



A TRIED AND TRUE, VIRTUALLY PAINLESS STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

GOALS OF THE TRAINING

1. Build a basis of understanding that to produce an effective plan, reflection is as important as doing.
2. Learn some tools to guide the reflective process.
3. Learn an effective strategic planning method by participating in a simulation exercise.

Part One – Systematic Reflections

Review Mission, Vision and Values of Organization

- What are we really about?
- What is this organization really trying to accomplish?
- What principles guide our actions?

Review SWOT

- Strengths – What practices are really working well, organizational competencies, effective processes
- Weaknesses – Knowledge gaps, inefficient procedures, lack of value, synergy
- Opportunities – Untapped resources, positive changes in external environment
- Threats – Environmental changes, threatened resources, unwise practices

Review Prior Strategic Accomplishments

- What did we say we would do, and what did we actually make happen?
- Was it the right thing to do?
- Did it get us closer to our goals? Why or why not?

Summarize Reflections

NEXT STEP: DEVELOPING THE PLAN ?

Part Two – Strategic Planning Input Exercise

1. Distribute post-it pads and Sharpie pens to participants.
2. Write the following question on a flip chart sheet: “What needs to happen to ensure that (agency) is a long-term success?” This question can be altered to address a more specific issue as needed.
3. Instruct the participants to write one response per post-it sheet.
 - Participants are to write as many responses as they can think of.
 - Participants should be instructed to write all responses and not filter any of their ideas.
4. Once every participant has completed writing his/her response on the post-it sheets, ask each participant to go to a blank wall and randomly stick the post-it sheets on the wall.
5. Instruct the group that the next part of the exercise is to take place in total silence. As a group, they are to approach the wall where the post-it notes are placed and silently categorize similar responses. Individuals can move post-it notes that others have placed in a category if they feel it better fits in another category. Caution – the group members will gradually begin to back away from the wall. Encourage all members to review the wall until all are satisfied with the classifications.

Part Three – Consensus Exercise

1. The facilitator will instruct the group that the next part of the exercise requires a consensus.
2. The facilitator will read each of the post-it responses that are grouped together and ask the group to develop a “title” or “heading” that describes the content of the responses. All group members must agree to the heading.
3. The facilitator will write the heading on a large paper and place it above the category. This process continues until all the post-it response groupings have a heading.
4. The headings are then labeled A, B, C, etc.

Part Four – Plan and Action Differentiation

1. A recorder takes a clean piece of flip-chart paper and creates a grid down the left-hand side of the page listing all the title letters.

Title A
Title B
Title C
Title D
Etc.

2. The facilitator will now take each title and, starting with title “A”, ask the group to respond to the question: “Does A need to take place before B (or in order for B to happen)?”
3. When the group responds (majority vote), the response must be a yes (0) or no (X). So, for example, “Does A need to happen before B?” If the group response is “yes”, the recorder makes a 0 on the flip chart. This is continued with A for all the other headings. Then you start with B, asking the same question, and then C until you have compared all titles against each other. (Example below).

Does A need to take place before B? – yes

Does A need to take place before C? – yes

Does A need to take place before D? – yes

Does A need to take place before E? – no

	A	B	C	D	E
Title A	-	0	0	0	X
Title B	X				

4. Then you start with B, asking the same question, and then C until you have compared all titles against each other. If the category has a majority of X’s, then it is a desired outcome or goal. If the category has a majority of 0’s, then it is a strategy for achieving the desired outcome. If it is a tie, it is both a strategy and an outcome.

