **Agenda** - Consider the following agenda: welcome, review of agenda, review of goal of the meeting, review of ground rules, introductions, questions and answers, wrap up.

5. **Membership** - Focus groups are usually conducted with 6-10 members who have some similar nature, e.g., similar age group, status in a program, etc. Select members who are likely to be participative and reflective. Attempt to select members who don't know each other.

6. **Plan to record the session with either an audio or audio-video recorder.** Don't count on your memory. If this isn't practical, involve a co-facilitator who is there to take notes.

Facilitating the Session

1. **Major goal of facilitation is collecting useful information to meet goal of meeting.**

2. **Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator, if used.**

3. **Explain the means to record the session.**

4. **Carry out the agenda** - (See "agenda" above).

5. **Carefully word each question** before that question is addressed by the group. Allow the group a few minutes for each member to carefully record their answers. Then, facilitate discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time.

6. **After each question is answered, carefully reflect back a summary of what you heard (the note taker may do this).**

7. **Ensure even participation.** If one or two people are dominating the meeting, then call on others. Consider using a round-table approach, including going in one direction around the table, giving each person a minute to answer the question. If the domination persists, note it to the group and ask for ideas about how the participation can be increased.

8. **Closing the session** - Tell members that they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers, thank them for coming, and adjourn the meeting.

Immediately After Session

1. **Verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the session.**

2. **Make any notes on your written notes**, e.g., to clarify any scratching, ensure pages are numbered, fill out any notes that don't make sense, etc.

3. **Write down any observations made during the session.** For example, where did the session occur and when, what was the nature of participation in the group? Were there any surprises during the session? Did the tape recorder break?

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NOTES

Additional Worksheets