Strategic Planning
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A major role of community leaders is to set priorities and guide others in identifying the most important needs to be addressed in a community. This is typically done by a process called *strategic planning*. Strategic planning is used to determine the mission, values, goals, objectives, roles, responsibilities, and timelines of community organizations. Quite simply, strategic planning is a management tool.

Inside-Out Planning vs. Outside-In Planning. Inside-Out Planning and Outside-In Planning are important concepts to understand in order to connect strategic planning to internal and external accountability measures (Kaufman & Herman, 1991). These internal and external accountability measures are prevalent in all facets of county governments, school districts and local businesses such as banks, insurance companies, etc.

Inside-Out Planning focuses on the organization as the primary client. It allows a group to look within the organization outside into the operational world. Inside out planning usually focuses on the mission, goals, and purposes. It studies the good of the organization and is typically referred to as *reactive* in nature.

Example: In Texas Cooperative Extension, this would be an internal group made up of employees to evaluate the current situation. This group would discuss priorities and make recommendations to the agency as a whole.

Outside-In Planning focuses on society as a primary audience. It looks into the organization from the outside. It typically challenges the status quo and sometimes causes discomfort to current employees because it suggests change. Outside-in planning is typically *proactive* in nature.

Example: In Texas Cooperative Extension, this would be an external group that helps set priorities. Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF) would be an example of bringing people together (outside the agency) to help identify issues and provide future direction for the agency.

The key is integration of both concepts. Integration of both the outside-in approach and inside-out approach will make organizations most effective in planning strategically. This works best when outside-in approach is conducted first. This allows for a more global approach. Then, the planner must look at the inside-out approach and ask "what is" vs. "what should be." From this, an organization can take the strengths of both methods and set the most effective strategy in place by evaluating the overlap and consistencies from both strategies.

Techniques for Setting Priorities. Two techniques are frequently used to help groups determine priorities as a part of the decision-making process in a variety of settings. Brainstorming provides the means for groups to generate ideas in a short period of time and encourages creativity as a part of the process. One common process for narrowing the ideas into manageable numbers and allowing groups to seek additional information before final decisions are made is called Nominal Group Technique.

Brainstorming. The most frequently used technique for group decision-making is *Brainstorming*. It is the foundation for many other techniques and the basis for creative problem-solving. In brainstorming, people in the group freely exchange ideas and generate lists in response to an open-ended question. An example of a question that might be used in brainstorming is, "What are possible ways we might raise money to support the 4-H awards program?" Participants try to generate as many ideas as possible, often building or piggybacking on a comment or idea from another participant. This supports creativity and leads to expanded possibilities. This is a fast way of getting ideas on the table (or flip chart) in a short period of time.

You should use brainstorming when you want to generate a large number of ideas or gather a lot of information for decision-making, priority setting or planning, when you want all participants to contribute freely and when you want to inspire creativity.

Guidelines for Conducting the *Brainstorming* Activity (Osbourn, 1963):
1. Clearly Frame an Open-ended Question.
2. Do Not Censure or Make Judgments About Any Ideas.
3. List All Ideas Generated on a Flip Chart.
4. Encourage Hitchhiking.
5. Focus on Quantity.
6. Stay Loose.
7. The Best Comes Last.

Nominal Group Technique. All groups find that much of their responsibilities center around exploring various options related to issues for the organization and making decisions that provide direction for the group. Generating ideas, understanding each option and the impact it would have on the decision, making choices and setting priorities are functions that require skill from the leader. *The Nominal Group Technique* is an effective way to make pooled judgments or decisions in groups which meet face-to-face.

This technique is effective in generating a large quantity of creative new ideas. It is designed to allow members of the group to express their ideas and it minimizes the influence of other participants. You should use Nominal Group Technique when you want to generate lots of ideas, when you want to assure all members participate freely without influence from other participants and when you want to identify priorities or select a few alternatives for further examination.

Guidelines for Conducting the Nominal Group Technique Activity (Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson, 1975):
1. Provide tables for participants.
2. Develop the focus question.
3. Silently brainstorm ideas.
4. Round robin sharing of ideas.
5. Discuss and clarify all ideas on the flip chart.
6. Ranking of alternatives.
7. Ranked items are discussed.
8. 2nd Ranking.
9. Final rankings are discussed.
10. Format for sharing results.

Conclusion. In order to be a leader, you must be able to think futuristically and be an agent of change. Strategic planning allows you to do this in a systematic way. These activities allows for clients to be heard and involved in the change process. This is an essential element of leadership.

References:
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