SOME CLUES TO FACILITATING

1. Understand that the facilitator is a member of the group with a special responsibility to help the other members express and organize their thinking so the group can set and move toward its goals with a minimum of difficulty.
 - a. Be one of the group, not its director
 - b. Use “we” rather than “you”
 - c. Create an atmosphere in which everyone feels free to participate
 - d. Help the group bring out and organize its thinking as members build on each other’s contributions
 - e. Help the group determine clear goals and progress toward them.
2. Have a clear idea of what ground should be covered in this meeting (but not what decisions should be reached).
3. Bury your predetermined ideas and listen intently for the essential point of what the speaker is saying (or trying to say). Don’t let any of your own concerns or memories interfere. Listening stops the instant you begin to think of one of them. When you write on the flip chart:
 - a. If a speaker’s point seems worth putting on the chart, when you think you understand it, ask her “Do you mean...?” “Let me see if I understand. Is your point...?” I think I’m with you but I’m not sure. Are you telling us...?”
 - b. If you feel a speaker’s point does not contribute, thank her and let it drop unless another member picks it up.
 - c. If you’re not sure of the value of a speaker’s point, or you begin to wonder if she has a point to make, toss it to the group – “What does someone else think of what Jane’s telling us?”
 - d. If a contribution seems useful but you think it might be improved, ask the group – “Would what Jane’s saying help us more if we put it differently?” Or write it first and then ask for improvements.
 - e. When discussion gets so rapid you can’t keep up, you can:
 - i. Intervene and have the group help you catch up (at the risk of slowing down that intense period or perhaps wrecking it).
 - ii. Gamble that you can successfully pick out the highlights (but when you start writing, you stop listening).
 - iii. Put down fragments as clues – when the tempo slackens ask the group to go back and help you fill in whatever part is worth putting in the record.
 - f. When discussion (whether fast or slow) gets so intense that no one looks at the chart and you don’t want to spoil it by breaking in, keep on writing. When the discussion reaches a point when you can intervene without harm, ask the group to review what you’ve written and correct or complete it.

4. Try to intervene only when it's essential. As you listen, moments will come when it seems useful for you to:
- a. Question what a statement means – when it is obscure, confused, overstated or understated. (“Do you mean...?”, “Are you saying...?”)
 - b. Ask about a viewpoint that seems overlooked – either it has been mentioned but not picked up by the group, or it hasn't been mentioned at all – it may be your viewpoint. If so, don't press it; give others a chance to pick it up. (“What do you think of this...?” , “No one has mentioned ... - should we think about it?”)
 - c. Question the course of the discussion – when it seems:
 - i. Off-track, chaotic or repetitious
 - ii. Blocked or on dead center
 - iii. Acrimonious or dominated by one or two persons
 - iv. Dominated by someone's personal needs
 - v. When a point seems to be overdiscussed, or is becoming a bore in some other way
 - vi. Strongly divergent from the ground the group has decided to cover in this meeting.

(“Is this taking us where we want to go?” “Should we go back to Sue's suggestions that ...?” “We decided earlier that we wanted to... Have we changed our minds?”)
 - d. Ask questions which will:
 - i. Facilitate the members' progress toward covering either:
 1. The ground determined in advance for this meeting, OR
 2. The ground the members obviously prefer to cover instead (“How will this help us work toward...?”)
 - ii. Help the group give shape and a cutting edge to the ideas it is developing. (“How can we make this more specific? Or more tangible?” “What's our main point here? How can we state it concisely?” “Does that mean...?” or “How could we do that?”)
 - iii. Help improve member interaction (“What do some of the rest of us think about this?”)
 - e. Summarize – when a recognizable degree of agreement seems to exist even among a minority of members – or as an alternative to questioning the course of the discussion (“Is this what we've been saying?” Write it on the flip chart if it's not too long.)
 - f. Test for consensus – as an alternative to summarizing when a degree of agreement seems to exist, even among a minority of members – or when the response to a summary indicates that consensus seems possible. (“Can we agree on something like this?” “I'm hearing... Is it right?” Again, write it on the flip chart if it's not too long.)

5. Make questions as short as feasible. Try to include only essential points so the other members can easily get the whole picture of what you're asking – not get lost in details.
6. Normally, stick to the practice of addressing questions to the whole group. On the other hand, if the discussion seems emotionally out of control, grin (it can help you stay objective) and direct a question to an individual.
7. Other times to direct a question to an individual include:
 - a. Following up a previous remark which needs clarification or seems valuable and is being lost.
 - b. A quiet member seems eager to talk.
 - c. A member is likely to have pertinent information on the point being discussed.
8. Be concerned about what is coming from the group, not what the members think of you.
9. Don't hesitate to level with the members. When you can't decide what is worth putting on the flip chart, or in what direction to lead, ask them. Normally that will bring on a useful review of where the discussion is heading.
10. When a near consensus seems to exist but there are few strong objections, ask (even push a bit if necessary) the majority to explore those objections open-mindedly. If they will, it is possible to get consensus – and much stronger follow-through – on a somewhat modified, and often better plan.